A Very Johnlock Valentine's

We're at it again! We enjoyed writing A Very Johnlock Christmas so much that we schemed for a Valentine's day themed one and now it's finally time! Every day leading up to Valentine's there will be three ficlets written be me (Avath), Golfechoromeo and Anne based on one prompt.

Expect the trifecta of fluff, angst and smut.

Notes

Today's prompt is Paris. Enjoy!
"Ah, fuck. Shit. Fuck," John moaned, looking at the dark head of curly hair between his legs. The slurping sounds alone were enough to make his toes curl. He fancied he could feel the French accent in the way that tongue was moving on him. But, there was something about watching the angular face with the soft lips on his cock that solidified this night as the most unexpected and erotic night of his life. John didn't even know his name. He had done all the talking while that handsome face had stared at him. His French was crap but he thought he'd done an alright job.

"Je m'appelle John, yeah? Je suis un er, étudiant? Is that the word? Doctor. Étudiant er, médecine? I'm here on an.. un programme d'échange," he had said. The handsome man had just looked blankly at him for a few moments before smiling.

John had smiled back and somehow he had known they would end up here in his hotel room with their clothes off. It was a fitting and quite salacious way to spend Valentine's Day in Paris and John had absolutely no complaints while he listened to the wet sounds coming from between his legs.

The intense heat was lessened with the removal of the mouth around him and a teasing, slow, agonising descent of a pink tongue on his cock started. John watched. He didn't know what the bigger turn on was; the tongue itself or the way a heavy and very obviously aroused breath was being panted onto his cock. Whoever this was, he was loving making love to John Watson's cock. And his balls. John closed his eyes for a brief moment when he felt that tongue wet one of his testicles. He opened them again to watch it being sucked between the soft lips that he was quickly becoming infatuated with.

A hand was slowly working on the tip of his cock, spreading his pre-come around. Everything was slippery. And John was making a lot of noise. "Fuck, fuck, fuck," he moaned. Cool air surrounded his testicle as the curly head moved back and the warm tip of a tongue was swirling up the shaft of his cock again. Whatever that tongue was doing to him was good. Far too good. He would never let that tongue leave his presence. I don't even know your name, he thought as he rather sweetly moved a curl away from the man's face. The soft lips he had been admiring earlier squeezed around the head of his cock and made him squirm as light blue eyes looked up at him. At first there seemed to be a softness in the eyes, as if the softness previously in his lips had been transported up his face, but then there was a change and they seemed irritated all of a sudden. Irritated and intense.

John's cock was suddenly swallowed down and swallowed around. "Oh my God, I'm going to come," John said, his tone rising in pitch. "What the fuck is the word for come in French?" he said, holding back so he could try to find the polite way to announce that he was about to ejaculate into someone's mouth in a foreign language. His cock pulsed and the man pulled off it with a gasp. "Fuck, John," he said before descending again. John had never heard his lover's voice before that. He hadn't imagined that it would be so deep and sensual, and he hadn't even entertained the possibility that his name would have been remembered.

The small touch of familiarity was what did it. His fingers, which had been so gentle before, gripped a handful of hair as he groaned. The man seemed to like that and he hummed, sending vibrations through his mouth and over to John's already over-excited nerve endings. John's mouth fell open with another swear, only being half pronounced in the end because the noises his body wanted to make weren't to be contained in a short four letter word.
This French man was as thorough in consuming John's semen as he had been in teasing it out of him. John put his other hand on his shoulder and squeezed. He didn't want him to go, but dawn was quickly coming and with it another day with things on both their agendas.

John watched his companion stand and right his clothes, and with a look in the mirror he smoothed his hair. John was not noticing that, however. His eyes were caught on a rather impressive looking erection still tucked away in expensive looking trousers. "Surely, you're not going to go before I help you with that," he said with an exaggerated gesture at it. "Christ, I should have paid attention in school. I don't even know how to ask you to stay. What's your name? Where do you live? I want to see you again. Stay," he said.

The man froze and looked coolly at John. "If you want to see me again, come to 221b Baker Street, London, England. That's where I live. Not too far from your dingy little student's flat. Eight - no, nine minutes on the tube if there are no delays," the man said.

John stared, his mouth gaping unattractively. "Oh, and if you do, don't touch me like we're romantically involved," he said, the two last words being said with so much scorn that John recoiled an inch where he sat. "You have a nice body and you make delightful sounds, so I'll give you another chance. When you return from your programme d'échange, come visit me and I'll let you reciprocate. No, it won't happen now. I'm busy. It's almost time to... No. You wouldn't understand the intricacies of this particular crime I'm investigating."

"You're English," John said finally.

"Astute observation slowly made, but I'll give you the benefit of the doubt seeing as you just released a large quantity of semen into my mouth and a large quantity of hormones into your blood stream. Anyway, I must dash. Lovely to meet you," the man said, pulling on his coat and turning up the collar. He was at the door before John had the sense to speak again.

"Wait," John said, getting up. "Wait. What's your name?"

The man smiled. "The name is Sherlock Holmes. The address is 221b Baker Street. Don't forget. Good morning."

And with a wink, Sherlock disappeared out the door.

John went to see him a week later, and a week after that he had moved in. Just as friends, Sherlock had insisted, but the sex had continued and so had the little affections John showed during them. Sherlock stopped being annoyed with them.

Of course they had fallen in love; They had met in Paris after all.

And people like Sherlock Holmes and John Watson were always destined to find each other and to fall in love even if the start of their companionship was a little on the salacious side.
The twinkling lights of Paris were spectacular; even Sherlock Holmes could appreciate this, their beauty. The way the city was reflected on the ripples of the Seine making the mirrored lights oscillate. The tall frame of the Eiffel Tower illuminating their surroundings, framed against the city that John had asked for the two of them to go to on holiday together for ages. The city was stunning. None of it, however, compared even slightly to the sight beside him. The lights of Paris reflected in John's brilliant blue eyes were a sight unlike anything Sherlock had ever seen before.

"What?" John asked as they walked, feeling the ever familiar scrutinising look of Sherlock. "What have I done this time?"

Sherlock said nothing but tightened his hold on John's hand. He knew their moments together were precious and fleeting and the way this timing had worked out was perfect. He would have called it a miracle if he believed in that sort of thing.

John merely smiled and looked forward again, his eager eyes taking in everything around him. The hustle and bustle of this city, the most romantic city in the world. The cool night breeze. The happy faces. The couples. The love. John desperately needed all of it to saturate into his pores, needed to put it into his mind and commit it to memory for the nights in Afghanistan that would be lonely and cold. Despite his army friends, none of them were Sherlock. None of them could ever compare. He didn't want any of them to. How John had managed to get his leave for the days preceding Valentine's Day was astounding. More so was the fact that Sherlock had put together this trip for the two of them in such a short period of time. But then again, when you had what seemed like an immeasurable and bottomless amount of money and an older brother with connections everywhere, a few days in the most romantic city of the world for the most romantic holiday seemed almost too easy.

They had done everything together that John had wanted to get accomplished on their holiday. Despite Sherlock's obvious aversion to being a tourist and doing touristy things, he had obliged John every step of the way. Of course, not all of their time had been spent wandering and exploring the streets of Paris. A fair portion of time was spent with their hands wandering over one another's bodies, exploring each other and becoming reacquainted between the sheets of a giant bed. But before they returned to the hotel for their last night together, memorising what it felt like to be together before they were separated for a great span of time again, they would spend their evening walking the streets of Paris and not talking about the obvious worry that, despite their promises that when John was out of the army to spend the rest of their lives together, something could go wrong while John was in Afghanistan and this could be the last night they spent together.

They found a bench beside the Seine and John sat down on it, Sherlock taking his rightful place beside him.

"God, this is something, isn't it?" John asked, his lips pulled up into a smile as he looked back and forth over the river, the iconic skyline being more breathtaking than he would have imagine.

"Mmm," Sherlock answered noncommittally, reluctantly tearing his eyes away from John to glance quickly at the buildings. A part of him was able to appreciate the architecture, the beauty, the sheer history surrounding them, but in a week, would it be what he remembered from this holiday? Not
John opened his mouth to say something else, but closed it, thinking that whatever small talk he was about to make about the Eiffel Tower on Valentine's Day had probably been said millions of times before and he would say nothing as eloquent as whatever Sherlock would have said about it. Besides, the moment was turning into something much greater than anticipated and John didn't want to ruin it with words. Nodding once to himself he leaned back on the bench, his shoulder leaning into Sherlock's.

With a deep breath, allowing the Parisian air to engulf his lungs and add to the experience when he revisited it in his mind palace, Sherlock tightened his hold on John's hand and tilted his head so it rested against John's.

"Happy Valentine's Day," he whispered after a minute or two.

John couldn't help but chuckle softly. "I still can't get used to you celebrating any holiday, let alone this one."

"I never wanted to before now," Sherlock admitted quietly.

John took a small breath. "And will you? After this one?" he asked, his question heavy with implication, both exciting and dreadful.

Sherlock knew this and responded with a kiss to the top of John's head. "So long as I am with you," he breathed.

Grinning and nodding to himself, John allowed his body to lean even more against his comfort source, knowing that by the next night, he would be apart from it for another indefinite amount of time. The two of them sat like that for an hour in silence, neither one wanting to imagine what the next day, week, month, or year would bring.

Little did they know, they had nothing to fear, for the next Valentine's Day and every subsequent one would find the two of them there, celebrating the night on that very bench above the Seine, looking out over the heart of Paris.
Paris - Anne

Sherlock hated Paris. He was tired of the haze of smoke (which he claimed was even worse than the one in London), he was tired of speaking French (a language that sounded unbearably romantic to his rational mind), and he was tired of being alone in a city of couples (although he supposed he would be alone if he was in London as well). The main difference was that the dreariness of London was properly suited to loneliness, while being lonely in France seemed like a severe crime against all semblance of human order.

Luckily for Sherlock, he was returning to Cambridge University for the Fall term, and thus guaranteed a reunion with his home city before the year elapsed.

As long as he could wait out the remainder of his summer break in Paris without completely losing his mind.

The talented genius would never fully understand why his parents had moved to Paris, although he had been told that it was primarily related to his father’s position in the British government and his mother’s position as a professor of mathematics at the Université Pierre-et-Marie-Curie. Sherlock had never even considered applying there; the thought of studying in Paris with his mother was unbearable.

However, that didn’t mean he wasn’t taking advantage of the university’s resources while his parents were requiring him to be in Paris. In fact, it just so happened that Sherlock was heading to the library on a beautiful Friday afternoon when he was approached by an attractive blond man with a map in his hand.

“Um… Tu peux m’aider a… uh… trouver un banque? Sorry… Anglais?” the man asked, looking flustered and more than a bit lost.

“That wasn’t too bad, actually,” Sherlock offered with a smirk, fully aware that they both knew John’s accent was appalling. He was, however, more taken by the other man’s reaction to his own accent than he had been by the broken French. Sherlock Holmes was unmistakably British and his new acquaintance was clearly shocked.

“I’m only here for a few days… Just figured I would at least need money for un sandwich au jambon, or… um… bifteck et frites.” John blushed, wishing that he possessed the ability to say something more charming in the few seconds he had left to make a good impression. Still, the lanky Brit didn’t seem to mind his poor sense of comedy, instead cocking up an eyebrow with reasonable interest. And the particular young man he had chosen to approach was gorgeous; lovely eyes, lovely cheekbones, lovely skin, lovely arse.

“Mm, I know just the place, if that is still your intention.” Now it was Sherlock’s turn to blush, albeit very faintly. After all, he had just asked a complete stranger out to lunch. A good looking, slightly older stranger.

“Um… Well, I should get some money first… I’m a bit broke, actually.”

“Don’t let it concern you. I’m buying lunch.”

“Sherlock Holmes.” With that, Sherlock turned on his heel and tromped off down a side street to his favorite restaurant in the area. It was known for having the best steak in the city. To his relief, John Watson followed him, walking just a few steps beside him in complete silence until Sherlock had plopped down at a table and ordered for them both.

"May I ask what you’re doing in Paris, John Watson?” Sherlock finally asked, looking over John suggestively. The other man couldn’t have been older than 28, making him a suitable enough partner, if it did indeed turn out that John was as interested in him as Sherlock was inferring.

“I’m shipping out on Sunday. To Afghanistan. For some reason, my plane is departing from Paris and not London. I suppose I get to see the city this way… I’ve actually never been to France before.”

God, he was rambling. Why was he rambling? Because this Sherlock Holmes bloke was tall, mysterious, and unbelievably good looking. And he had just ordered John something off of the ridiculously fancy menu in perfect French. A very expensive something.

“Ah, I see.”

“What about you, Sherlock?”

“My parents live here. I’m only spending the summer. I return to Cambridge in the Fall.” Tall, mysterious, unbelievably good looking, and brilliant. If Sherlock revealed any more desirable traits, John would lose the ability to converse with him.

“… You must be brilliant. I studied medicine at Bart’s before this.”

“Mm, smart then. And why has someone who wants to be a doctor, and is ostensibly smart enough to do so, enlisted in the army?” John paused, clearing his throat as he processed both the compliment and the question.

“I’ve been trained to say I’m leaving for real world experience.” Sherlock’s face was the very picture of casual disbelief; John wondered if he knew just how lovely his eyes were.

“But that’s not quite it.”

“No, not quite… It’s actually more of a money thing.”

“I see…”

“Yeah. Although the real world experience is good too.”

“Right. Of course.”

When they had finished eating, and John had watched Sherlock pay with an endearingly incredulous look painted on his face, there was a moment of intense insecurity. What happened next?

Well, the answer was clear. John would go back to the hostel he was staying at and Sherlock would disappear down a beautiful French boulevard never to be seen again. That was the only realistic conclusion to their encounter.

“John, would you like to come over…? Of course, I’m sure you have other plans for your time in Paris. I don’t want to obliterate them.”
“No. No, I don’t… you aren’t… I would love to come over.”

“Oh. Brilliant.”

“Sherlock… are you—?”

“Yes.”

“But…”

“I’m not staying at home. I have a hotel room.”

“I’m sorry. I’m leaving the day after tomorrow. I’m just a bit…”

“What?”

“I don’t know.”

“Scared? Tired? Lonely?”

“Yeah.”

“I know.”

Sherlock loved Paris. He loved the thick smoke that assaulted him on every corner, he loved the way the French language floated off his tongue, and he loved the fact that he was lying in bed with a handsome man whom he had arranged to spend the weekend with.

He only hated that they couldn’t stay in Paris.
John Watson was so bored. Nothing ever happened. Ever. Not to him. Not since he came back from Afghanistan where had been shot in the shoulder and had the biggest surge of adrenalin his body had ever experienced.

After that there had been nothing.

He was desperate now. He wanted something in his life to make it worthwhile even for a day. Or, even more specifically, for a night. So on this Valentine's Day, he made his way to a venue that had an organised Speed Dating even on. Get his leg over. That would help. Surely out of the dozens of lonely women he was to meet, there was someone he could charm enough to get their clothes off.

He arrived and was struck by the enormous amount of pink they had decorated the vestibule with. Pink lights, pink ribbon, pink welcome drinks. John gratefully accepted his and made his way to check in. As he waited in line he saw doors open to two ballroom sized spaces. One had an equal mix of women and men, all finding their seats in neat rows opposite each other. The other room had women opposite women and men opposite men. John's eyes lingered there. Curious.

"Name?"

"Watson. John," John said. He took a breath. "Look, I know this may be out of line, but is there a way for me to switch to the... other room?"

The woman in charge of checking everyone in looked at him over the rim of her glasses. "Pardon?" she said.

John squirmed awfully where he stood before he straightened his back and lifted his chin. "If there's an open spot in the other room, I'd like to switch if at all possible," he said, looking at a spot beyond the woman's face.

The woman smirked and John felt like turning on his heel and walking out.

"We've had a cancellation. It shouldn't be a problem," she said.

John visibly relaxed and tensed again. What the hell was he doing?

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"Hello, I'm Jo-"

"John. It says on your name tag. Be a little bit more original and less repetitive. A vain hope, I know,
but do please try. I am not stupid despite my presence here may suggest."

John's eyes widened and his interest was grabbed. His heart, which had been pounding uncomfortably since he set foot in the gay room, had moved up to his throat. The man was bloody gorgeous. Dark curls, pale skin, pale eyes. It was like someone had drawn the perfect man and it had come off the page.

John blinked.

"Fine, if you're going to be struck dumb by me, let me finish your introduction for you. You're a doctor. Army doctor. Recently back. Not on leave and not because you want to be back. You were shot and discharged because your injury has made you useless to the army in the capacity you were in it. You overspend money and you're going to have to leave London soon if you don't find a job and, more importantly, a share in a flat. No close family then. What a pity as you're so lonely." The man took a deep breath and sighed it out, leaning back in his chair. It was almost pornographic. It was like he'd had an orgasm. All that was needed to complete the image was a cigarette.

John gaped in shock. "How-" he said.

"I observe. I observe things," the man said.


"That was brilliant," John said. "Really fucking brilliant."

Sherlock leaned forward in his chair, suddenly tense and the happy afterglow of his deduction gone. "What?" he snapped.

"It was brilliant. I've never seen anyon-thing like it." John blushed. His damn mouth had almost given him away.

Sherlock smirked. He decided to continue. He liked John's reaction to him. "This is your first time attempting to court a man. You came here to be in the other room but you ended up here. Curiosity mixed with boredom. There's a lot more adrenalin in chasing you're not supposed to want than going for the obvious, isn't there, John?" he said, his voice smooth as velvet and as inebriating as a bottle of wine.

A lopsided smile came to John's face. It was freeing to have someone see right through him. Right through. Usually people saw right through him because he had a cane and a dark cloud hanging over his head, but nobody ever saw him clearly like Sherlock seemed to. "I seem obvious to you," he said.

"Everything is obvious to me. It's the curse of genius," Sherlock said.

"This doesn't really seem like your type of place," John said.

Sherlock smirked again. "No. It's not. My landlady," he said, rolling his eyes and saying no more as if it had been enough of an explanation.
"Yes?" John prompted.

"She took my skull. She took my skull and said I wouldn't get it back unless I came to this 'event'. Apparently I need to be properly socialised," Sherlock said with an air of someone who was routinely tortured.

"Right. She took your skull," John echoed. The other side of his mouth joined in in a full smile. "Lucky for me," he said, feeling brave.

Sherlock's brow drew together and he looked as if he'd been smacked in the face and stomach and positively walloped over the head.

John chuckled. "Oh, you can be surprised then?" he said teasingly. He wasn't sure if Sherlock's reaction was positive or if he was about to be rejected so he withdrew, leaning back in his chair and crossing his arms.

"John," Sherlock said after he'd stared at John for another dozen seconds in complete, unmoving silence.

"Yes?"

"We must go now. You're an army doctor. You'll be useful to my work. You've seen death, destruction, the ugly side of life. The interesting side. You'll help me with my cases. You'll move in my flat. I have a spare room. Mrs. Hudson will give me back my skull permanently if I have companion."

"A companion? What are you-"

"Come now, John. You can't keep circulating this room you might-... there's other men here who aren't as-... John. Come along," Sherlock said, rising.

Christ he's tall. Tall, dark and handsome and he wants me to go with him. John stood, taking the cane he'd leaned against the table.

They had much to discuss in the cab back to Baker Street - Consulting Detectives and what they do, murders, how John could help in The Work, the rent, and then (making John spectacularly red) who would top and who would bottom in the future. The discussions stopped when they had arrived and John had made his little comments and niceties about the flat. Sherlock had little patience for the chatter and pulled John back to his bedroom to show him just how good topping a man with a voluminous bottom could be.

In the morning, Sherlock found Billy the Skull back on the mantel where he belonged with an unbearably smug winky face drawn on a sticky note.
"Welcome, everyone, to 'Looking for Love,' a special speed dating event to find that special someone for this coming Valentine's Day!"

Sherlock couldn't figure out who in their right mind had put this short, overly enthusiastic woman dressed in head to toe bright red, in charge of an event aiming to pair up young gay men with one another. She was looking around at the room filled with eager and nervous faces as though she was their messiah, ready to lead them to a world of happiness where years from now, they would come back to her and thank her for being the reason Person A had fallen in love with Person B and had it not been for her beautiful and brilliantly planned speed dating event, Person A and Person B may have lived their lives, their paths never crossing.

All of these thoughts were rolling in Sherlock's head while the woman spoke, describing just how beneficial an event like this could be, but he didn't hear a single word. Sherlock was too busy looking around the group of men, trying to find someone, anyone, who he had any sort of attraction to. So far, no dice.

"You do realise how much you owe me for coming here with you," he grumbled to the man beside him.

Greg merely laughed. "Oi, calm down, Sherlock," he whispered. "You may thank me yet. There are some pretty good looking men here."

Sherlock's eyes narrowed. "Just because you're too timid to tell my brother that you-"

"We aren't talking about this," Greg said quickly, turning his body away from Sherlock and back towards the woman up front.

With a roll of his eyes Sherlock turned back and, out of his peripheral, caught sight of a rather attractive man who seemed to be a year or two older than he was. The man caught Sherlock's eye and winked before whispering something to the person he was with.

That one, Sherlock thought to himself. I want to be paired up with that one.

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John fidgeted nervously from one foot to the other, trying not to seem as anxious as he was.

"John, mate, you've got to calm down," Mike whispered to him.

Shaking his head slightly, John said, "Do you know how big of a step this is Mike? I come to terms with the fact that I may not be as straight as I had thought and the entire group decides I should try dating men. And somehow, I agree to come to this thing with you. You! And you're straight!"

"Just here to help you out, Johnny," Mike replied with a grin. "Who knows. Maybe you'll find your soul mate here and you'll have no one to thank but me for it."

"Yeah, maybe," John said with no real conviction. He looked around the room and saw a man who looked about his age, possible a year younger look over at him keenly. The man was a bit taller than
he was, but just slightly, and blonde. He looked John up and down and made John feel a flutter in his stomach at being checkout out like that.

_Alright, _he thought to himself. _Maybe this might not be so bad after all._

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Sherlock sat down at the table after seven spectacularly abhorrent "mini dates" as the woman kept calling them and, to his supreme delight, the tall man from earlier sat down across from him.

"Alex Cooper," the man said as he extended his hand out. He winked at Sherlock again to acknowledge that the move earlier had been intentional.

"Sherlock Holmes," he said in return, appraising Alex with his eyes.

"Quite a name," Alex said, visibly intrigued by the presence sitting across from him.

"Quite a lot more as I hope you'll get to know after tonight," Sherlock said as he lifted his wine and took a sip.

Alex leaned back in his chair, grinning. "Oh, you and I will get along very well indeed, Sher."

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John's leg was bobbing up and down and it only intensified when the young, blonde-haired man sat own opposite him.

"Hello," the man said. "I'm Louis McKenney."

"John Watson."

"Strong name for a strong looking guy," Louis said with a grin as he leaned forward across the table.

John didn't know what to say to this so he laughed a bit awkwardly and nodded.

"What do you do, John?" Louis asked, looking very interested in whatever John was about to say.

"I'm a medical student," John replied, knowing he should give more details, but feeling far too nervous to add anything else.

"Oh?" Louis asked, not getting enough information for his liking. "Tell me more about it, John."

With a nod, John slowly began to tell Louis about school, his mates, and his plans for the army once he passed his exams.

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It was to be the last mini-date of the night, but why Sherlock had even stuck around until the end was a mystery. He and Alex already had plans to meet up at a club in an hour and, based on the fact that his current mini-date walking towards him was holding a piece of paper in his hand with a lopsided grin led Sherlock to believe that this young man had gotten a phone number and had no intention of
pursuing anything with Sherlock either.

As the man took a seat, Sherlock’s body language could not convey his desire to leave and be done with this evening more.

"Hi," the man said politely, stuffing the paper into his pocket and holding out his hand. "John Watson." There was a confidence in John's voice that had not existed earlier in the night. He was riding the high of his positive encounter with Louis. The surly looking man across from him was just the last hurdle of the evening before he could leave.

"Sherlock Holmes," the dark haired man replied, almost lazily, bored, holding out his hand and shaking John's. He had to admit to himself that it was a good handshake, but the prospect of dancing in a dark secluded corner with Alex was the prevalent thought on his mind.

"Right, so..." John shifted a bit uncomfortably under the gaze of Sherlock. "What is it that you do then, Sherlock?"

Sherlock arched an eyebrow. The man had a pleasant voice and was very attractive. A bit short, but quite muscular. He worked out. One shoulder was held at a slightly different angle than the other. Dislocated. Twice. Three times. Rugby player, based on the clear signs of injuries to the fingers. Physique was muscular, more than a rugby player needed. So clearly, this John Watson spent time to build up his strength. A career in the army? In the future. The man's face was still soft and did not have the hardened wear of war showing on it. There were circles under his eyes. Student. Late night studying. But what student stays in school instead of immediately going into the army and spends so many nights up late studying? A doctor. A medical student. A future army doctor.

He told all of this to John very quickly. "That is what I do," he said as his conclusion. There. That should put an end to any conversation between the two of them.

But John was not offended, nor was he at all bothered by Sherlock's comments. A strange feeling settled over him as he looked in awe at the man sitting across from him. "That...was amazing."

Sherlock locked his eyes on John's, speechless. No one thought that Sherlock picking apart every aspect of their lives without a single word was amazing. Everyone thought he was a freak. But the way that John Watson was looking at him was one of being heavily impressed. "You think so?" he asked, almost cockily.

"It was quite extraordinary," John said, a smile spreading across his face. He leaned in subconsciously and licked his lips. "How did you do that? Did Mike Stamford tell you all of that?"

Sherlock's brow furrowed. "Who?" he asked. "And no, that would be cheating. I don't cheat. I made observations about you. That is all." He found himself leaning in towards John as well, somehow captivated by this attractive medical student who made him feel... warm. Sherlock wanted to cling to that.

"Well, it was something else, Mr. Holmes," John said.

"Please, call me Sherlock."

"Alright, Sherlock," John said. "Now, honestly, what is it that you do? So you're clearly brilliant and can tell anything about anyone. But what do you do with that?"

And for once, Sherlock didn't try to be mysterious and withhold the information about how he was
working with Scotland Yard. He wanted to impress John and so he began telling him all about his work and some of the cases he was working on, the research he was doing.

They talked like that for some time. The event had ended. John told Sherlock of his group of friends and Sherlock told John of his brother's relationship with fattening foods and his ever growing similarity to that of a small whale. Neither noticed that the room had cleared out and that the short woman in red was impatiently tapping her foot, waiting to leave. Neither noticed that the two men they had thought they would end up with had found comfort in each other and left together. Neither noticed that Greg Lestrade left the event, grinning madly, his phone in his hand to text Mycroft Holmes. Neither noticed Mike Stamford give them a look with a proud smile, eager to get home and tell his friends. Sherlock and John noticed nothing but the person they were sitting across from and how this mini-date had become their first date together.
The grey suit sat innocently on the kitchen table, and while John wasn’t Sherlock, he wasn’t entirely unobservant. High thread count, well-tailed, clearly made with his specific measurements in mind. An equally unobtrusive silk shirt lay beside it, along with a pair of dress shoes that exuded a nearly tangible opulence. Mary had smirked in her jealous, but indulgent, manner when John had asked about his new outfit, saying nothing but the one name John needed to hear.

Sherlock.

The perpetually un-retired soldier had grabbed his mobile from its charger and slipped it into his jeans with a nod, reminding his wife of their silent understanding that if Sherlock called, John would answer. After all, Sherlock was inviting him into war once more.

Dinner with Mary was strained. John hadn’t received any notice from Sherlock and it was making him irritable and restless. When his phone finally buzzed, John shot up from the table, grabbing his new clothes and rushing into the bedroom to change. Moments later, the door was slamming closed behind him, gun secured by the waistband of his trousers.

All John had was an address. Luckily, he knew what that meant.

“John. Pleasure.” The familiar, deep baritone made John’s eyes shoot up expectantly, and his pulse quickened in response. “Here’s your name tag. You need to inform me of any suspicious behavior. I’m looking for a man with a sprained wrist. Once we find him, I’ll alert Lestrade and you can return home.”

“Sherlock, slow down. What is this about?”

“Speed dating, John. I know he has to be here.”

“Speed dating? I’m married!”
“Ah, yes. I almost forgot.” Sherlock grabbed John’s hand, working the wedding ring from John’s finger and pocketing it.

“Sherlock.”

“Relax,” Sherlock replied in an unmistakably annoyed voice. "I fully intend to return the trivial representation of your marriage to Mary when we’re done.” When John didn’t immediately respond, Sherlock sighed in exasperation, and said a phrase so familiar that it made his companion smile despite himself. “John, it’s for a case.”

The detective caught John’s eyes before proceeding, cataloguing the slight deepening of his wrinkles, the new hair cut, and the sweet smile that was pulling John’s lips upwards. Then, without further ado, Sherlock grabbed John by the arm and tugged him towards the restaurant.

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John Watson did not like Sherlock’s chosen method of interviewing his suspected killer, even though the rational part of his mind told him that Sherlock’s behavior was a disguise for the case.

Firstly, John had never enjoyed speed dating. Secondly, he was already married. And lastly, and perhaps most importantly, John Watson was not gay. He hadn’t anticipated that Sherlock’s “it’s for a case” would require him to talk to men who were potentially interested in shagging him. He was not gay. Really. Even if he could concede that the tall man with the blond hair and the dimples made his heart flutter in his chest.

Within twenty minutes, the doctor had mostly forgotten about his assigned task. He was enjoying himself. He was enjoying the flirting, and the drinks, and the overwhelming amount of attractive men in one place. John even accepted a phone number, although he told himself that he was only playing the part, just as Sherlock clearly was. He would seem suspicious if he refused the promise of further contact after such an intriguing conversation.

Of course, John was still watching Sherlock out of the corner of his eye the whole time. The detective winked at him when their gazes met; John’s first thought was that Sherlock was flirting with him, but he realized moments later that it was more likely that he had found his man.

John swallowed thickly, barely paying attention to the corporate lawyer sitting across from him as anticipation bubbled up under his skin. Something was going to happen. Something exciting.
The doctor hadn't felt this good in a long time; he attributed his happiness to a mixture of adrenaline and the rush of the quite suggestive dates.

In a single moment, the good feeling was gone.

Sherlock’s suspect was kissing him; plush lips were parted, gorgeous eyes closed. John shot up from his chair, pulling the gun from his trousers and whacking the violator in the back of the head, just hard enough so that his unsuspecting victim jerked away in shock.

“What are you doing?”

“Get away from him!” John yelled, feeling his face go red with what he knew was unwarranted anger. He just couldn’t help himself. No one had the right to touch Sherlock Holmes like that.

There was a loud bang as the door was kicked down and a team of men rushed inside. They grabbed the man that Sherlock had kissed and John had smacked, handcuffed him efficiently, and led him out to a small group of police cars.

“Here’s your wedding ring,” Sherlock said with a cold voice, slipping the band of gold into the inside pocket of John’s suit and then striding away from the mess of police cars with his characteristic saunter. “Um… I’ll be sure to text you if another case comes up.”

“Um… Right.”

“Good bye, John…” Sherlock leaned forward and pressed a light kiss to John’s cheek.

The unexpected affection made John release a small puff of air and, in a sudden rush of motion, reach for Sherlock’s lips, finally unable to control the longing that plagued his chest with painful aches. To John’s surprise, Sherlock didn’t pull away, instead leaning into the contact desperately. Sherlock’s arms wrapped around John’s body, John’s tongue pressed into Sherlock’s mouth, and for a moment everything felt good again. All the hollow waves of tedium receded, and when they were together, John Watson was himself. Sherlock pulled away first, eyes wide with what John was
forced to conclude was pain.

The words were right on his lips, but John couldn’t say them. Instead he simply nodded, pulled his gaze away from Sherlock’s, and turned away to hail himself a cab. John could feel tears welling in his eyes, but he ignored them.

It didn’t matter. John would go back to his flat, he would crawl back into his life, and he would wait for a phone call. That’s what John did. He waited.

Because sometimes Sherlock called.
3 February

Hello! Today's prompt is Home-made Valentine's Day Presents! We hope you enjoy reading as much as we enjoyed writing them.

"Mrs. Hudson, I need your help."

She'd heard it twice in two days and had been equally surprised both times. What could her boys want from her that required such secrecy and hushed voices?

"What with, dear?" had been her answer both times.

Sherlock had paced around her kitchen, rambling on and on about something to do with the first human heart he ever saw and how it had been so exciting he'd nearly been sick (she felt sick at the thought of seeing a heart, but Sherlock was a different kind of human) and now he had a heart himself and now he felt sick all the time because John was it. She had tried to listen but Sherlock spoke so terribly fast and used words she didn't quite know the meaning of and he kept mentioning that human heart and describing it in such detail that she had had to make herself a strong cup of tea to cope with it.

"That's terribly romantic, Sherlock," she said. Well, she supposed it was. It sounded like it could be. Like Sherlock meant his disgusting talk to be romantic. Her assumption turned out to be correct.

"Is it? Really, Mrs. Hudson?" he replied. He looked so cautiously happy that she tilted her head to the side and smiled so fondly that she felt her heart might burst.

"Oh, yes. The bit with the heart and John. Is this about Valentine's day?"

"Yes."

The following day, John had come down the stairs to see her.

Unlike Sherlock, John had sat politely at her table and softly thanked her for the tea and biscuits she automatically laid out. She wasn't their mother in any biological sense but they were linked nonetheless in a way she had never experienced. They were as good as her sons and she may as well have been their mother. Especially John's as he didn't have one and, from what Mrs. Hudson had gathered, she hadn't been a very good one when she had been alive.

She wasn't their housekeeper or their mother, no. But that didn't mean she couldn't spoil them.
"Will you... help me, Mrs. Hudson? I know it's a lot to ask," John asked. She could never decline.

She told Sherlock to come while John was at work the following day and she told John that it was fine he couldn't come to see her until the evening because she was going to play bridge with Mrs. Turner all day.

She was glad she hadn't had to lie to Sherlock; he would have seen right through her. John, however, thought of her as a good natured, elderly woman and that was nice when she didn't want to bother with heavy things or when she was lying to his face.

Everything went according to plan. John left early for work and Sherlock came down an hour later after he'd had his morning tea and stared into his microscope until he was fit to see other people without yelling at them for being too stupid, too loud, too present.

They got to work. Sherlock, being Sherlock, insisted they make everything from scratch. Mrs. Hudson had argued that the jam she had was perfectly delicious and John loved it in her biscuits and Sherlock had snapped back that it wasn't her biscuits and John "deserved something special on this tedious and stupid sodding made up holiday designed to sell cards, chocolates, wine and to make lonely people feel worse and the smug married people even more smug."

Mrs. Hudson only uttered a softly outraged, "oh dear!", only pretending to scold him as she let him decompress. It wasn't easy for him, this relationship business, and she knew that.

It was best to adopt a very patient and lenient way of communication with him for now even though he was driving her completely batty with the way he was zipping about her kitchen, reading ingredient labels and making the dough five times over before it got to the exact consistency the recipe he'd printed out from the internet described. Everything was covered in flour and the surfaces of her kitchen were so sticky that she saw hours of hard work between Sherlock's visit and John's.

When the dough was perfect, Sherlock seemed to lose steam. He sat down and stared into the wall with an enormous pout on his lips.

"Sherlock?"

Nothing.

"Sherlock."

Nothing.

"Sherlock."

Nothing. Sherlock had checked out. The enormity of this show of affection finally becoming too much for his brain to cope with. He shut down and glared at Mrs. Hudson's innocent wallpaper as she finished up the biscuits.

"Mrs. Hudson," John said, tapping lightly at her door.
She opened it. Her kitchen was pristine and not a smell of baked goods was to be sniffed and not a residue of sticky jam was to be felt anywhere. There was nothing to make John suspect.

"Come in, John," she said, waving him in. She allowed herself a smile behind his back as he took his jacket off. "Where's Sherlock?"

"Upstairs. I went to say hello but he had something bloody on the table and didn't seem too interested in me," John said. He grinned. It wasn't very often he was happy about having bloody things on his kitchen table but there was always a time for an exception. This was it.

Working with John was a far more pleasant experience than working with Sherlock had been. And while John didn't stop half way through the job, he did have four cups of tea and somehow seemed to avoid half the work anyway.

Sighing, she finished off another batch of biscuits on her own.

Not their mother. Not their housekeeper.

And still she couldn't help spoiling them rotten.

-----------------------------------------------------------------

It was the following evening that John and Sherlock sat down to exchange their home-made Valentine's Day gifts. They decided to open their gifts at the same time, both smug in the fact that they probably had the best one. *He loves his biscuits*, they both thought of the other.

The sounds of wrapping paper being torn open ended and a silence took over.

"It's-" John said.

"It would seem so," Sherlock said.

Silence took over again. Until...

"MRS. HUDSON!" Sherlock yelled down the stairs.

Mrs. Hudson let out a soft exclamation. She had been caught, she realised with a giggle. She grabbed the bottle of champagne with the large ribbon she had bought for her boys and hurried to and up the stairs and into the living room. "Sherlock, you shouldn't shout. At my age it could end in a heart attack or possi-"

"Mrs. Hudson," Sherlock snapped. He took the box from John's hands and held out the one he'd received. "I think you have some explaining to do."

A self-satisfied smile came to Mrs. Hudson's face. "Do I?" she asked innocently.

"She's played us like chess pieces," John said with a laugh.

Sherlock looked thunderous. His landlady had tricked him. How? She'd lied to him and had secrets behind both their backs and now they were sitting there with biscuits they had made each other and how could he not have known? And even more importantly, how could his gift idea have been so unoriginal?
"Yes I have, John dear. It seemed the polite thing to do. You were ever so cute in the apron. I have a picture of Sherlock in one, too. Flour in his hair. Consider it my Valentine's gift to you. And this champagne," she said, delivering the bottle to John. He made a surprised and appreciative noise and went to get flutes from the kitchen.

"Sherlock, I wish you would stop looking at me like that. It's enough to make the flowers on my dress wither and die," she said. She couldn't help the grin on her face. Oh, it was nice to one up that arrogant boy sometimes.

Sherlock stop up, withering glare still firmly in place and he kissed her cheek. "Thank you," he whispered.

"Not a problem," she whispered back, patting his arm.

John returned with the glasses and the three of them sat down on the sofa together and drank the champagne with Mrs. Hudson entertaining them (and infuriating Sherlock) with the story of how she had managed to keep secrets hidden away from the world's only Consulting Detective and a very clever doctor.

Sherlock decided not to speak a word to Mrs. Hudson or Molly for a full week when he found out that the bloody thing he had so enjoyed dissecting and covering in chemicals the afternoon before had been a part of the scheme to keep him distracted and occupied while John was busy with Mrs. Hudson. Sherlock followed through on his plan, not quite comprehending that the scheming and tricking had been a sign of love from them and had made it possible for Sherlock and John to show how much they loved each other.

John bought them both a bouquet of flowers.

(And made sure to ride Sherlock into the mattress to show his appreciation for the jam that had been made especially for him.)
"Mrs. Hudson!" Sherlock called as he nervously moved around the flat. What was he going to do? No ideas were coming to him. Nothing was inspiring. Nothing was good enough.

The sound of footsteps on the stairs were quick and nervous which somehow comforted Sherlock. Mrs. Hudson would be there to assist him and she must have heard the tone of his voice and recognised his desperation and fear. He turned to look at the door and watched as Mrs. Hudson, a bit out of breath, came inside.

"Sherlock," she said, relieved to see that he was standing and not collapsed on the floor in a cocaine induced delirium. "What are you bloody yelling about as if the world is ending?"

"The world is ending, Mrs. Hudson, don't you see this?" Sherlock looked at her furiously.

She stared at him in confusion. "You know, I agree with John. That face you make, young man, when you think all of us should understand what's going on in that head of yours... It's insulting!"

Sherlock's eyes flicked up to hers in annoyance. No one understood him. John came the closest, but there was always something that was in Sherlock's head that could not be conveyed to others, despite how obvious he thought it was. And now, when he needed her the most and couldn't even go to John for help, she was looking at him as if he were speaking a different language. Well, he might as well have been, given her only basic comprehension of the English language and not at all its nuances and... He let out a frustrated growl. He was going to drive himself mad if he didn't come up with an idea soon.

