10 Years Later

by Tigresse

Summary

Sherlock, a 20-year-old brilliant Cambridge student, meets surgeon-in-training John Watson and falls head over heels in love. John tries to be sensible for both of them and attempts to slow things down, but fate intervenes and they get together.....defying all odds.

Then they realize, getting together was the easiest part.

Notes

Sherlock is not a detective here, nor is John his best friend and colleague in solving crimes. Please note this before reading.
Have dinner with me

The long queue outside the science fair was bustling with the usual noises of people talking, cell phones ringing, someone squealing, somebody laughing and the faint noise of traffic from the large parking lot. The annual fair, usually hosted in Geneva or Paris or London for the past twenty-five years, was being hosted at Cologne for a change and for William Sherlock Scott Holmes, the twenty-year-old Londoner who went simply by the name Sherlock Holmes, this was the best news of the year so far.

He was yearning to travel alone, away from his overbearing brother and his clingy parents, and this presented the perfect opportunity. Science was his passion, traveling was his thrill and being on his own was a rare luxury. All three seemed to have been gifted to him at the same time. Year 2001 was lucky for him!

A Cambridge student and a brilliant one at that, a degree in chemistry only a couple of semesters away, he was here to learn and earn. There was a small competition, which was usually a part of the final day at the three-day fair, where he could ‘sell’ his prototype. If that was selected by the panel of judges of course. In the past such fairs had thrown up numerous small inventions and products from brilliant students. Those had been bought and perfected later by large companies as mass-use products or sometimes as exclusive products for the government or selected companies. From soil testing equipment to a machine to create soya based ice-cream, many items had been borne out of ‘student-provided prototypes’.

Sherlock had one for this year. The previous year, at London, he had managed to sell his newfound compound Type-KX, which was of invaluable use to tyre manufacturers. But he was not satisfied with being part of the top 20. He wanted to be part of the top 5.

Those were the luckiest people who easily got internship at large Fortune 100 companies and even conditional employment provided they completed their graduation and earned their degrees. They also got a chance to be interviewed by one of the television channels covering the event and get featured in the ‘Science and Technology’ magazine for their next month’s edition.

*Maybe if I get into the top 5, mummy and daddy will take me seriously. Like they do with Mike.*

Mike was of course, David Mycroft Chad Holmes, his elder brother by seven years and a senior posted official in the MI5 unit. He was the pride of the family and the benchmark for Sherlock, whether Sherlock liked it or not.

He stood with his eyes on the ground, barely taking any notice of the people around him or the
several interested glances he drew from some of them. With his six-feet-one-inch height, slender lanky build, almond shaped green eyes, sculpted cheekbones and beautiful bow shaped lips, Sherlock was quite a head turner. A few women and a couple of men gave him repeated stares but Sherlock was totally unawares, he had always been somewhat asexual and focused on his work rather than the whole tiresome process of dating, fucking and breaking up.

“Oh my God he is choking, someone help him, please someone help him!!!”

The pitiful wail of a girl drew his attention to a group where one of the boys, possibly allergic to nuts, had mistakenly eaten some food which had nuts in it. As mayhem and chaos ensued and some of the women screamed and squealed while being of no assistance at all, a man of medium height and muscular build with very light brown, almost sandy blond hairs pushed everyone aside and knelt next to the man. Sherlock was not very easily moved by emotions or distress, his non-empathy almost bordered on sociopathy, but it was curiosity that drew him towards this man who seemed to have maintained his nerves while everyone else was losing theirs.

The poor young man was almost blue and his face was swollen to twice its size.

“I don’t want him to die,” the girl who had been crying and beseeching everyone for help pleaded, “Please save him.”

“I will,” sandy head said calmly, “I will do what I can but you might wanna call for an ambulance, just in case.”

He then raised his voice and said in a steely, almost commanding voice that surprisingly made Sherlock’s loins stir. “Clear out, give him some air, anyone coming too close will get my fist on their jaw and the shape of their faces will change forever.” Then he repeated the same in German, French and Spanish. Multilingual, Sherlock thought, such people are usually much brighter than the rest.