"Valentine's Day," he managed to say through clenched teeth.

"Yes, what about it?" Mrs. Hudson asked, still holding herself with her hand on her hip, affronted and defensive.

"Pres-ents," Sherlock said, enunciating each syllable as if this would help his landlady understand him better.

"I don't understand you, Sherlock. I really don't," Mrs. Hudson said as she shook her head. "Now, if you are going to treat me like a person and explain your problem to me, I can try and help you, dear. But carrying on like this will get you no where." She turned to leave the flat, knowing that he would wait until the very last possible moment to-

"Wait," Sherlock's voice came, and Mrs. Hudson could hear the restraint in it as though giving in and asking for her to stay was losing a battle that had been raging inside of him for months.

"Yes?" she asked, turning around with an innocent and pleasant smile on her face.

Sherlock glared at her. Oh, the woman knew exactly what she was doing and as much as he despised it, Sherlock realised that he was more or less at her mercy, lest he disappoint John.

"Yes, dear?" Mrs. Hudson repeated again as she walked up to Sherlock. "I can't help you if you don't tell me what you need help with." Her voice was sing-songy and Sherlock loathed every note and cadence.
"I need to make John something for this miserable excuse for a holiday and I have no ideas," he said softly, his voice lashing out harsh and quick like a whip.

This did absolutely nothing to phase Mrs. Hudson who chuckled delicately to herself and moved into the kitchen. "I'll make you a nice spot of tea, Sherlock," she said airily, clearly enjoying herself. "That will help us think."

Grumbling to himself, Sherlock followed her into the kitchen and placed his head into his heads. "Mrs. Hudson, somehow we agreed that we would not buy presents for each other but that they were to be homemade instead." He spat the word 'homemade' as if it were poison on his tongue.

"Well, what ideas have you come up with so far on your own?" Mrs. Hudson asked, a bit apprehensive about what disastrous possibilities could have been looming in John's future had she not been summoned to intervene.

With a groan, Sherlock lifted up his head. "Does it look like I've come up with anything?"

Mrs. Hudson huffed out a breath and crossed her arms. "Do not take that tone with me, Sherlock," she said with a snippy edge. "I'm here to help you and if you're just going to sit there and be rude and expect me to do everything for you, then you can just forget that I even came up here."

"No!" Sherlock said, and the desperation and fear was back, saturating that one small word.

A smug smile found it's way onto Mrs. Hudson's face. "That's what I thought. Now, what ideas have you come up with?"

Sherlock exhaled and forced himself to keep calm. "Ash."

"Sorry?"

"Ash," Sherlock repeated. "A new type of tobacco ash. I've been trying to enumerate more and one specific kind will be for John."

Mrs. Hudson blinked a few times as a silence settled down on the kitchen.

"No."

Sherlock looked surprised. "Sorry?" he asked in confusion.

"No, you are not giving that boy tobacco ash for Valentine's Day," Mrs. Hudson said with finality.

"I know ash!" Sherlock exclaimed.

"You know John!" Mrs. Hudson said back with exasperation. "Now I happen to know for a fact that he loves it when you play that violin of yours. What can you do with that?"

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"Oh, wow!" John said with a smile as he opened the gift. "A CD of... you playing violin. Sherlock this is very nice. Thank you."
Sherlock nodded a bit awkwardly. He was wearing the scarf John had knitted for him and doing his best not to point out that John had missed a few stitches and that the knots where he had to switch to new yarn were rather obvious. Mrs. Hudson had clearly helped him with his gift as well.

"I'll be honest," John said with a smirk. "I wasn't expecting something so..."

"So... what?" Sherlock asked, feeling as though he had failed John. He was already formulating ways to get back at Mrs. Hudson, places to hide her 'evening soothers.'

"So ordinary." John looked at Sherlock a bit bashfully. "Sorry, I don't know what else I was expecting. This is nice though. Very nice. Very...thoughtful."

A pause.

"Mrs. Hudson gave you the idea didn't she?"

"Yes. The scarf too, obviously?"

"Ah. Yes."

"Right."

John smiled. "I know that look," he said affectionately. "You had another idea, didn't you?"

"Yes, but Mrs. Hudson-"

"Show it to me."

Sherlock would do anything for that voice and the look in those eyes. He stood up and walked into the kitchen and, after shuffling a few containers around until he found the one he was looking for, came out holding a small one.

"Sorry it isn't wrapped," Sherlock said, holding it out for John who in no way seemed bothered by this.

Timidly, knowing that there could be literally anything inside the container, John opened it, and let out a soft laugh. "Tobacco ash."

"A new type. Derived of the cigars you told me your grandfather used to smoke."

John's eyes found Sherlock's and was speechless. Words simply would not do. Instead, he leaned up and kissed Sherlock deeply.

Yes, Sherlock knew ash, but Mrs. Hudson was right. Sherlock knew John.
Pillows and blankets were strewn all over the couch and on the floor. Blankets were pulled tight over a mess of chairs and the writing desk, and everything remotely warm and soft that Sherlock could possibly find (other than clothes) was amassed in the small space in hopeful wait. There was no light in the room, save the flickering of candles, that Sherlock actually find quite soothing and intimate. Interesting. Maybe being with John Watson was indeed eroding his powerful need to avoid the cliche.

Of course, the mess he had made in the living room was not the least bit cliche by his reckoning, which meant that uncertainty was the price that Sherlock had to pay. After all, how could he know whether he was closer to endearing than creepy, closer to eccentric than childish? How could he know if John Watson would appreciate his efforts?

There was only one element that he knew John would like, as far as Sherlock’s Valentine’s Day plans were concerned, namely the rowdy intercourse that was sure to conclude the night regardless of how well Sherlock’s attempt to be creatively romantic went over. He had only been dating John for a few months, and while certain aspects of their relationship hadn’t changed in the slightest, Sherlock still felt impossibly awkward in regards to interactions with his new boyfriend. Shagging, kissing, and lounging about in bed was one thing; having a normal conversation was another. Quite simply, Sherlock didn’t know how to be in a relationship. John didn’t seem to mind.

So Sherlock had naturally settled with the first thing that had come to mind, somehow coming to the conclusion that building a small fort in their living room was the ideal way to proceed.

“Sherlock?” Sherlock shot up from under a quilt when he heard John’s voice, accidentally knocking an extra blanket off of the couch and chuckling in an embarrassed fashion when he saw that John’s jaw had dropped. Not good? Had he messed up yet again? John shook his head in amazement, breaking into soft laughter and jerking into animation.

“Is this for Valentine’s Day?”

“Yes.”
“I see. Very nice… um… fort, Sherlock.”

“I used to make them all the time when I was young… Comfortable.”

Sherlock climbed out from his creation, face pink with the rush of John’s dubious approval, but the other man stopped him, pressing a hand into Sherlock’s chest and slipping into the bedroom.

“Give me a minute, genius. I’m not done with your gift.”

“I don’t need a gift. You know that,” Sherlock called through the door, an unquenchable feeling of exaltation increasing with every moment.

“Course you do. It’s Valentine’s Day. You aren’t going to like it, though… It’s much too sentimental. I’m apologizing ahead of time.”

“I am not surprised. Everything you do is sentimental. I’m assuming it’s because you’re impossibly in love with me.” A bell-like laugh wiggled under the door and lit Sherlock’s heart with a comfortable warmth. He loved John’s laugh.

“Something like that,” John replied shamelessly.

The doctor was taking too long and Sherlock was getting antsy. He couldn’t seem to be able to stop himself from wringing his hands like a maniac and he certainly couldn’t stop himself from ceaselessly pacing in front of the bedroom door. Being denied visual assurance of John’s presence in this situation was even worse than it was on the rare occasions when the other man locked the door to the bathroom when he went to take a shower. (While John had learned quickly to keep the door open, because it meant he got a hot, wet detective pressed up against his back, he still had periodic lapses in memory.)

The door finally swung open to reveal a very shy looking John carrying a parcel in his hand. The damn fool had even taken the time to wrap the body gift, making Sherlock wait longer than was strictly necessary.

“Here you go, you git. I know you don’t want to wait.” Sherlock grabbed his present, pulling apart the paper in a way that was more destructive than efficient. Scraps went flying, but in no more than a moment, the detective’s face softened when he saw the gift.
“That’s us.”

“Yeah. Sentimental, I know…” Two happy faces were peering out of the modest picture frame, hair windswept, faces flushed with cold air. John’s arms were wrapped around him, and Sherlock’s head was just slightly resting on his boyfriend’s shoulder, just above his scar. Sherlock could remember when the picture had been taken distinctly; after all, it had been the beginning of their life together.

“Certainly sentimental. I… Um… I’ll put it in our room,” Sherlock said softly, carrying the picture frame as if it were a priceless piece of china and setting it on his bedside table.

As it turned out, John and Sherlock were not so careful with his fort, which collapsed after taking quite a pounding.
He'd spent the last two years analysing the facts.

John had come on to him that first night in Angelo's. Fact. 
John had dated but his girlfriends were all jealous of him. Fact. 
John had been jealous of The Woman. Fact. 
John had stopped dating after that. Fact. 
John liked his cheekbones. Fact. 
John had made him eat. Fact. 
John had made him sleep. Fact. 
John had killed for him, taken down criminals for him, and done almost everything he had ever asked of him. Fact.

The only natural conclusion to this was that John Hamish Watson, doctor and army veteran, friend and partner in crime solving, was in love with him.

Had it not been for that fact Sherlock might not have made it through the lonely years he spent after Moriarty had made him jump off Bart's to save the lives of his friends. The guilt of John's grief plagued him until he convinced himself it probably wasn't as bad as he had initially thought. John was alright. Probably dating but that was okay. No one would be able to live up to the memory of him. Nothing would turn serious.

John was his. John had always been his.

It was mid-February when Sherlock returned to Baker Street. The flat was dark and smelled like no one had been there for a long time. It was highly uncomfortable. John needed to come back immediately.

Sherlock would be there welcome him and to tell him that his feelings were not unrequited.

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John received a text in the early hours of Valentine's Day.

*If convenient, come to Baker Street.*

It sent a shudder through his entire body. Grief that he left unexpressed. Grief he didn't know how to express because the magnitude of it left him handicapped. And Sherlock wasn't there to make his metaphorical limp go away this time.

He just had memories left. And people, like this anonymous texter, who taunted him for keeping that
memory as it should be. Pure. Sherlock wasn't a fake. He hadn't been. Sherlock wasn't anything these days because Sherlock was dead and John was without him.

But he had Mary. Mary Morstan who he was sure he loved. A sweet woman who put up with his emotional boundaries and didn't push him too hard. Mary.

*If inconvenient, come anyway.*

John's blood boiled. Who was texting him? What if someone was in Baker Street? The thought of a stranger rummaging through that flat, sitting in Sherlock's chair... it made John furious. He got up, dressed and collected his gun while Mary slept on soundly.

He arrived after a thirty minute journey through the quiet early morning streets of London. It took him another five minutes of standing by the door with the familiar set of keys in his hand before he could bring himself to unlock it. Before he went in, he went to correct the knocker only to find that it had been turned to the side already. The muscles in John's jaw contracted and released. The memories were already threatening to overwhelm him. It would be so nice to shoot someone. At the very least to pistol whip them. John put his hand on the small of his back and felt the outline of his gun. It relaxed him.

It was incredibly painful to stand in his former living room. He could almost hear Sherlock's footsteps, his voice, his breathing, the cogs of his brain working. Almost. He couldn't really hear anything because Sherlock was dead. It was the fact that ruled John's life now that Sherlock wasn't there to rule it himself.

"Hello?" he said.

There was no answer.

John closed his eyes.

Alone.

Sherlock stood in the bedroom, his hand gripping the wall. His fingertips were turning white from the pressure. John. John was out there. John's footsteps. John's voice. His John.

Suddenly he wasn't so sure if his planned romantic appearance back into John's life was the right way but there was no going back now.

He took a step to the right on to the creaky floorboard and waited.

John turned his entire body toward Sherlock's bedroom. Someone was in there. It felt like desecration. Rage boiled in him, making him feel strong as an ox but every footstep toward that room
made him feel weaker and weaker.

The bedroom represented all the things that never were. Maybe they could never have been. Now he would never know.

He pushed the door ajar and snaked a hand in and turned on the light before he opened the door entirely. His left hand was curled around the gun, ready to whip it out from the back of his trousers and point. He was ready to pull the trigger. Anything to stop being bored. Anything to express how he was feeling without ever saying a word.

"John."

John's eyes widened before they rolled back in his skull and everything became black and quiet.

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No. That had not been the expected reaction, Sherlock thought when he saw the heap on the floor that was John. He had no choice but to haul John up on the bed, disturbing the perfect heart on it that he had made of rose petals. He supposed John had ruined the full effect anyway when he'd turned on the ceiling light, making the candles superfluous. He put his hand down the back of John's trousers and took the gun out and put it on the bedside table.

John started to stir quickly and blinked his eyes open. Sherlock thought he looked terribly pale and he worried. Was his coming back a bit not good?

"John, please don't faint again. You are not a damsel in distress," he said softly, hovering over John's face with an unsure smile. How he longed to kiss him.

When he's conscious.

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John did not understand. He stared, gaping, up at Sherlock's face. You're dead, he said inside his mind. His mouth wasn't forming the words. He stared, his expression changing from shock to grief to anger to happiness to shock again. Sherlock's face above him looked stoic, almost completely blank but for the little pinch between his eyes and the small smile that was rapidly disappearing. John brought his left hand up to touch his face. It was real. Warm, soft flesh with sharp cheekbones.

Sherlock wasn't dead.

Sherlock's eyes fell closed at the gentle touch of his cheek. He hadn't felt a touch like that since before the Fall. It made him want to sob, but he was Sherlock Holmes and Sherlock Holmes didn't sob. Sherlock Holmes noticed things instead. Like the cool metal on the third finger of John's left hand.

Sherlock Holmes refused to sob.

Sherlock Holmes had spent the last two years fighting and he would continue now if that was what was needed.

"John, I am sorry. I had no idea you would be so affected," he said. He covered John's hand with his own, carefully avoiding touching the ring.
The touch sent jolts up John's heart and he realised that Sherlock was really, truly and completely alive. The next breath he drew filled his lungs like he wasn't a dead man himself. John had died with Sherlock in so many ways and now it was reversing. The rush of adrenalin upon finding his best friend alive (and well?) was unlike anything he'd ever experienced before. He didn't know whether to laugh or cry, to yell or speak normally, so he said nothing and just kept staring into pale eyes that were growing increasingly concerned.

John spread his fingers apart and Sherlock's fingers slid down and curled. He was holding John's hand while John held his face. Their worlds came crashing together once more and connected with the connection of their flesh. The fuzzy edges of life suddenly had sharp edges again. Life found meaning. There would be cases in their future. Criminals, late nights with no sleep and their quiet, constant camaraderie. It would all come back. It was the inevitable future now. John's brain struggled with the realisation that his inevitable future containing only a slow, grey slog towards death had been replaced with the colourful rush of Sherlock.

"I am sorry," Sherlock said again. He wanted to hear John speak again. He wanted forgiveness and understanding. He wanted far more than he deserved judging by John's reaction.

They lay there, in the perfectly disturbed heart of rose petals that Sherlock had made on his bed, surrounded by candles and the quiet sounds of their breathing. There would come a time when John would yell, they both knew that. There would come a time where John bought a bottle of whiskey and drank himself sick from the grief that somehow wasn't real anymore. There would come a time when the ring on the third finger on John's left hand came up in discussion and hard decisions had to be made. But that time wasn't now.

John nodded in acknowledgement that he had heard Sherlock.

He nodded again when Sherlock leaned down and kissed him.

"I have wanted you," Sherlock whispered. The confession came freely. It was a relief.

John's jaw flexed and he nodded. It frustrated Sherlock that John had yet to say a word to him but knew better than to force him.

Perhaps the time for speaking wasn't now.

They kissed again.
"No, it has to be rose petals," Sherlock complained to the man behind the counter.

The florist looked at the tall and arrogant man standing before him. Who did he think he was? Asking for that many rose petals on Valentine's Day. Didn't he know that most people ordered their bouquets of roses in advance? And the quantity that this man expected and downright demanded of him and his small flower shoppe was insulting.

"Sir," the florist said, pinching the bridge of his nose between his two fingers in frustration as he closed his eyes. Deep breath. You can do this. He's just a customer. "I understand your request, but I'm telling you that it just. Isn't. Possible."

"How much would make it possible?"

The florist's eyes opened wide. "Excuse me?"

Sherlock looked steadily at the man. "How much would I need to pay to make it possible to get the amount of roses and petals I require?"

The florist's jaw dropped. This man could not be serious. With a quick look over at how the man was dressed in such expensive clothing, the florist could only assume that yes, this man was serious and would be willing to pay whatever amount of money it took to get the roses. Perhaps if he could persuade him in the direction of a different flower, he could still make a large profit.

"Sir, if I could direct your attention to these beautiful lilies that we have, maybe you could-"

Sherlock spared the flowers once glance and shook his head. "Those aren't flowers. Those are buds. Lily buds. I require roses and rose petals. What part of this is so difficult for you to understand? You're a florist so surely you understand the difference between a lily and a rose. What I need are roses."

The florist had reached his breaking point. The customer was always right, but there was only so much cruelty and hostility he would allow himself to take from this man.

"Sir!" the florist said loudly. He would not allow himself to be bullied by this stranger who had no power over him. "I understand your predicament. However, the only possible way to get those roses to you today would be to import a shipment and have it expedited and-"

"Let's do that," Sherlock said simply. "Why didn't you mention that before? Make that happen."

The florist shook his head in disbelief. "Sir, do you realise how much that would cost?"

Sherlock looked nonplussed. "I believe I said I would pay any amount."

With a sigh of pure exasperation, the florist shook his head. "Alright then, sir. I'll see what I can do."

With a grin at how well this was now working, Sherlock began to go over the calculations in his head for how many rose petals would be needed.
John would be home from work at any minute and Sherlock sat on the steps leading up to the flat as he waited, his hands tapping anxiously on his thighs. He had managed to get everything taken care of with the help of his homeless network. The amount of money he had spent that day would never be disclosed to John.

The doorknob turned and Sherlock stood up.

"John," he said, a nervous energy in his voice. "Upstairs. Valentine's Day."

John looked at Sherlock in apprehension. "Yeah, alright," he said with caution. "Slow down there, Sherlock. I just got in. Let me catch a breath before we-"

"No. Now."

Sherlock reached out and grabbed John's hand and pulled him up the stairs despite John's protests that whatever was in the flat could wait the fourteen extra seconds it took to walk up the stairs at a normal human pace. When they reached the door, Sherlock took a deep breath.

"Happy Valentine's Day," he said, his voice stilted and formal. He opened the door to allow John entry.

John's jaw dropped. The entire floor, every single inch of it, was covered in red rose petals. There was no trace of wood. If John hadn't lived in that flat every day for years and had known that there were wood planks beneath his feet, he would have assumed that the entire flat was carpeted in flowers.

"What did you do?" John asked, turning and looking at Sherlock. "You covered the living room in rose petals!"

Sherlock shifted back and forth between his feet. "Not just the living room."

John's jaw dropped, if possible, even lower. "The entire flat? Sherlock, you..."

"I read that when people want to make a grand romantic gesture, especially on this specific date, they employ the use of a local florist and scatter rose petals on the floor to show their affection. I assumed that the amount of the rose petals correlated to the amount of affection one feels for the person receiving them so I deemed this amount to be sufficient. Should I have done more? Should I have covered the furniture in rose petals as well?"

It was all too much, in the best way imaginable. John burst out laughing and threw his arms around Sherlock's neck. "You romantic sod," he said. "This is perfect. I just wonder how comfortable these rose petals will be on your back."

"Comfortable on my back?" Sherlock asked in confusion.

John's eyebrows arched seductively as he pulled Sherlock into the room and shut the door behind them.
There would be no roses at Sherlock and John’s wedding.

It didn’t matter that the wedding was scheduled for Valentine’s Day, or that roses were traditional, expensive, and tasteful. For once, Sherlock could sacrifice all of the above, positive qualities without a rational reason. There were other flowers.

Hell, the wedding planner could decorate the room with every manner of flower; lilies, daisies, birds of paradise, irises, freesias, pansies, passion flowers, and orchids. Sherlock wouldn’t mind buying out the entire bloody flower shop. But no roses. None.

Mary’s favorite flower was the rose. Hence, John had purchased Mary roses frequently. Sherlock could remember the smell as John presented her with the bouquet of 24 red roses on Valentine’s Day, still fresh and wet with mist. The wedding had been a regular rose parade of white; Sherlock had even fastened a white rose to his lapel to match John’s, remarking internally on how well-suited John’s new wife was to roses, occasionally prickly, but otherwise lovely and sophisticated. Sherlock had brought her a fresh bouquet of yellow ones when she was in the hospital giving birth to John’s son.

There would be no roses at Sherlock and John’s wedding. Not a single bud. Mostly because Sherlock simultaneously missed Mary and resented her for taking John Watson and his heart away. Of course, a lot had changed since John had been married to Mary.

Mary had never seen Sherlock’s yellow roses. It wasn’t even entirely clear if Mary had seen her son.

The child was named after John. Obviously. The tired doctor hadn’t had much strength in him to argue at the time, and Sherlock had been very insistent. Luckily, while John had never liked the name Hamish, it certainly fit the young boy despite his father’s protestations. Mary and John’s son. John’s son. Sherlock’s son.

After Mary’s death, John had gravitated back to Sherlock, surprising them both by climbing into Sherlock’s bed in the middle of the night once they had returned to living in 221B; tears were streaming down his cheeks, his hair was mussed, and after that night, John had never left. Sherlock had said nothing, neither to encourage or dissuade, simply allowing John Watson to take what he needed. It was only reasonable that a grieving widower had a pressing need for sustained human contact, and Sherlock would try to fill it, even though that was neither his area nor his job. Providing John with physical satisfaction had been Mary’s position, and her role had made things easier for all of them. John hadn’t been forced to confront his sexuality, Mary had been able to maintain a firm
(but loving) grip on her husband’s heart, and Sherlock had been given the benefits of a family without the crippling feelings of inadequacy.

Without Mary, things had changed. With Hamish, things had changed.

Marriage didn’t seem like such an incredible leap, even when they were only sharing a bed. After all, John and Sherlock were raising an infant together, and while everyone was surprised by Sherlock’s natural talent with the child, no preconceptions about his parenting could change the fact he was certainly doing half the work. It did, despite the misgivings of those closest to him, make perfect logical sense that Sherlock adored Hamish. The baby had come from John and Mary; he was a Watson. Sherlock couldn’t help but love him.

As the days passed, Sherlock noticed that arms had gradually migrated to his waist, John’s face had began to press against Sherlock’s back or shoulder, soft breath warmed his neck, and legs intertwined underneath the sheets. His realization of the change had been unnerving, unexpected, and unbelievable. It was an outrageous concept that John Watson should sleep with his flatmate in this manner, or really that anyone should sleep with Sherlock in this manner. It was even more outrageous how quickly Sherlock became obsessively captivated by the need to be held, even though he knew that John wasn’t really holding him.

John was holding Mary.

And as time passed, John was kissing Mary, and fucking Mary, and falling in love with Mary all over again. To Sherlock's surprise, he found himself wondering what John thought of him as far as conventional labels went. He had always assumed that such trivial matters would be of importance to the doctor, and yet, Sherlock was the one who ended up asking, eyebrows drawn in intense confusion.

“We’re together, Sherlock.” And as soon as John had said it, Sherlock had known that it was the truth. He knew when he put Hamish to bed at night, when he cuddled up against John in a nonverbal voicing of his desire to be held, and when John began showing small affections in public. A hand casually placed in the pocket of Sherlock’s trousers, a hand slowly interlocking with his when they waited in line, a hand up his shirt, a hand to his face, fingers tracing his lips. Of course they were together, especially when John climbed on top of him late at night and sunk into Sherlock’s hot body, causing the generally cold detective to clutch the sheets and hold back long, needy moans so he wouldn’t wake the baby.

John was holding Mary, and kissing Mary, and fucking Mary, and falling in love with Mary all over again.
Sherlock was holding John, and kissing John, and fucking John, and falling in love with John. Every
day. Like he had been since the day a bullet had gone through glass and into the head of a very bad
cabbie.

Every time Sherlock closed his eyes, he could see a mess of rose petals, swirling in the wind,
dancing through the air, exuding the intoxicating scent that was so indicative of love.

So there would be no roses at Sherlock and John’s wedding. Not a single, fucking bud.
John sat in the Kabul International Airport and waited. He was going home. He had done his bit for the army. Repaid his debt to them with years of his life and with distance from the one he loved. He was ready.

His flight to Istanbul was delayed for an hour. It was okay - he had a three hour layover before the flight to London. Another hour spent in Afghanistan was nothing compared to the years total he had been there. It was nothing at all.

John walked around, taking in the sight and smell of Afghanistan for the last time. He had grown to love this country with its raw country side, its (mostly) friendly people and even grown accustomed to some of the more adventurous local dishes... but he missed home. He missed the drizzly days that made him feel gloomy down to his very bones, he missed the guilt after consuming a proper fry up and he even missed being able to take a day off from the life or death situations he was faced with daily here. What he missed most of all, however, was Sherlock.

He found another seat and pulled out the black velvet box he'd bought on his last leave in London. The box was a little worse for the wear. It wasn't quite black anymore and the velvet had a rough quality to it from weather and nature it had never meant to be a part of. A bit like him. He was not far past thirty but already his hair was greying.

John had wanted to ask then, right after he'd bought it, but the thought of another six months away stopped him. Anything could happen in those six months and he would not leave Sherlock engaged to someone dead or someone handicapped from an injury. Home safe first. Proposal second.

The time was coming. He opened the box and looked inside. The ring, a thin and simple band, was still shiny. John had kept it clean and polished. He looked at the engraving.

*SH O2  Love, JW*

Sherlock was the oxygen he breathed.

He put the ring back and snapped the box shut. He put it in his pocket. It wouldn't do to lose it now. In transit to its proper owner.

"The TK707 to Istanbul is now arriving at gate thirty-six. Passengers please make your way for boarding."

John smiled. He was going home. He'd missed Christmas and Sherlock's birthday, but in a couple weeks it would be Valentine's Day. Maybe he'd disgust Sherlock and propose then. He laughed as he walked towards the gate.
He shouldn't have felt relief. He shouldn't have let his guard down. Life was never so easy.

There was a scream, a loud bang and then another one quickly following. John knew those sounds. He knew that feeling of hot air pressing against the back of his body, making him almost lose his footing. Someone had set off two bombs in the airport. He dropped his bag and ran for cover. He reached for his rifle but of course it wasn't there. He'd handed it in. He had nothing but his wits to keep him safe.

_Not now_, he thought. He was so close to getting home with no physical evidence of his trip besides the small scars earned mostly from his own stupidity and greying hair. He wanted to keep it that way.

John heard a woman crying, coming closer as if she was walking towards him. He peeked out from his hiding place and saw her. Her hair was whitened by dust and her face was red with blood. The contrast would have taken his breath away if it hadn't been something he'd seen a hundred times over.

He scanned the surroundings and saw nothing that would pose an immediate danger to him. He ran out. His feet moved quickly, his back was hunched and he kept a sharp eye on his target. In and out. Quickly. That was the plan. He took her by the upper arm. She struggled against him in panic. He pulled her towards him and she tried to pull away. She screamed and he clamped a hand over her mouth.

"Come with me. I'm a doctor, I can-"

The world slowed. He heard it before he felt it. The gunshot. His breath stopped half-way through and his hands fell away from the woman in front of him. Her scream was gone and she looked to John's left shoulder. John looked too.

His shirt was saturated with blood. _That's a lot of blood_, he thought. He tried to think of major vessels that could have been torn by the bullet but his brain was not working. He suddenly remembered the first time he ever got drunk with Sherlock. The great mind had turned into a giggling fool and when John had asked him to list the first ten elements of the periodic table he hadn't remembered one. Could John remember them now? No.

He staggered and the woman reached her arms out to catch him. Their roles had been reversed. The Doctor and the Patient were now the Patient and the Doctor.

She was speaking quickly in a language he should have learned better but never had and he was gently brought down to his knees.

_I don't want to die. Please God. Let me live._

The woman laid him down on the cool ground and he was staring up into the ceiling. The world was already going out of focus.

"سنفنس" the woman said.

John knew that word. He'd said it many times himself.

_Breathe._

He pulled in a breath and oxygen filled his lungs. It hurt but he took another breath.

Oxygen is the 8th element on the periodic table. 8 is the symbol for eternity. I want an eternity with Sherlock. Please, God. Let me live.

Two weeks later, the doctors had finally decided John was well enough to come out of his medically-induced coma and had been easing him out for days. They were hopeful, they had told Sherlock, but it would take time.

As long as he is breathing, I will give him all the time I have.

John awoke.

"Yes," a frustrated voice he recognised said.

John realised his eyes were open and once again staring into a ceiling although it wasn't the same ceiling he had last seen. His eyes turned toward the voice.

They had never seen Sherlock look so tired, so unkempt and so unshaven. There was a painful relief in his eyes but also a frustrated impatience. It wasn't the first time Sherlock had said yes in the past fourteen days. He had said it the first time when he'd been given a little bag with the belongings John had had on him when he had been shot: Wallet. Passport. Boarding card. A black velvet box that wasn't quite black or quite velvety anymore. "Yes," he had said as he took the ring out and examined it before slipping it on his finger. In fact, every time John had so much as twitched his finger, Sherlock had been quick to say the word just in case John could hear him and understand. Sherlock had never been as desperate as he was to let John know that yes, I will marry you so please don't do something supremely stupid like die.

But John didn't know what the yes meant. He parted his dry and cracked lips and formed the word. No sound came out apart from a strangled breath but Sherlock seemed to understand.

"Yes, John. Yes, I will marry you," he said. He held up his hand to show John that the ring was already in place.

John tried to raise his hand to touch Sherlock but realised it was weighed down. Sherlock's long fingered and elegant right hand was holding on to John's left which was, like the rest of him, swollen with water retention. John curled his thumb around Sherlock's and smiled. Sherlock's nostrils flared at the sight and his face fell to John's hand as he started to loudly sob. The sound alerted the nurse who rushed over with a concerned look on her face. When she saw John's eyes open and realised Sherlock's crying was one of relief and nothing else, she beamed. She pressed the call button to bring a doctor in and then she patted Sherlock on the shoulder. When she touched John's free hand, she spoke softly to him.

"Welcome home to London, John. You've been missed. It's the morning of February the fourteenth and I think you've just given your fiancé the best gift he'll ever receive."
The Kabul Star Hotel stood against the backdrop of the country that John had spent so much time in. A sight of luxury juxtaposed against the barren desert. Beds and comforts where John had a cot and no privacy. Admittedly, he had felt a little guilty leaving everyone at the base as the car pulled up to drive him into Kabul, but not guilty enough to stay. The thought of choosing anything or anyone over what would be waiting for him in the capital, specifically inside an Executive Suite of the Kabul Star Hotel, seemed preposterous.

John's heart was strumming away in anticipation as he walked inside and up to the front desk. He had changed out of his army fatigues and into more standard clothing. The button down shirt and trousers felt foreign on his body, his skin not used to such smooth material. He gave his name to the man behind the desk and a key card was slid across to him. With a nod of thanks, John made his way to the lift.

Soon, he thought to himself.

Focusing on getting his breathing under control, John watched the numbers of the lift ascend as he rose up higher and higher through the building. All of this had been done for him. Mycroft Holmes had made the necessary phone calls and arrangements to give John a weekend away from base, away from fighting, away from war. John had done double patrols the week leading up to this in order to alleviate some of the guilt he felt at leaving his team for a weekend and would do double patrols for the two weeks following. Not all of the soldiers had significant others with such good connections to make this happen, and for Valentine's Day no less. None of them had Sherlock. With a ding!, the lift doors slid open and John walked down the hall to room 903. Sherlock is inside, he thought to himself. It had been 274 days since they had last seen each other, a tearful goodbye on the steps of the flat before John walked to the bus station alone, having told Sherlock that if he accompanied him, he never would have been able to leave. That last look in Sherlock's eyes had stayed with John for all of these months. The love. The heartbreak. The promise.

Should he knock? Or just swipe the card? What was John supposed to do in this instance? In the end, he settled for a combination of the two. The door beeped softly and John pushed it open slowly, rapping lightly on the door as he did.

"Sherlock?" he asked, hardly daring to believe that a voice would answer him.

But it did.

"John."
The tough army persona of Captain Doctor Watson of the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers vanished immediately as John's eyes locked onto those of, not the great Consulting Detective Holmes, but his Sherlock. In a matter of steps, in that grand and luxurious hotel room, John Watson found himself home again in the arms of his fiance.

It was about an hour later when the two of them were lying naked together in bed, their bodies finally calming after rising and falling so heavily, that they were finally able to talk.
"You're doing alright?" Sherlock asked. "You seem to be all in one piece, from what I saw. All of your extremities still attached to you."

John laughed, the first genuine laugh that had come out of his mouth in months. His body felt so much freer, unencumbered, and relaxed when Sherlock was near, though the orgasm he had just had certainly didn't hurt.

"Still in one piece," he said softly. "And you are, as well. Good to see that no London criminals have taken a chunk out of you. They'd have me to answer to if they did."

Sherlock chuckled and kissed the side of John's head. "They must know that, which is why none of them even attempt to."

"Soon enough, they'll have to answer to me anyway," John said with a lopsided grin.

"Soon," Sherlock agreed.

The two stayed in bed like that, holding each other, kissing, touching, making love. They took a break at one point to open that bottle of champagne and eat the chocolates that had been provided to celebrate the holiday. A few hours later, they took another break, putting on clothes to go and have dinner together. The clothes were short lived, as was their date, as the hotel staff looked away pointedly as the two lovers stumbled back into the hotel after dinner and made their way to the lift, not drunk on alcohol, but on each other.

But their Friday night ended, and bled seamlessly into Saturday, where John and Sherlock continued their regime of not letting the other person out of sight for even a second. Their eyes drank each other in, their bodies memorising the way it felt to slide together, move in and out of the other. They had fallen into their rhythm effortlessly, not wanting to waste any of their precious time finding it again.

When Sunday finally dawned, it was with a heavy and ominous feeling. John would be getting back into the car to take him to base and Sherlock would be getting on a plane and flying back to London.

"I'll be home soon," John said, cupping Sherlock's face in his hands, framing the pale white skin between the tan fingers. "For good, this time."

Sherlock nodded and willed himself not to cry. There would be time enough for that on the plane or back at the flat. It would not do to start now. He did not want to cloud his vision of John with tears. "Soon," Sherlock whispered.

They shared a last kiss before John got into one car and Sherlock into another, both turning and driving off in different directions.

It would be one week later, when Sherlock was out on a case, that his phone would ring violently,
the buzzing dark and dreadful.

*Mycroft Holmes*, the screen would say.

Sherlock would know what news awaited him when he answered it, and though every cell of his body protested, he took the call.

"Mycroft?"

It would be with speed, and horror, and hope that Sherlock would make his way to the hospital to wait, pacing back and forth and terrorising anyone who told him to sit down. John would be flown in and immediately operated on. A gun shot wound to the left shoulder during an insurgency during patrols. Heavy blood loss. Probable infection. Outlook uncertain. Mycroft would stay beside his brother, not offering words of comfort when they could prove to be meaningless.

All they could do was wait. They would get an answer soon.
Being an army doctor was tedious. John had grown accustomed to the aches and pains that frequently overtook his body from staying up all night on his feet, the exhaustion that accompanied his time desperately sewing some poor blokes back together, and the emotional discomfort that followed insistently pressing cold rags to the heads of infected men and administering countless rounds of antibiotics to break often unidentified fevers. He occasionally was even called in to have a chat with those who, in all honesty, needed to go home immediately from a mental health perspective, those who wanted to kill themselves, those who were finished with queen and country. John Watson wasn’t a psychologist, but sometimes, there was no one else to patch up the broken, the rotting, the fallen soldiers that quite frankly needed to be propped back up so they could be sent out again to fight for “the cause.” And his job was essentially impossible, as he simply didn’t possess what he needed to save every man’s life even though he knew that key lifesaving procedures could be obtained outside of the volatile desert air.

John liked his job at the same time as he despised it. For while he hated that getting new equipment was unnecessarily difficult and that sending out soldiers to receive better medical care in their home countries was an occasionally fatal process due to the glacial pace that the institution processed information, he finally felt like he was making a difference. Hell, he was really saving lives, even as dozens of souls slipped away from his calloused hands.

That being said, the war was getting to him. Any harmless rustling in the night brought his heart into his throat and his hand to his gun. The world was out to get him, and in this case, it wasn’t strictly his own paranoia. In fact, it was becoming increasingly clear that the longer John stayed in Afghanistan, the more likely it was than not that John was going to die. And he knew it.

John Watson was near the end of his rope when he received a private summons from his superior officer. Apparently, someone was being placed in his care, a special someone. A someone who, according to Sholto, would not be using his real name, and who was to be kept as much of a secret as was possible given the man’s condition. And so, John cleaned out his smallest room for the new arrival, relieved that he had enough space at the moment to avoid compromising the care of his other patients. He spent the next half hour preparing the necessary supplies to fix up a bullet wound so that he would be ready to do so immediately. After all, it was unknown to him where the other man was being kept at the moment, when he had been shot, how much blood he had lost, or whether the entry sight was infected. Still, John would do his best to fix things, as was his duty.

His patient was brought in by a man in a black suit and dark sunglasses who just as promptly disappeared without a word, his cargo’s unconscious head unceremoniously dumped on the hospital pillow.
The first thing John noticed was that the injured man was beautiful. Dark curls framed the sweaty face and perfect lips were chapped red, starkly contrasting with the paleness of his skin. Pale skin and a long, thin body that appeared to be as fragile as it was lovely. The gorgeous man was angelic, clearly dark but ethereal. And, perhaps most importantly, he was slipping away quickly.

No infection. The wound was recent (the man must have friends in high places to get the orders through so quickly), as it had not yet stopped bleeding. (That was John’s first job, then…) No other noticeable injuries. But, then again, a bullet in the chest was enough of a wound for anyone.

John called a few nurses into the operating room, quickly prepping for surgery as his mind hummed with controlled anxiety.

Back in the war now. This was his war now. Time to fight now.

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After a grueling hour, Doctor Watson was satisfied with the state of his beautiful patient, confident that he had returned the promise of life to the other man’s delicate body.

“Mary…” the barely conscious man murmured, bringing John immediately to his side.

“Hello? Are you awake? This is Doctor Watson. You’ve been shot.”

“Obviously.” Even though the voice was strained and tired, John could sense an unmistakably trace of annoyance. Impertinent little bastard then.

“Right, well. I’ll let you rest. The wound is properly stitched up now. You’re welcome, by the way.” Eyes shot open, and John had to remind himself not to gape at the icy blue hue. “I’m your doctor. Best not to talk too much.”

“Yes. You’re Doctor Watson. I’m Sherlock. Sherlock Holmes.”

“I was told I wasn’t going to get the pleasure of knowing your name.”
“Mm, my brother, Mycroft, is disgustingly paranoid. After all, you could be working for the enemy. Or the enemy could capture you and torture you until you disclosed my whereabouts.”

“Sherlock, rest.” John could see an argument forming in Sherlock’s pale eyes, but the man only gave a small nod and let those lovely eyes fall shut. Even someone as utterly precocious as this Sherlock Holmes bloke needed sleep to properly recover from a bullet wound. Upon contemplation, the doctor realized it must have been this brother who had gotten Sherlock help so quickly, which led to a Google search of the Holmes family in general. There was no sign of a Mycroft Holmes anywhere, but there was a Sherlock. He was apparently a detective of some sort, given the absurd contents of his website. Hm… Interesting.

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When John went to bring Sherlock broth to eat in the morning, the other man gave him only a glance before his eyes grew bright in amusement.

“I looked you up on the internet last night.”

“Anything interesting? Actually don’t tell me. I’d rather you got me something else to eat.” John looked at the broth in confusion, wondering what problem Sherlock had found with something so plain and uninteresting.

“Like?”

“Like chocolate.” At that John could help but chuckled softly, running a hand through his hair in exasperation. He hadn’t felt so relaxed in months.

“Sherlock. You’ve just been shot.”

“John. I’ve just been shot. And I want chocolate.”

“Am I expected to go out and buy it?”
“Yes, assuming you don’t have some on you.” Sherlock’s eyes were smoldering, mostly because he liked what he saw. John was quite simply the most agreeable person he had met in the past fifteen years, at the very least. He had half a mind to drive the army doctor to the Kabul airport with him so he could take John Watson home with him.

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While John should have ignored his demanding, top-secret patient’s ridiculous request, he made his way out into the rest of the hospital and asked around for chocolate, finally snagging some from a very attractive and intelligent looking blond nurse.

“Why? Got a new girlfriend, Doc?” she asked as she produced a mostly full bag of chocolate kisses, sweet voice lilting up just slightly.

“What?”

“It’s Valentine’s Day, Doctor Watson.”

“Oh. No. It’s for my… Sherlock.” The woman paused, a blank look on her face that dissipated in a single moment of brilliant comprehension. John’s breath caught in his throat. He should correct himself. Obviously. He really hadn’t meant to say that.

“Oh. Right.”

“What? No! I meant… my patient.”

“Right. It’s fine,” she replied quickly, an embarrassed smile gracing her plush lips. John took the chocolate and ran, only throwing back a second, slightly irritated look in the nurse’s direction. Had he just unintentionally come out? He was not gay. He was most definitely, 100%, not gay.

The man in that room is gorgeous. He has great cheekbones. Beautiful hair. Beautiful hands. God, his arse. God, the things I want to do to his arse. And his lips. Nip them until they’re raw. Stick my tongue into his mouth. Into his arse. I want… I want…
John shuddered suddenly, realizing where his mind had gone and how quickly it had done so. Okay. Maybe he was a bit gay.

He shrugged the thought away and focused on getting back to the aforementioned patient so he could present him with his findings proudly, a noticeable blush on his face. Was he really giving Sherlock chocolate for Valentine’s Day? It hadn’t been his intention, but things seemed to be working out that way… Of course, that didn’t mean he intended it like that. Did it? Did he?

“Happy Valentine’s Day, Sherlock,” he teased tossing a bag of kisses on the bed.

“Um… Yes. You too. Thank you for the… kisses.” Sherlock looked up at John and smiled widely, blue eyes sparkling. “Now all I need is a real one to go with them to complete the picture of idealized, unattainable romantic bliss that this pointless holiday mindlessly encourages.” The detective unwrapped a chocolate and popped it into his mouth, and John watched Sherlock’s eyes flutter closed as he sucked on the candy.

“Not a fan of Valentine’s Day then? Somehow, I suppose could have guessed.” John cleared his throat, letting his eyes look over Sherlock’s body as he thought. “Might be because you’ve never spent it with anyone.” Sherlock paused at that, eyebrows rising in pleased surprise.

“Mm, are you suggesting an experiment?”

“Might be.”

“What are you proposing?”

“Well… Um… I… uh… I suppose it could start by me giving you that kiss you were talking about.”

“Doctor Watson, you barely know me. You want to kiss me?” Sherlock’s question may have meant to evoke how incredulous he was, but all John heard was sex. Thick, beautiful sex. That might have been because Sherlock was trying his very best to be as seductive as possible, putting his vocal chords to good use in the process.

“God, yes.” The words just slipped out. John turned bright red and kept his distance, monitoring Sherlock’s reactions as sensitively as he knew how.
“Well, you’re going to have to come over here to do it.”

“Oh. Right.” John crisply strode to the bed, clearing his throat once more upon the realization that Sherlock’s face was even more beautiful when he was this close. The other man clearly lacked subtlety, although John supposed it was his fault in these circumstances. After all, hadn’t exactly been subtle either. John leaned his head forward, bracing himself for when lips would make contact, holding his breath and then reminding himself to breath, hoping that his breath smelled nice and that his face wasn’t bristly.

And then Sherlock got a kiss from his doctor.

Oddly enough, Sherlock didn’t much mind Valentine’s Day in the years that followed. Of course, that could be directly related to the fact that he always spent them with John.
Hello! Today's prompt is: Secret Admirer.

The other ficlets will be posted in a few hours, I'm afraid. It's just one of those days where things just got busybusybusy for the others. One the bright side, I accidentally wrote a really long "ficlet" so hopefully that makes up for it a bit.

To: ShERllok
I lovE yuo. I wAnt to play cAtch wiht yuo.

To: ShErlock
Sory I spElt yuor nAme wroNg lAst tlme. I liKe yuo. Do yuo liKE mE?

To: ShErlock
mAybE onE dAy yuo cAn com plAy At my hosE?

Sherlock had been getting letters stuffed in his backpack for weeks. He didn't know who by or when they were doing it. Sherlock had kept a close eye on his backpack ever since the first letter and still this person managed to keep themselves secret. It was infuriating and made him so curious he'd had a hard time sleeping despite his mummy stroking his hair and reading from the book she was writing. Sherlock liked being told he was clever so he pretended to understand what she was talking about. Her softly spoken praise hadn't sent him off to sleep. Neither had cuddling Redbeard or a warm glass of milk. Sherlock wanted to know who was sending him those letters.

It made him mad that he didn't know who it was. Who liked him? Who? How was he supposed to say yes, please to the invitation to play if he didn't anyone to say yes to?

To: ShErlock

Sherlock poured over the letters at the desk in his bedroom. The desk, a large brown mahogany
thing, was still far too big for him but he'd grow in to it in a few short years. He sat with two pillows underneath him and his feet against Redbeard's back. Redbeard always slept under the desk when Sherlock was sitting by it.

Sherlock nervously worked his toes, squeezing the soft fur and feeling the comforting warmth of his dog. Redbeard always kept him from getting too frustrated and getting told off. Sherlock didn't like getting told off. It just made him even more frustrated and ended up with him being more told off.

"What doeth it mean? Who writeth to me, Redbeard? Who would write to a pirate like me? I'm thcary and no one liketh me becauth I'm a pirate. And they're thtupid and I don't want them to like me anyway," Sherlock muttered.

After another ten minutes of staring at the pages of what Sherlock had decided was good penmanship and signs of intelligence, he got so frustrated that he grabbed his pencil sharpener and threw it at his door. The plastic broke apart and slivers of shaved off wood wafted to the floor. Redbeard lifted his head with a huff.

"Thorry. I got mad," Sherlock said in explanation. He crossed his arms and leaned back in his chair, his toes working faster in Redbeard's fur.

"Sherlock, what the bloody hell was that noise?" Mycroft called out as he walked quickly through the hall from his room to Sherlock's. He threw open the door. Sherlock made him nervous; he felt such a huge weight of responsibility on his shoulders to care for his seven year younger brother. Their parents, a little concerned about the emotional maturity of their eldest son and how he would take to a younger sibling, had told him upon Sherlock's birth that Sherlock was as much his responsibility as he was theirs because they were family. Had they known how Mycroft would take it to heart, they would probably not have phrased it that way.

"I got mad!" Sherlock said, yelling last word. His body went rigid for a moment before he slammed his back against the backrest of the chair.

"Why?" Mycroft asked, coming in to Sherlock's room and closing the door behind him. He stepped neatly over the remains of the pencil sharpener.

"Becauthe," Sherlock said.

"Because what?" Mycroft asked.

"Becauthe becauth," Sherlock said. He didn't want to tell Mycroft he couldn't figure out who was sending him letters. Mycroft would think he was stupid and then they would get angry at each other.

"Because what, Sherlock. Don't be such a child. Just tell me," Mycroft snapped. He was so anxious to know. Had Sherlock been bullied again? Was it the boys down the street or someone at the new school he was going to?

Sherlock didn't answer but instead grabbed all the letters off his desk and threw them at Mycroft. He regretted doing so at once. The letters, while infuriating and upsetting, were some of his prized
possessions. Proof that someone liked him.

"Oh Sherlock," Mycroft sighed as he bent over to pick up the pieces of paper. He read them several times over with a very surprised look on his face. His brother had an admirer.

Mycroft laid the letters back on Sherlock's desk and Sherlock neatly folded them up and put them together in a small stack in the order he'd received them.

"A secret admirer," Mycroft said.

Sherlock nodded.

"You want to know who it is but you don't," Mycroft said.

Sherlock nodded again.

"Okay. So let's figure it out then," Mycroft said.

Sherlock looked up at Mycroft with his light eyes wide and bright. "Really?" he asked his voice high in surprise. It felt like Mycroft never spent any time with him anymore because he was so busy studying. It had never crossed his mind that Mycroft would want to help him instead of making fun of him for not understanding it himself.

"Yes." Mycroft hopped up on the desk and looked down at his little brother. "So what do we know so far, Sherlock?"

"I get letterth," Sherlock said.

Mycroft nodded encouragingly.

"Thomeone putth them in my backpack when I'm not looking even though I'm alwayth looking. That meanth he'th clever like me. Thneaky," Sherlock said, squinting his eyes as he thought hard about what he could tell about his secret admirer.

"What else?" Mycroft said.

"He'th polite. He thaid he'th thorry after getting my name wrong. Did you thee he thpelled Therlock wrong?" Sherlock said, taking out the first letter and presenting the evidence.

"Yes, I did notice. Good. What else?" Mycroft said. He wondered why his brother had immediately started referring to the letter writer as male when it was far more likely it was a female. "Why do you say he?"

Sherlock looked like a question mark.

"It's far more likely that it's a girl writing you these letters. Why do you say it's a he?" Mycroft explained.
Sherlock made a face. "Why would I want a girl to write me, Mycroft? That's stupid."

Mycroft's eyes widened marginally before he turned his face blank again. *That* was a conversation he didn't want to revisit for several years yet. How typical of his precocious little brother to be that way.

"It's still far more likely it's a girl writing to you," Mycroft said with a rather gentle tone.

Sherlock made a face and looked at the letters as if they had wounded him.

"Keep going. What else do you know about this person from the letters?" Mycroft asked.

"They want to play catch with me and want me to come to their house. Maybe I could sleep over?" Sherlock asked, looking up at Mycroft so hopefully that there Mycroft felt a very unpleasant jolt of love for his little brother.

"Maybe you could," was all he could say in return.

"Who is it, Mycroft?" Sherlock said, frustration seeping into his voice again.

"How should I know? I don't go to your class," Mycroft said.

"How do I know?" Sherlock asked. Surely Mycroft could figure anything out. Mycroft knew everything.

"Well," Mycroft said. "The letter writer hasn't yet learned their letters properly. You noticed how they capitalise letters that shouldn't be? The A:s and E:s in particular. They spell 'you' wrong too. What you need to do is look at which of your classmates do that and then you'll find this person."

Sherlock nodded, a new wave of nervous energy hitting him. School wasn't until tomorrow. How could he possibly wait? His toes were squeezing and releasing Redbeard's fur at a fantastic pace.

"Be discreet. Oh and, Sherlock," Mycroft said.

Sherlock looked up at Mycroft, ready to soak in the sage advice he was about to be imparted with.

"Clean up the mess you made before mummy sees."

Sherlock sulked for five minutes after Mycroft left before doing as he was told.

The next day in class, Sherlock was so wound up he got a telling off from the teacher twice and was put in a corner of the classroom to calm down. He worked his toes in his shoes like he had Redbeard under his feet but it didn't help very much. He needed Redbeard himself. He needed to go look at the other children's handwriting but his stupid teacher wouldn't let him up until he had calmed down and he couldn't calm down because he was so anxious to get up. He was caught in an awful spiral with no end in sight.

"What are you doing?" a boy's voice asked.
"Nothing. Go away," Sherlock replied before he looked up and saw that it was John talking to him. He sniffed. He never meant to snap at John. John was always nice to him.

"I don't want to go away. I'm sorry you got told off," John said, sitting down on the chair next to Sherlock.

"Why are you thorry? It wathn't your fault," Sherlock said. He turned away from John and sunk even deeper in his anxious sulk.

"Oh," John said. He fiddled with fingers and then made a move to leave.

"I need to know how the otherth write," Sherlock said, mostly to keep John from leaving. He didn't really think he'd get any help.

"Oh. Do you want me to get them to write things for you?" John asked, twisting in his chair with restless energy.

Sherlock nodded, astounded that John had offered to help him. John was off without another word spoken.

After fifteen minutes John returned with a stack of papers, each with a child's writing on it.

"What you need them for, Sherlock?" John asked curiously as Sherlock critically went through the pile. There were a few suspects but he needed more time to look through them.

"A cathe."

"Case?" John asked. He didn't know what the word meant.

"A mythtery. My big brother Mycroft will know how to tholve it. He'th a pirate too thometimeth. But he'th older than me and tho he hath more important thingth to do thometimeth," Sherlock said.

"John Watson! Sherlock is in time-out. You're not supposed to be speaking to him. Come away. Go on," the teacher said, clapping her hands and waving John away.

A more experienced teacher would have noticed that Sherlock had stopped bouncing his legs and was generally far more calm than he had before John had interrupted his time-out and let John stay. But as it was, Sherlock kept disrupting the class so much that he spent most of his day alone in the corner.

"Mycroft! Mycroft!" Sherlock yelled, running down the stairs and to the front door when he heard Mycroft coming home from school.

"Sherlock?" Mycroft asked. "Ah, you've gathered more clues."
"Yeth. Mycroft, there are thome that fit a little but not all of it. I don’t think any of them matth," Sherlock said, shoving the handwriting samples and his mystery letters at his brother.

Mycroft dropped his bag and went to sit at the kitchen table and laid out all the papers in front of them. He scanned them as Sherlock anxiously watched on.

"No," Mycroft said after a couple minutes. "None of these match. Are you sure this is everyone? No one was sick today?"

"No one was thick," Sherlock said. He was about to crawl out of his skin with nerves. Mycroft pulled him onto his lap and held him tight despite Sherlock's protesting squirms. After a minute Sherlock always calmed down even if the initial process of it was uncomfortable.

"Hmm. That's confusing," Mycroft said. "Are you absolutely sure this is everyone's?"

Sherlock narrowed his eyes and went through his classmates names, surname first starting at the letter A, mentally ticking them off as he went. He tried not to get frustrated as he neared the end of the list and not one person was missing. When he came to the last person he got so excited that he kicked his legs and drove an elbow into Mycroft's unsuspecting stomach.

"Watthon," Sherlock said. "John. John didn't write one!" He tried to turn around in Mycroft's lap, resulting in almost slipping off completely. Mycroft caught him with a jolt of fear.

"John Watson? Why didn't he write one? That sounds very suspect," Mycroft said, grinning at his brother's obvious excitement.

"He went and gathered the evidenthe for me. I thaid I needed to thee the other'th handwriting and he got me them. He wath very helpful in thith mythery," Sherlock said. It wasn't the first time John had helped him, either. Did that mean John wanted to play with him?

"Oh, did he? And then he didn't write one himself? Well, Sherlock. I think we've cracked your mystery. I think your secret admirer is John Watson," Mycroft said.

Sherlock was nearly vibrating out of his skin. John Watson wanted to be his friend and wanted Sherlock to come play at his house. Maybe John could come to his house, too, and play pirates with him and Redbeard.

"Tell me, Sherlock. Is John a... nice boy?" Mycroft asked softly. He needed to make sure that no one was going to be mean to his younger brother.

Sherlock nodded. He knew his brother would want evidence for his claim so he thought back. "Onthe, one of the girthth wath pulling my hair and John came and thaid it wath mean and thhe had to thtop. Thhe thtarted to cry and went to teacher and John got told off and put in time-out." Sherlock had never even said thank you. Guilt welled up in him.

"That sounds nice," Mycroft said.
"On the I dropped a penthil and he picked it up for me," Sherlock said. It had been his favourite pencil and John had saved it.

Mycroft nodded. His initial impression of John was good, but he would have to meet him and make absolutely sure. There were no maybes when it came to his brother.

Sherlock slid off Mycroft's lap and started to pace the kitchen. Mycroft let him be, knowing that if Sherlock had nervous energy it had to be worked off or he'd be a pain the rest of the day.

Twenty minutes later, their dad came home.

"Boys? You home?" he called from the door.

"Kitchen, father," Mycroft called back.

Their dad bustled in, rosy cheeked and cheery looking with a bag of groceries in one hand and a wrapped up bouquet of flowers in the other.

"Your mummy isn't home yet is she? Good. I'm going to make dinner tonight. Clever isn't it? She'll be expecting it tomorrow for Valentine's Day but I'll surprise her a day early. It's not easy to keep your mother on her toes, but the hard work is worth it," he said, tearing open the paper around the flowers and putting them in a vase. Sixteen red roses. One for every year they had been together.

"Daddy," Sherlock said, running up to him and putting his arms out to be picked up. His dad picked him up and held him tight. "Is something wrong, Lockie?" he asked softly, not used to his son asking for affection this way.

"No," Sherlock said.

Mr. Holmes looked over at Mycroft who just shrugged. It wasn't his place to tell his brother's secrets.

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The following morning Sherlock woke late after having had a difficult time sleeping. His mother had let him sleep another thirty minutes, insisting that it was more important her son got enough sleep than it was for him to be on time for school.

"Mummy!" Sherlock wailed in frustration. He had made big plans for the day and he couldn't believe he had slept so long.

"It's alright, dear, you won't be in trouble with the school. I've already called your teacher to let her know we'll be a little late. Here, eat your cereal."

Sherlock stared at the bowl and refused to eat until his mother told him they would not be leaving the
house until he had eaten it, brushed his teeth and combed his hair.

Sherlock was ready to leave within fifteen minutes.

The last thing he did before leaving his bedroom was pet Redbeard and remind him of the time Sherlock got off school, and then he grabbed the letter he had written to John. Sherlock ran down the stairs and toward the front door where his mother was waiting with his coat. As he was helped into it, he saw the vase of roses on the kitchen table. He froze.

"Sherlock, put your arm through. Sherlock. Sherlock," his mother said, trying to tug the coat on an entirely stiff arm.

"Mummy. Mummy, can I have one of your flowerth?" Sherlock asked shyly.

"My flowers?" Mrs. Holmes said, looking down at Sherlock. "Why?"

"I want to give it to John," Sherlock said.

"John?" Mrs. Holmes said neutrally even though she was shocked. Sherlock tended not to take to other children well.

Sherlock unfolded the letter in his hand and showed it to her. She blinked as her eyes welled up with tears. Sherlock never took to another person.

"Yes of course you can. I'll get you one," Mrs. Holmes said. She picked the nicest rose from her bouquet and handed it to Sherlock. She was already making plans to invite John and his family over. She would do everything in her power to encourage this new friendship. If she was very lucky, John would have an older sibling that Mycroft might find a friend in.

They drove to school. Mrs. Holmes looked over at Sherlock every so often to see the growing impatience in him. She really needed to talk to her husband about finding ways to teach Sherlock to manage all the energy he had or it might turn very bad for him.

Despite desperately wanting to go in and meet John, Mrs. Holmes just dropped Sherlock off at gate like she usually did. She watched him run in with a proud smile and renewed tears prickling her eyes.

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Sherlock's classmates were already busy with their work when he sprinted in. Where was John? Sherlock spotted him at the crafting table and started to run forward when his teacher caught him.

"Good morning, Sherlock. Take your jacket off before you settle in, there's a good boy," she said, unzipping Sherlock's jacket for him. Sherlock let her do it. Putting up a fight now would only delay his reaching John.

"I need to go thee John," he said when the teacher asked him what he wanted to do before snack time.
A look of surprise came over her and she was struck dumb. Sherlock took it as permission and ran over to John even though running wasn't allowed inside.

"John."

John looked up and smiled. "Sherlock! Why are you late?" he asked.

"Mummy made me thleep," Sherlock replied with an offended look on his face. He shoved the rose and his letter forward. He looked very serious and nervous with his offerings held out in front of him. When John took them, the look on his face didn't disappear. If anything, he looked even more grave.

John unfolded the letter (which was crumpled a bit from Sherlock holding on to it so tightly).

It said:

John,

I like you too. I would love to come play with you at your house. I have a dog. His name is Redbeard. We'll all be friends and play pirates at my house. Thank you for telling Sally not to pull my hair.

Love,

Sherlock.

Mycroft had helped him write it the evening before and Sherlock was very pleased with how it had come out.

John read slowly and got stuck on the word 'Redbeard' which was a very long word and he had to sound it out. He only smiled when Sherlock, impatient as he was, corrected him.

"Okay," John said, shuffling over on his chair so Sherlock could sit on it too.

"You'll come play pirateth?" Sherlock asked carefully.

"I've never played pirates before. Can you teach me?" John asked.

"Yeth."

And then Sherlock leaned over and threw his arms around John's neck and hugged him. John hugged him back.

"Redbeard thaid if you thaid you wanted to come play I thould hug you," Sherlock explained with a little blush on his cheeks.

"Oh. I like dogs," John said.

"I like dogth too."

After that, Sherlock and John were always together. They grew up comfortably in each other's presence, always secure in their friendship and, later on, their relationship. In their future they solved a lot of puzzles in the form of crimes, but the one mystery Sherlock always thought back on with the
most fondness was the mystery of his secret admirer.
John walked back from class feeling particularly grumpy. What a fucking tosser that professor had been, singling him out in front of everyone when he hadn't known the answer to such an impossibly difficult question. He felt like a fool, ridiculed and embarrassed in front of his peers.

His desire to be a doctor was strong, and having to know aspects of organic chemistry was proving to be difficult as he did not have a solid background in it as his classmates, something Professor Lyle was all too willing to illustrate to the lecture hall. Deciding to take his aggression and temper out on the pavement and his trainers, John took the long way home, walking around campus until the sun was starting to set.

He unlocked the door to the dorm room. Tuesdays were always his roommate's long day, and Mike Stamford wouldn't be home until after dinner. The room was in the exact shape it had been when John left it that morning, long after Mike had gone for the day. There was one distinct difference: a letter.

The unassuming envelope was anything but. It was simple. White. Clean. The only thing written upon it in an almost miniscule scrawl was John's name.

Apprehensively (because who would have slid something under the door for him?), John picked up the envelope and examined it for a mere three seconds before neatly opening it. Probably a form about rugby practice or... But he had never gotten any sort of letter like this about rugby before. As he opened the envelope, all that was inside was a single sheet of paper.

John,

That was an unfair question and you were subjected to Professor Lyle's favourite form of torture.

Do not be discouraged.

He'll ask you a question during your next class. The answer, if you don't know it, will be: Neopentane, 9.5°C.

Regards.

John stared at the letter, mouth agape for about a minute, before he flipped it over in his hand. No name on the back either. No mark anywhere on the paper besides the note. Peering inside the envelope, John was disappointed (though not surprised) not to find anything in there as well.

Nothing like this had ever happened to him before. He had had a secret admirer in primary school, a girl who left little love notes for him, but this was different. John had truly no notion whatsoever as to who could have given him this, whose knowledge about Professor Lyle's class as well as organic chemistry was so apparently adept.

John put the letter back into the envelope and put it in the pages of his notebook. When Thursday rolled around, he would put this information to use and either be further ridiculed in class, or would save some face. For some reason, the thought of not trusting the author of the letter had never
occurred to John, something that if he had been noticed would have shocked him.

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When John walked back to his dorm on Thursday afternoon, he was feeling very pleased with himself. His mystery sender had proven himself to be reliable; Professor Lyle had asked the very question that John was given the answer to, which both impressed and shocked both professor as well as room full of students.

Once John knew he was in the clear, he began to look around the lecture hall curiously. His mystery sender must have been somewhere in the room, but it was impossible to match a face to the handwriting, especially since there were so many classmates. Disgruntled, but not altogether discouraged, John sat back into his seat and tried to focus on the lesson.

John was about to walk directly back to his dorm when he paused. He had to give his mystery sender time to leave another note. Last time, he had taken a detour to vent his frustration. He didn't want to miss another letter, not that there would be any need for one. Shaking his head, John told himself that there would be no letter left for him that afternoon. Despite this conviction, his feet still led him on a rather roundabout route back to his dorm building, giving the mystery sender enough time, which was ridiculous, John reminded himself, because there would be no letter at all.

But of course there was.
John was less cautious this time, less patient, as he quickly opened the envelope and took out a single sheet of paper again.

John,
Excellently done.
He has now decided that you will be his favourite quiz subject.
The answer to Tuesday's question is: The density of the compound at 20°C over the maximum density of water, which is at 4°C.
Regards.

---

This went on for the rest of the first semester of school, John's "Secret admirer" as he referred to him (it must have been a 'him' based on the handwriting) in his head, leaving envelopes under the door each day John returned from class. When it was time for final exams, the Secret Admirer had somehow wedged a fat manila envelope under the door complete with detailed notes about everything that was likely to be on the final exam, which John studied meticulously. Walking out of that exam, John had never felt more confident in both his performance on the questions, as well as his understanding of the material overall.

The second semester of the school year started that January and John found himself, yet again, in the second part of Professor Lyle's class for organic chemistry. Before the first lesson, there had been a note left in John's dorm room with the answer to the question Professor Lyle was sure to ask him.

John, if he were honest with himself, was starting to fancy this Secret Admirer, whoever he was. He didn't even have a face or a name to go with the letters.

Not until class that Thursday, February 13th.

"Oh, well done, Mr. Watson," Professor Lyle was saying, turning back to the board. Upon it, he
wrote the formula for Dimethylhexane that John had (to no one's surprise anymore) provided. "Honestly, I believe the last time a student got that correct was a year and a half ago when Sherlock Holmes took this course. Come to think of it, I don't think Mr. Holmes missed a single one of my questions either."

Sherlock Holmes.

Sherlock Holmes.

It was nothing but a name, and one that John had only heard a handful of times during uni so far, usually in passing about some brilliant student in one class who also was a raging arrogant arse in another. Even Mike Stamford had mentioned him once or twice, having taken a few classes with him. But never had John had any inkling to meet him.

Until now.

There was the sound of the door to the room slamming loudly and everyone turned to look, John's head snapping around first. There was no doubt in his mind about who had just exited the classroom and his suspicions were immediately confirmed.

"Ah, I see I've singled out and embarrassed our young auditor by recounting the stories of his triumphs in here," Professor Lyle said, looking towards the door with the hint of a smile.

John's stomach flipped. Sherlock Holmes had sent him the letters for the past five months, had sat in the back seat of the lecture hall, had singled John out for the spotlight as he himself had shrunk into the shadows, sitting by the door, ready to leave at a moment's notice. John wracked his brain to try and remember what he could have looked like, but nothing was coming to mind. Every face he could remember was vague and hazy, a mere fuzzy blur in his memory. Not good enough. What did Sherlock Holmes look like?

Nothing else said during the lecture mattered. Not a word was retained if it had even been heard by John. Only four words kept beating inside the walls of his skull like a mantra, a manifest.

Sherlock Holmes.

Secret Admirer.

Sherlock Holmes.

Secret Admirer.

Sherlock Holmes.

When Professor Lyle dismissed them, John all but sprinted out of the lecture hall and to his dorm room. He did not bother to take the long way back this time. He had neither the patience nor the will power. Sherlock Holmes had left the class with a good thirty-five minutes left, more than enough time for him to write John a letter and slip it under the door and leave. But what if-

John halted, dead in his tracks in the middle of the sidewalk as a feeling of dread and anxiety crept up inside of him, questions and worries, fears and doubts plaguing his mind.
What if the letter that awaited him was not another piece of friendly advice and encouragement? What if the letter said that now that the secret was out, that would be it? No more?

Or worse.

What if there was no letter waiting for John at all?

No, he thought as he started to run to his dorm again. He wouldn't do that to me. Not after everything we've been through.

Ah, a voice in his head answered. But how do you know he wouldn't do that to you? Think of everything you've ever heard about Sherlock Holmes. The stories of his rudeness, arrogance, selfishness. Why would he care to continue now that you know who he is?

Refusing to believe that, and not wanting to accept it, John pushed forward, making his way into his dorm building, flying up the stairs, and making it to his room. His hand trembling with the key, he finally managed to get it into the lock as he turned it and pushed the door open.

Relief surged through John, filling every pore.

There was an envelope on the floor.

With a giddy smile, John tore open the envelope and pulled out the sheet of paper, his eyes scanning once for any words that would disappoint him, and, finally coming to the conclusion that his world was not ending, John went back with a more comprehensive eye and read the letter through.

John,

So now you know who I am. I will admit, that is not the way I wanted you to find out who I was. I had it all planned out and it was -

Sod it. I'm going to do it anyway. Professor Lyle isn't going to rob me of this.

Tomorrow night. Dinner. I'll wait for you by that ridiculously sad looking oak tree behind your building.

Regards.

P.S. The answer to Tuesday's question will be: Trichlorophenoxyacetic acid.

John couldn't believe it. Not only did his No Longer So Secret Admirer have a name and still want to carry on, but he was also being asked out to dinner. A date? he thought wildly. No, it isn't a date. But his stomach flipped delightfully at the prospect of it, especially when he remembered that the next day was Valentine's Day.

"Oh, Sherlock Holmes," John said to himself, "You thought you had this planned so well."

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It had taken five different button down shirts and four different pairs of trousers before Mike
Stamford, quite literally, pushed John out the front door.

"It will be fine!" he said, an exasperated smile on his face. "I know Sherlock, John, and you've nothing to worry about, as I keep telling you, mate. He's an unfriendly fellow to most people but he's been nothing but nice to you, which means he fancies you too. You look handsome and I'm sure he looks handsome too. I can say that as an unbiased, objective, definitely straight third-party member. Now go!"

The door was shut behind John as he was trying to pry more information about Sherlock Holmes out of Mike before his possible date with his No Longer So Secret Admirer. With a deep and bracing breath, John took the stairs down and left the back door to the building, walking towards the sad looking oak tree. There, standing beneath it, and leaning against it looking tall, brooding, and incredibly sexy, was Sherlock Holmes.

John's heart thudded into his throat. Of course he had seen Sherlock before. He just never knew the name to go with the face. That face. That angular yet soft and simply gorgeous face. Sherlock was looking at him attentively, his eyes calculating and his hand tapping a mile a minute against the bark. He's nervous, too, John thought and somehow, the knowledge calmed him.

"Sherlock Holmes?" John asked with a smile.

But the smile was not returned.

"Not the way I had it planned out, John," he nearly growled at him in anger and frustration. "You are ruining my plan! Turn around, take a few steps, and then walk back towards me, as if you were seeing me for the first time and Professor Lyle wasn't a colossal dick who had to go and ruin everything."

John froze in his place. Was Sherlock being serious? According to every set and determined plane on his face, Sherlock was the farthest thing from joking that John had ever seen.

"Alright," John said questioningly and defensively, turning around and taking ten steps away from Sherlock before stopping. What the hell was he doing? John was never so easily commanded by others. He planned this out for you. Give it to him. He helped you pass last semester and this semester too, most likely. Give him this. With a nod, John pivoted and faced Sherlock. He arranged his features into one that he hoped would be believable surprise and confusion as he began to walk towards his No Longer So Secret Admirer.

"Excuse me," John said politely to the stranger standing beneath the tree. "I'm supposed to be meeting someone here. Someone who has been leaving me notes for the past few months. Is it you?"

Delight burst forth from Sherlock's eyes and John's heart fluttered at being looked at like that, but Sherlock's lips were still pressed in a line, not wanting to give up the charade just yet. John couldn't even imagine how long Sherlock had been planning this, the big reveal. He felt sorry for him for just a moment, having Professor Lyle steal his thunder so thoroughly, but it was hard to stay sorry for
long as he looked up at Sherlock. John knew he was smiling like a fool, but there was nothing he could do to stop himself.

"Yes," Sherlock said, his voice now rich and velvety and not angry and frustrated like it had been before. "That would have been me. Hello, John Watson. My name is Sherlock Holmes."

John beamed up at him and Sherlock lost whatever battle he had been having with himself and beamed back, his beautiful smile far happier than the sad and depressed looking oak tree standing beside him.

"Dinner?" Sherlock asked as he started to walk to the road, not even waiting for more than ten seconds before taking John's hand in his own as they moved.

"Dinner," John agreed happily, squeezing the hand of his No Longer So Secret Admirer and Soon To Be Boyfriend, Sherlock Holmes.
“Sherlock, I need your help with something.”

And so it was that a phrase, which uttered from anyone else’s mouth would make him cringe, made Sherlock sit up straighter and focus his gaze on John Watson’s hopeful face.

“I have to go to class. What is it?”

“Um… Well, it’s a bit embarrassing actually.”

“Right.” Obviously. It seemed that everything John ever needed assistance with was embarrassing or stupid, although Sherlock never really understood the emotional connections that John had made with whatever trivial task he wanted Sherlock for. Sherlock liked it when John asked him for help. Sherlock liked doing things for John.

“Okay… Well, I… uh… I’ve been getting these letters.” Sherlock’s face froze, but he did his best to hide the tension that had just shot through his body. Sherlock knew all about the letters, he simply hadn’t expected John to come to him about them. “They’re from… a secret admirer. Something like that.” John swooped in front of him, trying to break the silent genius from his trance with a wave of his hand. “I know this isn’t your area, but I don’t need… talk… What I need is for you to find out who it is.”

“Oh.” Sherlock paused, swallowing slowly before offering John a perfunctory smile. “I will do what I can. You can show them to me later.” And then Sherlock grabbed his things and disappeared, only realizing he was holding his breath when he was halfway down the hall.

In retrospect, leaving John letters was idiotic, but after all the crap telly his flatmate had forced him to watch (Sherlock loved watching telly with John, because it meant he got to cuddle with John on his bed, the laptop balanced somewhere between them), it hadn’t seemed like such a terrible idea. After all, leaving the completely not gay rugby player notes from a secret admirer fit right alongside the plots of many successful TV shows, and while Sherlock didn’t profess to know anything about human nature, he was trying his best to pick up some tricks. Besides, he had every reason to believe that John was lying about his lack of interest in men, if a few drunken snogs at one of Stamford’s parties were any indication. Sherlock had never been so pleased with himself as when John pushed him up against the nearest wall and brought their lips together, but he knew that drunk didn’t really count for anything.
John,

I saw the rugby game this weekend. You are by far the best payer on the team, and I’m quite disappointed that Moran continues to take many of your opportunities for success. I’d much rather watch you play.

In other news, I like your new button up shirt, as it really emphasizes how lovely your eyes are. I’m assuming it’s Sherlock’s doing.

Your Secret Admirer

John,

I have been told by a source that you snogged a bloke at Mike Stamford’s party.

Three different blokes at three different parties, actually.

Okay, my source is indeed Mike Stamford, although Sherlock Holmes confirmed one of those instances.

Exactly how not gay would you describe yourself?

Your Secret Admirer

John,

You looked quite unhappy today.

Accept this letter as a form of comfort.

Your Secret Admirer

John,

I can’t stand the fact that you continue to go on countless mindless dates with idiotic blondes, mostly because you can’t seem to be able to actually acquire one to be your girlfriend.

Also because I would be perfectly happy to go out to dinner with you.

Here’s to another halfhearted attempt at a relationship.

Your Secret Admirer

John,

Congratulations on the results of your Midterm grades. I have come to the conclusion that you’re brilliant. Perhaps not as brilliant as Sherlock, but you’ve chosen a difficult best friend to compare
yourself to in regards to both height and intelligence.

He’s not really that tall. The coat helps.

Your Secret Admirer

John,

Please don’t join the army. I haven’t been able to sleep since I was alerted of your plans due to concern about your future well being. I’m sure you will make an excellent soldier and an excellent doctor, and I’m certain you will save lives, etc… However, there are others to do that too. You belong in London.

I wanted you to move in with me next year. Not sure how I’m going to live alone.

Your Secret Admirer

John,

Valentine’s Day is next week.

Plans?

Your Secret Admirer

What was Sherlock supposed to say in this situation? He couldn’t simply tell John that he was unable to unearth the origin of the letters, for reasons both selfish and practical, but was he really expected to reveal his identity now of all times?

Sherlock barely paid attention in his class, ignoring the rest of the world so that he could harness the enormous bulk of his mind onto this singular problem. His feelings for John Watson. That was the real problem, although he hadn’t thought about his feelings in such unambiguous terms before. He didn’t want to say anything. He didn’t want to have to face his likely rejection and lose much of the oh-so-welcome closeness that his roommate was drowning him in. However, Valentine’s Day was fast approaching, and he knew that John would get a date soon, if he hadn’t already. Sherlock could already imagine being asked to vacate the room for the night so John could shag, he could almost imagine the slightly musty smell that accompanied such nights, and the dark moods that would plague Sherlock until all evidence of sexual interaction had dissipated.

John should be Sherlock’s. He wanted John to be his. He wanted all the disgustingly sappy things that no one could ever believe he wanted, and that he could never admit to wanting if he was still to maintain his reputation. So he decided that revealing his identity was probably the best decision, mostly because the balance of probability indicated that John would figure out who was was on his own anyway, and it would be better to tell him.
Sherlock practically ran back to their room when his class had ended, small backpack a mess of unorganized papers he had simply shoved away upon dismissal. He needed to get to John. Before it was too late. Before he would be obligated to spend Valentine’s Day alone.

“John. What are you doing for Valentine’s Day?”

“Have a date. Mary Morstan. She’s very pretty, don’t you think? Smart, funny… And I’m pretty sure she’s the one who’s been leaving me those letters. Think you could find somewhere else to spend the night?” Sherlock’s heart fell and he was sure John had seen it on his face, but it didn’t matter. Nothing mattered. John didn’t want him or his problems or his quirks or his body. John wanted Mary.

“Fine.”

“Sherlock. You didn’t honestly think I’d want to have a night in on Valentine’s Day, did you…?”

John’s voice was gentle, as if he was only once again reminding Sherlock of the facts of life. People went out for this holiday; attractive blokes didn’t spend Valentine’s Day eating Chinese and watching telly with their best mates.

“It’s fine.”

“Sherlock…”

“I think I should inform you before you make a complete fool of yourself that she is not your Secret Admirer.” John stopped at that, his eyes perking up with interest.

“Oh. And how would you know that? I only told you about the letters a couple hours ago.”

“Because I’ve been writing them. Oddly enough, the matter didn’t take much investigation.” John looked up at Sherlock with a relieved smile, inciting confusion and doubt from the unruly genius.

“Thank God, because I don’t actually have a date with Mary.” There was a long moment of silence
as Sherlock processed, his beautiful face contorted in thought.

“You knew.”

“Of course I knew. You said yourself that I have above average intelligence,” John teased carefully, still watching Sherlock’s expression for hints of what was to come.

“Yes, but I’ve been very careful. How did you figure it out.”

“You have a very distinctive writing style, Sherlock. Valentine’s Day is in a few days, and I wanted you to… I don’t know…”

“Ask you out.”

“Yeah, Sherlock. If that’s something you do. Or if you’d rather just “get dinner,” or whatever it is your pompous arse desires. Oh, and in response to one of your questions, it would appear I’m a bit gay.” Sherlock finally broke out into a sudden fit of laughing, eyes firmly locked on John’s, which were bright with pleasure.

“Um… Yes. Dinner.”

“Perfect. Maybe around 8.”

“Obviously.”
Hello! Today's prompt is No Date On Valentine's Day!

Thank you so much for the comments and subs. It's really nice people want to read our stuff =)

"He's not my date," John said with a tired voice after Angelo had brought their table a bottle of crisp, white wine and an extra candle. Angelo merely gave him a wink before he bustled off to get their dinner which apparently they didn't need to verbally order anymore. Angelo knew.

"I don't see why it bothers you," Sherlock said, staring out the window as if something had his complete attention.

"What?" John asked.

"When people think we're on a date. I don't see why you care," Sherlock said, looking at John now with his eyes narrowed.

John felt like he'd become smaller under that gaze. He knew it shouldn't bother him. Not really. And he knew how it came off; he sounded like an arsehole. A possibly homophobic arsehole.

"We're not on a date. I don't see why I shouldn't correct them," John said. He looked away from Sherlock's face so he would stop shrinking.

"You're not gay," Sherlock said slowly, exaggerating the pronunciation of each word.