Something about the authority in that voice made people take him seriously. Everyone stood around in a circle but maintained safe distance as this man, using a set of everyday objects like a thin plastic pipe, a pair of tongs, a tweezer and some spoons and a swiss knife, managed to not only get the food stuck in the wind and food pipe of the victim but also made a hairline cut on the neck without nicking any important veins or arteries, letting the contaminated blood flow out rather than reach his heart.

As the victim coughed, spluttered out some blood and then began to breathe again, a collective cheer went up from the crowd.
Sherlock had watched the whole process intently, admiring the man’s deft hands and confident moves. He was adroit no doubt but also had quiet charisma. Even as he worked on the nearly dying man, he kept talking to his stricken and nervous sister and assuring her all would be well. She in return planted a big kiss on his cheek to thank him and Sherlock squirmed, feeling a weird sensation inside. Was it jealousy? He couldn’t quite define it but he didn’t like it at all.

The ambulance arrived almost ten minutes later.

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Sherlock found himself strangely drawn to that man and kept following him around the fair like a lost puppy. He had never been swept off his feet by anyone before but this man came pretty close. Though unassuming in a crowd, up close there was something so powerfully gorgeous about this man that Sherlock experienced ‘hot flushes’ every single time he came too close to him. But maintaining a safe distance was hardly possible because he didn’t want to lose the man in the melee. He kept cursing the crowd as he walked past the artifacts on display and reading the day’s itinerary on the kiosks.

“Don’t curse the crowd, we make up the crowd after all.”

Sherlock bit back the gasp as his heart did backflips in his chest. Sandy head had not only noticed him but also managed to slip away and sneak up behind him, grabbing his attention with this sudden one liner. Usually such lectures and sanctimonious sermons bored him or annoyed him but the way the words had been thrown at him, in a tone that was laced with amusement more than sarcasm, that he actually took them seriously. “Yes we do,” he said, “But most of these morons are here just because they want to look cool or have nothing better to do. They don’t understand a thing about this.”

“People have a right to be wherever they want to be.”

Sherlock noticed the face properly. He couldn’t be more than twenty-five or twenty-six, but he had an almost regal aura of self-assurance about him, something befitting a person at least ten years older. His eyes were light brown, kindly and intelligent, his lopsided smile was strangely alluring and his overall look was extremely attractive. He was effortlessly manly and yet not one of those steroid pumping wooden faced hunks who looked good only on posters and in magazines. He was surprisingly human and charming despite all his virility.
“Is it?” Sherlock said, “Like the jail?”

“Have you been there?”

“Once.”

“Lucky. Three times for me.”

“Are you a criminal?”

The older man laughed and thrust out his hand, “No, I am John Hamish Watson.”

Sherlock looked the man up and down and within thirty seconds he knew quite a bit about him. He had extremely powerful powers of observation, coupled with a formidable ability to deduce different things from them, which made him see right through other human beings. People who liked this ability called him the human X-Ray machine while the haters called him a psycho freak. Sherlock didn’t care about such epithets one way or the other but he was keen to know how this ‘John’ would react to one such set of ‘deductions’ from him. “Hello John,” he said, “I am Sherlock. Can I tell you something about you?”

John frowned but the smile remained, “You mean about you?”

“No, you.”

“Oh.”

“May I?”

“Okay, interesting, go on!”

“You are English but you’ve been brought up in Wales, you have recently moved to London, you are not from money but not burdened by loans either, you love beach vacations and fast cars but hate alcoholics and lazy people, you do some heavy-duty work with your hands but you are still a student
and you do your own cooking. You have one sibling and your parents are divorced.”

John Watson looked a bit perturbed for a moment before he showed a remarkable sense of humor and said, “I am not important enough for someone to send an assassin after me.”

He moved a bit closer and added, “That too such a pretty one.”

Sherlock felt that same stirrings in his loin again and the next words just fell out of his mouth. “You are gay.”