John felt like he was being mocked. Sherlock must have figured him out by now. They'd lived together for years and Sherlock knew every other bloody thing about him. Of course he knew John was bisexual and carried an enormous torch for his flatmate who didn't feel that way about other people. Except maybe Irene Adler. The Woman. So even if he was capable of romantic or sexual feelings, they'd be for a woman. Not for John. Never John. It was something he lived with.

John didn't answer. What was there to say that didn't make him look like a complete fool in Sherlock's eyes and, perhaps even worse, his own?

They sat in silence with John avoiding to look at Sherlock and Sherlock looking nowhere but John's face.

"It's not a completely ludicrous concept. It's Valentine's Day and we're here at a restaurant that has tried very hard to create a romantic atmosphere and it's Valentine's Day. And we live together. And we're always seen together. The Great Hat Detective and his Partner. The papers are never wrong, John," Sherlock said. He sounded almost angry and drew John's eyes on him once more.

Sherlock sighed. Despite his best efforts, he had found the lead up to this ridiculous day grating on his emotional status. John had made efforts to secure himself a date and been grumpy when it hadn't
worked out the way he'd wanted. Sherlock had watched on, as usual, wondering what the world might have been like if John was gay and they went on a date. Sherlock wasn't one who liked to romanticise things but he thought that world might have been rather wonderful.

"Yeah. Maybe we should be more careful," John said quietly. It made him nauseous. He wanted to go home. He definitely didn't want to eat the heaping pile of lasagne that Angelo was carrying toward him.

"There you are, lads. Enjoy yourselves," he said with a wink before leaving them to it.

Sherlock huffed.

"What?" John snapped.

"Aren't you going to follow him and demand that he take back his wink and sexual innuendo? Isn't that what you do, John? Not-gay John. Straight as an arrow John. Wouldn't be caught dead letting someone believe you could possibly like the most unlikeable man in all of England," Sherlock said. He hadn't even looked at his food and he wasn't intending on eating a bite of it. He had lost his appetite. Probably for days. At least then John would fuss over him and he could pretend for a while that he was cared for in the way he wanted.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" John asked, his temper starting to spike.

"Nothing," Sherlock said, crossing his arms and looking out the window again.

"You're bloody impossible, you know that?" John said.

Sherlock shrugged. He knew. Sometimes he was impossible on purpose just for the fun of it.

"I'm trying to have a nice meal out with my... you and you've gone and put yourself in a bloody mood and I don't know why. So just shut up, pick up your fucking fork and eat," John said.

Sherlock snapped up to stare at John. His eyes were narrowed again and John found himself wanting to wilt in front of that gaze. He refused. "Pick up your fucking fork, Sherlock," he repeated.

"No."

"Yes."

"No."

"Yes."

"Nope."

"Yes."

"Nooope."

"Sherlock."

"No."
"Fine."

John started to eat, cutting the lasagne to pieces as if it had done him great personal harm in the past and he was finally getting his revenge. He hoped the silence would continue and Sherlock would leave him be. Of course, he knew better than that.

"Why are you so afraid of being seen as gay, John? I don't take you as the homophobic type. Your sister would have beaten that out of you years ago. And yet here you are, fighting this little assumption tooth and nail," Sherlock said.

"I'm not afraid," John said.

"Yeah, you are, John," Sherlock said.

"I just don't want you to think I'm gay," John said.

Sherlock leaned back. It felt like a punch. John, the much more emotionally mature out of the two of them, didn't want Sherlock to think he was gay. *He must know I am. He must know how I... feel,* he thought. *Do not jump to conclusions. Be casual. Press on.*

"Me? You proclaim it to the rest of the world, too, but you single out me. Why?" he asked.

John glared at him.

Sherlock looked back, his expression now one of blank, almost-polite interest.

*He wants me to confess to it. He wants to humiliate me here again. The same bloody restaurant. The same bloody meal. He wants to be able to reject me again,* John thought angrily. He had not forgotten the sting of Sherlock kindly telling him that he was married to his work and the date John had been looking for wasn't going to happen. Ever. And now Sherlock wanted to re-experience it.

"Well?" Sherlock pressed. He wanted to be making deductions. Hopeful deductions. Deductions that were bent on making him feel happy but he stopped them. There was just no chance.

"Sherlock," John said, his voice simultaneously sounding like a plea and a warning.

"Tell me why," Sherlock said in the voice he knew John to be soft for. The commanding one.

"Great. Yeah. Okay. Let's relive it then, you complete arsehole. I'm still single, you're still single. I can't keep a girlfriend because they all see how I... well, I'm not gay, Sherlock. But there are other sexualities out there. Not that it matters to you. You're set on having work being your romance, aren't you? Or Irene sodding Adler," John said. He stabbed his fork into the lasagne and started sawing it with his knife. He had no intention of eating anymore but he had to do something. He couldn't just sit there and be humiliated.

"That made absolutely no sense, John," Sherlock said. His happy, hopeful deductions were starting to invade his mind.

"Yeah, well. I'm stupid. You've told me that a million time already. Apparently I can't even admit to having feelings for my arrogant, selfish, egocentric and hurtful flatmate right. My sincerest apologies. Can we drop it now? I've lived with it for years and it hasn't disrupted our daily lives. Please don't
Sherlock's head jerked. *It's all fine? Oh.* John thought that what Sherlock had said years ago was still true. Maybe John really was stupid if he thought that his feelings for him hadn't changed in the *years* they'd known each other. Sherlock wasn't the type to fall in love over the course of one dinner. He wasn't the type to fall in love over the course of ten dinners. It had taken him almost a year to realise that what he felt for John wasn't friendship. But how should he have known? He hadn't had a friend in a very long time. He hadn't known how to differentiate between friendship love and romantic love. But he knew now because he realised he had other friends and he didn't feel for them like he felt for John.

"Feelings?" Sherlock said. He'd been quite for a few minutes without realising.

"Yes, Sherlock. I'm sorry. Can we just forget about it?" John said. He'd watched Sherlock go absolutely still, eyes blank with shock and unresponsive to John saying his name. He could only conclude that Sherlock hadn't known how he felt.

"Forget about it?" Sherlock asked.

"Do that... deleting thing. Delete it. Delete this whole evening," John said.

"Delete it?" Sherlock said. He shook his head to get his brain going. He sounded like a parrot. He wasn't a parrot. He was far more intelligent than a parrot. Except, apparently, in matters of John Watson.

"You still have feelings for me?" he added quickly.

John wished he had died in Afghanistan. What a cruel twist of fate it had been for him to survive and be forced to live this moment.

"Yes, still. Please Sherlock, I know I'm stupid. I know it. I know you don't have feelings for me and I know you aren't gay. Alright? Just. Leave. It," John said. The warning was gone from his voice. He was only pleading now.

"Listen, John," Sherlock said. John closed his eyes. He'd heard this speech before and he wasn't eager to hear it again, but who knew? Maybe it would make him realise that it would never *ever* happen and he could let go.

"I am surprised that you still have a romantic attachment to me after I tried to stop you years ago. In this same seat actually. Hmm. Neat. I did not wish to form a relationship with you besides sharing a living space and perhaps some sort of companionship in cases," Sherlock said.

God, it was torture to listen. John suddenly wished someone would pull out a gun and murder someone right there in the restaurant to distract Sherlock from continuing.

"I have, however, changed my mind. The change was gradual. I am not one to easily bestow my affections or regards on someone else but your loyalty, company, humour and unfailing aid of The Work has brought me to the conclusion that I do feel... feelings for you. In fact I think, although I cannot be absolutely sure without further introspection, that I am in love with you," Sherlock said. He straightened his back and tilted his head to the side. This was merely fact. Logic. Conclusions. It was nothing to be afraid of. But Sherlock was terrified.
It was John's turn to be struck dumb. He stared, his mouth widening more and more until he realised he was gaping like a goldfish. He shut it.

"John."
Silence.
"John."
Silence.
"John. Speak."
"Uhh, I."
"Speak more."
Silence.

"Oh, for heaven's sake," Sherlock said impatiently. He was frightened. He was far more hopeful than he wanted to be. He told himself he was a little drunk.

"Sh- oh," John said. Sherlock had cupped the back of his head and pulled him in and was kissing him.

Badly kissing him.

Suddenly John existed in a world where he knew Sherlock was a bad kisser.

"Oh, you boys. Try to keep your hands off each other until you get home," Angelo said cheerfully, appearing at their table to pour them more wine. Sherlock leaned back and glared at the nosy restaurateur who had no idea that the most significant thing in Sherlock's life had just happened.

But, if Sherlock was to be fair, Angelo thought that moment had happened years ago. In fact, everyone thought this first kiss must have happened years ago. Not now. Not today.

"No," Sherlock said, aghast.

"What?" John said, his hand finding its way to Sherlock's thigh completely on its own.

Sherlock looked down at it.

"Sherlock? What's wrong?" John said, pulling his hand away. Oh my God, he's realised he doesn't have feelings for me. Oh my God. Oh my God. The man who just gave me half a hard on from kissing me badly just realised he doesn't want to be kissing me at all.

"It's Valentine's Day, John," Sherlock said, his face distressed.

"Yeah?" John said.

"Can you... delete? Delete tonight? We can have this conversation again tomorrow when it's not Valentine's Day," Sherlock said.
John started to laugh. The relief spread in his body like a warm blanket had been placed around him and he laughed more than was actually called for.

"And not have a date for Valentine's Day? Not a chance, Sherlock."

Sherlock blushed.
Sherlock was sulking. There was no other word for it. He was sitting in his armchair, facing the fire, in a most impressive and rather spectacular sulk. And why shouldn't he be? He was entitled to this prolonged moment of pouting. It was Valentine's Day. And he, as anyone would have guessed, was alone and dateless.

But not John Watson.

Of course not John Watson, who had secured this date with that harlot from the train station when a case had taken them there a week prior. John had been sure to set their date for Friday, February 14th so as to not join the ranks of the lonely Sherlock Holmes.

And so, Sherlock sat in his armchair and barely acknowledged as a rather dapper looking John came downstairs from his room and said he was off for the night. A mere inclination of the head from Sherlock was all he did to indicate that he had heard his flatmate. Having to speak aloud would crush him. John, meanwhile, was standing awkwardly, hovering by the armchair, looking as though he wanted very much to sit in it but could not.

"Right," John said slowly. "So, is this all you'll be doing tonight then while I'm out with Jess?"

Sherlock bristled internally but remained still as stone in his chair. Jess. That horrendous women had introduced herself as Jessica, and yet somehow John felt familiar enough with her to call her Jess. For the slightest second, Sherlock mused on how often John and Jess must have talked to warrant such familiarity, but the thought made his stomach heave in nausea and so he promptly pushed it out of his mind.

Ah, yes. John had asked him a question. Sherlock inclined his head again in an answer.

John's eyes narrowed as he licked his lips watching Sherlock. The git could be so frustrating and infuriating. John knew Sherlock was jealous that he had a date; Sherlock always was. But it wasn't as if the two had had any plans for the evening, hadn't set anything aside for Valentine's Day. That would be a very un-not gay action on John's behalf. A part of him hoped, however. Didn't a part of him always hope? But there Sherlock sat, silent and sulking, angry and jealous of John for...what? Being more sociable? Having someone to talk to besides his flatmate? Being romantically involved with someone else? The desire to have Sherlock made John feel ill with unrequited feelings and so he forced the feeling away, as he had been doing for years now.

"You're in a right cheerful mood tonight," John said, trying to remain cheerful himself.

No reply.

His smile dissolving, John decided to try again.

"Not going out tonight at all, then? No plans?"

No reply.

"Going to open a bottle of wine and heat up Mrs. Hudson's leftover stew and treat yourself to a Valentine's Day dinner?"

No reply.
John's phone began to ring. Jess. He answered it as a distraction to the sinking feeling he was feeling from Sherlock not responding to him at all.

"Hey, Jess."

Much to Sherlock's horror, the woman's overly affected high pitched voice was loud and clear, as if she had her hands on John and was standing beside him in their living room.

"Hi, Johnny! Just letting you know I may be a tad late to dinner. I am losing this fight with my hairdryer!"

Sherlock was going to be sick all over their living room floor. Johnny? That was certainly a familiar name. Jess and Johnny. Sherlock was already formulating excuses about why he would be unable to attend their wedding. Jess. Johnny.

The name did not sit right with John, though he made no physical indication of this. "That's fine," he said into his phone. "Take your time."

There was a disgusting kissing sound on the other end of the line that almost made Sherlock physically gag. He did not know that it almost elicited the same reaction in John.

"Not going to answer me at all then?" John asked as he slipped his phone back into his pocket.

No reply.

Infuriated now, John's temper ignited, causing him to lash out at his cold and despondent flatmate.

"Of course," John said in fury. "Your date for tonight is yourself. Who else would the great Sherlock Holmes want to be with? Can't feel for anyone but himself. Enjoy your evening. I won't be back until tomorrow I hope."

It gutted him to say, but with any luck, John would get a leg over with Jess and for a few welcomed hours, Sherlock Holmes would not be at the forefront of his mind.

It gutted Sherlock to hear, images of John and Jess in bed together, moaning each others' names, touching, writhing. A shudder passed through him which John saw but did not register. He was far too angry as he stormed out of the flat and made his way to the restaurant.

Sherlock sat in front of the fire for some time, thinking about what John had said and how wrong he had been. The great Sherlock Holmes hated that he was alone, that the only person with whom he wanted to be was off wining and dining someone in the hopes of a shag. Sherlock felt for John far more than he felt for himself, far more than he had ever felt for anyone in the entire time of his existence. How could John not know that?

Angrily, Sherlock took his phone out and sent a text, knowing it probably wouldn't be answered.

You're wrong, you know. SH

He turned his phone over in his hand, counting upwards until he would get a response or hit 100. Whichever came first.

The number 47 came first as his phone buzzed.

Oh, was I? JW
Wrong about what? JW
Sherlock dove into his phone thumbs first, texting back energetically.

That I don't feel for anyone but myself. SH
And that I don't want to be with anyone. SH

[delayed reply]
Oh? JW

Yes. SH

Who? JW

Does it matter? SH
My circumstances will remain the same. SH

It does matter. JW
Sherlock, tell me. JW
Do I know the person? JW

[delayed reply]
Yes. SH

Is it Irene Adler? JW

God, no. SH
It isn't any woman at all, John. SH
How unobservant. SH

A man? JW
Really? JW

Yes of course, John. SH
I told you girlfriends weren't my area. SH

Sherlock, tell me who it is. Please. JW

Nothing will come of it, John. SH
Except losing something. SH

What would you lose? JW

My flatmate. SH

[no reply]

Sherlock hated himself. How could he have done that? How could he have been so stupid and told John? He had doomed himself. Not only had he embarrassed himself by means of text message, but John would assuredly want to move out now that it was clear Sherlock had feelings for him. Perhaps he should be kind and assist him as a parting gesture before the two went their separate ways. With a heavy heart, Sherlock lifted himself up out of his chair and began to gather up all of John's personal belongings.

When the door to the flat burst open twenty minutes later, Sherlock had made excellent progress, finding old boxes and filling them with everything of John's that was on that floor. Sherlock wouldn't go up to John's bedroom; he couldn't face it. So instead, he was packing all of John's items form the
living room and kitchen. When he heard the door open, Sherlock was putting John's RAMC cup and bottle of whiskey into the box. Standing in the doorway, looking both furious (as was expected) and confused (even more expected) was John Watson.

John stared at his best friend and flatmate in what had turned into a hopeful rage on his way home from the restaurant. Sherlock's text could only mean one thing, couldn't it? But...

"What the bloody hell are you doing?" he asked, looking at his possessions all piled into boxes. "What are you doing with all of my stuff?" His voice was horrified. He had misinterpreted the messages somehow. "Are you kicking me out?"

Sherlock stood up tall. If this was to happen, he would do it with dignity and grace.

"I'm more giving you the out since you will want it having discovered about me what you have," Sherlock said in a clipped tone. "I think it's safe to say you no longer wish to be flatmates with someone who has such deep and resolute feelings for you."

John's anger vanished immediately upon hearing Sherlock say the words aloud.

"You clot," he said, his voice softening and his lips curling up into a smile. "The last thing I want to do is move out. You couldn't kick me out now if you tried."

Something wasn't adding up. Sherlock looked at his watch. "John," he said slowly. "It's still early. Shouldn't you still be at dinner with Jess?" He couldn't help himself from saying the name with revulsion.

"Yeah, but that was before I got your text messages. I left as soon as you mentioned your... you know... feelings."

Sherlock's breath caught and he hardly dared to believe it. Surely, John was not implying that... He couldn't mean... No. Be logical, Sherlock.

"I see," Sherlock said, softly. "You decided to let me down easy because it is Valentine's Day and you, what? Took pity on me that I was alone and dateless and now that you can see that I am, in fact, still whole and in one piece, you can return to Jess and we will settle all of this tomorrow. I wouldn't want you to miss your night with your date."

John's smile widened. "I am with my date," he said slowly. "Only he has one now. If he'll take me that is. It was with an almost sheepish smile that John crossed the room and with all of the bravery he had (and as an army doctor, that happened to be a great deal), took Sherlock's hand in his own.

It took a lot for Sherlock Holmes to be rendered speechless. John Watson being his first date on Valentine's Day, and every Valentine's Day to follow, would do the trick. Beside a box filled with John's belongings, the two flatmates stood smiling at one another before going back and sitting in their armchairs in front of the fire as if nothing had changed except for how closely their chairs were moved together and how tightly their hands were joined.
It was February 14th and Sherlock and John were alone together.

After some languid deliberation, Sherlock made them a reservation at The Veeraswamy, deciding that dishing out a few hundred pounds for a dinner with his flatmate was acceptable, as they were both alone together and it wouldn’t do to sulk. Besides, he remembered that John liked Indian food.

John bought out all the remaining chocolate at his favorite candy store, bringing three huge bags of sweets into 221B and depositing them on the kitchen table for Sherlock. They might as well take advantage of the pure volume and quality of candy available on this particular day. Besides, he remembered that Sherlock liked chocolate. (How could he forget?)

Sherlock passed a flower shop on his way back from the bank, where he had withdrawn the amount of money necessary to pay for their exorbitant dinner in cash. It wouldn’t do for Mycroft to check his credit card expenses and see such a large bill from such a fancy restaurant. His meddlesome older brother, who of course denied that he looked at Sherlock’s accounts at all, might think he had been on a date. Of course, it wasn’t anything nearly as shocking. Sherlock and John were alone together. And there was no reason not to buy 4 dozen red roses on his way back to the flat, especially considering that it was already close to dinnertime and the vender would likely throw the flowers away if they weren’t sold. He also went into the Holmes’ favorite suit shop to buy something appropriate for John. His oh-so-casual flatmate couldn’t be seen in the place they were going in a jumper. Besides, he thought that John would look particularly good in grey, especially with the blue tie Sherlock had selected.

John spent quite some time in the shower, shaved carefully, donned a pricy cologne that Sherlock had purchased him for Christmas, and slicked back his hair for the lonely night he would be spending with his flatmate. Why hadn’t he asked out someone from his office? Why had he waited until the very last minute and then decided to spend the holiday of love with Sherlock, of all people?

Sherlock arrived with the flowers and the suit, depositing both in John’s room while the other man was in the shower, picking out something particular sexy for himself. It was worthwhile to feel sexy when one was alone in the company of someone else who was also alone, for self-esteem if nothing else.

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John did indeed look dashing in his new suit, and Sherlock was his usually sexy self. The combination was so noteworthy that the host at the restaurant had specifically mentioned what an attractive couple they made. John had corrected him, informing everyone waiting to be seated that they were not on a date. Sherlock had laughed at the very mention of dating. He was married to His Work.

The two lonely flatmates discussed the chocolate, flowers, and new suit vaguely, as well as how ridiculous it was that it was impossible for two uninvolved men to go to one of the most romantic and costly restaurants in the city without being taken as a couple. John remarked that at least eating by candlelight was a nice change, even if the scattered rose petals occasionally got in his way.

While John ordered their food (Roast Duck Vindaloo, Lobster Malabar Curry, and Raan Akbari), Sherlock purchased two splendid bottles of wine for them to enjoy; a 2008 Grand Cru Bougros and a 2009 Chassagne-Montrachet, both from Burgundy. They had a pleasant time together, talking about Sherlock’s Work, John’s job at the clinic, and the incredible amount of cases they had been busy with over the past few months. John was sure to compliment Sherlock’s brilliance and Sherlock was sure to compliment John’s abilities with a firearm, which made them both beam with pleasure.

By the time John and Sherlock were eating mango Kulfi and sweet Gulab Jamun covered in syrup, both bottles were empty and they were both more than a bit tipsy. Sherlock took the bill, much to John’s protestations, and they stumbled to the curb for a taxi, both feeling brilliantly full and content. Sherlock went so far as to rest his head on John’s shoulder during the cab ride, softly murmuring about how nice the dinner had been, even though neither of them had dates, and John played with his hair, running his fingers through the soft curls.

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Once they were back in 221B, Sherlock had pulled out a bottle of scotch that had been given to him by Mycroft for his birthday, and they had sipped it on the couch instead of their chairs, because Sherlock had decided he very much liked laying in John’s lap and he was drunk enough to insist it.

John had spent the next half hour complimenting his flatmate, for whom his feelings were completely platonic, especially mentioning his lips and arse, and Sherlock had giggled naughtily when he admitted that he had indeed caught a glance of John’s cock when he had been coming out of the shower earlier.

They were both starting to drift off, so Sherlock pulled John off the couch and to his bed, divesting both the doctor and himself of their trousers and shirts, and happily falling into John’s arms with the full intention of keeping John very close for the night. After all, there was no reason they could have a completely platonic shag in the morning.
It was really too bad that they had spent Valentine’s Day alone together.
Hello! Today's prompt is: Miles apart on Valentine's Day.

If you want, you can hop back to chapter 18 and see that I added Anne's very cute Secret Admirer fic. It's one of my favourites so far =)

Dr. Thorpe had been wondering what it would take to break Sherlock Holmes. He hadn't expected it to be Valentine's Day.

"It's Valentine's Day," Lillian said.

"I wish I was at home with my husband," Maggie said.

"I wish I was with my wife," Ian said.

Sherlock snorted.

"Don't you wish you were home?" Maggie asked.

"No."

Why would he want to be home? John had betrayed him. He had paired up with Mycroft and the two of them had tricked him and forced him to enter a three month long rehab stint in the middle of nowhere where nothing happened. He was bored and he wasn't even allowed cocaine to make it better. John had never loved him. It wasn't a surprise really. Did John even know how to love? There was all this talk about how fucked up Sherlock was but why did no one ever take a closer look at John? Were people so easily tricked by the anonymous appearance he had? Nondescript trousers. Beige jumpers. Beige hair. Beige skin tone. Beige beige beige. John was beige. John was a bastard. How had he ever thought he loved John?

Sherlock snorted again.

"Would you like to talk about it, Sherlock?" Doctor Thorpe asked.

"There is nothing wrong with me," Sherlock replied before crossing his arms and continuing his sulk.

No, he decided. John didn't know how to love. If he had loved Sherlock then he wouldn't have sent him here with these people. Drunks, smack heads, pill poppers and even a shopaholic. He had nothing in common with them. Nothing. John was the one with the problems.

"He is the one with problems!" Sherlock shouted suddenly, making the rest of the patients in the
group therapy session jump. It was a celebratory shout. He felt relieved. He had been somewhat plagued the past six weeks that John had had a point, that perhaps the way Sherlock dealt with life wasn't the best way. Now it felt like he'd found the Out. The Loophole.

It was John. John should be the one locked away and miserable.

"His parents were both alcoholics. They never loved him. His sister started drinking when she had barely entered into adolescence. She never showed him much care either."

"Who?" Doctor Thorpe asked even though he was fairly sure he knew who Sherlock was talking about. His other addiction. A benign addiction.

Sherlock snorted again. "The only love he knows is... well. Nothing. What does he know? His father would rather use a belt on him than talk to him, and his mother's version of love was to look the other way to spare him the humiliation of being watched when it happened. And now John fucking Watson is doing the same to me with the help of my dear and precious brother."

"Would you care to elaborate on that?" Doctor Thorpe asked with a mildly interested tone. It would not do to show an outright interest and excitement. Sherlock would notice and clam up again. Sherlock had been a tough nut to crack, but through trial and error Doctor Thorpe had a pretty good grasp on what not to do if he wanted Sherlock to keep talking.

"John is beating me with a belt and Mycroft is doing even worse than just looking away. He handed John the belt and told him to hit me harder. How is that fair?" Sherlock said.

Lillian had put her hand to her mouth. She had never heard Sherlock speak this much since the day he arrived. It had been magnificent in a devastating way.

A gaunt, pale looking man had strode into the rehab centre wearing a dramatic coat that looked too big on his thin frame billowing after him. He had been speaking a mile a minute and made the nurse helping him burst into tears. The nurse in question had been working with patients with addictions for over twenty years and had not cried once from the plenty of verbal abuse she had received over those years. Sherlock had her sobbing in five minutes flat.

Sherlock had refused to eat. Refused tea. Refused to go to the group session. He had refused to share a room with another patient and had spent the night sitting on the couch in the common room refusing sleep. The only thing that he had wanted to do was to pick apart every single other patient. He had been a whirlwind. Unstoppable.

"He beats you?" Lillian whispered in shock, feeling like she had found the source for the anger she had witnessed the first day. "That's horrible. That's awful, Sherlock. My ex-husband beat me. He knocked out a tooth once." She started to cry and Doctor Thorpe passed her a tissue.

"No, he doesn't literally beat me you stupid woman," Sherlock said with an exasperated tone.

Ian hissed in a breath. "Don't talk to her that way! Can't you see she is upset?" he said.
"I'm upset, too!" Sherlock snapped back.

"Are you?" Doctor Thorpe asked.

"Yes of course I am. I shouldn't be here. I had my recreational use of that substance under complete control. I know my limits and I had not reached them. John overreacted. Mycroft overreacted. The stupid are prone to doing that, the evidence of that sits before us in the shape of Lillian," Sherlock said, gesturing at her.

Lillian let out a heaving sob and Doctor Thorpe passed her another tissue.

"So you think your boyfriend doesn't love you and that he's exaggerating your drug use," Doctor Thorpe said over the sound of crying.

"I know he doesn't love me. The evidence of that sits before you in the shape of me in this sodding chair. I shouldn't be here," Sherlock said.

Doctor Thorpe opened his mouth to speak again but Sherlock was faster.

"Fine Valentine's Day gift this is. I preferred when he veered towards the overly sentimental," Sherlock said, his crossed arms tightening over his chest.

"What kind of gifts has he got you before?" Doctor Thorpe asked.

Sherlock was thrown back in time.

Their first Valentine's Day together. He had just turned twenty and John had been twenty-two. They had met a few months before and had been shagging since then. Neither of them had mentioned dating, but somehow it had become that. Unspoken. John spent more time in Sherlock's flat than anywhere else and that was exactly the way Sherlock had wanted it. They slept together, ate together, studied together and sometimes showered together. But no official word on their relationship status, both of them too emotionally constipated to bring it up. Sherlock thought he was incapable of love and John thought he was incapable of trusting someone again. Both their assumptions about themselves had been wrong.

That Valentine's Day, John had gone miles out of his comfort zone and fussed over Sherlock. Breakfast in bed (which wasn't unusual and hadn't made Sherlock suspect anything. John just liked to make sure Sherlock ate), a bit of an awkward massage as they showered together, a kiss on the cheek before John left for class. It was the kiss that had made Sherlock suspect that John was buying into the completely commercial holiday. John had never kissed his cheek before. It was a form of gentlemanly affection that Sherlock loudly proclaimed to hate.

What was romance when there was pure, fiery lust? Romance was a waste of time.

And still that kiss had been all Sherlock had thought about all day and it had been accompanied with vasodilation in his cheeks and the muscles around his lips contracting. Sherlock did not blush and
smile. He had wanted no part of it.

But then John had come home with one single rose and a heart shaped box of chocolates, announcing they were going out to dinner.

"A date," John had added to the end of the sentence. Sherlock had stared at him and it had rattled John. "We are dating. You and me. Look, Sherlock. I know we're both not really... We both really don't know how to do this but let's just do it. You and me. What do you say?"

Sherlock had inclined his head three times in response and then quickly switched the topic of conversation to what happened when you submerged a severed toe in vinegar over the period of a week. It didn't hide the blush or the smile.

The following Valentine's Day John had brought home another red rose, a heart shaped box of chocolates and he had taken Sherlock out to dinner again. Such traditions were easy ways out for those who had trouble coming up with new ways to explain what they felt and felt uncomfortable trying. But again, John went miles out of his comfort zone and tried.

"Sherlock," John had said with such a weight and gravitas that Sherlock's stomach had lurched. He was sure it was going to be bad news.

I don't want to be with you anymore.

I think Mycroft is more clever than you.

I slept with that girl at the grocery store who keeps looking at me every single sodding time we go without taking the hint no matter how much you keep kissing me in front of her so she'll stop looking at what is not hers and never ever, ever will be hers.

"I love you."

Goosebumps had appeared on Sherlock's arms and the hairs at the back of his neck had stood on end.

They're just words. Get a hold of yourself. They mean nothing more and nothing less than all the other words John has said to you.

But Sherlock knew his thoughts were wrong. It meant everything.

The third Valentine's Day John had brought home the rose and box of chocolates that Sherlock had been expecting. They'd gone out to dinner, too. It had been a lovely evening. Their relationship was safe and comfortable with the rush of adrenaline that only two excitement junkies could together conjure in a shared life. The sex was amazing and John treated Sherlock's arse like it was the answer to all the hidden secrets of life. Sherlock was excited to get home to have John try to tease some more answers out. But plans were changed. They had fallen into bed, kissing and their fingers tugging on each other's clothes; all signs of good sex ahead and still John had surprised him.

"Sherlock, you top this time," he had whispered.

Miles and miles out of his comfort zone.
The fourth Valentine's Day had been different. Sherlock's only other friend, Victor Trevor, had introduced him to cocaine a few months earlier. When John came home that day with his rose, his box of chocolates and the invitation to dinner, he had found Sherlock on the couch, blood trickling from a puncture in his arm and a needle dropped carelessly on the floor next to him. It wasn't the first time he'd seen it, but he had certainly hoped that Valentine's Day (which was, in hindsight, their accidental anniversary) would have been exempt from Sherlock's new hobby. What had been new, however, had been the sight of Victor Trevor straddling Sherlock's hips and grinding down on him with the loudest moans John had ever heard. It almost drowned out the mad giggles coming from Sherlock's mouth.

Victor left with a black eye and pissed blood for a week after a well-aimed punch to his kidney. They had never discussed it. Sherlock assumed it didn't need to be as John never brought it up. He didn't see why John would be upset anyway; Sherlock hadn't been hard so he hadn't really been cheating. Victor had been acting a fool, that was all.

Sherlock was glad to see life return to normal after a couple tense weeks.

Sherlock didn't know that John had twice over gone miles out of his comfort zone in the weeks surrounding Valentine's Day.

Once when he been buying an engagement ring.

The other when he had been returning it.

It would have been an easy deduction to make if his mind hadn't been clouded with the constant craving for a high. As it happened, he had been informed of the ring-that-almost-was by Mycroft six months later on John's birthday.

Sherlock had gone out to get a little hit to get him through the tedium of celebrating John's twenty-seventh birthday with his awful friends and even worse family. Mycroft found him slumped on a park bench seven hours later and he had shouted at him. Shouted. Mycroft wasn't often one to shout or get so upset that his emotions showed. It had been fascinating.

"Think of what you're doing to John. He loves you. For whatever godforsaken reason he has convinced himself that you're the one he wants to be with even though we both bloody know he could do much better than you in the state you're in now," Mycroft had hissed at him.


"You've lost fifteen pounds, that you did not have to lose in the first place, in the past four months alone. How John bears to look at you every day when you look like this I don't know. I don't know how he continued to look at you after what happened with Trevor," Mycroft had said, his volume rising.

"Oh, he told you about that did he? Didn't realise he was so sensitive that someone flirting with me would send him off into dramatics," Sherlock said dismissively.
"Flirting? Sherlock, *that* was cheating. And John had a ring in his pocket that he had worked double shifts to buy for you. But you didn't even notice him gone those days did you? High. And by the look on your face I can deduce you had no idea that John had bought you a ring and then had to return it because the *one he thought loved him was being humped on his couch!*" Mycroft shouted.

It had hurt. It had required another injection.

And another.

And another.

Countless injections of cocaine into his bloodstream to eradicate the pain John Watson caused in his life.

"Sounds to me like he loves you very much," Doctor Thorpe said, alerting Sherlock to the fact that he had spoken all the stories out loud. For thirty minutes he had been talking, his voice rising and falling in pitch as the anger, love and guilt associated with John ebb and flowed.

There was a murmur of agreement from the other patients and Sherlock looked around at them like he had never seen them before, so intensely wrapped up in his story had he been.

"But he sent me here," Sherlock complained.

"Let's look at the facts, Sherlock," Doctor Thorpe said.

Sherlock narrowed his eyes. He liked facts but people so often got them wrong.

"You're a very bright young man. Very bright. Top student. Five papers published in prestigious magazines by the age of twenty-two. And, quite frankly, a disturbingly uncanny way of seeing right through people. Quite amazing," Doctor Thorpe said.

Sherlock nodded. All correct. He was an extraordinary brain.

"But those accomplishments are old. What have you done in the past year? You've dropped out of university. John tells us the the scientific journals you enjoyed reading before have been used as kindling for fires by you instead of food for your brain. Your brain is barely functioning. When you got here you couldn't even tell us your phone number. You haven't been doing anything except abusing cocaine," Doctor Thorpe said. His voice was deceptively soft.

"I have been doing research," Sherlock said automatically.

"Have you? John told us that in October he moved all your scientific equipment from the kitchen to a closet and you didn't notice. He tells us that all you've been doing is write illegible notes. You've filled notebook after notebook with stuff that nobody can read because the words make no sense based on your high ramblings. How is that research?"
Sherlock's lips twitched.

"John is a bastard," he said, his voice cracking. *What have I done.*

"John is someone who was abused as a child by two parents who, like you, Sherlock, were addicted and didn't see the value in him. John is someone who has come from the bottom of society and is now a doctor despite the struggle he had with his live-in patient during his last year of study. John is someone who has taken care of you after you've pissed, shat and thrown up on yourself in your come-down fits. John is someone who stayed with you after you cheated on him on the day he intended to propose to you," Doctor Thorpe said sharply, relentless and hitting every mark he needed to.

It was unbearable. Sherlock couldn't go on. He would need to get cocaine or find some way to commit suicide.

"John is someone," Doctor Thorpe said, his tone gentle again, "who remembers who you are. Who you are. Underneath this shell cocaine has put around you, it's still there and he still loves you. Amazingly. John sounds to me like someone loyal to the point of destroying himself. John sounds like someone who knows how to love you more than you have been able to accept."

Sherlock was miles from his comfort zone.

"The way you are now is not John's fault. This was your choice," Doctor Thorpe said.

Sherlock nodded. The room was in complete silence, only interrupted by the sound of crying. Sherlock turned his gaze on to Lillian again to glare at her for still crying. Her face was dry. No one was crying. But someone was crying.

The only deduction he could make was the he was the one crying.

He was miles and miles away from his comfort zone.

But still an uncountable amount of miles behind John.

John had always gone further. John had always been the braver one. John had always tried harder.

And now he was miles apart from him on Valentine's Day. Their day. The day they decided they should be a them. An us. A pair.

And it was no one's fault but his own. He had failed them. He had failed John. He had failed himself.

"I-" Sherlock said but he couldn't complete his sentence. The tears were demanded to be cried.

"Good, Sherlock," Doctor Thorpe said. "Now the real work can begin and we can get you ready to return home to your John. He told me he'd wait for you."
John,

By the time you receive this letter, should I choose to send it at all once I sober up, it will be after the fact, just another date on a calendar. It will be one more day of you believing me to not exist in this world and me trying to secure everyone's safety from what feels like the other side of the world. I suppose it is. I don't know geography. I've deleted it. Unimportant.

Has London changed much in my year away from it? I often wonder about how you are doing, if you're coping well or if you have changed the decor of the flat in my absence. I do trust that you're taking good care of Billy and that any experiments and lab equipment I left out will remain there untouched when I return. You know how much I dislike it when my things are moved.

What have you been doing with your days? I imagine that you haven't gone on any cases without me, but I also imagine the inbox is filled with old emails from people with varying mysteries. And I know you. I imagine you stay up with a glass of whiskey from time to time and go through them all, seeing which you can solve on your own. I imagine that's why I've taken to drinking whiskey on the nights that are proving to be most difficult, because I like to believe that you are too. Nights like tonight when I drink a bit too much. It quiets the self loathing at least partially. I hope to return soon, John, but it may not be for some time. I am trying to be as fast and efficient as possible. I hope you were not too affected by my death. I will make it up to you when I get back. I will buy milk. No I won't. We'll see. Maybe. Don't push your luck.

Do you know how many of these letters I have started and haven't sent? Do you know how many times I have almost texted or called you or asked Mycroft to inform you that I am alive and want to see you? I was about to resort to asking for Mycroft's help. This is where I am. This is what my life has become.

What a sodding ridiculous holiday this is. Valentine's Day. Where couples all over the world profess their love with partners and shower them in meretricious items that will most likely be discarded when the inevitable break-up happens. What does one give to a person whom one adores and wants to prove it true? Does it have to be confined to one day a year when it is allowed for one to make a grand gesture of emotions?

Another glass of whiskey is needed for any sort of gesture, even one that I'm never going to send.

Wherever you are, John, I hope that you are happy or as happy as you could be given what I've put you through. I will be home soon and hope that I can tell you in person that I have harbored feeli

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John folded the letter and placed it back into the envelope, a sad smile on his lips. Sherlock hadn't even finished writing the letter. Even drunk, he couldn't bring himself to admit to the love he had felt for his best friend, even when John believed him to be dead. And based on the progression of the slowness and slant of the handwriting, Sherlock had been very very drunk.

John walked out of their bedroom, holding the letter in his hand, looking at his boyfriend, lounging in his armchair. "You know," he said with a grin. "It probably would have been a very grand and
romantic gesture if you had sent this letter. Assuming, of course, I had recovered enough from getting a letter from my dead best friend."

Sherlock chuckled. "So you mean I didn't need to buy you a token this year to show you that I do, in fact, love you? Should I try returning that oversized teddy bear?"

"Yes," John said, sitting down on Sherlock's lap and wrapping his arms around his neck. "I don't need it. Assuming you still meant what you almost wrote in your letter that you almost sent to me three years ago... You, Sherlock Holmes, harbor feelings for me."

Sherlock pulled John in closer. "Well, of course," he said, taking a deep breath. "Even though I was fantastically drunk, miles away, and you believed me to be dead, I almost told you I may or may not have been in love with you."

"You courageous git," John said affectionately, leaning down and kissing Sherlock deeply.
Sherlock missed John.

He had never missed anyone with anywhere near the fervor with which he missed John.

Sherlock missed John so much that he thought he might die from the pure missing, from the pain that was crushing his chest in a very tangible manner.

Who had known that the cliche of heartbreak derived from a very real bodily sensation?

They had never been a couple; John would never think about him with the unadulterated longing that went beyond the mere physical nature of human bodies. Whereas Sherlock saw them as two minds on the same wave of light, skimming the surface of a great sea of bright, otherworldly swells. Him and his John. Him and the soldier, gone off to save the bloody world, as if saving Sherlock wasn’t enough.

They were not together. Sherlock had no right to miss John how he did, to feel the sky that he so often fancied himself transcending collapsing onto his narrow shoulders and crushing his very heart.

John was not gay. Sherlock had no right to imagine the other boy stripping him of his clothes and pressing him apart on the bed, claiming his body in a brilliant burst of hot hearts meeting and melting in the inferno of Sherlock’s lust.

He had no right to think of John on Valentine’s Day, to imagine soft lips on his forehead, on his elbows, on the curve of his back, to imagine John adoring him how he had always wanted to be adored.

Worst of all, Sherlock knew the right wasn’t his. He did, however, have the right to drink himself into coma calm, to inject himself back above the heavy weight of the sky, to dig himself a hole straight to hell, which was where he knew he belonged, where all his devils and his demons could feast on his tender, pale flesh.