John raised his eyebrows for a brief moment before he said, “Yeah, as gay as a goose. And my friend William, so are you.”

Sherlock startled. John held up his hand and laughed, “I am not an assassin either. I just read your name tag at your hip.”

Sherlock exhaled, “Well, I know you aren’t an assassin. You save lives.”

“I hardly saved him. He was not really going to die. By the way, whatever you said is correct. All except one of course, my parents are not divorced. I never knew who they were. I’d say they never married at all. But yeah, I do have an elder sister who is about a year and half older than me. Her name is Harriet, Harry for short, and we had both been abandoned together by our unwed teenaged mother.”

“You got one thing wrong too,” Sherlock said, disarmed by the man’s frankness, “My full name is what you see on the name tag but the first name is not what I go by. My first name is Sherlock.”

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The whole day Sherlock stuck by John’s side like glue. Through their conversations he understood some interesting facts about the older man. John was a self-made man who had graduated from medical school on 100% scholarship and was now studying for his PG degree as a neurosurgeon. Again, on scholarship. To support his living costs, he worked with a showroom where they customized cars and bikes according to the customer’s pocket and tastes and, on weekends, he doubled up as a sous chef at a restaurant run by one of his friends named Mike Stamford.
John offered not much more insight than that so Sherlock started to do his deductions, based on what John wore, spoke, things he noticed on the man and the way he interacted with others.

A man who was self-reliant with tremendous fighting spirit, knew how to bounce back after setbacks, knew martial arts and was a crack shot, steady nerves no doubt, liked reading comics and watching action and spy thrillers. He was indomitable and fearless, loyal to a fault and very sure of himself. For the first time in his short life, Sherlock was impressed by someone. And since that near impossible thing had happened, for he was snobbish and critical of others to a fault, he was possessed by a tremendous urge to know this particular man more and if possible, date him.

Yes, date him!

But as the day ended and Sherlock hoped that John would at least ask him if there were any plans for dinner, the man simply walked out of the fair with his hands thrust into his pockets and started to walk away from him.

“Jawn?”

“Yes, Sherlock?”

“I….um….dinner?”

“You’re staying at the Ritz. I am sure you have quite a spread there to choose from.”

“What about you?”

Sherlock had hoped his newfound friend would happily agree to join him there but he was severely disappointed. John shrugged, not the least bit bothered by the lack of money or the difference in their status, and answered honestly. “I think a food truck or a small eatery where I can grab a decent bratwurst and sauerkraut. They remain open for half the night I guess so one can never be too late to grab one. And some beer, good old German beer, they have tumblers the size of bathtubs. All right then Sherlock, it was nice to meet you and talk to you. Have a nice evening kiddo.”

“Kiddo?”
“Yeah, how old are you? Seventeen?”

“Rubbish. I am twenty.”

“Same.”

“No, it is not.”

John just offered a mysterious smile and turned his back on Sherlock again. Not used to being ignored like this, Sherlock quickly reached the departing man in three quick strides and blocked his path. “There is a difference between twenty and seventeen. I am an adult, even if you call me kiddo. I am old enough to do lots of things, like travel alone, much like you are. And the reason I asked you about dinner was because I wanted to…..”

“Have dinner with me?”

Sherlock nodded eagerly. “Look,” John had an unreadable expression on his face, “As I said, it was nice to meet you and know you some. You’re brilliant, you made awesome deductions about me which makes me wonder if the MI5 would need you someday as a criminal profiler. But dinner? I’m sorry kiddo.”

Sherlock’s gut dropped. “But why? Is there someone else you’ve promised?”

“No. You just said we are both traveling alone. Who would ask me.”

“I am.”

“Sorry, can’t.”

With that, John stepped past Sherlock and walked off, leaving him standing there like a lemon.
I can’t be with you all day

Chapter Summary

Sherlock tries to get closer to John who gives him the hot and cold treatment

“He said he had come via road and was staying at a shared accommodation near to some street where there are lots of food trucks and stalls which remain open till very late hours. Of course, he is a man of modest means and more importantly, a man who wouldn’t waste money on showoff or habits that are strictly posh. So I can safely assume it is a bed and breakfast place he is in. Now, can you tell me, which street could he have described and if there are B&B’s close by. All of them?”

Sherlock offered a sweet smile along with the request.

The receptionist a Ritz looked pretty amused by this unusual chore. Nonetheless she indulged Sherlock. Guests staying at ridiculously overpriced luxury hotels were always treated like royalty. After all they had paid a royal price for their rooms and meals. “Hmmm, let me check,” she said as she looked at a map of the city, “I am born and brought up here so you have come to the right person. There are two such places in this city, we usually call them food streets because people flock there just for the taste of street fare. One is Moritz lane and the other will be Kaiser Street.”

“Which one is closest to the bus depot? I mean the place where the buses from other countries arrive with the tourists?”

“Moritz lane. It’s also less posh as compared to Kaiser Street and there are greater chances of B&B’s there. Let’s look at a list of B&B’s in the directory. Hmmm, there seem to be seventeen of them in and around the lane.”

“May I have their numbers?”

“Mr. Holmes, you surely don’t mean to say you will be calling each one of them to check for the man who left his wallet at the fair? Maybe he will be at the fair right now, looking for his wallet.”

Sherlock pouted.
“Oh okay,” she collected herself immediately, “I think not. All right, let’s do this. I will call half of them and you can call the other half.”

“That’s so sweet of you,” Sherlock immediately appreciated her assistance, “I hope you don’t mind though.”

“Not at all. I have colleagues here who can fill in for me if I take thirty minutes off.”

“I owe you Miss Johnson.”

“Anything for a fellow Britisher in Germany.”

Sherlock wrapped his knuckles on the table, offered her a sweet smile again and hop-skip-jumped on his way back to the room. She had been easy to convince. Of course, he had to lie saying he wanted to return John Watson’s wallet. Fortunately for him, she hadn’t been overtly curious and believed that at face value.

An hour later, the mission was successfully accomplished. Eventually it was Miss Johnson who had struck gold. She was on her ninth call, to a place named ‘Eva’s Lodge’ which had three B&B rooms, when the owner confirmed the presence of a British tourist named John Hamish Watson. Sherlock thanked her profusely and hung up, his face shining with happiness. If John thought he could escape Sherlock by simply walking away from him then he had seriously underestimated him. “It is going to take a lot more effort from your side to avoid me Dr. Watson,” Sherlock muttered to himself while he made some plans in his head, “I shall speak to you first thing tomorrow morning.”

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“H’lo.”

“John?”

Sherlock closed his eyes and thought about the husky, sleep-rough voice. He was himself developing a nice deep baritone but somehow John’s voice was manlier, more emphatic and certainly more mature. It also thrilled him to imagine John in bed, sleep ruffled, hairs askew, eyes dozy and barely visible above the thick comforter. “Hey hi.....” he continued when no sounds came from the other side apart from rustling of sheets, “I am....um....we met yesterday at the science fair.”
“Yes, of course, Sherlock right?”

“Yeah, good morning.”

“Morning. Why are you calling me?”

Sherlock felt nearly offended by that. How rude! And here he thought he was one of those acerbic people who hardly ever spoke in a civil tone with acquaintances. “Have you had breakfast yet?” He asked, swallowing the anger that came and went.

“Nope. Just woke up.”

“Breakfast with me then?”

“I have paid for the breakfast here Sherlock. Wouldn’t wanna miss it.”

“You haven’t paid for lunch I suppose because it’s a bed and breakfast place. No other meals are provided. So then…..Can we have lunch?”

There was such a long silence from John that Sherlock began to think the call had dropped. But just as he was about to speak again, he heard a big sigh and then John’s slightly guarded tone. “I am going to the fair again today. I think we can eat at the cafeteria together.”