Happy Valentine’s Day.
It was a happy day indeed. Although Sherlock wasn’t sure if he would even remember it.


John was fighting a war; Sherlock was fighting himself. John’s status was buried in a stack of papers under the close watch of the bureaucracy; Sherlock was losing.

Sherlock was fading, disintegrating, wearing away to nothing. His pale skin got paler, his red lips got redder, his thin body got thinner, his wild curls settled into permanent tangles, his heart turned to ice and he had to suffer through the pain of thawing it and refreezing it on a daily basis. Sherlock was losing his bloody mind without John. He needed John. John kept him right, John kept him sane, John kept him alive.

That’s why Sherlock took a little bit too much on Valentine’s Day, an extra injection, praying that his heart would stop so that it would stop hurting, so that he would stop missing, so that he would stop loving. At his urging, the steady rhythm pounding against the inside of his chest faltered, it trembled, it slowly fell away, like a leaf from an oak tree in autumn.

And Sherlock Holmes died.

Heaven was clean and white and clinical; Sherlock didn’t believe in Heaven. Heaven was home to indifferent, fluorescent lights and a persistent beeping that was quite frankly driving Sherlock up the walls of his head. He closed his eyes and opened them again, waiting for an eternity of blackness, but it never came.

“Not dead,” a voice choked out beside him, a familiar voice that brought tears to his tired eyes. Sherlock tried to clear his throat, but he could only barely make his body do his bidding. And then he came to, with a deep rumbling in his chest that worked it’s way into his rusty vocal chords.

“You fucker. If you—if you ever do that… Christ. Sherlock. I—God.” Sherlock tilted his head so that his nose could rest in John’s hair, shorter than he liked it, but still thick with John’s smell.
“Sherlock. How could you?” Angry eyes met his own, cheeks streaked with tears.

“You’re going to rehab, you hear me, Sherlock? I wouldn’t even be here except for your bloody brother…”

“I love you… I love you so bloody much, and you still had to go and—“ John’s voice broke with a sound that Sherlock categorized as a whine.

“You.” The soldier’s eyes darted up to meet his own, more sad than angry. “Please don’t go back. I love you. Don’t go back.”

“Yeah. I love you too.” John spoke softly, climbing into Sherlock’s bed at that and gently resting an arm on his best friend's chest, sliding his hand right over Sherlock's heart. John kept him right, John kept him sane. And at the simple touch, Sherlock transcended the sky on a beam of light. He had never felt so alive; he had never wanted to live so much.
Hello! Today's prompt is stolen from a song called Suddenly by Billy Ocean.

You Wake Up and Suddenly You're in Love.

Sherlock woke up and he knew he'd been slipped a love potion. It was probably someone's idea of a joke. Maybe Moran's or Donovan's. Possibly Anderson. It didn't matter. And that's how he knew he was the victim of a love potion.

The only thing that mattered was John Watson, Captain of the Gryffindor Quidditch team. Prefect (but would never be Head Boy because of his temper.) Bright boy. Muggle father. Witch mother. Muggle sister. Sturdy, eight inch oak wand with dual unicorn hair core. Sandy blonde hair and bright blue eyes. A sarcastic wit that made Sherlock laugh even when he didn't mean to. A smile that made Sherlock want to be on his best behaviour. His friend.
Sherlock lay in his four poster bed and stared into the ceiling. The other boys were still snoring around him. Dawn had not yet come but yet it felt like Sherlock's soul was alight.
It was one thing to read about the effects of a love potion. It was an entirely different thing to experience it first hand. It was fascinating.

His body was hot and restless. He was simultaneously deliriously happy that John Watson existed and sad that their existences weren't somehow merged into one happy symbiotic life. His heart fluttered and his stomach had what was commonly called 'butterflies' but was actually a release of adrenalin in his bloodstream. He couldn't imagine ever being able to fall asleep again when there were so many thoughts to be had concerning John and things to be learned about him.

Curse the Sorting Hat for putting him in Ravenclaw! If he had been put in Gryffindor he could have known all the minutiae of the make-up of John Watson. What kind of jam did he prefer? Did he drink coffee or tea in the morning? Was he grumpy first thing or did he wake up in a reasonable mood? Why had Sherlock never asked these questions in their shared classes? Why had he never invited John to eat breakfast or any other meal at the Ravenclaw table?

Sherlock flipped on to his stomach and sighed. John was his best friend. Nobody was a friend like John was. Smarter than most other idiots, handsome, kind, loyal, funny, patient. Sherlock sighed again. How could something hurt so much and yet feel so indescribably good? It was agony. It twisted his insides with sudden pangs of pain (what if they didn't speak today? What if John had found a Valentine? What if he kissed her? What if they became a couple? What if Sherlock tripped and fell in front of John and he laughed?) and then released in a rush of warm hopefulness (They might have a really long conversation today. Maybe they'd go on one of their walks around the grounds and sit by the lake. Maybe he could think of a reason to hold his hand?) only to be twisted into pain again (none of what he hoped for would ever happen).

He needed to get up and make the antidote.

But he couldn't move. He was stuck where he was with thoughts of John swirling around in his mind like he had been swept up in a hurricane of emotions. Love Potions were nearly impossible to logic
your way out of. It took him hours to get out of bed.

"Holmes, where do you think you're going?" Greg Lestrade, Prefect and second in command of Sherlock's Head Boy brother, said when he spotted Sherlock taking a turn that was not a path to the Great Hall and breakfast.

"Dungeon," Sherlock said, not bothering to look at him.

"No," Greg said.

That caught Sherlock's attention. "No?" he asked, turning to look at him.

"Breakfast first. You know you'll be stuck there all day if you go now. Just eat something," Greg said.

Sherlock sighed. Somehow being in cahoots with his elder brother had made Greg Sherlock's new minder.

"Fine," he said. He'd had a cup of tea and then go. It would calm his nerves. He'd never attempted to make an antidote for a Love Potion before. He didn't think it would be hard but being anxious wouldn't help anything so he made his way to the Great Hall for that calming cup of tea. He paused at the doors to survey the disgusting amount of pink that had been used in decorations for Valentine's Day. Sherlock hated the Love Potion for making the decorations seem completely reasonable and even a little... nice. He was considering what kind of hex he would use to make the people responsible for his drugged state when he heard John's voice behind him, laughing with one of his housemates

Sherlock's heart was in his mouth as he turned around in time to see John descend the last of the stairs with a little jump. The tension melted out of Sherlock's shoulders and he smiled. John was so wonderful. So charming. Even the way he moved was special. How many people would hop the last two stairs like that and land so gracefully and with so much personality?

"Sherlock! Hey!" John called out, raising a hand in greeting.

"John," Sherlock croaked. He started to blush horribly.

"What are you standing around here for? You trying to skive off from breakfast? I won't have it. Come on," John said. He put his hand Sherlock's back and pushed him toward the Gryffindor table.

Sherlock could scarcely believe what was happening. He was going to sit next to John and have breakfast. He felt like he was about to throw up. How was he supposed to eat? And how was the bench by the Gryffindor table somehow softer and more comfortable than the Ravenclaw one? How was any of this happening?

Sherlock reminded himself that he was under the influence of a Love Potion and his perception of reality was probably very skewed.

But knowing he was drugged did nothing to stop the rush of heat in his body when John poured them each a cup of tea and then prepared toast with strawberry jam. Sherlock greedily filed the information away in his mind and enthusiastically ate the piece of toast with John's favourite jam. It tasted wonderful. It even smelled wonderful. It was simply fascinating how a Love Potion could
"You going into Hogsmeade tomorrow?" John asked. There was jam in the corners of his mouth and Sherlock had to stop himself from leaning in to kiss it off.

"Maybe," he said. He was surprised by the disinterested cool he was able to inject into his tone despite the way his heart was hammering in his chest.

"Oh. I was thinking I might go. Nice to get out isn't it? Away from the castle for a bit. It's a nice walk, too. Not on the grounds," John said.

The effects of the Love Potion was making it look like John was blushing. It made Sherlock think that John wanted to ask him to take that walk to Hogsmeade with him. A rush of heady hopefulness was followed quickly by the twist of pain. Of course he wasn't going to ask.

*I really need the antidote,* Sherlock thought as he looked longingly at John's mouth.

"Sherlock, I was wond-"

"I have to go. Good morning," Sherlock said, getting up so fast that he almost tripped on his long legs.

He escaped quickly into the dungeons and set up his cauldron and read from his potions book. Wiggentree twigs, gurdyroot and castor oil. Definitely not an advanced spell. He would make it perfectly despite his compromised position.

Chopping ingredients, stirring and critically surveying potions was something that brought Sherlock a sense of calm and it did even now in this drugged state. He thought of John in serene situations; warm summer days walking through a forest to catch poisonous toads, John teaching Sherlock how to fly better on his broomstick, Sherlock helping John perfect a potion and John being so grateful that he kissed him... Time flew by and suddenly the pink hue of potion was turning clear.

It was ready.

Sherlock didn't waste a moment. He couldn't go thinking of his best friend this way. It was embarrassing and, frankly, it was beneath him. He dumped a goblet in and drank it down.

He waited.

John was still at the forefront of his mind. John. Handsome John. John who had made him tea and toast for breakfast.

Had he done something wrong? He looked over the recipe and then recounted his steps. No. He had done nothing wrong. He stood and hovered over the cauldron and sniffed the contents. The potion was perfect. Absolutely perfect. Like the shape of John's nose.

Sherlock staggered back with a gasp. His eyes were wide and looking around the dungeon as if the writing had been on the wall the whole time. He wasn't the victim of a Love Potion. He was just In
Love. He was a great big fool and he'd gone and fallen in love with John Watson. His eyes watered with the realisation of it. This feeling wasn't temporary. He was going to be thrown between despair and hope forever. The morning's suffering wasn't going to end ever.

Never ever.

Sherlock sulked in the dungeon for the rest of the morning until he decided to go research the subject in the library. Perhaps the Restricted Section had a book on how to block these types of feelings. Someone else must have suffered from the same affliction at some point in history and done something about it. It was perhaps an extreme measure to take but surely he wasn't meant to endure these feelings for the rest of eternity? He was already going mad.

He packed up his bag and slung it over his shoulder. He felt confident the library would help him as it had so many times before.

He poured over book after book for hours. He snapped at other students who dared to whisper in his proximity and break his concentration. He ruffled his hair until it was so fluffy that his quill got stuck in it when he tried to scratch his head with the end of it. He sighed so often he had to get a drink of water to wet his dry mouth.

"Sherlock, there you are."


"Listen, I'm sorry about before," John said. His tone sounded so hollow and dejected that Sherlock looked up at him with concerned eyes even though he had promised himself that he would not look at John Watson again until the horrible feelings had gone away.

John squirmed where he stood, clearly very uncomfortable but compelled to stay.

"Christ, you never make things easy do you? I'm sorry about before at breakfast. I should have known you weren't interested. I got the impression before that you might... well, never mind. I am really sorry. I kind of want to sink through the earth but I'm sure that feeling will pass. I'm really sorry I made you so uncomfortable. I hope we can still be friends," John said. He had no intentions of staying friends with Sherlock. In fact, he was considering asking his mother if he could transfer schools.

Sherlock sat frozen, wordless and still.

"Yeah. I'll just go. I'm really sorry."

John turned and left, and still Sherlock could not move.

He didn't move until Madam Pince shooed him away to bed.

The night was endless as Sherlock tried to piece together what the hell had happened the previous day. He had woken up in agony, spent the day in agony and then watched John walk away in the same sort of agony he was feeling. It did not make sense. John had so many friends and somehow he had singled Sherlock out for... a date? Had that been John asking him on a date to Hogsmeade? For Valentine’s Day? If it had been any other person saying those things to any one else, Sherlock would have said yes, it had been proposal for a date, but it seemed so unlikely that someone was going to ask him. That John Watson would ask him for date.
However, in viewing the cold facts of the situation, he had to accept that a date had been exactly what John had been talking about.

At four in the morning, Sherlock realised he hadn't accepted and John now thought that his feelings were unrequited.

He dressed immediately and sat in the Common Room, waiting for the point after breakfast when people would start making their way to the wizard village for a day out.

At eight, people in his house started to stir. The inane conversation sent Sherlock out into the rest of the castle and he sat on the stairs he had watched John descend the morning before until the inane conversation had caught up with him even there. He moved to the cold outside and waited. After two hours he started to despair. Maybe John had decided against going to Hogsmeade at all. *Maybe he's already found someone else*, Sherlock thought. He whined into the scarf he had wrapped around the bottom half of his face and impatiently stomped the snow.

Another half hour of agony followed until John finally appeared, alone and slightly slumped looking. Sherlock froze again, his brain hiccuping at the sight of someone who liked him.

He stared and stared until Sarah Sawyer, a pretty Gryffindor girl, came through the doors and smiled. *She wants him too*, Sherlock realised in horror. And Sarah had the distinct advantage of not being frozen to the spot. She started to jog toward John and Sherlock started to run.

"John! John!" he shouted as he ran, pulling the scarf away from his mouth so his voice would carry better.

John turned and his eyes landed on Sarah first.


John continued turning, his eyes catching on Sherlock and an uncertain smile spread on his face.

"John! I accept! I forgot to say I accept your offer!" Sherlock shouted.

John didn't look happy. He just stared at the tall figure running at him.

"John? I mean to say I accept your offer of accompanying you to Hogsmeade this morning as you suggested yesterday," Sherlock said, his voice wavering. Had he been wrong?

No. John's lips pulled into a bright smile and Sarah stopped jogging.

"Leaving it a bit late aren't you?" John said when Sherlock caught up.

"I didn't mean to," Sherlock said.

John put his gloved hand in Sherlock's and with pink cheeks they started their Valentine's Day date walk to Hogsmeade.
Sherlock Holmes worked alone. That had always been true in every aspect of his life. He went on cases alone, he lived alone, and when it came to relationships, he was most assuredly, alone. This was not to say that Sherlock never slept with anyone. Far from it. But never did Sherlock let the sex progress past one night. He was always very clear about that.

So on Valentine's Day, when Sherlock, alone as always, ended up at the bar, it was with every intention of ending up in someone's bed. He hoped it would be his own, but he would allow events to unfold as they would. In a very dominant mood that evening, perhaps he would top in his own bed instead of someone else's. The thought made him feel a strum of anticipation in his gut as he waved to the bartender who fixed Sherlock's usual drink without a word.

Taking a seat at the bar, Sherlock turned to survey his prospects for that evening. A few eyes lingered on him and he was instantly dismissive. Anyone who was that eager this early would be boring in bed. He had made that mistake enough. And on a holiday like this where people were throwing themselves at one another to try and keep the loneliness at bay, Sherlock did not want any of the desperate ones who would be clingy.

Sherlock let an hour go by, watching as person after person in the bar paired themselves up with someone else. He could be very impatient, but with this? A possible shag? Sherlock would not rush this and ruin it.

"Any takers?" the bartender asked as he slid another vodka tonic to Sherlock.

"None as of yet, Pete," Sherlock said, lifting the glass to his lips and taking a sip. "What about you? See anyone for me?"

Pete nodded down towards two men who were at the opposite end of the bar. One was a bit on the rotund side, glasses making him resemble an older Harry Potter, and the other was... Sherlock's eyebrows shot up. The other man was shorter, sandy coloured hair, and would probably be rather unremarkable looking in his good looks, but something about him sparked something deep in Sherlock. There was a complexity about his features, somehow simultaneously hard and soft and his physique was one that hinted towards past muscularity, but was now less toned. The one in the glasses was clearly trying to have his friend smile and enjoy himself, but the shorter man seemed almost tense.

"Well done, sir," Sherlock said with a smile. "Send him one of whatever he's drinking, from me."

"Of course, Sherlock," Pete said, pouring another beer for the lad at the end of the bar.

Sherlock waited patiently, careful not to make eye contact or acknowledge that he had been the one to send the drink. That was the key. Do not seem too eager. Buy a drink, and let them come to you. Biding his time until the man came over, Sherlock watched as man, after man, after woman, after woman all began to flirt, and snog, and leave.

Still no man from the end of the bar came up to Sherlock. Nor did Pete come back with any message or phone number.
Sherlock Holmes never made the second move. He bought the starting drink, but then did not spare a second look until the receiver stood in front of him. But what was he supposed to do when the person never came? Sherlock looked over towards the end of the bar. The man was drinking the beer and continuing to look and talk to his friend. Utterly perplexed, Sherlock looked back at Pete.

"What happened?" he demanded, feeling that somehow, Pete had mucked it all up.

"I gave him the drink, Sherlock," Pete said in confusion. "I said that it was from the tall gent at the end of the bar, he looked over at you and nodded, and then took the beer and went back to what he was doing."

Sherlock fumed. How dare he? How dare this man not follow the pattern? Who was he to make Sherlock break his rules? His eyes narrowing, he pushed himself straight to his feet and moved down to the end of the bar.

"I bought you a drink," Sherlock said gruffly, standing before the two men and completely ignoring the one in the glasses.

The short man looked at him with a blank expression.

"Right. Cheers, mate," he said, lifting the glass and taking a sip, before turning back to his friend. "What were you saying, Mike?"

But Sherlock didn't let the man in the glasses get a word in.

"I bought you a drink," he repeated, feeling challenged and infuriated.

"John," the man in the glasses said softly, nodding towards Sherlock.

The shorter man, apparently named John, sighed and turned back to Sherlock. "Yes, I can see that. And I'm drinking it. Thank you."

"That's all? Thank you?"

"Yes. Thank you."

"I didn't buy you the drink to be thanked."

"Well then you wasted your money."

"Did I?"

"Yeah, mate. Ta. Have a good night."

"Let me buy you another."

John gaped at the man and Sherlock should have regretted the request, but he was so bothered and enticed by this John. No one denied him like this. No one was so cavalier. Sherlock was instantly captivated.

"I'll give you two a moment alone," the man in the glasses said a bit nervously, turning and walking to talk up some girls who were nearby. Sherlock immediately moved in to fill in the void he had left
before John made any attempt to follow his friend.

"Pete," he said, his eyes not leaving John's. "Another beer for John."

It instantly appeared, as did a fresh vodka tonic.

"I don't want your drink if you think anything is attached to it," John said, crossing his arms stubbornly. "I didn't come here tonight with the expectation of going home with anyone, unlike you."

Sherlock said nothing but picked up his new drink and sipped it.

"Then what was your intention for being at a bar on Valentine's Day?" Sherlock asked. He was immediately deducing John (former soldier, invalided home from either Afghanistan or Iraq, trust issues) but found himself unsatisfied by what he was coming up with. The desire to talk to him and get to know more was overwhelming.

"My friend Mike brought me," John said, gesturing towards Harry-Potter-Glasses. "I'm supposed to be his wing man, or something, but I'm doing a piss poor job of it being that I am being bought drinks and he's off on his own to fend for himself."

"Afghanistan or Iraq?"

The question had clearly caught John off guard and Sherlock was pleased to see that he was impressed.

"Afghanistan. Sorry, how did you-"

"Tell me, John," Sherlock said, interrupting. "How do you and Mike know each other? Colleagues, I'm assuming? Old school friends? He clearly is not an army veteran like you."

"We know each other from Bart's," John said, lifting the second beer from Sherlock and drinking it. "Before I joined the army. We've reconnected since I've come home."

Another two hours of conversation passed during which Mike had left the bar with a woman and had given Sherlock and John a rousing wink.

"John," Sherlock said. "Do you-"

"Yeah. Where do you live?"

"Baker Street."

"Right then. Let's go."

Sherlock Holmes didn't bottom. But he did that night.

As he and John lay side by side, breathing heavily, Sherlock started to laugh. No, it wasn't a laugh. It was a giggle. And John was joining in.

"God, that was fantastic," John said. "And to think I wasn't going to go home with someone
"This could have happened much sooner if you had just come over to me and talked to me when I bought you that drink," Sherlock said without any resentment.

"I knew that if you were serious about me, you'd come to me. And you did. Good man." John patted Sherlock's thigh and laughed again.

"Wasn't it worth it to work for it a little bit?"

"A little bit?" Sherlock asked, turning on his side to look at John in shock. "A little? You had me break almost every rule I have. I'm supposed to be the mysterious one. I'm supposed to be the one people flock to and instead... well... you know how it went."

"I do," John said with a smug smile. "I'd like to know again in a little bit, too, once I catch my breath."

But they didn't shag again. And Sherlock didn't care. He didn't even notice. All he knew was that he and John were laughing and talking and then, suddenly, there was light streaming in and waking him up. Blinking, Sherlock turned into the warm body that was wrapped around his. Ordinarily, this would have been the part when he would kick out the guest in his bed, but he found that he did not want John to go anywhere. More than that, Sherlock wanted John to stay that night as well, and for as many days nights as John would have him or want to.

Sherlock pressed a kiss against John's chest and smiled. John had surprised him at every turn since he had spotted him the night before. He challenged him, humored him, and made Sherlock feel accepted and wanted in more than just a carnal way.

Sherlock Holmes didn't fall in love. He worked alone. But that morning after Valentine's Day, with John Watson asleep and naked next to him, Sherlock realised he had fallen asleep in interest and had woken up in love.
John was layering kisses upon kisses as he covered Sherlock’s body with his hot mouth, making the detective lose his head with rushes of overwhelming need. The room was steamy, their bodies were misted with sweat, and yet John kept torturing Sherlock in the sweetest way, forcing him to arch his back on the silk sheets and clutch at the fabric.

Sherlock had gone to sleep by himself in this room. What had changed that had granted him the pleasures of this morning?

John was grabbing lube, murmuring declarations of love, slowing sinking fingers into Sherlock’s body. Sherlock’s legs were trembling, eyes flashing, muscles tensing and then releasing upon penetration. Want. Need. Sherlock sighed, a long deep sound that incited an unexplained chuckle from his lover.

“Sherlock, I love you. I want to spend the remainder of our lives together. Say yes.” Was that John’s voice? Thick and steamy like the air in the room, the air that only barely managed to sneak between their bodies.

John wouldn’t say something like that to him. Would he?

“Sherlock, I love you. I want to spend the remainder of our lives together. Say yes.” Decidedly un-John-like, although upon repetition it sounded even more sweet. Sherlock ignored the lapse in believable dialogue, focusing instead on John’s lips, the thrusting of his hips. “I’m going to take you now…”

“God, wait…” Sherlock’s voice was distant, light and scared, but incredibly strained with need.

“What…? What is it, gorgeous?”

“I… You… Um… Okay.” Sherlock felt his mind buzzing. Sex. When was the last time he had had sex? Could he even remember? A bar. A faceless man. It was unclear whether he had even reached orgasm. Upon reflection, Sherlock decided that it was unlikely. Regardless of his past experiences, John wanted to have sex with him. John bloody Watson. His best friend. His best friend, who currently had three fingers knuckle deep in his arse. And he wanted to as well. “Yes… Yes, fuck… Please.”
John growled at that, pressing those fingers up against Sherlock’s prostate. How did he know how to do that? John was experienced, John knew everything there was to know about anal sex. Obviously. Sherlock relaxed, letting his body thrum with arousal with every slight curl of John’s fingers.

“Sherlock, I love you. I want to spend the remainder of our lives together. Say yes.”

“Yes.” That again. That constant phrase, wearing him down to a one word response. Yes. Of course. It would always be yes. John hummed his approval, nibbling Sherlock’s neck, lathering lube everywhere and lining up their bodies. The long length sank into Sherlock’s body and his knees pulled together instinctively. Too much. More. Deeper. No more. He took in a deep breath, feeling his muscles slowly relax as they began to remember. Sex. This was what sex felt like. Brilliant and out of control and hot and slick.

“Sherlock, I love you. I want to spend the remainder of our lives together. Say yes.”

“Yes. Yes, John. Of course. I love you too.”

“You do?”

“I always have. I… I have always been in love with you.”

“Fuck, Sherlock…” Heat was gathering with even more persistence than before as John eased out of him and pressed in again before getting himself into a decent rhythm. Sherlock’s hips were twitching, his whole body still trembling, and then, in one final explosion of energy, Sherlock was coming all over his chest.


And then Sherlock woke up. Clear, white light was streaming through his bedroom window and adorning his sheets with its beautifully ethereal presence. Sherlock was taking up the entire bed, arms and legs splayed out and tangled in sheets, and there was a big wet patch on his pants from his orgasm. Inconveniently, that had been the only part of his sexual adventure with his flatmate that had been very real. He stripped, tossing the dirtied clothes into his laundry hamper with a mental note that they would benefit from immediate washing, and grabbed his robe so that he could make himself some tea without reprimand.
God, he had actually come in his pants. That had literally never happened since he had turned 17.

Luckily, Sherlock’s tea was already waiting for him, so he could sit and think about what exactly had made his night different from any other. He could think as he was drinking tea made by John, not Mrs. Hudson, on what appeared to be a fine morning. Tea made by John. It was no longer morning and John had made him tea. John knew something. How much John knew was uncertain, but given the heat of the tea, his flatmate had guessed when he would be coming out of his room to a few minutes.

“Sherlock. You’re up. It is… almost noon,” John said in a friendly enough voice, glancing down at his watch. "I considered waking you, but you haven’t really slept since the case of the elephant in the room.”

There was an elephant in the room indeed. A very large elephant. And Sherlock feared this one wouldn’t be quite as easy to get rid of as the actual one had been.

Mainly due to the fact that Sherlock was almost positive he had yelled John’s name at least once, and he highly doubted that it had been unaccompanied by other sounds. The sophisticated and internationally sought after detective had just had a wet dream about his best friend while said best friend was sitting in the next room over, and chances were they both knew it.

“I…”

“It’s… fine. I hope you had a restful sleep.” John’s choice of words was innocuous enough, although the repetition of the word “fine” evoked the memory of their first conversation about sexuality. His thoughts flitted about restlessly, searching desperately for an explanation for his behavior.

Sherlock was married to his work. Sherlock loved his work.

John was Sherlock’s best friend. John helped Sherlock with his work, which he loved.

Sherlock loved John. Sherlock was in love with John Watson.

The realization hit him with all the force of a tidal wave, knocking his jaw open and causing all other movement to freeze. The detective had gone to bed like he always went to bed, he had woken up after a peculiar dream, and now… he was in love. Just like that. Well, perhaps he had always been in
love, but now he felt it within every drop of his blood and on every inch of his skin. John may have known that Sherlock had had an orgasm in his sleep, but he couldn’t know that Sherlock was so deeply in love.

Sex. He had dreamed of sex. Sex wasn’t necessarily indicative of love. Perhaps Sherlock needed a wank, a proper shag, and his flatmate was the obvious person to come to mind, given the amount of time together. And yet, he knew that he was feeling love, not lust. Well, love as well as lust. Intense, uncontrollable love.

Sherlock looked over at John, his face still locked in a look of shock and awe.

“Must have been a good wank,” John teased in an incredibly awkward voice, clearing his throat and flipping through the newspaper. “Or do the Holmes’s not do that?”

“I’m sorry?” Was it really necessary that they discuss? Considering John’s general desire to avoid talking things through, Sherlock had to assume he had something important to say.

“Never mind. You probably… needed that. I suppose.” Or not… John was disengaging. Sherlock needed to keep the conversation going. Time to say something witty if he could think of something.

“I can’t speak for all the Holmes’s. I’ve never been particularly partial to masturbation, but I’m sure Mycroft’s lack of human contact necessitates constant self-stimulation. I caught him getting off to the Erskine May once when I was a teenager. Rather stimulating stuff, I’m sure.” Sherlock had been almost positive that the Mycroft’s textbook had been covering up pornography of some kind, but there was no need to mention that now that John was laughing appropriately.

“Mm, interesting. Something tells me that he would have a similar story. Something about the Periodic Table of Elements.” Sherlock blushed, both because they were now talking about his sexual habits, as well as because he had indeed experimented masturbation with the Periodic Table when he had been in uni. It had been an /experiment./

“John, shut up. I’m sure you get off reading that blog of yours.” Silence. Complete silence. All the playfulness was gone and Sherlock couldn’t help but stare at John, who had turned a bright shade of pink.

“Well, at least I don’t yell out your name when I get off! Jesus, Sherlock. That’s bloody odd. You’re odd.” Freak. He could hear the unspoken accusation reverberating through John’s suddenly quite
angry tone. So John had heard. And now John wanted nothing to do with him.

“It was an accident. It won’t happen again.”

“Even better.” Sherlock’s eyebrows shot up in consideration at that, his playfulness halting, but not becoming anger. What was that supposed to mean?

“John. You… uh… You are permitted to yell out my name.”

“You git.”

“Seriously. If you ever want to call out my name, that’s completely fine. I would even be willing to run some experiments.” John’s face softened, and Sherlock breathed a silent sigh of relief.

“What type of experiments?”

“Hm… well, I’d like to test different forms of stimulation, I suppose. Whether looking at a picture of me changes things. Or having me in the room. Or… other things.” The doctor smiled, chucking softly when he saw how intently Sherlock was observing him.

“Sherlock, what happened in there?” he finally asked curiously, shaking his head in mild disbelief.

“I fell in love with you.” More silence. More shock. John was clearly shocked to hear such a radical phrase slip from Sherlock’s lips, and Sherlock was perhaps even more shocked that he had said it.

“Oh. Um… Finally something I figured out before you.” Sherlock grinned shyly at that, taking a long sip of tea and trying to figure out exactly how best to get the fit doctor into his bed.
Chapter Summary

Today's prompt is: Candy Hearts.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sherlock was dissecting hearts. Dove hearts, mouse hearts, horse hearts, human hearts, dog hearts... any heart he could find. It was his silent protest to the ridiculous 'holiday' of Valentine's Day. He couldn't stand the gooey eyed, sentimental and unavoidableness of it all. Couples walking around, wrapped up in each other like an ordinary day in the calendar had somehow ramped up their love into something more meaningful than it was.

The dissections had started a week before the 'holiday'. In hindsight, maybe he shouldn't have started with mouse hearts. They were impossibly small.

He filled up the kitchen table with mouse carcasses and was surprised to hear John's upset tone upon his return home.


"Not an adequate sentence," Sherlock said.
"What?" John said. He balled his hands into fists to control his anger.
"If you're trying to ask me what the thirty-two mice are doing on the table, then the words you uttered are completely inadequate to get your meaning across. The answer is, I tried to cut up the chambers of a mouse heart and I am experiencing difficulty. They are very small," Sherlock said. John stared at him with impatient anger on his face. His nostrils were wide and his fists were relaxing and tightening as if he was trying to pump the emotion out of himself. "Fine. Move over," he said.

"What?" Sherlock asked.

"I said, move over." John had used his Captain's voice, which was entirely unfair because Sherlock couldn't stop himself from obeying it.
John took the scalpel from the table and expertly quartered the mouse heart Sherlock had had in front of him.
"Oh," Sherlock said. Sometimes he forgot John had trained as a surgeon before becoming a GP.
"You have very steady hands," he said as John went to the sink to thoroughly wash his hands off.
"Yes," John said. He had never thought he'd use his hard-earned skills to help his mad boyfriend to cut up a mouse heart in the kitchen. It was not something he had ever intended to use his training for. Bloody hearts.
Sherlock had kept working intensely. So much so that he didn't notice that John was spending an awful lot of time outside the flat and was not quite acting himself until two days before Valentine's Day.

John came home smelling like women's perfume.

John was decisively a man. Sherlock had plenty of first hand proof of that, the last one being a blow job the evening following John's help with the mouse heart. John didn't wear women's perfume.

Sherlock allowed himself one moment where he closed his eyes and felt the pain of the obvious deduction before he got back to work cutting up hearts and submerging them in acid, in vinegar, and, a little later that night, simply crushing one with his fist.

He hated Valentine's Day and he hated hearts. Especially his own.

The following day, Sherlock noticed that John left. John did not, however, notice that Sherlock followed. He never did notice when Sherlock followed even though he almost always did.

John got on the underground Jubilee line and casually read a newspaper someone else had left behind. Sherlock stared at him, anger, hurt and an awful lot of disappointment filling up his being in a way that made him understand why Mycroft had always told him that feelings were a disadvantage. He felt like he might burst although he knew he wouldn't. He wouldn't allow it. He would go and confirm his suspicions and then he would purchase cocaine, go home, wait for John to get home, tell him that their relationship was over and then find a nice place in London (Big Ben?) to use.

They ended up getting off at Hoxton and then walking to a café near the station. A woman was waiting for John. They hugged and kissed each other on the cheek. Sherlock's left arm itched for a needle to penetrate it. He considered walking over and making himself known to the happy couple and declaring his intentions to use until feelings were no longer of any import. But John would only call him dramatic the and perhaps have ammunition to use to defend his infidelity.

Sherlock huffed. Infidelity. Weren't they too old to be playing games like this? He had viewed John as rather a lot smarter than stooping to such a low but apparently he had been extremely mistaken in the character of his boyfriend, best friend and flatmate. Sherlock berated himself for giving one faulty human three such important roles. John had been bound to fail. Maybe Sherlock had wanted him to? One final proof that human contact was nothing but a waste of time and a distraction from the important things in life. Work was the important thing. Not John. Not the way John liked to sleep with at least a hand on Sherlock if not a full-on cuddle. It helped the nightmares to feel the warmth of another person there. And Sherlock had become so in tune to John's breathing patterns and physical movements during sleep that he usually woke before John was even aware that his dreams were about to turn bad. A few soft kisses and a few whispered words as a reminder of where he was usually did the trick.

He would never give the gift of a peaceful night to John ever again.

John got up to order, leaving Sherlock to stare at the woman he had chosen to fulfil some hidden need that apparently Sherlock wasn't good enough for.

She was pretty. Ish. Her hair was a dark share of blonde and didn't go further than her chin. It was slightly longer in the front than in the back in an misjudged attempt to be 'edgy' and 'trendy'. Her
eyes were blue and her nose had a squashed look to it. Her lips were thin and pressed into an even thinner line as she checked her phone and answered a text. She was anxious. There was a definite interest there for the person she was texting. She glanced at John's back, still waiting in line, and sighed. She didn't really want to be there. Interesting. John’s lover had lost interest in him. John would soon find himself completely alone. That was very good.

Sherlock wished he could see more of clothes and see her move to make more deductions, but the table was obscuring much of his view. He moved on to looking at John. His shoulders were relaxed but the military straight-backedness was more pronounced in some way. John was on his good behaviour, familiar but alert. Not entirely comfortable, then, with his woman.

John came back with a tray. Two coffees and a shared brownie. John didn't eat brownies normally. He said they lacked a certain jammy quality he looked for in desserts. But he ate brownies for her.

It was very painful for Sherlock to stand there, watching the only person he had ever felt secure in loving betray him. His clever doctor. His loyal soldier. His John. None of it was his anymore. All the stable ground Sherlock had let John build beneath his feet shook and broke apart. Sherlock could only breathe through the pain because he knew a very reliable dealer who would provide him with an analgesic.

When the cosy snack break ended and the woman hooked her arm through John's and started walking down the street, Sherlock followed half-heartedly. He didn't need to see anymore but it seemed like he was a glutton for pain. They walked for a few minutes before the woman pointed at a cake shop and John laughed and nodded eagerly. More brownies? It was the final straw. Sherlock turned on his heel and walked in the opposite way.

He took a cab to a dodgy bit of London and procured a couple baggies of fine cocaine and headed back home. He hid it in his sock drawer and laid down on John's side of the bed. Angry tears pressed out of his eyes and he cried bitterly for what felt like an age before he fell asleep. John came home hours later, and Sherlock slept through it. John had a shower and Sherlock slept through it. John had dinner and Sherlock slept through it. John went to bed and Sherlock slept through it. Sherlock slept through the night, his brain completely exhausted from the hit it had taken and having to rewire his thoughts when it came to John Watson. The saint had become the sinner and the grief of it put Sherlock in a deep sleep. When he woke, John was sleeping on his side of the bed with his forehead pressed to Sherlock's upper arm. His face was relaxed and his body shaped around the curve of Sherlock's. He was completely at ease.

*Well he would be after an afternoon of sex with some woman,* Sherlock thought. He wondered why he had ever given his metaphorical heart to John, expert surgeon and ruthless killer. John had carved it to pieces and he hadn't even been careful about it. It was all jagged edges and little stringy bits that would never be able to be put back together.

Sherlock was still for a minute, listening to the sounds of John's breathing for the last time. He counted twelve of them before he pushed John off him and launched himself out of bed.

"Why," was John's first word.

"Why indeed, John. Why would a man like you who was associated with me for a large number of years behave as you have?" Sherlock said.
"What?" John asked. He rubbed a hand over his face and thought it was far, far too early in the morning to be dealing with one of Sherlock's mad, cryptic moods. If this was to be a Valentine's speech, he wished Sherlock had waited.

Sherlock looked at him. Sandy hair with generous amounts of grey was standing up in all directions on his head, the bags under his eyes were more pronounced and yet somehow John had never looked more lovely.

*You always want what you can't have.*

"I followed you yesterday after my suspicions had been roused the day before. I know, John," Sherlock said.

John closed his eyes. "Ah. Of course you do. I should have known. Can't keep a secret from you, can I?" John said.

The absence of guilt or regret on John's face brought forth one lone angry tear which Sherlock wiped off his face with the back of his hand. "No, you can't keep secrets from me. Why you thought you could is beyond me, John. Even if you do not regret that the end for us has come, I do. I have been foolish, I know, to trust my heart and my life with something so fallible as another human being but I had hopes that perhaps our relationship would be different. Foolish. Very foolish. In a matter of months I will perhaps be grateful you taught me this valuable lesson of mistrust, but until then I fear I can only feel disappointment and a measure of hurt," Sherlock said.

John blinked, trying to follow what Sherlock was talking about. "The end for us?" he repeated back.

"Yes, John. You will have to move out. It will not be difficult for you to find a place to live now, but I do not recommend you move in with your current lover as she is not interest in you anymore and already had someone else lined up. It was clear to me from the way she was impatiently waiting for texts and resentfully looking at you," Sherlock said.

"My- what? My sister?" Sherlock said. His heart did an awful leap in his chest and threatened to come out of his mouth.

"Wait, wait, wait, you think I was having an affair? With my sister? God, Sherlock, I know we aren't exactly the conventional family but that's a little fucking far to take it," John said.

"Your sister? Harry?" Sherlock said. His heart did an awful leap in his chest and threatened to come out of his mouth.

"Yeah, Harry. You didn't know? I bloody told you I was going out for coffee with her again," John said.

"Again?" Sherlock said. He was starting to feel foolish again. But a different kind of foolish. A better foolish.

"Yes. I went with her a couple days ago, too. She's been having a rough time and she's been helping me get you a Valentine's present to keep her mind of things. I told you I was out with her and I told you I was going out with her again. You didn't listen to a bloody word I said," John said, the last sentence coming out accusingly.

"No, apparently not," Sherlock said. He jumped back on the bed and straddled John's hips and buried his face in John's neck. He went limp and somehow shrunk in John's arms.
"Oh, no. Little darling," John cooed as he sometimes did to comfort Sherlock. It happened very seldom as it was hard for either of them to accept that kind of softness. He stroked Sherlock's hair. "Did you really think I was cheating on you? My clever detective? What could be better than you? You must have been so sad. It's alright now. You were just wr- It wasn't what you thought it was.” Using the word wrong would have been a mistake on John's part and he was extremely glad he caught himself in time.

Sherlock stayed as he was for five minutes with his clever doctor, loyal soldier and very best friend petting him before he remembered that there had been talk of a gift.

"I want my present," he said gruffly.

"Under the bed," John said, kissing the top of Sherlock's head before he had time to pull away.

Sherlock crawled to the edge of the bed and groped under it until his fingers landed on a box. He pulled it up and opened it.

"Oh, John. John. John are they real?" Sherlock said.

"If you mean real as in it real that chocolates shaped as anatomically correct hearts exist, then yes. It's real. I tried one at the shop and they're really nice," John said. "It seemed like a fitting present with your experiments this week. I had Harry do all the research for me to find a place that sold them so you wouldn't find anything on my laptop to give it away."

Sherlock had thrown one in his mouth as John talked and crawled back to sit on John's lap to eat another. It was unlikely that John would get much physical space for the next few days; Sherlock would crave constant comfort to make the hours he thought he had lost his John all better.