“Done, see you at the fair,” Sherlock said and hung up, punching the air in glee and going ‘yessss’ the next moment. A part of him wondered why he was going so out of the way for John, who seemed hardly interested in him, when there had been so many boys, girls and men who had shown interest in him but he hadn’t reciprocated. Was it because John was special or was it because he liked to do the chasing instead of being the one who was chased? Whatever it was, Sherlock was sure that he was going to snag this man as a future boyfriend. He was also quite certain that the evident disinterest in him was only a façade and deep down John desired him too.

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John didn’t wear expensive clothes but whatever he wore were fashionable, clean and well-
maintained. His corduroy trousers and shirt, the cardigan thrown casually on top of it, everything looked well-coordinated, laundered and immaculately maintained.

Though not a man of appearances or vanity, John knew the value of coming across as well-turned out and debonair. Sherlock liked that.

“Schnitzel with noodles, cappuccino and Greek salad, that’s most of European cuisine in a single meal,” John said jovially as he placed the two trays of food on the plastic table between them and handed Sherlock a small packet which contained disposable plastic cutlery and tissues. He had met Sherlock briefly at the start of the fair and then slunk away within a few minutes, promising to meet him at the Cold Stone ice-cream stall around one. He had kept his word and also insisted on paying for lunch.

“I should have paid,” Sherlock said, “It was my idea.”

“I am older,” John said as he tore open a package of ketchup, “I should pay and I did. After all, I agreed to have lunch with you, didn’t I? You didn’t drag me in, kicking and screaming.”

“It seemed like that for a moment.”

“What? It did? Like that?”

“Yeah.”

“It wasn’t my intention to hurt you Sherlock or make you feel insulted in any way. I was just not prepared for this, that’s all. I am not someone who makes friends easily or even has too many pals. Naturally I have limited experience of planning meals with them. I am somewhat of a loner and us together, having lunch, barely twenty-four hours since we met, that seems a bit weird to me. That’s about it, nothing else.”

Sherlock looked up excitedly from his barely-touched food which, despite all his efforts to like it, was hardly anything to rave about. “That means we can have dinner tomorrow night? I spotted a nice Italian place around here which we both might like. I think I might have an occasion to celebrate.”

John didn’t even react or respond to that. He simply kept eating and watching Sherlock as the latter played with his food rather than eating it. The younger man eagerly awaited a response throughout their meal but John spoke little and spoke mostly about the fair, nothing about them or the dinner he had been asked to. Sherlock had almost given up hope for an answer when John gave him the
answer that he was ‘not looking’ for. “I am very flattered by your attention Sherlock and very grateful to be invited for dinner but tomorrow evening I am leaving. Right after the fair I have to catch a bus and set out for England again. I need to be at work by Tuesday. So, I gotta take a rain check for this time.”

Sherlock felt like pulling out his own hairs. Why the fuck was he still interested in a man who cared two hoots about him?

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The next day gave the English lad strangely mixed feelings.

John was nowhere to be seen and a call at the B&B had revealed that he had checked out already. Sherlock felt terrible and could hardly concentrate on the day’s plan, disappointed and disillusioned as he was. Somehow, he pulled himself together and went to the fair. The evening’s competition was very important for him and he didn’t wish to miss it, John Watson or no John Watson.

Thereafter, things had gone quite well. Sherlock’s little device prototype, which could determine the exact time a machine had been started and switched off and the exact lifeline of the machine by calculating its wear and tear, eventually took him to the top five list. Although the television interview didn’t happen, he did get a chance to be photographed interviewed by the magazine. In addition he also got certificates, a medallion and a cash prize of five thousand euros, along with a state of the art DSLR camera with a powerful zoom lens.

Still, as he emerged off the backstage room and was congratulated by random strangers, he wished someone from his family or maybe John could have been there to see him win.

*Wait, what’s wrong with me? Why am I equating John with family?*

Amidst congratulatory messages on the phone from mummy, daddy, even a cut and dry one from Mycroft and face to face ‘well done’ felicitations from several people at the venue, Sherlock walked towards the hotel car he had kept at his disposal. An evening alone and a lonely night was staring him in the face. Earlier that didn’t bother him but right now it was giving him serious blues.

“Congratulations Mr. Holmes.”
Sherlock spun around and his jaw dropped. John Watson was standing there with a slightly embarrassed grin and a mildly apologetic look. Clad in all black, he looked dashing and very much the creature of the night, without being overtly Goth. Sherlock liked that look and he might have even complimented John had he not been so taken aback that he was almost about to drop his trophy and the bouquet of flowers he was carrying. John grabbed his arm and steadied it before he winked. “Easy big boy, it is really me.”

“Of course,” Sherlock said, trying not to look too eager, “But why?”

John gave a small shrug, “I thought it was a big evening for you. You shouldn’t have to spend it alone. Had your family or some friends been around you, I might not have made the effort to come here.”

“So if they were, you would have stuck to your earlier decision.”

“Yes, I would say that.”

*Take what you’re getting and never mind what you’re not. Don’t be greedy Sherlock. Don’t try to extract more than what John Watson can give you at this point.*

“Sherlock,” John clicked his fingers before his eyes, “Sherlock?”

“Oh, what?” Sherlock blinked, realizing he was so busy talking to himself that he had zoned out for a few seconds.

“Grimani’s,” John said in an amiable tone, “A nice Italian joint which is authentic and popular and easy on the pocket. Let’s go there. We can walk. Ask your chauffeur to park his car on the street opposite to Grimani’s and wait for you there.”

“You-You are t-taking me out for dinner?” Sherlock couldn’t hide the glee he felt inside. His eyes glowed and his grin broke through.

John gave him a duh look. “You didn’t suppose I cancelled my travel plans to just show up, congratulate you and walk back. You have just won a big event, it deserves a celebration. Before you argue, I am paying and this is my treat.”
“But this was my idea,” Sherlock protested.

“It sure was,” John replied, “When I have something to celebrate you can pay. But not tonight.”

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They ordered Chianti and bruschetta to begin with and for the main course asked for lasagna with an olive and eggplant salad on the side. For dessert Sherlock preferred a fruit bowl with cream while John went with tiramisu. The conversation was pleasant but Sherlock couldn’t help but notice that John spoke very little throughout the two and half hours they spent there. He was more eager to listen to Sherlock and let him yap away about the prototype, the prize he got, his college life back in London, his parents and their enormous wealth, his brother and of course his hobbies like playing the violin, beekeeping, collecting stamps.

“Thanks for this,” Sherlock said as they got up, “The food was lovely.”

He couldn’t suppress the yawn that popped up right after. He hadn’t slept well the night before, all because of this man and his apparent rejection of Sherlock’s dinner proposal, and now the long day, three glasses of wine and full belly was beginning to give him a nice buzz and a lulling experience. He resisted for a few seconds before he rubbed his eyes like a tired child would do. John understood and put his hand on the small of Sherlock’s back, guiding him outside the restaurant and towards the car. “Come one, I think it’s way past your bedtime kiddo.”

“Stop it.”

“Okay, okay, I won’t. But you are sleepy, admit it.”

“Can we take a walk please?”

“Not tonight. Even I am tired.”

“Tomorrow?”
“Sherlock, we are both leaving tomorrow, aren’t we?”

Sherlock shook his head like a petulant child, coming across as hugely needy despite his best efforts at holding back. “I don’t want us to leave tomorrow. I want another day here with you Jawn. I want to see the Cathedral, go for a river cruise, visit a museum, shop, eat somewhere, walk around downtown area. Come on, it’s just one day we are talking about. Only one day.”

John looked hugely surprised but something about the way Sherlock looked moved him to say yes. In a clear change of mind he squeezed Sherlock’s hand and said, “All right, I’ll book for the day after. But I can’t be with you all day. I have to study some, my exams are coming up soon.”
Sherlock's resolve to make a boyfriend out of John increases with every move John makes to keep his distance from the younger man.