"Happy Valentine's Day, Sherlock," John said, a slightly smug look on his face. He had done well with his present and a little too well with his secrecy.

"I hate Valentine's Day."

"I'm still taking you out for dinner."

"Fine. Angelo's."

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Chapter End Notes

If you're wondering what anatomically shaped chocolates look like, here's a link!

http://www.visualanatomy.com/images/16hearts2.jpg
"You're a fucking liar, Sherlock," John said, rolling his eyes as they walked through the streets of London.

"I am nothing of the sort," Sherlock replied. "Well, at least not in this instance," he added, seeing the look of incredulity on John's face.

"Yeah, you are," John replied, almost laughing with how ridiculous his boyfriend was being. "There is no way that you can taste the difference between different colours of candy hearts. They all taste exactly alike."

"This is inaccurate," Sherlock said, frustration tinting his tone. "They sugar is coloured different because of different dyes. These dyes all have different tastes, John. The chemicals in each cannot possibly taste alike!"

John shook his head. "You're just trying to show off and act like you're so good at deducing everything. But I'm telling you. Candy hearts all taste the same and not even the great Sherlock Holmes can tell the difference between them."

"Of course I can," Sherlock said with indignation. "I most definitely can. Don't be an idiot."

John bristled at being called that, just as Sherlock knew he would.

"Alright then," John said, looking up at Sherlock with defiance and a challenge. He smirked. "Let's make a wager about this. I bet you that out of fifteen candy hearts, you cannot correctly identify the colour of... oh... ten of them if you taste it while blindfolded."

Sherlock made a face of confusion and curiosity. "Why ten?"

John grinned. "Because even you get lucky when you guess once in a while. I'm willing to bet that five of them are correct."

Sherlock smirked back. This was too easy. "You're on. And what does the winner get?"

"The usual."

"Blowjob?"

"Blowjob."

"Done," Sherlock agreed. "But let's make it a little bit more interesting. For every colour I guess correctly, you remove an article of clothing and for every I get wrong, which will be none, I will remove an item of clothing."

"You're on," John said, feeling very confident with himself.

The two stopped at Tesco's on their way back to the flat and bought a large bag of them (for more variety of flavours, Sherlock had said while John had rolled his eyes) and returned home where Sherlock stood in the living room, his eyes covered with one of John's t-shirts to ensure he couldn't
"Alright," he said. "I am ready for the first heart." Sherlock opened his mouth and stuck out his tongue.

John reached into the bag and pulled out a pink heart. Very festive. He placed it on Sherlock's tongue and waited.

"Mmm," Sherlock hummed as he sucked on the heart and took a bite into it. "Pink." There was barely any time to deduct.

"Fuck," John breathed as Sherlock laughed in triumph. *Maybe the git can tell the difference*, he thought.

"Remove your jumper before I have the second heart, John," Sherlock said with all of the smugness in the world in his voice, making John give him the finger which he remembered only after the fact that Sherlock could not see because of the makeshift blindfold. He pulled off his jumper and let it fall to the floor.

Reaching into the bag, John pulled out a white heart at random and placed it on Sherlock's tongue. This time, Sherlock took more time to gauge the flavour. John was pleased to see Sherlock's forehead wrinkle which only meant that his eyebrows were furrowed in frustration. *He doesn't know it.*

"Green," Sherlock said, confidently.

"Wrong!" John said in delight. "Take off that button down shirt."

Grumbling, Sherlock undid the buttons and let his shirt float to the floor. "What colour was it?" he asked.

"Oh no, I'm sorry. I'm afraid that wasn't part of the arrangement," John said, knowing exactly what Sherlock was doing.

"What?" Sherlock asked in outrage. "Why wouldn't you tell me?"

"Because you're developing a palate for them now," John explained. "Somehow, you'll be able to tell the difference if I tell you what colours you got wrong, so I'm not going to. But nice try."

"Another," he said in a low voice, sticking out his tongue. He was seething.

John placed an orange heart on Sherlock's tongue and waited as Sherlock began to mull over his choices in his mind, trying to determine the flavour. "Yellow," he said, and John was pleased that the smugness was not as prevalent.

"Nope!" John said gleefully. "Wrong again! Take off that belt!"

It continued like this, Sherlock getting another one (pink) correct, but missing a purple, a green, and another white. He was now standing in his trousers and socks. The second missed white gave John an idea.

"Here's the next," he said, placing another white candy heart on Sherlock's tongue.
At this point, the consulting detective was about to lose his mind in insanity. *Why* was he so unable to identify the flavours? It had seemed such an easy boast to make. How wrong he was. And here was *this* flavour again! He didn't know it. If John had just told him originally what it was, he could have guessed.

"Yellow," he said through gritted teeth, knowing that we was-

"Wrong!" John said happily. Take off one of your socks!"

Another white candy heart. Another sock.

Another white candy heart. Sherlock's trousers.

Another white candy heart. Sherlock's watch.

All that remained was Sherlock's pants and this, the tenth and final candy heart and John would win.

"Here we go!" John said, feeling so confident and placing that last heart on Sherlock's tongue. He watched it disappear between Sherlock's lips and stifled a giggle as those plump lips pulled back in almost a snarl.

"You're cheating," Sherlock growled.

"Not cheating!" John said. "This should be easy for someone who can taste the difference in the candy hearts because of the dyes used."

"Green," Sherlock guessed and he instantly knew he had lost by the woop of delight that John had made.

"Take off those pants and take off that blindfold!" John shouted, laughing in victory. "You lose, Sherlock, and you have no one to blame but yourself and your impossibly massive ego."

Sherlock furiously tore the t-shirt off of his eyes. "What colour was it?" he asked. It would drive him insane if John didn't tell him.

"White!"

"White?"

"White."

"White isn't a flavour!"

"No, but it is a colour."

"A technicality!"

"That you got wrong. Now, I believe it was our usual bet." John beamed as he unzipped his trousers and tugged them down a bit. "On your knees, Sherlock Holmes."

Sherlock did as he was told, still furious with both himself and John. The one good thing that came
of losing was that in addition to the taste of John that Sherlock loved so much, this blowjob had the added bonus of being very sweet from the high residue of sugar that coated his mouth and tongue. It inspired many blowjobs over the course of the month, Sherlock experimenting with different colours and flavours of the candy hearts mixed with the constant and strong flavour that Sherlock always knew was John.
HI LOVE,

Sherlock, you're SO FINE, as I’m sure you’re aware, MY LOVE. I can’t help but SMILE when I see you.

Tonight, YOU’RE TOPS. After all, you're MY MAN and I trust you. WHY NOT? I’d do anything FOR YOU, and I want you to be ALL MINE.

I’m so glad you LOVE ME, because you’re certainly more than just MY PAL.

BE TRUE, MY LOVE, and KISS ME, MY DOLL.

OH BOY, I HOPE you’re not going to be a git about how sappy AND childish my grand romantic gesture is. WHATEVER. BE KIND, and don’t tell me to DREAM ON.

I’M SURE ILU, LOVER BOY, and I’ll tell you so even when you don’t ASK ME to.

It’s TRUE LOVE.

I want ONLY YOU.

JW

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Sherlock found John's letter by his microscope when he finally woke up and dragged himself out of bed. His first inclination was to groan his distaste for the overwhelming amount of sentiment, but he
ignored it because John wasn’t home and he had no one to act for.

He didn’t have to pretend that he didn’t like it, that John’s outpouring of affection wasn’t reassuring. For while Sherlock wasn’t prone to appreciation of romantic gestures, he needed to be reminded that John wasn’t going to leave him for his occasionally abrasive coldness, he needed to be sure that John loved him. So, while he would offer countless complaints when John was around, discoveries such as this one made the detective release a long sigh of relief.

John was most likely perfectly well aware. After all, if he had truly thought that Sherlock wouldn’t appreciate his candy heart message, then he wouldn’t have left it.

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You’re a sentimental dolt. I object. SH

Love you too, Sherlock. JW

You only had the audacity to leave me such banal nonsense because you knew you’d be gone all day at the clinic. SH

I’ll be home soon. Don’t worry, Sherlock. JW

Worry? Why would I worry? SH

I’ll be home soon. JW

Do you have anything to say to me? JW

What? SH

Sherlock, it’s Valentine’s Day. JW

Our reservation’s at 8? SH
Sherlock. JW

I love you too. SH

Thanks, love. See you tonight. JW

[delayed] John, do you really want me to top, or were you only trying to utilize the maximum amount of candy hearts? SH

Mm, you did read it. JW

Of course I read it. SH

Yeah, I’m serious. I would like that. JW

Okay. SH

Blood was flowing through Sherlock’s body at an alarming rate, making his face turn red with the beginnings of arousal just at the thought of finally topping John. He felt giddy, giddy and sexy and more accepting of Valentine’s Day than he had ever been in prior years. He opened the box of chocolate John had left him along with the note, consuming the candy greedily for breakfast and then proceeding to continue with an experiment that had been bothering him for the past few days. The decay of flesh appeared to increase parabolically in the presence of certain acids, and he needed to identify the exact molarity required to produce the aforementioned result as opposed to the previously observed exponential trend. Was his data flawed? An experimental error?

Sherlock found his work fascinating. He truly did. But he couldn’t concentrate on it, not when he had every reason to believe that he would be having sex with his boyfriend when John finally managed to get his sorry arse home. The annoyed detective put aside the severed fingers he had marinating in hydrochloric acid altogether when he realized he had added 500 ml of 3.0 molar instead of 2.0 molar, searching the kitchen for a pen and paper. There was no way he continue to experiment when he was so distracted; Sherlock Holmes needed to find a way to quiet his mind, at least temporarily.
John,

Your candy message was ridiculous, and I, once again, found myself doubting your current age and level of intelligence.

That being said, I love you dearly. I love you… to distraction. Quite literally, as the thought of tonight’s sex has disrupted a very interesting experiment involving decaying flesh, and so I have gravitated towards the remaining candy hearts in a half-hearted attempt to emulate your methods.

Happy Valentine’s Day.

MARRY ME.

SH

Sherlock put his letter by the tea kettle, feeling an enormous amount of tension dissipate from his body. He had time to get nervous later, when John was reading the bloody letter. For now, he would focus. After all, he was almost positive John would agree to marry him, mostly because the cunning doctor had left four different candy hearts with that very message in an otherwise empty box on the shelf by Sherlock’s microscope slides.
12 February

Today's prompt is: The Box.

John had gone through a lot of boxes in his life. Boxes of cereal, shoe boxes (including the shoebox of porn he kept under his bed as a teenager), boxes of food, moving boxes, boxes of medical supplies, boxes of things he got in the post. A lot of boxes. Each of those boxes had eventually been flattened and thrown away, discarded out of his life without a second thought. They had been insignificant boxes in the end.

There were other boxes that had got a third, fourth and even fifth thought. Like the box that the jeweller had shown him containing an engagement ring John had considered buying for his university girlfriend. On the fifth thought, he had decided against it. He was off to war, a soldier and a doctor, and he didn't want to be bound to anything at home or have anyone bound to him. He'd broken it off with her. Sometimes he wondered if he would have made the same decision had he known about the coming years and the complete impossibility of finding someone else that was willing to settle down with him.

Contenders came and went, but none stuck. It was a hard realisation to face that the current most significant and long lasting relationship he had was with his flatmate. Not that Sherlock Holmes was a bad flatmate to have. He had brought excitement back to John's life. Brought life back to his life. Heart pounding, lung ventilating, adrenaline releasing life. Sherlock had been a blessing that had been incomprehensible to him. John had never thought that the kind of life he wanted - fast paced, dangerous and surprising - could be available to him outside a war zone. But as Mycroft had noted upon their first meeting, Sherlock had welcomed him back.

The war of the London underworld gave him that excitement that he had been sorely lacking after his return from Afghanistan and the flat he shared with Sherlock at 221b Baker Street gave him all the creature comforts that Afghanistan never could have. He loved his chair with the Union Jack pillow and quilt that sat by the fireplace. He loved the home his RAMC cup had in the kitchen cupboard and how he could take it out without looking because he always knew where it would be sitting. He loved the little quiet mornings he shared with Sherlock when they weren't on a case, when he had the utter joy of actually watching Sherlock consume enough calories to keep a male adult healthy and functioning. And he definitely loved when their flat was put in shambles when they were on a case and Sherlock spread evidence everywhere in ordered chaos and then spent hours huffing in frustration before he called out in happy realisation when he had seen the connections.

Things had turned out very well for John. Sherlock Holmes was definitely not a bad flatmate to have, but it bothered John that his more significant and long lasting relationship was with him. Sherlock Holmes was not a woman.

And here is where boxes became a problem for John. The box he lived in said that a person who
wasn't a woman shouldn't be the most significant person in his life. The box said his most long lasting relationship shouldn't be with a male flatmate. The box was very clear on who and what he should find attractive, and Sherlock definitely didn't fit into that mould. The box clearly stated that when Sherlock frightened his girlfriends away his primary feeling shouldn't be relief but anger. The box further noted that out of all the things John had taken to teaching Sherlock - about timing, about what perhaps not to say in front of other people, about sometimes shutting up - he had never talked to him about disturbing dates or insulting the women he brought to the flat so badly that they left. And John Watson should definitely not have been plagued by increasingly vivid dreams about him.

Sherlock Holmes was not a woman and it was making the box John lived in feel very small.

It wasn't a box that he could stomp on and then throw in the bin, it wasn't a box he could find another purpose for, and it wasn't even a box he could reject completely after a third, fourth or fifth thought. The box was stuck around him, attached to him like ideas that had been believed for thirty-odd years tended to be.

He believed he was straight. He believed that the most significant relationship in his life was supposed to be with a woman. But now he also knew that Sherlock Holmes existed and that he believed in Sherlock's perfect ability to bring chaos anywhere he went. And this included John's perception of himself and his sexuality.

John had learned in school that rules were proved by an exception to it. He wasn't sure if the concept of it translated into his sexuality but it felt like a comforting thought. He didn't know how he would deal with figuring out that he was gay in his thirties but perhaps he could deal with finding the exception to his heterosexuality.

It was just enormously fucking annoying that his exception had to be someone who seemed very unlikely to be interested in him unless he turned into an exceptionally interesting murder victim.

Perhaps that was why John tried to keep himself firmly in the box even though he knew in the back of his mind he didn't really belong in it. The thought of coming out of that box only to have the speech Sherlock had made the first time they'd had dinner at Angelo's repeated back at him again was horrifically mortifying.

This was the limbo John Watson lived in because of the man he lived with.

His only way of coping was his endless quest in getting his leg over. The quest was only made more significant mid-February when Valentine's Day came around to remind him that yes, you're still alone and probably in love with your flatmate.

John was not one to sit around and brood, however, so he donned his nice brown leather shoes, a button down that he tucked into his dark blue jeans and a blazer

"Where are you going?" Sherlock asked with an obvious disapproval at being left alone to a boring
Friday evening.

"Out."

"Obviously. Where?" As far as Sherlock knew, John didn't have a date. He would have known. John always got that smug look about him when a woman agreed to spend a few hours of one day with him.

"Just out," John said, accidentally snapping at Sherlock. He didn't particularly want to go out but he wasn't about to spend Valentine's day sitting across from Sherlock and thinking about how he wished.

"You've put on your nice clothes. It's Valentine's Day. You're going to go to a pub to find lonely women who might let you shag them," Sherlock said, alarmed.

Sherlock was exactly right. "Thanks for putting it so romantically, Sherlock. No, that's not what I'm doing. I'm just going out for a pint," John said.

"I don't know why you bother lying to me," Sherlock said. He ruffled the newspaper he was holding and folded it up. "Well, if you're going to go out 'on the pull' as they say, I'll go with you. You might actually pick someone you have a chance with if I am there to guide you."

John could not imagine a worse direction for the evening to take. "No. No, definitely not."

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An hour later they were standing at the bar, each with a pint in their hand. Sherlock was scanning the crowd, deducing and rejecting each person considered as a possibly mate for John. They were too tall, too short, too skinny, too fat, too loud, too quiet, too mediocre. "John, this place isn't any good. None of these options will do. We will go somewhere else."

"Options? Jesus, Sherlock. Don't talk about people like they're objects. We've had this discussion," John said.

"What? Objects? They are not objects to me," Sherlock said.

"To you? You? Are you saying they're objects to me?" John asked.

"Obviously they are John. You want to have sex with one of them. You are not looking for a long-term relationship, unless you count a maximum of seven hours long-term. That includes sleeping. You would hardly last seven hours in constant sexual arousal."

"Jesus Christ," John muttered, taking a long sip of his beer. This was humiliating.

"On further thought, I think your stamina would be severely affected by the lack of stimulation you have had lately. It would be clever of you to spend the majority of the time focusing the foreplay on
the woman and keeping yourself calm and level-headed or you might be in the risk of disappointing her by premature ejaculation," Sherlock said.

"Shut up."


"Yeah, thanks, but I don't want this help from you," John said.

"Fine. Be an unsuccessful sexual partner then," Sherlock said with a huff.

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John went home with Sherlock that night but not in the way he wanted. They giggled as they walked up the stairs, reminiscing about a crime scene in a way that most other people would find highly inappropriate.

The box seemed to shrink and John wanted to get out. It was suffocating. Wouldn't Valentine's Day be the perfect day to confess his feelings?

"Goodnight, John," Sherlock said as they reached the second floor landing.

Their eyes met and the laughter died from John's face when Sherlock turned away without another word and left for the living room and his violin.

"Goodnight, Sherlock," John said. A happy tune followed him up the stairs and to bed.

If it was the box that grew or John that shrunk to fit in it wasn't clear but suddenly the box fit him better again.
It was more or less an annual tradition now, as much as it was a challenge. A competition of sorts that always found Sherlock Holmes to be the victor. The consulting detective was smug about his triumph every February, boasting on his abilities to be able to read John so well and to make accurate deductions. Honestly, the way John thought he could surprise Sherlock was almost laughable, especially after the previous Valentine's Day when Sherlock had solved the mystery in a record one hour and four minutes.

It had started three years ago, before John and Sherlock were technically a couple. In an act of pure bravery, John had decided to talk to Sherlock about becoming *official*, adding a label to what it was they were doing. In a gesture of romance, he had decided to bring up the topic on Valentine's Day and, to hopefully play to Sherlock's weaknesses, purchased a box of fine chocolates to aid him. The box was wrapped neatly and to an unknowing eye, could have contained anything. The instant it was carried through the threshold of 221B, it became the subject of intense scrutiny under the critical eye of Sherlock Holmes.

The box came home with John at 1:30 in the afternoon. During dinner, at 6:04pm, Sherlock said, "I'll take those chocolates at any time now and accept your proposition for a relationship." The words had been nonchalant and, had his lips not quirked upwards at the end with the hint of smugness at the satisfaction he felt looking at the shock on John's face, a stranger would have assumed that Sherlock was merely harking back to an older conversation.

John threw the box across the table with a huff. "Git," he grumbled.

"Ah, but a git who is now your *boyfriend,*" Sherlock said in delight, tearing off the red wrapping paper and nodding in confirmation that he had been correct in his deductions.

This happened the following year when it had taken only three hours for Sherlock to deduce that the wrapped box brought home contained a new black leather belt.

"How-

"Simple, John," Sherlock answered, opening the box and taking out the belt. "I made a comment about how mine was getting too worn in and I'd need to buy another. All I needed to do was confirm that the weight of this box and it's contents was the same and that this is the same wrapping paper as used by-"

"Yeah, yeah," John said in frustration. Even through his anger, he couldn't help but admire the way the belt hugged Sherlock's hips. "I thought you were going to say that you noticed your belt in your closet was in a different position than you had left it in because I was checking the size."

Sherlock grinned. "I noticed that right away. I only went through the motions of making more deductions in order not to ruin your spirits completely."

"Oh, of course," John said with bitter sarcasm. "Well, spare me no pity, Sherlock. Next year, tell me as soon as you figure it out."

Which he had, after only one hour and four minutes.
"Violin rosin," Sherlock said with an ecstatic smile. "And-" He inhaled deeply, the wrapped box under his nose. "Expensive too, judging by the smell."

"You can't possibly smell rosin through the box and wrapping paper," John growled through his teeth.

"Of course I can," Sherlock said. "Good rosin?"

"They told me it was the best," John said, trying not to sound defeated.

"Excellent," Sherlock exclaimed as he clapped his hands together in excitement.

"I'm assuming you went to Bridgewood?"

"Yes," John growled, his fists clenched tightly.

"Very good," Sherlock said, his eyes fixated on the small block of rosin after he had removed it from the box. "Very very good. Good luck next year. Maybe I can get it figured out in under an hour. Who are we kidding? We both know I will."

That was it. John had reached his breaking point. Something that at the start of the following February, Sherlock noticed immediately.

"Where are you going?" he asked on a Tuesday morning as John put on his coat.

"Out," was all John replied before opening the door and leaving.

With a grin, Sherlock sat back in his armchair. *He thinks he can outsmart me,* he thought. *How charming.*

But when John returned home, there was no box. Of course there wouldn't be; it was not Valentine's Day yet. But now John was the one with the smug smile. It immediately put Sherlock on edge and made him very suspicious.

"What were you doing?" he asked, knowing fully that John would offer no information, but was hopefully able to get a hint.

John said nothing and kept the same hint of a grin on his face as he walked into the bathroom and shut and locked the door behind him, making Sherlock's mind race with possibilities, all of which were dead ends.

The next day was the same thing. John went out, came home, no box, no clues. Each day leading up to Valentine's Day was the same. The only thing that kept changing was the location that John would go to when he came home from his day of secrecy. It changed and never kept the same pattern between bathroom, bedroom, upstairs spare room, or living room. Those days were the most frustrating of all. John would sit across from Sherlock and say nothing. Unbeknownst to John, Sherlock had kept diligent and detailed research notes about what happened each day: how long
John was gone for, which direction he walked upon leaving the flat, where he went in the flat upon his arrival back home, etc. Sherlock had even tried to follow John one day, but Mrs. Hudson was waiting at the front door to usher Sherlock back upstairs. It seemed John had employed help this time to keep Sherlock in the dark to try and win.

And so far, it was working.

Finally, on Valentine's Day, when John returned home, he was carrying a large wrapped box in his hands. He placed it in front of Sherlock at 12:03pm and grinned. "Tell me when you've solved it. If you can," he added with a smirk, moving to sit down in his chair.

Sherlock shook the box, weighed it, smelled it, everything. After two hours, he could not figure anything out, something that infuriated him as much as it delighted John.

"Anything yet, Gorgeous?" he called in from the living room as Sherlock began to examine the wrapping paper beneath his magnifying glass. With a chuckle, John returned to reading his newspaper when there was no response at all from a very disgruntled Sherlock.

What perplexed Sherlock the most about the box was that there seemed to be no movement of an object inside of it, and yet there was still enough weight that he could tell it was not empty. What has he done?

"Sherlock," John called when it was nearing 7pm. "You know we have to eat at some point."


The grumble indicated that Sherlock didn't want anything, so John ordered lo mein for him anyway.

By 11:30pm, Sherlock was running out of time. It was an unspoken agreement between the two of them that if Valentine's Day ended and Sherlock had not solved it, John would win.

"Sherlock," he said as he looked at his watch. "Just admit defeat. If you don't know it yet, you're not going to figure it out in half an hour's time. And besides, I would still like for you to actually open your gift on Valentine's Day. That's kind of the whole point of this."

Sherlock looked up from the kitchen table, his eyes and hair both wild after hours of speculation, all of which had been in vain. He was at his wits end and his desire to just know raged against his stubborn nature and his desire to win again. He said nothing.

John sighed loudly. "Sherlock, if you don't acknowledge that I won, this is going to be the last year we do this. I am not going to keep going on with this if you won't even admit that I-"

"Fine."
John's eyes locked onto Sherlock's. "What did you say?" he asked in disbelief.

"I said fine," Sherlock grumbled. "I like this challenge and I'd like for it to continue. Don't make me repeat what I said."

John beamed with pride. "I fooled you."

"Can I open my present?"

"I fooled you."

"John, really."

"I fooled you."

"John!"

"Yes, yes, alright, you impatient git," John said with a wide and nervous smile.

Sherlock wasted no time and tore at the paper and found himself with a nondescript cardboard box.

"I don't understand," he said. "It's not from a store?"

"Just open it."

Sherlock did and found that the box was packed with bubble wrap. *Ah*, he thought. *That would explain the lack of movement in the box.* Whatever was inside was kept still by its layers of protection. Sherlock removed all of the bubble wrap until all that was left was...

"Another box?" he asked, holding up a smaller black box.

"Open it." John's voice was tense and the smile had disappeared. He was holding his breath.

And suddenly, Sherlock knew without even having to open the box. He knew there would be another box inside and that sitting inside that would be a ring. John would not have gone through all the trouble to keep the mystery and surprise had it been anything else. Of course he would have employed Mrs. Hudson's help. She had probably been the one to wrap it. John probably had the ring purchased months earlier and had just gone through the charade of pretending to shop to drive Sherlock mad and to throw him off. John knew how Sherlock's mind worked and he had done everything to ensure that the contents of the box could not be guessed. When John came home each day and went to a different room in the flat, it had been for no reason other than to keep Sherlock guessing and guessing at an answer he could never solve. Sherlock was so proud of John's cleverness.

He looked up at John's face and saw the tension. Sherlock only smiled.

"Aren't you going to open it?" John asked. "Don't you want to know what's inside of the box?"

Sherlock's smile spread from ear to ear. "I don't need to. My answer is yes, of course. I'll marry
you, John Watson, though I cannot help but to roll my eyes that we would get engaged on Valentine's Day."

John's face lit up ecstatically. "Oh, please," he said. "You wouldn't have it any other way. You're just being a sore loser."

Sherlock opened the box, and the box inside of it, and slipped the ring onto his finger. It was a beautiful dark Tungsten ring that fit him perfectly. "You know you'll never be able to out-do yourself," he said, his eyes moving back up to John who nodded. "You'll never be able to win again. Enjoy this while it lasts."

"I don't think I have it in me to do all of this again," John agreed. "But we'll see what ideas I can come up with within the year." John moved forward and kissed Sherlock deeply. That Valentine's Day, he had been the winner in every way he had imagined.
“John, you have to focus!” Sherlock shouted, earning an angry huff from his best friend.

“I am focusing. Jesus, Sherlock.”

“Creating a mind palace is a very sensitive and mentally rigorous process. You are underestimating the amount of focus necessary to extract any useful results.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t even want a bloody mind palace. And it’s bloody Valentine’s Day! I’m supposed to be with Mary.”

“Yes. You do want a mind palace. After Magnussen, you do.”

“Oh, shut up.”

Comfortable silence fell between them as John rubbed his temples and Sherlock lay back on the couch in a meditative state. How could one teach another human being how to create a mind palace? How had Sherlock even started his own?

“John. Instead of focusing on the bedroom you share with Mary, which does not seem to be working, I want you to focus on a single box.”

“A box? What kind of box?”

“Any kind of bloody box. It’s your box, after all. A box you’re familiar with, if you have one. Think of details.” Sherlock snapped, secretly wondering if John had been ignoring everything he had said earlier. The mind was personal. Sherlock couldn’t tell John what type of box to use, because imaging a box in perfect detail was beyond the scope of words. The doctor’s eyes fluttered shut and Sherlock found himself staring, taking in the beautiful calm that had descended upon John’s face.

John had a box. The box he had brought over to 221B with his things, the sorry leftovers of the life
he had had before he had gone to war. With all his clothes packed in suitcases, he had only needed to put one box in storage and that box had been returned to him with every leave. He could see the thick line of packing tape from where he had continually opened and closed the box, he could see a long tear down the left flank of the box, the tired cardboard, the patch of brown where he had once spilled his coffee. The box was large, now that he looked at it like this, and one of the sides was bent from the box constantly being folded up after he unpacked it.

“Relax.” The detective brought his hands to John’s shoulders and helped the other man onto his back, propping him up just slightly against the couch. To his surprise, John didn’t fight him, but rather became soft under Sherlock’s grasp. “Now… Think of something you know a considerable amount about. Something you find endlessly intriguing. Something you like thinking about.” John let out a long, deep breath, nodding slightly at his best friend’s words.

If John was being honest, nothing seemed like the right thing to put into his box. He needed something he knew about. Something intriguing. Something he liked thinking about. Thoughts felt more tangible when he was relaxed like he was, and they whipped by the worn looking cardboard that was waiting to be filled.

_Sherlock._ The thought barreled into him suddenly and he knew instantly that it was the right one. John would fill his box with Sherlock.

“Okay… I… I think I have something,” John mumbled, impossibly relaxed now that Sherlock was touching him.

“John, I want you to create a specific pattern for going through your box. Um… Such as… start by focusing on the rim and go around counterclockwise, slide down a crease that’s marked in some way, go to each corner first, and then to the center. Needs to be a pattern… Do you know the box well enough? Put some things in it. Simple things that were in it last you saw it. Like… a baseball, a folder, a book. Is this helpful?”

“Relax, Sherlock. I know the box… That shouldn’t be a problem.” A medical book had been at the bottom of the box, his diploma rested on top of it, the right edge hanging over the edge of the binding below it. There was a rugby ball in the other corner, a huge disappointment to him when he had returned home to London with a cane. He hadn’t thought about rugby once he had started chasing criminals. The ball was dirty and worn, and actually coming apart at the seams now that John remembered it. Resting against the ball were a few pictures, things he had kept around the flat. One of his mum and Harry, one of his whole family in their Sunday best, one with him in his army uniform shaking his father’s hand. Easy enough to remember. A threadbare t-shirt covered half of the last picture; it must have escaped his packing.
“Good. Think about details… Specific details. Retrace the pattern through your box several times. Good?” Much better. John’s shoulders had released their characteristic tension, and Sherlock began to massage them as he spoke, making his voice as low and soothing as he could.

“Yeah… I think so. I’m… I’m going over things with my hand. Is that okay?” Around the edges, sliding down the crease, tracing the bottom edge, just as Sherlock had suggested, going in spirals to the center.

“Yes. That’s good. Now try to put something in the box.”

“Um… I need… a bit more than that, Sherlock. Sorry… I don’t really… get it.”

“Okay… I suppose I’m not really good at… explaining. And this isn’t typical, per se. It’s supposed to be a place, capitalizing on the brain’s ability to remember location… Still… I’m trying to use your ridiculous propensity for focusing on details combined with your above average spacial awareness. We can try something else if this is unsuccessful.” Sherlock paused, deep in thoughts of his own now. He had started with a box, and although it wasn’t typical, it certainly seemed to work. “Pick a single fact then. Something you’d like to remember.”

Sherlock laughing with him by the stairs after they had run through London and John had realized he didn’t need his cane. John couldn’t imagine forgetting such a thing. Not ever. But he supposed that was a good way to start.

“Right… Does a memory work?”

“That’s… harder. I was thinking more of a grocery list or something like that.”

Sherlock’s hands shaking, his face pale with exhaustion and fear. The fire burning beside them. “Look at me. I’m afraid, John. Afraid.”

"John, um… I think you should know that I consider myself married to my work and while I’m flattered by your interest I’m—“ Candle on the table. Pasta. Cane. Shame.

Sherlock sleeping, sprawled out on the couch in complete rest, drool making the couch slightly
damp, brown curls messy and tangled. Peaceful Sherlock. Sherlock was so much like a child. Innocent and un-indoctrinated. John had actually thought to himself that Sherlock needed someone to brush his hair. He wouldn’t have minded doing so, if he hadn’t thought his high-strung best friend would explode at him upon the suggestion.

Sherlock coming off of cocaine, his head buried in his hands, his whole body thin and fragile under a thick blanket on the couch of 221B. Sherlock tugging John onto the couch when the he had ventured close enough with a soothing cup of tea. Sherlock cuddling up against John in a need to feel warm and safe, burying his head into John’s chest. John holding his crazy flatmate, running a hand through that beautiful, soft hair and gently stroking Sherlock’s back.

"John, you have endured war and injury and tragic loss - so sorry again about that last one - so know this; today you sit between the woman you have made your wife and the man you have saved. In short, the two people who love you most in all this world.” Love. Sherlock loved him. Of course Sherlock loved him.

“Um… Sorry. I have to stop.”

“What happened? Not working?”

“I didn’t… I didn’t get there. Sorry.”

“It’s… fine. We can try it some other time.” John reached out for Sherlock, placing hands on either side of the other man’s head and leading it close enough so that he could press a kiss to Sherlock’s forehead.

“Thank you. I will work on that. It’s fine if I don’t get it. We have your mind palace. Quite a wealth of knowledge there.”

“That’s true,” Sherlock hummed, pleasantly pleased by the sudden show of physical affection. He collapsed on his doctor with a small sigh, hoping that John wouldn’t say anything about how much the detective clearly wanted a cuddle.

John was silent, easing the now pliable body up higher so that the Sherlock could rest his head on John’s chest and so that John could play with Sherlock’s hair.

“You have to go,” Sherlock muttered in annoyance after a few minutes of blissful rest, shifting his head so that he could look John in the eye. “It’s Valentine’s Day.”
“Yes,” John conceded after a long pause. He did indeed have to go and it was indeed Valentine’s Day. “I’m sure you’re dying to kick me out so you can finish up some experiment involving highly toxic chemicals.”

“I don’t want you to go,” Sherlock said in very sincere voice, tightening the pressure of his arms on John’s sides. John’s heart cracked in his chest, right underneath Sherlock’s head. Why had he thought Sherlock would want him to go? They had lived together successfully for quite some time. Sherlock loved him.

John cleared his throat, pressing another loving kiss to Sherlock’s forehead.

“I’m sorry…”

“It’s fine. Obviously. I know you have to.” Sherlock swallowed thickly, feeling a long shiver run down his spine at the thought of being alone once more. “… Five more minutes?”

“Yeah… Sure. Five more minutes.” Within five minutes, Sherlock had fallen asleep. (John was constantly wondering how often Sherlock slept now that he wasn’t around to monitor, and had established that the number of hours quite simply wasn’t enough.) John slid out from under his friend, covering him with a blanket, and then stopping to simply stare at him; the sharp cheekbones, the small wrinkles around his eyes, the gangly limbs that lost all their cat-like gracefulness once Sherlock was asleep, the quite frankly appalling paleness of Sherlock’s skin.

John pulled on his shoes slowly, fighting the deep longing to stay, to crawl back onto the couch and demand that Sherlock love him, that Sherlock love him more and better and always.

Instead of capitulate, John walked to the door with heavy feet, straightening his spine and standing at attention with a small jerk of his head.

After all, it was time to go back to war.
Chapter Summary

12 February

Today's prompt is: New York City!

"I've always wanted to go," John said, giving Sherlock a hopeful look.

It made Sherlock want to scream out loud. Why was John making him deny him something? He didn't want to upset John but he didn't want to go to New York sodding City. It was so cliché. They'd spent the last ten months of their gap year travelling through the United States (with a memorable week in Mexico that both of them pretended not to remember at all) and Sherlock could not believe that John wanted to make New York City their last stop before going home to London. Why did John have to be so tediously predictable at the most inopportune times?

"Why?" Sherlock asked with the disdain he usually kept for likes of Sally Donovan. He hoped it would scare John off even though he knew his moods never scared John off. John was steady and loyal and they'd been in each other's constant company for over three quarters of a year. John hadn't left yet. It was fascinating and completely unprecedented. Sherlock had even taken to half-hearted attempts at experiments to see how far he could push John before he snapped and went on his own way.

John hadn't snapped and he had stayed. He'd yelled, yes, he'd cursed and looked at Sherlock as if he were insane, but he had stayed. So Sherlock had accepted John as some sort of freak of nature, which was rather fitting because he was known as a freak himself wherever he went.

"It's New York! People are going to ask if we went. We can't just spend a year backpacking through the U.S and not at least spend a few days of it in New York. It's an iconic city! We can't not go, Sherlock," John said. He was looking in a phone book at the motel they were staying in near Detroit.

John thought Sherlock rather owed it to him to go to New York. John hadn't particularly wanted to go to the most crime dense city in the United States, but Sherlock had wanted to go and John wasn't too good at saying no to Sherlock. It had turned out to be fun for the both of them. Sherlock had a way of finding an important person in local police forces and worming his way into difficult cases and solving them. Mayors and the general public had been so grateful for their help that they had 'sponsored' their stays at nice hotels and made restaurants they normally couldn't have afforded open to them.

Detroit had offered them no less four murder cases. Two of them had been easy, one had been 'intermediate' (as Sherlock put it) and the other had kept Sherlock in a state of glee for over a week as he tried to figure it out. John had thought that given the help Sherlock had been in that last murder, they would have been treated to a stay at a nice hotel but it seemed that the economy in Detroit was so bad that all they could afford to offer was this quite badly run down motel. John didn't mind. It felt
more adventurous. It was certainly more exciting to write about rough living conditions and describing the size of the cockroach he had seen (blood enormous, at least three inches long) than how the fancy hotels had tried to treat the Brits to a 'piece of home' with tea and badly made scones.

"Give me one reason we should go," Sherlock said.

John looked at his laptop and the Wikipedia page he had open. "It's the most populous city in the United States. Global power city. Loads of impact on finance, media, art, fashion, research," John said.

Sherlock huffed. Like some vague reference to research would change his mind.

"Broadway. Skyscrapers, Wall Street, Columbia," John said, picking up on key words in the article and throwing them out there and hoping one stuck out to Sherlock.

"Dull. Boring. I don't care, John."


"Yes, John. Every single city we've been to has had all those things. Why people hold New York up on a pedestal I don't know. It's just a city with an overly large belly. It's the Mycroft of cities, John. Self-important. Huge. Mummy sent me a picture of Mycroft in her last email. I sent Mycroft a picture of a gym. Mummy called me to tell me off," Sherlock said, suddenly remembering the funny story he had forgot to tell John.

John laughed and Sherlock hummed and nodded. Good. The intended effect.

"I still want to go," John said, absent-mindedly as he kept scrolling. "Ah! Crime. Let's see here then."

"Yes?" Sherlock said, interested despite himself.

"Largest Police department. Er, lowest overall crime rate. Second lowest murder rate." John did not want to keep reading.

"John. We cannot possibly go to that ghastly place."

"Oh come on." John kept reading, hoping there would be something in the article that stood out as interesting. "Record low homicide rate." He stopped reading when he came to the paragraph detailing the criminal organisations. He didn't want Sherlock to get any bright ideas about taking one of them down. John valued his life. And Sherlock's.

"Please," John said.

Sherlock stormed into the bathroom and had a shower. He didn't want to go. He didn't want to go. He didn't want to go.

He knew he would end up going.

Four days later they pulled up after a thirteen hour bus ride from Detroit. Sherlock was in a horrible mood and so was John. He hated the bus. God, he would never ever ride a bus again after this trip. Once back in London, he'd take the tube or a cab. Never ever ever ever the bus again.
"Christ all-fucking mighty," John snapped as they hauled their bags out and tried to stretch their cramped bodies out.

"This is what you wanted," Sherlock said accusingly.

"You fucking agreed you complete cunt," John said.

They continued to argue as they walked through the streets looking for a place to stay. John argued that they should probably be looking outside of Manhattan to find affordable accommodations and Sherlock was not listening.

"In here," Sherlock said, pulling them into The Plaza hotel.

"Sherlock, I can't afford this," John said, trying to pull Sherlock back out.

"No, but I can. I'm not staying in a poor facility after that journey you just put me through," Sherlock snapped. He walked to the front desk.

"I'm going to need a room," he said.

"Certainly, sir. We have a Deluxe Courtyard Room available. Would that be... alright, sir?" the concierge asked.

"Yes, yes, yes. Whatever. I want it now," Sherlock said. He took out his card and lobbed it across the desk.

"Of course. A Valentine's Day treat for you and your friend," the man said mildly and with a slight smile before he started to tap on the computer.

Ten minutes later they had been brought up to the room and had dropped their enormous backpacks down to the floor. They stood silently, breathing in the relief of knowing that relaxation was ahead of them.

John started to move first. He was desperate for a shower.

"Oh God," he said when realised there was only one bed. One very large bed, but still just one bed. They'd managed to escape this sort of... misunderstanding for ten months. Of course on their last stop this would happen.