Sherlock was all for fashion but he had never spent so much time checking himself out in the mirror and every other shiny surface possible as he walked out of his hotel the next afternoon to spend a few hours with John. As he sat in the car, he noticed many heads turn towards him and for the first time allowed himself a smug look. Suddenly it mattered to him how he appeared in the eyes of others.

Maybe even John would appreciate.

He had taken time to shampoo, dry and set his curls. He had used expensive sunscreen and cologne. He had worn designer labels from top to toe and tried his best not to walk like a gangster, like Mycroft often taunted him. Chest out, back straight, shoulders held high and steady, head steady and eyes up, he had followed the ‘right posture’ to the T. He had worn a purple shirt over black jeans with a charcoal gray coat thrown on top, with Gucci loafers and a Rolex watch. Anyone who looked at him would see he came from money and also had enough class and panache.

Maybe even John would think the same.

They met outside the Cologne Cathedral where John arrived a few minutes after Sherlock did. Clad in denims, clean and spotless sneakers, sunglasses perched on his nose and a cap on his head, he looked more casual and fitted in easily with the other tourists and pedestrians. Sherlock immediately felt over-dressed.

“Hey,” he said eagerly, “Thanks for joining me.”

“You look handsome, really good in fact.” John said but he didn’t express it with as much exuberance one would expect with a compliment like that.

“Thanks,” Sherlock said, “I was thinking maybe I am a bit….maybe I should have worn casuals.”
“The purple color suits you,” John commented, “Brings out the color of your skin and eyes.”

“You really think so?”

“If there is one thing I can assure you of, it’s my ability to speak the truth no matter the circumstances. If you looked out of place I would have said that too.”

“So I don’t?”

“You just look like a rich kid who is genetically blessed with good looks.”

Sherlock’s heart was happy as a lark’s for the rest of the afternoon and evening. They did most of the things he had planned for, aside from shopping, and the two of them agreed to split the cost 50-50. On John’s insistence they ate at a nice Chinese restaurant where the food was so yummy that Sherlock actually felt like pooh-poohing the food served by some of the best up-market Mandarin/Asian restro-bars and eateries in London.

At some point he had a grain of rice sticking to the corner of his lips and, despite John’s several instructions, he couldn’t get it off his face. John hesitantly reached out and touched his face lightly, removing the grain with his fingers.

That was when Sherlock felt some sort of magical yet comical ‘kaboing’ sound going off in his head. That touch! He had been touched before, even though things had never gotten past a stage and he hadn’t had sex yet, he had been touched and even kissed, though not on the lip. But none of those touches, groping, pecks on the cheek or temple or forehead had caused a spark to go off inside him. This innocent fleeting ghost of a touch had the effects of a thousand lightbulbs going off in his brain and a hundred bells going ding-ding-ding in his ears. This was completely different. This felt so good, so very good!

He deliberately allowed their shoulders, hips and hands to touch and knock together as they walked around or sat for dinner and some beer. He touched John in all ways possible, nudges, grabs of his hand or shoulder bumps, all in the guise of pointing out something to him.

But John never attempted to touch him again.

Sherlock however was damn sure he had seen John’s expression change when he had touched
Sherlock’s face. He was sure the medical student was just as excited by that touch as he was.

Then why was John acting immune to his charms afterwards?

As much as he dreaded it, the day came to an end. Around ten-thirty in the night John gave Sherlock a one shoulder hug and said, “Congratulations once again and it was good to meet you, spend time with you and try some nice food around here. Take care of yourself and do well Sherlock. I have to go now. Godspeed.”

“Jawn,” Sherlock was aghast, “We don’t have to part.”

“What? No, no I can’t come back to the hotel with you.”

“Why not?”

“Kiddo, you don’t understand. There is a reason I call you kiddo. While I agree that you are a very sharp young man and you have a brilliant future in your chosen field, you can see through people due to your hawk-like powers of observation and you’re intelligent enough to hold your own with anyone, just about anyone. But you’re not wise yet. That will come with maturity, with advancing years, with experience. Things are not always black and white or two-dimensional Sherlock. You can’t just meet a stranger somewhere and in two or three days given them so much power over your life and heart.”