"What? What's wrong? I am going to kill the hotel manager and raise the homicidal rate of this city. I have no patience for this, John. Do you understand? What's wrong?" Sherlock snapped.

"One bed, Sherlock," John said. He was curious to know what Sherlock would say about that.

"Oh."

"Oh?"

"Oh."

Silence.

John turned and found the bathroom. He stripped off and got himself under the water and rubbed
himself clean of Detroit and the Greyhound bus while he thought. And thought. And thought. They'd be back in London in a week. He could go for it. Stop pretending. He was sure that their friendship would survive a rejection at this point (although, on further thought, he might not personally survive it).

He wrapped himself up in a fluffy, white bathrobe and stepped back into the room. Sherlock was standing by the window, looking out at the courtyard below.

John cleared his throat. "Sherlock," he said.

Sherlock turned slowly. His face was blank.

"I don't mind," John said. He gestured at the bed.

The implication was clear.

"You don't mind?" Sherlock said, his face inquisitive.

"I don't," John said. The feeling in his chest was far more intense than when they'd gone bungee jumping in California.

Sherlock stepped forward, quickly and light on his feet. It startled John, who took half a step backwards before Sherlock stopped him with a hand on the tie of his robe.

Sherlock tugged and the ribbon John had tied was undone. He stretched out a long finger and parted the front of the robe and left John exposed.

"You don't mind," he said, his deep voice suddenly far deeper.

John shook his head, shell shocked by what was happening.

There were a few moments of stillness; Sherlock looking down John's body and John starting to get aroused under the intensity of Sherlock's gaze.

And then he was enveloped. Lips were kissing at his neck, hands were groping inside his robe and there was a sound coming out of Sherlock's throat that was a whining moan. John couldn't explain it any other way than that.

"Sherlock," John said, pushing Sherlock off and bursting into laughter. "You smell terrible."

Sherlock's mouth fell open and he gasped. "How da-

"I do dare, you big git. Go have a shower and then we'll..." John paused. "Er, continue."

Sherlock gasped again. How could John be resisting him? He had never been so insulted.

"Oh, I see our new sexual relationship doesn't change your bad attitude towards me. I never even wanted to come here," Sherlock called out in frustration as he stormed off to the bathroom and started the shower.

"Yeah? Too bad. Now you're here and you are going to come here," John shouted through the closed door.

They were both tired enough too laugh.
Oh, it's just so cliche," Sherlock said as he rolled his eyes and looked up at the skyscraper.

"Sherlock, it's iconic," John replied, unable to wipe the goofy grin from his face. They were in New York City on Valentine's Day and the Empire State Building was illuminated against the bright lights of the city, shining and lit up at the top in a rather spectacular and breathtaking display of reds, purples, and pinks.

"It's ghastly. Meretricious. American."

John sighed loudly. "I take it you don't want to go up to the top then?"

Sherlock turned and looked at John with a blank stare that John knew to mean, No, absolutely not, not on your life, I'd rather be locked in a room with Anderson, no, never.

"Surely there must be something to do in this godforsaken city that isn't incredibly tedious and dull," Sherlock said, looking around. Where was the crime? The murder? The excitement?

"Tedious and dull?" John asked, his jaw dropping in disbelief. "Sherlock, you realise that this is New York fucking City?"

"Yes, I am very much aware of our current location, John. Unfortunately."

"And you also realise that we are surrounded by millions of people?"

"Who aren't doing anything interesting. Yes."

"You're unbelievable," John said as they continued to walk down Fifth Avenue.

It was snowing a bit and Sherlock was complaining about being bored. So unbelievably bored. Each time he mentioned it, John's temper rose a little more. He had decided to use the tactic of just not replying to Sherlock's comments at all which, in fact, only made Sherlock complain even more until he got a rise out of John.

"Fine!" John yelled loudly. "What do you want to do then? We're here because I needed a holiday away from London and you were so reluctant to let me go alone that you insisted you come with me. So now what, Sherlock? Now that you've forced your way in and don't like anything that I'm doing on what should have been my holiday, what do you want to do?" John took a few deep breaths, his entire body trembling with fury. His jaw was locked tightly as he looked up at Sherlock who seemed calmed and at peace.

"Let's go home."

"No."

"But John," Sherlock started to whine.

"Fuck off," John growled, hailing a cab. "If you want to be like this, then go ahead. You have a
This was not what Sherlock wanted at all. The point had been to spend time with John, to go on holiday together. In his mind, it had been foolproof. They would holiday together and Sherlock would ensure that John did not sleep with any women and, by the time the holiday ended, John would realise he was every bit in love with Sherlock as Sherlock was with him. But that did not seem to be what was happening.

"Well, I can't very much go back to London by myself," Sherlock said, walking towards the curb to join John. "So I'll have to stay with you until you decide that you've had enough of this city and are ready to return to Baker Street."

"If you're going to stay, then you have to do what I want," John growled. "No more complaining. I've heard the last of you demanding to leave. I'm not going to have you completely ruin this holiday. All I want to do now is get some drinks and forget about the hell that you've put me through."

That cut Sherlock deeply. Despite his complaining, he was rather enjoying his time with John; he always did. It seemed, however, that he had pushed John too far and if he was not careful, would push John right into the arms of a woman. The opposite of what he wanted.

And the idea came to him in a fantastic stroke of brilliance that surprised even him, the great consulting detective Sherlock Holmes. He would need to do research on his phone, of course, but if he did this correctly, then it would turn out to be a no-lose situation for him.

"Fine," Sherlock said, keeping up the charade of being disgruntled and ornery. "Fine. We'll go drink then."

A cab pulled up and the two of them moved inside.

"Yes? the cabbie asked gruffly when an address wasn't immediately given to him.

"A bar," John said.

"A bar," John said.

The cabbie rolled his eyes. "Specifically?"

"I don't care," John said angrily. "Any place with alcohol where I can get drunk enough to forget my day."

"Beer and shots?"

"Perfect."

The cab driver nodded and took off through the streets.

"Your day wasn't that terrible," Sherlock said, hoping to remind John that they did have some enjoyable moments together.

John, however, disagreed with this entirely, but didn't comment on it. He would not speak to Sherlock again until he had enough alcohol in his system to tolerate the infuriating man beside him.

They sat in silence for the entire duration of the ride, John looking out the window and soaking in the
city while Sherlock sat, his eyes buried in his phone, doing the research necessary for their evening. When the cab pulled up in front of a small bar called Barcelona (Sherlock rolled his eyes at the name), John immediately paid the driver, thanked him, and stepped out, the cold New York air making him catch his breath.

"Fuck, it's freezing," he said as he turned to see if Sherlock was behind him. He felt an unexpected rush of affection for his best friend who was already by his side. No, stop feeling that, John thought to himself. You're angry at him and you're not supposed to... feel that.

The two walked inside of the bar and the warmth of it enveloped the flatmates. It was filled with a younger crowd than John would have preferred, but that didn't matter. His end game was the same. Moving up to the bar, he asked the bartender for a pint.


"And for your friend?"

"Vodka tonic?" John asked, unsure of what this bar would provide for the exceptionally picky-when-it-came-to-liquor Sherlock Holmes.

"Sure," the bartender said. As he started fixing their drinks, he looked at John and Sherlock. "Going by your accent, I'm going to take a wild guess and say you're from out of town and probably don't know too much about this place. We specialise in shots. Here's a list of them if you're interested after you've finished your drinks." He slid them across the bar and said, "That'll be twelve dollars. Or did you want to just start a tab?"

Sherlock responded first, handing his card to the bartender. "That would be preferred." He lifted the glasses and handed the beer to John before picking up the list of shots the bartender had left for them.

"Oh, God," Sherlock said as he read through the list, John reading along with him. "Remember what I was saying about America before?"

"Oh, shut up, Sherlock," John said, his eyes lighting up as he read through the list, all of which seemed to employ the use of props, each shot referencing something pop culture related. There were well over one hundred options, each looking more fun and entertaining than the next. "This is bloody fantastic. Which should we start with?"

The level of excitement in John's voice reminded Sherlock that he needed to try and appease John to make and keep him happy and away from unwanted women.

"Alright," Sherlock said, forcing himself to be fun and in the moment. "Let's do the... Top Gun shot?" he said questioningly, choosing one completely at random, having no idea what it was referring to.

The bartender, who seemed to be waiting and listening, called out in happiness. "Two Top Gun shots, coming right up, Maverick and Goose."
The names made John laugh but Sherlock, who had never seen the film, blinked in confusion. "John, what did he call us?" This only made John laugh harder.

The bartender gave them both two pairs of ridiculously oversized aviator sunglasses and two pilots' hats, and the music in the bar stopped as "Highway to the Danger Zone" blasted. John was wooping in amusement, placing the props on himself as the bartender poured out the two shots for them. Sherlock was looking at the glasses and pilot's hat almost aghast. What on earth was going on?

"Come on, Sherlock," John said, picking up the glasses and hat and putting them on Sherlock's head and face. "Live a little. Loosen up. Have some fun with me."

Those were the magic words that Sherlock needed to hear. He braced himself and picked up the shot and the look in John's eyes was worth the embarrassment he felt.

"Alright," Sherlock said.

That was the first shot.

The third was a Lord of the Rings themed one where the two men wore crowns and drank from goblets.

The seventh and final shot of the evening was the Harry Potter shot which tasted like cinnamon and also involved the bar getting set on fire.

As the two men stumbled outside, thoroughly drunk and laughing, Sherlock felt alive and currently loving New York, though he would never admit this to John.

"I'm not ready to go home," John was saying, looking up and admiring the buildings around him. "To the hotel, to London, to anywhere. I want to see more. Sherlock, show me more."

"Another bar?"

"Anything."

Sherlock hailed a cab and gave the cab driver the address, who nodded with a smirk. "Another bar," Sherlock said to John. "It's downtown."

As they drove, Sherlock and John continued to laugh in the backseat. It was completely different than how they were earlier. There was much less space between their bodies, and Sherlock wished he had the courage to just reach his hand out and cover John's with it. But there would be time enough to do that later. Time enough when they reached the bar, which they did after a fifteen minute ride. Sherlock paid the driver and slid out of the cab, John following behind him.

"Pieces?" John said, reading the name of the bar.

"I heard people talking about it in Barcelona," Sherlock lied. "Let's go in."
Sherlock Holmes had never been in a gay bar before and neither had John Watson.

"Oh," John said, completely caught off guard.

There were men everywhere and Sherlock and John found themselves instantly greeted by those closest to them. There were giant screens showing music videos (someone named Katy Perry was scantily clad and singing and dancing in the one that was playing when they walked in) and the music was loud and pulsing. And, most importantly, not a woman in sight.

"Sherlock, you brought me to a gay bar?" John asked and his tone would have been one of almost anger had he not been so drunk. As it happened, intoxicated John found this whole scenario very amusing. And (though he hated to admit it) promising when it came to Sherlock and his hidden desires. "Well, let's get some drinks."

It was everything Sherlock hoped it would be. Sherlock and John drank and talked and laughed, completely at ease, both of them pretending not to notice how close together their bodies moved. How lingering their looks were. How many times John licked his lips as he looked at Sherlock. How many times Sherlock placed his hand on John's bicep. How many times the conversation stopped. How thick the air was with unresolved sexual tension. How badly they wanted to resolve it. How quickly they left and got a cab and how the tension only intensified upon sitting in the small enclosed space as it moved through the streets of New York.

Their room in the hotel had two beds, but only one was used that night as John and Sherlock fell into bed together, their bodies moving together beneath the white sheet that was illuminated by the lights of the New York and the festive lighting from the Empire State Building.
Sherlock had always harbored an inexplicable interest in New York City.

Perhaps it was the pure mass of people, with all their lives just waiting to be unearthed and untangled by Sherlock’s eyes. Perhaps it was the city, brimming with skyscrapers and streets and the rush of life. Perhaps it was the fact that people were always comparing New York City to London. Sherlock loved London; Sherlock loved cities. Sherlock needed to get away from London, at least for a while. Mycroft was keeping a careful eye on him, ensuring that his wayward baby brother didn’t reach for his syringe again now that he had completed his mandatory stay in the nearest (and poshest) rehabilitation center in the area. The supervision was eating away at him from the inside, making him crave cocaine more than ever. Although Sherlock pretty much always craved cocaine.

Mycroft could do a lot of things, but he couldn’t stop Sherlock from getting on a plane to New York. Well, maybe he could, but this time, he didn’t. He could only exert so much power over Sherlock without losing him completely, and the loss of his brother would break his heart.

Sherlock picked the most expensive hotel he could find, which just so happened to be the St. Regis, booking a room for a week with plans to stay longer if everything went well. Mycroft would know that he wasn’t spending his time in a drug den, although his Sherlock was sure he could manage to get high pretty much anywhere.

John had never thought anything of New York City. Perhaps it was that every time he was free from his obligations as a soldier, he immediately thought of London. Even on his worst nights, John could picture the view of the island from the plane and feel his whole being settle. London was ineffably dear to him, the core of all that made him feel safe and human. However, this time, he was obligated to go to the United States for military recognition. He had saved two American soldiers on his most recent campaign, and someone behind a desk had decided that his service deserved a medal. After all, his efforts in freeing the men from an underground terrorist cell and making sure they were safely transported to the British base and brought back to health constituted a highlight of his career, arguably the most important thing he had ever done. And most certainly the last thing he would ever do.

While John was truly honored to be recognized for his military achievements, he couldn’t help but bitterly conclude that a medal was hardly decent compensation for the bullet he had taken to the left shoulder and the loss of mobility in his leg.

The United States army had booked him a room in the St. Regis hotel, which he could tell by a glance was clearly the most expensive hotel he had ever stayed in. Rather than excite him, it sparked deep resentment in his gut. Did someone really think they could buy his happiness with some posh silk sheets or a golden chandelier?

First Night

Sherlock decided that he would end his long day of travel at the hotel bar, planning out places to go for the next evening. Crime was bound to run rampant in such a large city on Friday night, and he looked forward to catching at least a few murderers or rapists so that he could properly enjoy his time in the United States. After a quick internet search, he determined that Harlem and Washington Heights both had reputations for being particularly dangerous. Excellent. Lovely. Sherlock could
almost feel the thrill of the chase begin to build in his chest already. Oddly enough, there were not many crimes to solve in rehab.

John decided that he would end his long day of travel at the hotel bar, planning out places to go for the next evening. Attractive women were bound to run rampant in such a large city on a Friday night, and he looked forward to catching at least of few of them to bring back to his hotel room during his stay in the city so that he could properly enjoy his time in the United States. After a quick internet search, he tagged a few clubs and bars that looked interesting, fully intending to spend his entire time in New York City in a blissful haze of intoxication. By his reasoning, he hadn’t yet had the time to fully mourn the effects that war had had on his physical, mental and emotional states.

John caught Sherlock’s attention because he could pick out a British accent from across the room, although he ignored the obviously sloshed Brit once he had determined that the specimen, who was a few stools down from him, was of no significant interest. Sherlock caught John’s attention because he had a gorgeous arse. Of course, that was unrelated to his near obsession with the Byronic looking man beside him. Not gay men didn’t pay attention to whether gorgeous men had gorgeous arses.

Second Night

Sherlock happily bounced off to Harlem, ready to experience a world of American crime and leave his print on the States as only someone of his superior mental faculties could do. He asked locals where the majority of crimes took place and was met with confused looks, and even a comment about gentrification of the area. However, after the dedicated collection of answers to the all-important question (where would I go tonight to get mugged?), Sherlock determined that he should go south and spend a few hours in Morningside Park. He did indeed witness some crime that night. A Columbia student had his iPhone pinched by a man in a hoodie. Sherlock was disappointed by how straightforward the case was as well as by how the man had immediately dropped the electronic device and ran when Sherlock had threatened to call the police. He returned to the hotel bar in a sulk, sipping a scotch as he looked up crime reports more thoroughly. After all, he had to consider that he was going about his crime fighting all wrong. Chances were he was better suited to tracking a serial killer than he was to stopping spontaneous, petty crime.

John spent his night bar hopping, his medal safely packed in his bag after a short afternoon ceremony. The more he was rejected, the more inebriated he became until the whole of the city was a blurry collection of light. To his pleasure, he did manage to find an attractive brunette wearing a lace tank top that he instantly realized he would very much like to take off of her, but when she left his company to vomit in the bathroom, he wobbled out of the mess of people and onto the next place on his list shag-less. American girls seemed to like his accent; he would find another. After a night of searching, John returned to the hotel bar, half heartedly drinking a beer to keep his buzz. The gorgeous man from the night before sat beside him again, wearing an extremely ugly grimace that contorted the beautiful pale skin.

“Let me buy you a drink.”

“Mm, it looks like you’ve had too much.”

“Not too much. Maybe just enough.”

“I’m not going to sleep with you.”
“I’m not gay.” At that Sherlock laughed, feeling blood rush to his face. No, he couldn’t see himself sleeping with this drunk moron, but he liked the attention. Not gay? Yeah, right. Upon further examination (and some very suggestive conversation), the detective determined that his new solider friend was injured and quite persistently not idiotic. To his dismay, the realization made him more even more hopelessly attracted to the John’s sloppy smile and deep gaze. John Watson, a commendable citizen that even looked like the type of man to receive a military honor. Sherlock couldn’t stop himself from staring into John’s eyes when John explained how the bullet wound had ruined his future as a surgeon.

“Have a drink with me,” John repeated when Sherlock finally pulled himself away with the excuse that he had research to do in his room. “Tomorrow, I mean…Tomorrow’s my last night in the States.” The easy answer was no, but after having such a fruitless night of crime watching, Sherlock didn’t see how going out for a quick drink would ruin his plans.

“Fine. Tomorrow. But I pick the venue.”

Third Night

John wasn’t sure what had possessed him. Apparently, he had harangued a man down at the bar to agree to get drinks with him and now he was at the Marquee. It was quite easily the nicest bar he had ever been in, and he was almost positive he recognized a few of the people at one of the tables below them from a popular television show. Lovely. This Sherlock Holmes was clearly connected, or else the bouncer hadn’t thought twice about letting such a beautiful person into the establishment. Sherlock ordered them both a fancy (and expensive looking) cocktail and John shyly teased that Sherlock was trying to get him drunk before his flight home. Sherlock gracefully denied the accusation, but the soldier saw Sherlock’s eyes flash intensely with every sexy word that slipped from those plush lips. It was difficult for him to know what was real and what was charm.

It only took a few fancy drinks for Sherlock to wear down John’s resistance. It only took a few drinks and John was pressing his tongue into Sherlock’s mouth and pressing the detective against the wall. It only took a few drinks and Sherlock was hailing a cab and leading John into the elevator and down the hall to his hotel suite, unbuttoning his shirt as he went. It only took one night and Sherlock was canceling all his plans and flying back to London with John Watson.

In retrospect, they had both rather enjoyed New York City.
Chapter Summary

Ah, the penultimate day. Tomorrow is the last round of ficlets. But never fear! We are planning to do another week or two in March around the official season change to spring. If you want to join in then, just subscribe to me and you won't miss out.

This morning we had four prompts left so today and tomorrow we'll be double-prompt days. Combining to prompts into one ficlet!

Today's prompts are: London & Belgrade

They were on their way home from a case in Belgrade. It had turned out to be a rather complicated affair with simple answers when language barriers and cultural differences had been seen to. The murderer who kidnapped, tortured and killed gay men had obviously been a transgender woman with experience in carpentry. Well, *obviously* she must have had, in her former life as a he, to be able to make the medieval style of torture instruments. Sherlock had cleared the prime suspect after one look in his bedroom. The drawer had been fixed with several yards of sticky tape. Not what someone with great knowledge in carpentry would do

"We ought to be more careful in the future," John said as they boarded the plane that would take them from Belgrade to London.

"It was fine," Sherlock said, although truth be told, he was shaken by the possibilities of the 'what-ifs'.

"He - sorry, *she* saw us kissing and then she targeted you. She almost got you, Sherlock. If I hadn't been there to sto-"

"Yes, yes, I know, John," Sherlock said, waving his hand dismissively. He found their seats and promptly took the window one even though that particular seat was booked for one Dr. John H. Watson.

John just sighed and sat down in the aisle seat with a softly spoken insult. It was more for show than anything else. Sherlock could have anything he liked for the next few days, that's how frightening the situation of finding his boyfriend with a chloroformed tissue over his mouth and nose and a tall woman leaning over him with a very obvious erection in her skirt had been.

"Psychology is so simple and yet people think it's so hard," Sherlock said, looking out the window at the runway.

"Hmm?" John said. He was digging into a tax free bag of chocolates and not really listening at all.

"Her mother, John. Obvious. Her mother shamed her when she was still a him about wearing women's clothes. Beat her. Possibly chained her up like she did her victims. That's why she didn't do the last surgery. To remove her penis and testicles and reform it into a... female form would have
gone against all the mental barriers her mother spent an entire lifetime building up. No wonder she was resentful towards men," Sherlock said.

"She'd done her breasts though," John said, recalling how tight her blouse had been over her chest.

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "So heterosexual," he sighed.

"I am not," John said, looking up at Sherlock with a frown. "But I'm not gay either," he said with a smirk before he got back to his chocolates.

"How not gay?" Sherlock said. His voice had dropped to a deeper register.

John stop chewing for a moment. He knew that tone. He'd fucked Sherlock for much less than that tone, but that tone was an invitation. A decision. He started to chew again. He knew Sherlock would have noted the slight pause and he'd go in for the kill.

"I'm willing to experiment."

John kept chewing.

"In the air, John," Sherlock said, starting to sound a little frustrated.

John kept chewing.

"Sex, John," Sherlock said, definitely sounding frustrated now as he grabbed John's cock through his trousers.

John jerked and a couple chocolates fell to the floor. He followed their quick fall before his eyes snapped to look at Sherlock's hand.

He forgot to chew but, to Sherlock's great annoyance, still said nothing at all.

"Sex. On this aeroplane. Restroom. Are you not understanding me?" Sherlock said. He squeezed his hand around John.

John's jerk of hips was a little more subtle this time.

Sherlock's expression grew dark and he made a sound at the back of his throat that usually meant he was about go into a great, long sulk.

"You think I'd deny you that, you big idiot?" John said. He slid the bag of chocolates into the pouch of the seat in front of him.

A shiver of excitement went through Sherlock. He'd gone so long wondering if John could ever be attracted to him that when John agreed to sex he still got a little over-excited. And if he wasn't satisfied straight away, the over-excitement inevitably turned to nervous energy. Sherlock started to tap the fingers of his free hand against the arm rest. The other hand's fingers were still firmly closed around John's cock which was growing slowly under their touch. Too slowly, according to Sherlock, but he'd soon see to that if the plane would just get into the air.

"Calm down," John said.
"No."

"Calm down."

"Shut up."

"Calm down or they'll think you're a nervous flier and keep a close eye on you, and then we won't be able to sneak into the restroom together," John said.

The hardening pulse of blood through John's cock made Sherlock grin. It calmed him to know that John was keen too, even though he was trying to put up a show.

John was keen. He sometimes liked a little sex in public places. He supposed it was to do with his fascination with dangerous situations and need for an adrenaline rush every so often (more often than not). The times when Sherlock had lured him out to public spots for a rendezvous had all coincided with a rut in exciting cases. Sherlock wasn't the only one who became snippy and unreasonable when there hadn't been a good case on for a while. John needed it just as much as Sherlock did.

But in this case, the dangerous-case quota had been filled up and would last them both at least a couple of weeks. This was letting off steam and expressing to each other that they were both really happy that Sherlock was still alive.

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The plane was in the air and Sherlock's hand had not left the front of John's trousers nor had they stopped giving well-planned squeezes to slowly rile John up.

The seatbelt signs switched off.

John was practical and took of his coat to remove some of his bulk, but Sherlock left his coat on. John gave Sherlock a meaningful look as they stood up and was about to suggest that Sherlock take his off too or they'd barely be able to fit in small cubicle. Sherlock hushed him.

They made their way down the aisle to the back of the plane. John made a big showing of yawning and stretching and Sherlock rolled his eyes.


If not for the long foreplay that Sherlock had put him through while they had taxied to the runway and taken off, John might have considered not having sex with Sherlock as a punishment.

Considered.

There was no way he was going to give up having sex with Sherlock and officially joining the mile-high club.

John opened the cubicle door and Sherlock slipped inside with a little flourish of his coat. John looked around surreptitiously before following and closing the door behind them.
He found himself with the front of his body pressed against Sherlock's back. Sherlock wasn't too comfortable either with the way his leg was pressing against the rim of the toilet.

"It was bigger in my imagination," Sherlock said, trying to look around to reassess the size of the restroom.

"Oi," John said playfully, pressing his hips up against Sherlock's arse.

Sherlock chuckled and tried to turn around where he stood. It didn't work.

"Okay, just... take a step to your left so you can lean on the sink," John whispered.

Sherlock did as he was asked and John followed the movement. "Ah, that sort of works? Push your trousers down," John said.

"What? No romance, John? I've understood that romance is a large part of sex," Sherlock said, looking at John through the mirror. He was smiling as he undid his belt and buttons, and slid his trousers and pants off his arse. He hummed as John pushed his coat to the side and got his hands on him.

"Valentine's weekend away in Belgrade is romance enough, don't you think?" John said as he ran his forefinger ran down the crack of the arse in front of him. "Shit, we don't have lube or condoms."


"Ah, you came prepared. Have you been planning this?" John asked. He reached into Sherlock's pocket and pulled out the aforementioned items. His fingers were quickly covered in lube.

"I'm always prepared."

This made John push his fingers against Sherlock's hole, which in turn made Sherlock push back against John's fingers.

They stopped speaking but kept eye contact through the mirror as John pushed his middle finger against the outer ring of muscles until they yielded and let him pass through. Sherlock took a deep breath and let his eyes close for the duration of it. He opened them again; he knew both he and John responded well to eye contact during sexual congress. That it was through a mirror this time made it even better.

John thrust his finger slowly until Sherlock was pushing his arse back, unhappy with the emptiness he was feeling and wanting more.

John added another finger. He was watching Sherlock carefully in the reflection and growing harder and harder each time a muscle changed the expression on his partner's face. He looked almost grumpy, reluctant to show that he was in pleasure, like the notion of enjoying his body in such a purely physical way was insulting his genius. But there was always a moment when Sherlock stopped thinking and John was just about to reach it.

Sherlock thought about it for a split second and then locked his with his own reflection.

And his face relaxed.

"You see what I see?" John breathed. "The way your lips curve." He moaned, and pushed his cock up against an arse cheek.

Sherlock's lips parted and he looked surprised to hear a moan come out from between them. His tongue slipped out and wet his lips.

"God, yes. Lick them again. Do you see? Do you know what that's like to see wrapped around my cock, Sherlock? It drives me crazy. Just the fucking memory of it. Sometimes when you talk, all I can think of is pushing you down on your knees and filling your mouth with my cock. Can you blame me? Look."

Sherlock looked. His lips parted wider and he ran his tongue over them again, slower this time and leaving a sheen of saliva over them. He started rocking faster against John's fingers. More.

John's practised hand undid his own trousers, pushed them down and applied both a condom and lube on himself while Sherlock pushed back against him with a whining. John was pleased to see that Sherlock was still staring at his own face.

"God, you're fucking gorgeous," John said. Sherlock pushed his arse back more insistently and John steered his cock right. Sherlock rocked against it and it slid inside, bit by bit until John had to stand on his tiptoes. Sherlock bent his knees automatically. He was used to adjusting for their height difference.

John reached around and stroked his lubed hand over the length of Sherlock's cock. Sherlock pushed back again and John took the hint and started to thrust. The restroom was filled with the sounds of their laboured breathing and the deep noises that came out from the taller man's throat.

"Tell me more about my lips," Sherlock said, his eyes fixated on them. His tongue flicked over them, making them shinier still.

John was watching them, too, so he had a hard time formulating anything coherent to say about them. "What if I just show you what it looks like when you suck on me," he said, voice tight and needy. He brought his free hand up to Sherlock's face and offered him his forefinger. It was immediately sucked in to the waiting wet mouth.

"Jesus," John moaned as he sped up both his thrusts and the hand he had on Sherlock's cock.

Sherlock was moaning too, a deep sound that encapsulated them in the small space. He was sucking hard, hollowing out his cheeks and sliding on John's finger.

"Jesus," John moaned again, as fixated on Sherlock's mouth and his finger as his partner was. It was like being blown at the same time as he was having sex.
Sherlock came off John's finger so he could lick up the length of it a few times. The first time he looked at the way his tongue looked as it ascended. The second time he looked at his own hooded eyes. The third time he looked up at John.

"Do you see what I see? What I live with? I'd fuck you all day long if you'd let me," John said gruffly. He was helpless against the urge to speed up his thrusts.

Sherlock smirked and nodded. Then he parted his lips again and took John's finger back in and sucked on it hard.

John was moaning Sherlock's name now and that could only mean one thing; he was rapidly approaching the critical limit. Sherlock wasn't far behind.

An announcement came over the speakers.

"The Captain has illuminated the seatbelt signs so any passengers not in their seats, please return to your seats and fasten your seatbelt. Thank you."

The turbulence started immediately after. It shook them where they stood, vibrating John's hand on Sherlock's cock and in his mouth.

"Oh my god," John moaned in surprise and he looked between their bodies. Sherlock's arse was clenching on him as the muscles were compensating for the suddenly unstable ground.

"John," Sherlock said around John's finger. John's gaze snapped up and locked again with Sherlock's. A little droplet of saliva was making it's way down from the corner of Sherlock's mouth from speaking.

"I'm with you," John moaned. The vibrations through their bodies was amazing; it made their movements just a little out of their control and the element of surprise had them both hurtling toward orgasm.

Sherlock went first. He bit down gently on John's finger as he came to quieten his moans and clenched so hard around John that he had to lean forward and bite into Sherlock's coat. He came with a few deep, grinding thrusts and a mouth full of expensive fabric.

They disentangled themselves from each other and made their way back to their seats in a post-case/sex high of giggles and affection. Sherlock ate six of John's chocolates before he fell asleep with his head against the window, effectively blocking any view John had of the sky.

John didn't mind though. Sherlock was the better view.
London & Belgrade - Golfechoromeo

It had been one thing to be alone in Serbia the two years before, living in the seedy parts of Belgrade to gather information about Moriarty's network. His head was fully immersed in his mission: eliminate the web. His heart, however, was miles away, belonging to his best friend who believed him to be dead.

Upon Moriarty's return, it appeared that Sherlock would need to return back. How could he leave London now? The threat, as Mycroft repeatedly pointed out, was very real, but after much investigation, there were no leads for anything nearby. Somehow, he and Sherlock had missed something in Serbia. Or, more likely, something new had been arisen. It would need to happen soon. As quickly as possible. And despite Sherlock would have to say goodbye to John again.

"What do you mean?" John asked, aghast. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"John, I have to," Sherlock said calmly, bringing his pressed hands together to his chin. He had practised this speech exactly like this, sitting in his chair, looking at John sitting in his, anticipating each line of dialogue as it happened.

"So you are going back then," John said, looking at Sherlock in anger, his white fury boiling just beneath the surface. "Two weeks ago when you got on that plane for that...mission. Is this what you're doing?"

Sherlock shook his head. "That was entirely different. This is Moriarty."

"No, I understand that," John said through clenched teeth. "But you got on that plane alone. That's not happening again."

"John, you have a baby on the way. I do not expect you to-"

"I don't care if you expect it or not, Sherlock. I'm coming with you."

"No."

Sherlock had practised how he would deliver that small two-letter word that made him feel like he was being swallowed home and consumed into the darkest and deepest level of Hell. He was trying to protect John who had protected Sherlock so many times. All Sherlock seemed to do lately was return the favour, and keep John and John's happiness safe. It was why he told John not to accompany him back to Belgrade.

"No?" John asked, his lip curling up a bit almost like a snarl.

"No. I do not want you there, John. I work alone."

Sherlock was saying everything he could to keep John from wanting to go. Mycroft had not sugar coated what was going to happen in Serbia. It would be dangerous, possibly the most dangerous situation Sherlock had ever been in, let alone one that Mycroft would send him into. The last thing Sherlock wanted was to send John, a father to be with a wife whom (despite some very unforgivable
acts) he loved. Sherlock would never forgive himself if he was responsible for anything happening to John. It would be the end of Sherlock's life if an end came to John's.

"Nice try," John said.

"You are not going. I don't want you there."

"Bullshit," John said, knowing exactly what Sherlock was doing. "You don't control me, no matter what you think. I'm going with you and that's final. Who's supposed to make sure you don't get yourself killed?"

"John, I'm not going to let-"

"I don't give a dam what you think you can let me do, Sherlock!" John shouted, standing up. This was the John Watson that not only terrified Sherlock but also made him feel calm and safe. "Look," John continued, trying to keep his voice level. "The last time you went there, I thought you were dead and I...I could have helped. I could have done something. If you go there and something happens to you and I wasn't there to... Sherlock, I couldn't live with that. I barely made it through the last time you died. Don't do it to me again. Let me be there..."

It had been a fight for everyone involved, though John never told Sherlock how much of a fight it had been between him and Mary. All Sherlock knew was that the night before they were supposed to leave, John had shown up with his bag, looking worn and tired, his eyes red and bloodshot. Sherlock had not asked him any questions, but had gone upstairs and fixed his bed for him. But John had no intentions of sleeping that night and instead stayed up for as long as he could in his arm chair, staring blankly into the fire until he drifted to sleep around 3am. Sherlock stayed awake with him the entire time. John was clearly upset and Sherlock would watch over and protect him.

Serbia was miserable in February, especially when it was Valentine's Day. John had been nearly completely silent the entire time they were in Belgrade, brooding over how he had left things with Mary, no doubt. But February 14th made John downright impossible to be with. Sherlock stopped trying to talk to John after being torn a new one at breakfast. And since then, John had stopped talking to Sherlock altogether and instead retreated to the small room they were both sharing in Belgrade.

After an infuriating day of not getting anywhere with Moriarty's network, Sherlock returned to their room to find John curled up in a ball, choking back sobs.

"John?"

"Just shut the fuck up, Sherlock. I do not want to hear anything form you."

"I wasn't going to-"

"Because I left my wife and unborn child in London to be here. With you."

"I know, John. I told you not-"

"And I told you to shut up, Sherlock. You told me that day in the flat after my wife almost shot you
again. I chose her."

Sherlock said nothing.

"I only chose her because you were dead. But now, I've made my choice."

Sherlock blinked a few times. "John?"

"I chose you. I'm here in fucking Serbia in the fucking middle of winter. And all I can think is that I've ruined my entire life by trying to get over you when you were dead."

John had stopped sobbing. Somehow finally getting everything off his chest soothed him. "Why did you tell me to stay with her? Sherlock, she shot you."

Sherlock crawled into small bed beside John. "She made you happy. She was there for you when I was... here."

"She shot you. And you told me to stay with her. Sherlock, I'm supposed to protect you and I couldn't protect you from my wife who you told me to stay with." John breathed deeply and took hold of Sherlock's hand. "I chose you, Sherlock. Do you understand me?" Sherlock nodded.

The sound of the wind swirling the snow outside lingered and filled in the silence that had fallen between the two of them. The last time Sherlock had been in Belgrade, his heart had been in London. This time, his heart was lying in bed beside him and Sherlock would defend it and continue to protect it as dutifully as he could.
Sherlock,
Don’t be dead.
John

“John… I think we need to talk about this,” Ella began, looking down her patient as the adversary he was. John Watson was notoriously difficult, practically impossible to help, as he wouldn’t share anything about his past or what his feelings were towards anything. This, however, was fairly straightforward. John missed Sherlock, the detective that had been in the news constantly a couple of years prior.

“I… I don’t—there’s nothing to talk about.” Rain beat against the window, running in small rivulets that caught on the bottom of the glass. It was always raining in London, especially this year it seemed. Maybe John was simply reading into the weather too much.

“Why did you bring me a letter addressed to Sherlock?” she asked, voice clear and calm.

“Because I wrote a letter to Sherlock. Well… a note.”

“Why did you feel the need to write Sherlock a note?”

“Why do you bloody think?” John spat, feeling his face and neck get hot with anger. He was supposed to be moving on and he knew it, he could see it in the looks that Ella was giving him. Still on Sherlock, John? Really? How pathetic.

Everything still hurt, though. Even as things got serious with Mary, John continued to revert to the past, overcome by his memories in a way that even he could admit was unhealthy.

It would finally get into his head one day. Sherlock wasn’t coming back to him.

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“Dare I ask the meaning of this?” Mycroft managed to say, seething in a way that Sherlock had only seen a few times before. Times including when Redbeard had been put down, when Sherlock had almost (accidentally) prevented Mycroft’s application to Cambridge from being submitted, and when Sherlock had loudly announced to an entire table of people at Mycroft’s promotion dinner that he would regain the hundred pounds he had lost if he kept eating how he was.

This was different. He had seen Mycroft seethe before, but not like this.

“Sherlock. You’re not explaining.”

His brother held up the slip of notebook paper, the envelope already hastily discarded, and presented the message for Sherlock’s viewing pleasure.

John,

I’m not dead.

Sherlock

“I wasn’t going to send it. Don’t be daft.”

“I know you weren’t. But you were thinking about it, and I think we are both fully aware of how dangerous thinking is.” Sherlock considered his brother’s seed of wisdom pensively, coming to the conclusion that he would have indeed been tempted to send the letter, but uncertain as to whether he would have actually gone through with it.

Sherlock Holmes missed John Watson dearly, but while Mycroft had never explicitly said anything, it had been implicitly understood that any form of contact was prohibited. Even with Moriarty's web unraveling, informants of all sorts were watching John’s every move, and it was more than likely that all his mail was being persistently perused. Sherlock wasn’t stupid. He knew that attempting to contact his best friend was potentially even more dangerous for John than it was for him.

So, his conclusion was that while it would be easy for him to say that his brother simply didn’t know what he was talking about, it would be a lie. Sherlock knew that Mycroft had a very good idea of his feelings on the subject, at least from an intellectual standpoint. His brother was just making the safe decision, and protecting both John as well as Sherlock in the process.

“Well, now you have it. There’s nothing to think about.” Mycroft had Sherlock’s letter to John,
quickly scribbled out in the middle of the night when sleep had evaded him, and while the very thought was slightly nauseating, Sherlock supposed it was for the best.

“Quite right. I hope you’ve devoted at least a portion of your time to the new mission I’ve assigned you.”

“Naturally, brother dear. Wouldn’t want to disappoint queen or country,” Sherlock jabbed, his terse reply appropriately received. Mycroft nodded, but said nothing. It would only be cruel to draw attention to Sherlock’s vulnerability concerning his beloved doctor.

Mycroft was protecting John in a way that Sherlock would not be made aware of until he left Belgrade and truly did return to London; John was moving on. John had a serious girlfriend by the looks of it, and it was the least Mycroft could do to allow John Watson to finish the grieving process develop some sense of self without a vague and disturbing note from his impulsive little brother.

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“John… why today?”

_Because it’s Valentine’s Day, you idiot_, he wanted to yell, to admit, to finally say out loud. Yes, he had thought about Sherlock Holmes on Valentine’s Day. He had thought about how lovely Sherlock looked rolling out of bed in the morning and how lovely Sherlock looked rolling into bed at night. He thought of the way those brilliant blue eyes lit up around a crime scene and the way the corners of Sherlock’s lips turned up when he was happy, as if he hadn’t learned how to smile properly.

John just shrugged instead, heart shaking in his chest as it fell. If Sherlock didn’t return, he was going to propose to Mary. It was that simple. He couldn’t afford spending any more of his time longing for a dead man.

He grabbed the note and tore it up, depositing the pieces on Ella’s desk with a painful grimace. No matter what anyone said, John believed in Sherlock Holmes. He couldn’t help it.

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Valentine’s Day. Sherlock knew that Mycroft had made the connection. Sherlock knew that Mycroft
was completely aware of his almost obsessive infatuation with John Watson, and they both knew that John slipped away the longer that Sherlock made him wait. Of course, finishing off the web was the only way he could truly return, the only way either of them had any chance at happiness, and so Sherlock plucked the letter from Mycroft’s hands and threw it in the fireplace. For a split second, Sherlock felt as if his very heart was being burned out of his chest.

Sherlock just had to make sure John was safe. He only hoped that he would have a home to return to afterwards.
Sherlock didn't want to be alone. He had been alone on his two year long exile from his life in London and he'd come back to find himself alone there too. John had moved on. John had moved out. He had moved on and moved in with Mary, and now they were married and had a child together. Sherlock was happy for him but sad for himself. He dearly wished John could love him as he loved John.

The flat was empty far too often. Mrs. Hudson came up with tea and sometimes to ensure that Sherlock ate something. Molly came to visit and sometimes brought samples for him to experiment on. Lestrade came and left equally as quickly, no doubt on Molly's orders. The person who spent the most time there was John, but even he left to go home. Home to his wife and child. But he always came back the next morning, sometimes as early as breakfast.

But still Sherlock was terribly alone.

Late one Friday evening when John had got up from his chair, announced he was leaving and left, Sherlock opened up his laptop and started to research way to meet people. Loud bars weren't his thing and meeting people through friends was hard because he didn't have that many. Several sources of varying degrees of reliability told him that those who felt like they had emptied the resources around them could perhaps find better luck on dating sites.

Sherlock got to work on finding the best one and writing a profile. He took a picture of himself with his phone and attached it to the words he had written about himself. He thought long and hard about whether or not to include a paragraph about his genius but decided in the end it was best to be upfront about it, and wrote: "I am probably more intelligent than you but as I have lived my entire life surrounded by idiots it is something I have learned to overlook in most circumstances. I would prefer it if you were of above average intelligence but I think in romantic attachments personal compatibility is perhaps more important."

John was clever. Not as clever as him, granted, but he had always had an element of intelligence that had complemented his own. Sherlock shook his head. Now was not the time to be thinking about John. Now was the time for thinking about a new person in his life that could maybe in time replace the function he had imagined John to have.

He woke up to a dozen emails. He deleted all of them for the crimes of poor grammar, obvious signs of stupidity and dullness, and for only being interested in sex. Despite this first let down, it became an obsession. As soon as John had left each night Sherlock took out his laptop and starting fielding through his emails and looking through profiles. After a few weeks and a couple of dates, Sherlock
started to check during the day. This change coincided with the beginning of a correspondence with a man named Victor.

Victor seemed clever enough and had a way of writing that made Sherlock chuckle. They had a love of science in common. Victor was a chemist. He was also very attractive, based on the photos he had put up on the website.

John's daily visits continue. He had cut his working hours in half as Sherlock's reputation as a detective meant they were being paid handsome sums for private cases. Their time together was as comfortable as it had always been; sometimes they were quiet with John reading the newspaper and Sherlock hunching over his microscope, and sometimes they argued over whatever silly thing they found to argue about. John still made Sherlock tea and brought it over, huffing when he got no thanks for it.

It was a little over five weeks into Sherlock's adventure into the world of online dating, and two weeks into his online acquaintance with Victor, when John brought him his tea and decided he wanted to argue about the lack of gratitude for it.

"You know, a thanks would be nice," John snapped, glaring down at Sherlock where he sat by the desk, tapping away at his laptop.

"Thank you, John," Sherlock said.

"What?" John said in surprise. He hadn't expected that. He'd expected a little battle. He'd looked forward to a little fight to decompress. He needed them.

"I said, thank you for the tea, John," Sherlock said. He was still typing.

John looked a little closer at Sherlock and saw that there was a little smile on his face and that the site he was on was... what?

"You... working on a case?" John asked after a few seconds of slack-jawed shock.

"No."

"Research?"

"No."

"Then what the hell are you doing on a dating site?" John said, sounding angry.

"What do people normally do on a dating site?" Sherlock replied.

Long seconds of silence followed.

"You're... online dating?" John asked, his tone disbelieving.

"Yes. It's been going well. I've had three dates altogether. One was a disaster. The other two were alright although I would not see them again, but I have been talking to this man for two weeks and I th-"

"Man?" John said, interrupting Sherlock. He couldn't believe what he was hearing.
"Yes, man. As I was thinking, I think that I mi-"

"Man? You're, uh, gay then?" John said.

"Yes, of course I'm gay, John," Sherlock said, looking away from the screen to frown at John. "And I am going on a date this Saturday with this man. Unless there's a case."

"A date," John echoed.

"Yes. A date. With a man. This Saturday. I'm looking forward to it. He's very smart. Funny. And if you look here at his profile picture, he is physically appealing," Sherlock said, using the cursor to point at Victor's face. He wondered if John had always been this stupid and slow on the uptake or if he was used to a quicker wit from Victor now. He hoped it was the latter and that his infatuation with John Watson was coming to an end.

John felt so deflated that he silently sat down in his chair and drank his tea. He left earlier than usual and didn't come until very late in the afternoon. Sherlock hardly noticed. He and Victor had exchanged phone numbers and had taken to texting each other. He was so caught up in the texts that he didn't notice John growing increasingly annoyed by the pinging of his phone and the speed in which he texted back.

It continued in the days leading up to Saturday and during Saturday morning and through the afternoon. John sat in his chair and watched on in a growing jealousy. Sherlock had been gay all along. Sherlock had been gay and open to a relationship but not with him. It hurt.

Sherlock showered and took longer than usual grooming himself. He picked one of his tighter shirts to wear and then took to sitting in his chair, his leg bouncing in nervous energy.

"You look nice," John said. He was torn; half of him wanted to flirt now that he knew that Sherlock was not straight and the other half thought he was wasting his time *again*. Besides, he was married. Happily married.

"Thank you, John."

Sherlock didn't even look at him. Not once did he look before he left the flat to go on his date.

John sat lost in his thoughts for an hour before he went home to his family. He didn't want to be there in case Sherlock brought someone home in a fit of passion.

The date went very well. The easy conversation they'd had over emails and texts continued over dinner and Victor didn't seem put off by Sherlock's off putting personality. He laughed, like John did, at his more inappropriate jokes and even paid for dinner. He kissed Sherlock's cheek before they parted. Sherlock thought about him all night.

John watched Sherlock closely the next day. The texts were still coming in so he could only assume the date had gone well. He couldn't bring himself to ask. He couldn't stand the jealousy that made his stomach burn so he left early.
Sherlock saw Victor again on Monday, then again on Thursday and Saturday. On Sunday, Victor came home with Sherlock and gave him his first taste of what sexual pleasure could be with someone else. He spent the entirety of Monday researching blowjob techniques so he could return the favour. Victor seemed to appreciate it when he came by that evening after John had gone home. They exchanged 'favours' before falling asleep together. In the early morning they woke up to exchange them again before Victor had to leave for work.

That evening, Sherlock texted John.

[20:04] Where are you? SH
[20:04] Home. JW
[20:05] Are you ill? SH
[20:07] No? I'm fine. JW
[20:07] How are you? JW
[20:07] Well. SH
[20:08] You didn't come today. SH
[20:12] I did. JW
[20:14] About the time when someone who I assume was Victor was shouting your name. JW
[20:15] Oh. You should have stayed and met him. SH

[20:28] I haven't had any tea today. SH


Weeks passed and Sherlock found that he was seeing more and more of Victor and less of John. John was arriving later in the mornings and leaving earlier during the day. Sherlock assumed it was the natural progression of things. They'd had to let go of their friendship to an extent when Mary came into the picture, and now they had to let go of it even more with Victor there. Sherlock couldn't deny that he was happier now. He had a chance at the kind of domestic bliss John was enjoying with his wife and the sting of his jealousy of it was losing its edge.
John did everything he could to avoid meeting Victor, but it was inevitable that they did.

"John, Victor will be here in approximately one minute and twelve seconds. Will you make tea?" Sherlock said one Wednesday afternoon.

"What?" John said, unable to hide the horror he felt.

"My boyfriend, Victor Trevor, will be arriving here at my flat at 221b Baker Street and I was wondering if you, John Watson, could make tea for us to enjoy together," Sherlock said.

John's ears were ringing. He didn't want to face Victor Trevor. And he definitely was not about to make him tea.

Sherlock's prediction of Victor's arrival was wrong; his steps were heard on the stairs half a minute before schedule. He was eager. He always was and yet Sherlock always forgot to account for it.

"Hi! Hello," Victor said as he came in, grinning as he walked to Sherlock. They embraced and the sight of it was so offensive to John that he cleared his throat to hopefully stop them from doing it.

"Oh! Who's this?" Victor asked, turning around to look at John. He kept both his hands on Sherlock. John stood up.

"Victor, this is my friend, John Watson. John, this is my boyfriend, Victor Trevor," Sherlock said.

The look on Victor's face told John that their meeting was as much of a surprise to him as it was to John.

"John, of course. It's a pleasure to meet you," Victor said, recovering first. He extended his hand for John to shake.

John looked at it and briefly considered not taking it. He shook it, gripping tighter than he normally did.

"And you, Victor," he said.

Victor was taller than he was and less than an inch shorter than Sherlock. He was as handsome as his photograph, if not more. John felt no attraction to him, only an anger that he knew Victor didn't deserve.

The handshake ended and a silence settled over the room.

"Well," John said. "I'll leave you to it." He took his coat from the back of his chair and put it on.

"See you tomorrow," Sherlock said. He was tapping at his computer and started to speak quickly with Victor, obviously carrying on a conversation they'd had before.

That night, John and Mary fought for the first time in almost a year. He shouted, she shouted. She cried, John didn't. She slept on their bed and John slept on the sofa. Their fight had been about whose turn it was to do the dishes, but with so many other layers beneath. John lay awake for hours. He thought about Mary and the truce that had been struck between them during their Christmas at the Holmes'. He thought about the polite way he treated her, the way she had tried to provoke him into relaxing around her again and how she had eventually given up and focused on their child. He thought about who she said she was and wondered who she really was. He thought about their daily life together and how it lacked something that had been there at the start.
He thought about Sherlock and how easy it was to be around him. How they argued. How they laughed together, solved cases together and how they didn't bother being polite and sugar coating things. He thought about how simple life had been when it had just been the two of them living together and how content he had been.

John realised there was something very wrong with his life.

The arguments continued over the following weeks and John found refuge nowhere. He continued to visit Sherlock but with Victor now being there more often than not the visits became shorter. He started to miss days and instead walked around London, thinking. One morning after his shower he forgot to put his wedding ring back on. It stayed off.

"John, this is ridiculous. We should be able to talk about this," Mary said that evening over dinner.

"Talk about what?" John asked. He already sounded defensive. After a year of polite coexisting, there was now nothing but tension between them.

"You're not wearing your ring. You're barely ever home and when you are you're either silent or we're fighting. What's wrong with you?" she said.

"Me? Why is it always me?" John snapped. His temper was boiling and the little things they had fought about - dishes, laundry, groceries, a misunderstood word - gave way to the real issues between them.

"It's not always you. But this is you. What the hell is wrong with you?" Mary snapped back.

John stood and put his plate in the sink with a loud clatter. "There is nothing wrong with me." The unbidden memory of Sherlock saying those exact words came to him and he almost laughed. Mary recoiled again. "You think this is funny? You think our marriage is funny?" she asked.

"Yeah, a little, now that you mention it. It's bloody hilarious that I don't even know who my wife is. What's her name? Where does she come from? Is she even a proper nurse or have I been treating patients unsafely? Does anything ever come out of her mouth that isn't a lie?" John said.

Mary drew back. "I thought the problems of my past were my business," she said.

"I was wrong. Your problems became my business when I married you and you didn't even have the courtesy to tell me."

Mary opened her mouth to speak but John kept going.

"They became my problem when you shot my best friend in the chest and then almost finished him off later. It became my problem when Sherlock had to kill someone in order to protect our happy little married life," John said. The last five words were said with such heavy sarcasm that Mary recoiled again. "He's not a killer. Not like you and me, Mary. He was never meant to be a killer."

"But I'm still me, John. I'm still the woman you met and fell in love with," Mary said.

"You? I don't know who you are. A.G.R.A. Who is that? No, Mary. I said I loved you, but I lied. But then again, so have you."
Mary got up and left the kitchen. She slammed the bedroom door behind her. The baby started to cry in her room.

There was no salvaging the marriage. It crumbled quickly under the weight of all the unspoken things coming to surface and as the denial John had practised disappeared. John knew it and he was sure Mary would come to see it in time. He moved out that same week and took a small room not too far from where he'd first lived after coming home from Afghanistan.

He hadn't seen Sherlock in nine days. There had been no texts, no phone calls or visits.

John was alone and Sherlock was in a happy bubble with Victor.

On the tenth day, Sherlock finally gave in.

[10:34] I have angered you? SH

[10:35] No. JW

[10:36] Something is wrong. What is wrong? SH

[10:36] Sorry I haven't been round. Had a lot going on. JW

[10:39] You are avoiding my question. What is wrong? SH

[10:40] Nothing is wrong. I have left Mary. We are getting a divorce and that's that. JW


[10:51] Because it wasn't right. JW


[11:11] Any of it. I should have left her when I found out she had lied. JW

[11:22] Ok. SH

John didn't know what he had been expecting. An invitation to move back in to Baker Street, perhaps. He knew their lives had moved past that now. If anyone was going to move into Baker Street now it would be Victor. It seemed to be going well between them and John could only watch on in increasing heartbreak.

Sherlock had always been who he wanted.

It took another four days and increasingly frustrated texts from Sherlock between John went to Baker Street again. Victor was not there, which was John was grateful for.

"Are you alright?" Sherlock asked John as soon as he came in. His eyes were narrowed and he scanned John to pick up the details of his being. "You are having trouble sleeping. You've been
eating unhealthy foods. Your shirt is fresh today but before changing to come here you wore the same one for three days. You are heartbroken. Why did you leave her if you love her, John?"

John sat down in his chair and rubbed his face. "I'm not in love with her. I haven't been for a while."

"You're lying, John. It's written all over you," Sherlock said. He sat down in his chair and leaned his elbows on his knees. His fingertips were pressed together and he kept surveying John.

"I'm not lying. I am not heartbroken for Mary. Leaving her was the right thing to do. I wasn't happy. Sorry to disappoint you. I know how eager you were for me to stay with her. If you weren't gay and in a relationship with someone else I would think you were in love with her," John said. His jealousy gave a bite to his words.

Sherlock leaned back and tilted his head to the side. Was this just a stage of grief or was there something more behind the words? He waited. He knew John would talk. He was like a pressure cooker. He built up and up and up and then....

"Funny though, how you never told me. That you're gay, I mean. Would have been great information to have. I suspected it, I guess, until you nearly shagged Irene Adler in front of me and then that... business with Janine. But those were all games to you, weren't they? Lies. God, is everyone a liar? I know I am. I am the biggest liar of them all," John said.

"Are you?" Sherlock said with practised polite interest. On the inside, he was bursting with curiosity.

"Oh yeah. Like, remember when I told you I love you?" John said.

"Not really," Sherlock said softly. John had said he cared.

"No? Maybe that's for the best because I lied."

"Lied?" Sherlock said, his eyes widening into the wounded dog look he could adopt.

"It's more, isn't it? I don't just love you, do I?" John laughed bitterly. There was a shirt hanging over the back of the sofa. It was not Sherlock's or one that John had left behind. "It doesn't matter anymore. Forget it. I have to go."

John got up and left, leaving Sherlock to a long day and night of thinking.

Sherlock was not used to this kind of thinking. His thoughts were usually trained on the logic and solid facts of situations but his current situation was a matter of the heart. He had been with Victor for months now. He enjoyed his company; the conversations were still mutually beneficial and the blow jobs were still very pleasing to him. He had even considered trying out anal sex in the near future. But John.... John Watson. He had longed, pined and tried to let go. His best friend. His other half in so many ways and his opposite in many others. They fit together like puzzle pieces. But who said there couldn't be more than one puzzle piece in his life? The notion of a poly-amorous relationship struck him but he quickly discarded it. He was barely capable of a relationship with one person. Two would be asking to fail. It was a matter of choice.

It was an easy choice one he had waded through the unfamiliar emotional ramifications of exiting one relationship to enter another.
John. SH

Yeah? JW

Unfailing military habit. SH

Or the need to get ready for work. JW

Or that. SH

Did you want something? JW

Move back in with me. SH

That's nice of you to offer but I can't do that. JW

Why not? SH

Seriously? JW

I don't understand. SH

Because I cannot bloody watch you fall in love with someone else under my own roof. JW

John, you misunderstand. SH

What do you mean? No bloody riddles. It's too early in the morning. JW

Move in with me. SH

With me. Live with me. SH

Are you serious? JW

Yes of course. SH

What about Victor? JW

Yes, that is unfortunate. But I assure you that my feelings for you have always surpassed my feelings for him. He is a nice man but you are better. SH

I assure you you have nothing to be concerned about regarding Victor. I have invited him for lunch today and by the time it is over, he will no longer be a part of my life. SH

Okay. JW

Good. SH

This is very good. SH

Bit sudden. JW

Is it? I feel like I have been waiting for years. SH

That's possibly the sweetest thing you've ever said. JW

I love you. SH
You said that just to best yourself didn't you. JW

Yes. Doesn't make it less true though. SH

I love you too, Sherlock. JW

Text me when you're single and looking. JW

Or do I need to set up an account on that site you were on? JW

Laughing at me will give you wrinkles. SH

You already do give me wrinkles. JW

I'll speed up the process with chemicals. SH

Christ. Tell me again why I'm moving back in with you in that madhouse? JW

Because you more than love me. SH

Or maybe because I'm mad myself. JW

It's because you more than love me, John. SH

Yes. It's because I more than love you. JW

Good luck later. Let me know when I can move back in. JW

Now. SH
It had been three months since the breakup, since everything had blown up in their faces and what should have been the great romance between Sherlock Holmes and John Watson had not only crumbled, but had crashed and burned. John had moved out after a day-long blowout between the two, alternating between bouts of silence and shattering shouts. Mrs. Hudson had stayed in her flat as John moved his belongings, crying about how things had fallen apart between her boys, but what could she do? The rift between them was more of a chasm and there was nothing she could do to take back the words that were said that day.

"What are you talking about?" John had asked that day, looking up as if he hadn't heard what Sherlock had said. The words could not have been real. Did Sherlock not want him?

"If you want to call that woman, then do it," Sherlock said. "She obviously found you charming enough to give you her number so why don't you pursue it?"

"Sherlock," John said slowly, trying to ignore the way his heart was beginning to splinter. "I have no interest in her. I'm with you. I love you. Why are you saying this?"

The reason behind Sherlock's comment was that he was terrified. Truly and properly terrified. Sherlock Holmes had fallen in love with John Watson, and he had fallen hard. But it was not good. It was very not good. For John. Sherlock could not give him what he wanted or needed, and he knew this. Sherlock assumed John knew this too and was just allowing himself to remain blissfully ignorant. But when John finally did come around, it would break them both even worse. Sherlock was far too frightened to wake up and see the love gone from John's eyes to be replaced with hardened resentment. So he would force John away before John was hurt beyond repair. The last thing anyone should be was in love with Sherlock Holmes.

"Because," Sherlock said with a deep breath. Could he do it? Could he push away and actively hurt and ruin his only chance to be truly happy? He had to. In order to save John, he would need to break him. "You should be with someone who will be what you want."

John looked at Sherlock in utter disbelief at what he was hearing. "Sherlock, I want you. You are what I want. Whatever's going on, we can get past it. I love you and you love me."

Silence.
John bit into his lip. "You love me."

Silence.

Sherlock saw the look in John's eyes. It was desperate, needing the reassurance from him and what was about to be said would effectively ruin things beyond repair between them. Their story would be over.

"I don't."

"Sherlock?" John's voice was like a lost child's.

"I don't, John. I said I loved you, but I lied."

Every single emotion that flashed across John's face made Sherlock almost immediately take back the lie, but he couldn't. John needed to leave before the pain became irreversible.

"Why are you saying this?"

Sherlock sighed. The sigh that John hated. The sigh that implied impatience and stupidity. It had the desired effect. The heartbreak in John's eyes was interrupted by a flash of anger. "Because it's true," Sherlock said, his voice infuriatingly calm. "I was lonely and I desired company. I said the words I knew you wished to hear in order so that I might have you to myself. But it seems to be interrupting your real love life that you could have so it's time this farce ended."

There had been shouting but no tears. John was devastated, as Sherlock knew, but for some reason refused to allow his now ex-boyfriend to see how much. And Sherlock certainly did not shed a tear, at least not while John was still in the flat. He had packed up all of his things and Greg came by to help move everything, trying to ask Sherlock what was happening.

"It was time it ended," was all Sherlock would reply.

Once Greg’s car was packed up, John and Sherlock stood facing each other in the living room, alone.
"Well," John said awkwardly.

"Yes," Sherlock replied.

"Sherlock, don't do this." It was a last ditch effort on John's part to try and salvage everything. It almost worked.

"It's time, John. I am sorry I could not be what you wanted. I never could have been. You deserve happiness. I cannot give it to you. I do not feel for you in that way. You are my friend. Nothing more."

John recoiled from the pain of the words and said, "No. Not anymore. Goodbye, Sherlock."

He left the flat and Sherlock knew he would not see or speak to John Watson ever again.

Mrs. Hudson had come up that night and found Sherlock a sobbing mess on his couch, trembling, nauseous, destroyed. And in his moment of weakness, he confided in her, telling her of his reasons for his actions.

"Oh, Sherlock," she said as she rubbed his back. "You proud fool. You have to tell him. For both of your sakes."

"No," Sherlock had said resolutely. "He deserves someone else. Someone good. Someone worthy enough. That is not me. You mustn't tell him. Promise me."

Mrs. Hudson promised. She would not tell John.

And she didn't.

But she told others.
They worked behind the scenes, keeping both Sherlock and John from doing anything they would regret later on. John didn't have a rebound. Greg saw to that. He took John out to cheer him up, but never once was his wingman. On the contrary, Greg kept John from being with anyone else, something that wasn't exactly difficult since they had become flatmates while John looked for a new place to live.

A new place he would never find. Mycroft Holmes saw to that. Every time a landlord would go to contact Mr. Watson in regards to his application to rent a flat, it would fall through. Apparently, no one wanted to rent to someone who received such an appalling reference from the British government, though all Mr. Watson was told was that he was "not a right fit for the flat."

Nor was Sherlock a right fit for anyone else. Molly Hooper saw to that. She kept Sherlock late into the night, entertaining him with particularly gruesome corpses and telling anyone who showed interest in him that it was good Sherlock had something to take his mind off of his recent breakout of herpes. Of course, Sherlock never even knew people were interested.

Mrs. Hudson knew when it was time, three months later and she found Sherlock curled up asleep in a ball in John's chair. Gently, she roused him to wake up. It was time.

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"Why don't you try online dating?" Greg said one afternoon. "It's been three months since the breakup."

John looked up from his book with an arched eyebrow. "Why online dating? I can meet someone out at a bar or in person if I wanted to."

"Because it's less commitment, John," Greg explained, taking the book out of his hand and placing his laptop down instead. "Come on. I'll help you make a profile."

"Why are you pushing this?" John asked.

"Don't get me wrong, John. I've loved having you here the past three months. But it's time you get yourself out there again."

"What if I don't want to get myself out there again?" John turned his eyes away from Greg and stared emptily ahead. He thought that it would get easier, that he wouldn't feel as if he was still sinking every day. Surely by now he should be treading water, but all he could think about was where he went wrong.

"That's why this is what you should do," Greg said, pointing at the laptop as if it was a gateway to all of the answers that John was seeking. "You can take it as slowly as you want. Just try it out. You might find the love of your life."

"I thought I already found him," John said under his breath.
Greg arranged his features in what he hoped would be plausible sympathy, but that was exactly what he had been hoping John would say. "John, I know it's been...tough, these past few months. But you're never going to find anyone if you don't try. At least look at other profiles and see if any spark your interest."

John stared at Greg and took a few deep breaths, his head whirring. This was it. His first active step to moving on since that step he took out of the flat, leaving that life with Sherlock behind him. He needed to do this for himself. Sherlock had never loved him and he had been an idiot to think that he had been special, that he had been someone of importance or interest to the cold detective. To the man who had infused life and excitement back into his existence. The gorgeous git of a man who - no. He couldn't do this. He couldn't keep pining. Sherlock had dropped him and now John needed to let himself fall. For someone else.

"Get me a beer," he said, opening his laptop.

"Excellent!" Greg said, moving towards the kitchen. He slid out his phone and sent a quick text.

Showtime. GL

After creating John's profile, Greg and John poured over possibilities. For every one that seemed interesting to John, Greg found something that would be a dealbreaker or a major turn off and then it was onto the next one. And then onto the next one. And the next one. And the next one. And the next one.

"You scrolled right by that one," Greg said almost with urgency.

"Who?"

"That last one. You didn't even look."

John scrolled back up and looked at the name. "William S. Scott?"

"Yeah," Greg said. "Why did you ignore it?"

"He..." John paused. It sounded so idiotic and foolish. "His name is boring. It's ordinary. There's nothing... special about it."

Greg bit the inside of his cheek to keep himself from smiling and blowing the whole thing. "That seems unfair. Check him out. He's got a run of the mill name, yeah, but maybe he isn't a run of the mill guy."

With a roll of the eyes, John scrolled back up and clicked on the profile for William S. Scott. He was instantly intrigued, though he didn't let on to Greg, lest he be subjected to boastful I-Told-You-So looks and throat clears the entire night. Luckily, Greg went to bed earlier than usual and John stayed up on the couch, pouring over the profile of William S. Scott. There was something familiar about the language. It was almost Sherlockian, but maybe that was just John forcing himself to see it. He wandered away from William S. Scott's profile and clicked on a few others, but none of them were as interesting or captured his attention like that one from this William S. Scott.
You need to move on from him, John thought. No more Sherlock. It's time.

John typed up a message and sent it to William S. Scott.

Hello,
I've never done anything like this before, but I saw your profile and you seem interesting, so I thought I would send you a message through the site.
I don't know what I'm doing. I'm crazy for sending this.
JW

Send.

John chugged an entire beer and by the time he was done, there was a message in his inbox.

Hello,
You can't sleep either?
WSS

John looked at his watch. How the fuck was it 3:30 in the morning? Had he really been looking at this man's profile for over five hours?

Not at all. What are you doing awake?
JW

John stared at the little icon of an envelope next to his name on the dating site, waiting for a message. The thrill of the little red number one when he had a new message was almost embarrassing, but this was a feeling John had thought he would never feel again. He would chase this, the sudden adrenaline rush, that he thought he had lost when he left Baker Street.

I have a difficult time sleeping as of late. In fact, I've always found it rather difficult. What about you?
WSS

The truth?
JW

Of course.
WSS

I was looking at your profile and arguing about whether or not I should send you a message.
JW
I'm flattered. Your profile is very entertaining.

WSS

Entertaining? Should I be offended by that comment?

JW

Not necessarily. It just sounds like it's written by two different people. There are two voices.

WSS

It was, actually. My flatmate helped me write it all up. You could tell?

JW

Oh, yes. It's very distinct. So which are you? The one who wrote the line about wanting someone to go drinking with or the one who said that you aren't sure if you want anything serious?

WSS

The second one.

JW

Oh good. That's my favourite of the two. Very genuine.

WSS

John grinned at his computer and when Greg came in the next morning, the most recent message from William S. Scott was on the screen, though John was fast asleep on the couch. With a wide smile, Greg sent a text to Mycroft.

Showtime indeed. GL

John spent the next two weeks sending messages back and forth to William S. Scott, downloading the dating site app to his phone so he could continue to talk to him beyond the confines of Greg's flat. How was it possible that he felt himself falling so easily? This was exactly what it had been
like last time. Maybe he had a type and the two men would turn out to be eerily similar. It was definitely something John would need to talk to his therapist about.

"Look at you, all smiles," Greg said one afternoon as John sat on the couch, typing away on his phone as he always did. "When are you going to meet him?"

John blanched. "I...don't know," he said. "I don't know if I want to."

Greg scoffed as he took two beers out of the fridge. "If you want to? John, I haven't seen you this happy in months. You don't want to meet the bloke?"

John said nothing.

"Are you worried that you'll meet him and realise you're not over Sherlock?"

"Fuck off."

"John?"

"Yeah?"

"You should meet him."

"Why?"

"To see if you're over Sherlock or not."

John sighed. Greg was right. He needed to see if he was capable of moving on or if he was a lost cause. And if anyone was going to do it, it was William S. Scott.

So, this is going to sound crazy, I'm sure, but do you want to meet?

JW

I thought you'd never ask. Friday night?

WSS

Valentine's Day?

JW

Is it? I don't pay attention to things like that. It's just any other day that people deemed to be
John sat at the small table at the cafe and stared furiously at the door, waiting for someone to walk in. He had never seen a picture of William S. Scott before, but John had this feeling in his bones that he would know him when he saw him. Greg had wished him luck before he left, but it was halfhearted. He could barely pull himself away from his phone, clearly finding whoever he was texting more interesting than John going on a date.

Taking a long sip of coffee, John checked his phone. No new messages in his inbox. No cancellation. This was going to happen. He was still looking down at his phone when the bell above the door jingled as it was opened. John's head snapped up and his eyes locked on a tall, handsome figure.

John's heart leaped and sank somehow simultaneously as Sherlock walked towards him and sat down in the chair opposite him.

"You can't sit there," John said, his entire body screaming at him.

"Of course I can," Sherlock said. There was no smirk and John couldn't help but notice that his ex-boyfriend looked nervous. Very very nervous. As nervous as he himself felt.

"No, you can't. I'm meeting someone."

"Yes, I know."

"How do you know?"

"I'm him." Sherlock held out his hand. "William Sherlock Scott Holmes."

John glared at him. "You goddamn fucking bastard," he snarled. "You think this is funny? You create a fake online dating profile to fucking screw with me? Didn't you do that enough? Didn't making me believe that you loved me provide enough entertainment and enjoyment for you? It wasn't enough? You had to-"

"I love you."
John shook his head. "No, you don't. You don't love anyone but yourself. You made that perfectly clear when you-"

"I lied."

John clenched his fist on the table. "Stop interrupting me, Sherlock, or I swear to God, I will-"

"I love you, John."

It was too much. All of it, too much. "No," John said, standing up from the table. "I can't do this. I can't let you fuck me over again."

Sherlock stood up and reached out, desperately taking John's hand. The other guests in the cafe tried not to make it seem like they were eavesdropping. "John, please listen to what I am saying to you."

John wanted to shake off the touch, but he couldn't bear to be parted from it. There was warmth and electricity there and an annoying and unwanted voice in his head wouldn't shut up. *You fell in love with him all over again. You have a type. It's Sherlock Holmes.*

"Fine," John said, sinking back down into the chair. "Talk."

Sherlock slowly sat down, still holding John's hand. With a deep breath, he told John everything, his reasons for breaking up, his every action the day he had broken John's heart, what he had been doing the last three months, and how the entire online dating idea had been concocted by their concerned and overzealous friends.

But by the time Sherlock had brought them up to the current moment, John only had one question on his mind.

"Do you love me, Sherlock?"

"From the day I met you. I never stopped."

"Promise?"

"Promise. I said I didn't love you, but I lied. I have never loved another more than I have loved you."

They left the cafe immediately after that and walked back to Baker Street, their hands still clasped together. They made their way into the flat and John was surprised at how unsurprised he was that all of his belongings were already back, clearly done while he had been on his date. He looked up at Sherlock as the love of his life looked back down at him and they knew as they smiled, the past three and a half months washing away.

The great romance of Sherlock Holmes and John Watson had not ended. It was only just beginning.
Dating Site & I said I loved you, but I lied - Anne

Sherlock detested the fact that John had coerced him into creating a profile on a popular dating site for gay men. He had grumbled through the whole awkward sexuality conversation, through the filling out of preliminary forms, through John’s spontaneous photo shoot (the doctor had stolen a few pictures of him against his will), through the whole bloody process of submitting all his information, and through John's persistent insistence that he improve the aesthetic nature of his profile. Sherlock didn’t want anyone. Well, Sherlock didn’t want anyone if John was to be excluded from the options, as he most certainly was due to the fact that he was already married.

Sherlock didn’t like to think of himself as close minded, although he was well-aware that his inhibitions concerning human contact could be construed as close-mindedness, but he certainly couldn’t see himself getting on with a complete stranger.

Still, he had played along, as John seemed very excited about the prospect of handing over the metaphorical reins that controlled Sherlock’s health and behavior to another qualified individual, and so the detective let it be. He wasn’t exactly a desirable partner. It was more than likely that nothing would come of his adventurous endeavors in the dating sphere. However, despite Sherlock’s efforts to sound as unappealing and cold as possible, the picture attracted a few hits within the first hour alone, so that by the time John and Sherlock had finished eating their Pad See Ew and Gai Med Ma Moung out of take-out containers from the Thai place, there were already four messages in Sherlock’s inbox.

When the food had been put away, and John had instructed Sherlock to heat up the leftovers the next day for a second dinner, he insisted that Sherlock open the new messages, full of more nervous excitement than Sherlock seemed to be. John Watson was happy to be back. John couldn’t stop thinking it as he sat in the messy kitchen with his old flatmate, and he couldn’t stop saying it, ignoring the way Sherlock rolled his eyes upon every repetition of the same general sentiment. He was happy to be there, but the doctor knew he couldn’t stay permanently, and he knew that Sherlock needed someone.

Sherlock was significantly less thrilled with the prospect that his best mate was trying to tie him to a stranger for care-taking purposes, now that John would be too busy to fill Sherlock’s personal needs on account of the baby.

Hey Sexy,

Message me back for a steamy connection!!!

8====D

Rocky Thunderrod
Sherlock,

Can’t believe you’re on here! I’ll be sure to let the boys know, just in case someone wants a date.

LOL

Greg Lestrade

Mr. Holmes,

Hello. I saw your profile and wondered if you’d want to go out some time… I’m really new to this sort of thing, but you seem like an interesting bloke. Yeah. Just… message me back!

Bradley Murray

Sherlock Holmes,

I’ve read your website and I have to say I’m most definitely a fan of your overwhelming genius. I’m currently a student at Cambridge; needless to say, I’ve heard some interesting stories about you, sir, if you know what I mean. Let me buy you a drink so I can meet the man behind the legend. I’m eager for you to impart your wisdom. ;)

Carter Cooper

Sherlock stared at the messages, deleting the first two and staring at the two remaining ones with faked interest. John needed to see that he was testing the waters, that he was putting in effort, even though the very prospect of contacting one of the remaining men for a date was impossibly hateful. The detective could delete the more promising messages along with the clearly undesirable ones once his interfering best mate left.

“Satisfied, John?”

“Sounds like that Murray bloke has some potential.”

Sherlock shrugged. Anyone on a dating site was bound to have problems; there had to be a reason why they struggled with meeting someone in the real world.

“I’m more interested in Cooper.”
“Cooper? Jesus, Sherlock. He’s not even out of uni yet!” John’s face turned red with anger and Sherlock couldn’t help but disengage even further. Didn’t the other man see that he wasn’t really going to contact any of them, so that whichever man he found more intriguing was of no importance?

“So?”


“I didn’t even want to make this bloody account,” he reminded his friend, crossing his arms defensively.

“Well, I didn’t know you were going to start dating the barely legal.” The words stung like a slap across the face, and Sherlock could do nothing but stare for a moment.

“John, I won’t reply to him if you bothers you so much! Relax.” The doctor brought his hands to his knees restlessly, staring at the computer screen as if it was his worst enemy. Perhaps the doctor was regretting his decision already and would let Sherlock permanently destroy the profile he had only just made.

“Sherlock… why are you so opposed to finding somebody?”

“I have found somebody.”

“This Cooper kid?” Sherlock paused, feeling the aching feeling worsen in a way he hadn’t thought possible.

“Somebody else,” the detective said in a softer voice, feeling his muscles constrict at the thought of having to ward off more of John’s questions. After his most recent tango with cocaine (and the liking he had taken to morphine), he knew it was probably safer to simply alert the doctor to his incurable disease, the love that he couldn’t seem to extinguish, and then hope they could move on. John wasn’t really the type to move on, though, and Sherlock could foresee quite a mess if the conversation continued in the direction it seemed to be going.

“I don’t understand.” Of course John didn’t understand. To him, Sherlock was someone to chum
around with, not boyfriend material, especially not now that John was married and expecting the birth of his first child.

“I have already met someone. I am uninterested in anyone else.”

“Then why aren’t you with him?”

“He is already married.”

"Jesus… I… I’m so sorry. Who is it?”

“John… I…” He could see the comprehension slowly come into his best friends eyes and the sight made him clench his jaw until his face was morphed into an unrevealing mask.

“Say it,” John insisted, eyes focused intently on Sherlock’s face. Sherlock remained silent, watching the seconds on his watch tick by so slowly that he wondered if the watch was even functional. “Sherlock, I want you to say it.”

“I’m… I love you.” There was more silence, this time maintained by the look of complete turmoil that had taken over John’s face. “Um… Right. I’m going to take a shower. Feel free to let yourself out.” Sherlock nearly jumped to his feet before locking himself in the bathroom and turning on the water in a vain attempt to shatter John’s uncanny silence that had so frozen his heart.

When he had fully decompressed and donned comfortable clothes, he returned to the living room, only to find that John was still there, seated on the couch, his eyes securely fixed on Sherlock.

“I will… I will talk to Mary. I will get a divorce.”

“What? Why?” Panic. John couldn’t leave Mary. John didn’t like to discard his responsibilities, and chances were he would only resent Sherlock for his interference.

“I can still support the child… We will remain on good terms. She… I’m assuming she already knows.”
“John, you’re not leaving Mary.”

“I’m in love with you, Sherlock. I will do what it takes.” In love. The words were like a punch in the gut, but Sherlock persisted, clinging to the vaguest hope that things could go back to the way they were and that John wouldn’t destroy his family on a whim for a man who wasn’t even reliable enough to eat or clean on a regular basis.

“You are not leaving Mary!”

“You can’t bloody tell me what to do about this. You have no idea how long I’ve been in love with you. How much I fucking want you. How long I’ve been waiting for you to say that.”

Sherlock could hear the desperation in John’s voice, the hard grind of what was right against what he wanted, and it was very clear what the detective’s role was at this point. Love was one thing; madness was another.

“I… I lied. I said I loved you, but I lied.”

“Why would you do that?”

“So you would stop bothering me to go on dates. So you would allow me to delete the account I just made.” He could see the new data being processed by John, the way it wasn’t computing in every crease on John’s forehead.

“Sherlock, I can’t believe you would do something like that. You’re… you’re lying.”

“I’m quite serious.”

“For fuck’s sake… You always do this. I’m not an idiot. That is most definitely a lie.” Sherlock’s doctor was a good man, a loyal man, and Sherlock wanted to run over to him and kiss every doubt from his mind. Of course Sherlock was lying; of course John knew Sherlock was lying, even if John had no proof, even if no one else on the planet (save Mycroft and possibly Mrs. Hudson) could pick up on it.
“What do I always do?”

“Protect me. Like this. It was the same when you jumped.”

“I am doing no such thing.” John grabbed Sherlock’s shoulders, staring into his eyes with an unmistakably stormy look on his face as if he could read the truth from somewhere deep inside the detective’s brain before he pulled Sherlock close and pressed a passionate kiss to the plush lips.

And Sherlock, despite himself, kissed back. In fact, Sherlock pushed John back on the couch, climbing on top of him and pinning John down so that he could better plant kiss after kiss after kiss until both of their lips were red and swollen from the bruising contact.

“Tell me that you love me again,” Sherlock demanded, voice wavering as he was once again reminded of what he was doing, of the fact that he was most likely ruining John Watson’s life.

“I love you, Sherlock. I have always loved you.” Sherlock’s ears perked up at the words, his ribs seemed to be squeezing his heart to a pulp, and then Sherlock Holmes, the consulting detective with an international reputation, began to cry.

He hadn’t cried since Redbeard had been so cruelly taken from him, but he cried now, causing John to clutch him in awe. The doctor fit their bodies together on the couch and stroked Sherlock’s back and neck, wiping away tears with the palms of his hands even though they kept falling.

Sherlock fell asleep that way, exhausted from the wild burst of emotion and relaxed in John’s arms. John stayed up late into the night, looking at the man currently pressed to his chest and wondering what in his life he had done wrong to deserve all of this. He also wondered what it was he had done right.

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