“We can get to know each other better,” Sherlock was dismayed by John’s dismissiveness, “But you’re refusing to even try.”

“You just don’t understand it do you Sherlock?” John seemed patient but inside he was a boiling cauldron of frustrations and it showed in his eyes, which were stormy to call it out mildly, “This isn’t about trying or experimenting or going with impulses. People meet during vacations or other travels and collect some nice memories together or as a group. This was a nice time we had, we met and spent time together, we discussed interesting topics, it was all shiny and fun while it lasted. But we are going back now, to our lives, our work, our society, friends, family. Well, I don’t have family but…..”

“And I don’t have friends. We could be friends.”
“No. At this point we don’t have enough commonalities to forge a bond. Listen to me kiddo….”

“Oh I have no reason to. I hate you.”

The words just slipped out and John, in spite of his initial expression of shock, did nothing to dissuade Sherlock from leaving. Sherlock kept walking away from the older man, hoping and praying fervently that he would be stopped, that John would call out for him, but he never did.

After walking in silence for almost two full minutes and crossing the entire length of a street, Sherlock stopped on his own. Regretting his choice of words and sudden temperamental outburst, he made up his mind to apologize to John and exchange addresses and phone numbers with him. If not today, someday John would thaw and see reason. Perhaps he would covet Sherlock as much as Sherlock coveted him.

“Jawn I…..” he turned and looked at the spot where he had left John standing. His heart sank.

John was not there.

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The Holmes mansion in Hampstead stood in snooty elegance amidst its equally posh neighboring residential buildings, six frighteningly expensive late model cars jostling for space in front of it, uniformed retainers working silently on the grounds and indoors.

Mrs. Eugenia Holmes sat in the garden, having tea with her elder son Mycroft Holmes. She was clad in an expensive Dior dress while Mycroft was in a three-piece elegant Burberry suit.

Reginald Holmes joined his wife and son, still in his gym clothes after an hour’s session with his personal trainer. “Myc says he is soon due to get his CBE from the Queen,” the proud mother gushed, “He will be one of the youngest to receive this honor and of course all of us will be part of the investiture ceremony. You have the OBE Reginald, now our son is going to receive an even higher order of recognition. Do you think it merits a party?”

“Mummy,” Mycroft spoke in his polished, almost snobbish accent, “Let the announcement be made first.”
“Congratulations Mycroft, this is your finest hour yet,” Reginald said with his usual reserve and
Mycroft reciprocated in his equally restrained manner with a brief nod and a slight bow, “I agree we
must throw a party but that has to wait until my tour of Portugal. We are opening a new plant there
and my partner needs some support. So I will be flying out next week and be there for three weeks.”
He accepted the cup of tea handed to him by his wife, “I hope this is chamomile. Ah, this is good!
So, where is our young genius today? He returned from Cologne last night didn’t he?”

“That was two nights ago,” Eugenia corrected.

“That means he hasn’t even been outside his room since then?” Mycroft asked, looking a tad bit
disappointed.

“Evidently not,” Reginald said, “Naturally, I had no clue he was back.”

“He’s tired,” Eugenia defended her youngest born for whom she had a soft corner, “It must have
been three completely hectic days there plus a full day of partying.”

“You really think our son parties?” Reginald scoffed, “I wish he did. The only friends he has are
Victor Trevor and James Moriarty and James is in USA now, studying in Stanford. Don’t think he’s
let anyone else in. He always shuts the door.”

“There he is,” Mycroft said in his polished accent, “Just woken.” He looked pointedly at his watch
which said it was one in the afternoon.

“Morning,” Eugenia greeted Sherlock who sleepily flopped down on a chair and reached for the tea.
He splashed some on the saucer, some on the table and even got a few drops on his robe before an
exasperated Mycroft took a fresh cup and poured it for him.

“More like afternoon,” he said.

“Not everyone needs to be in a three-piece suit on a Sunday Mikey,” Sherlock retorted.

Reginald smelled the war brewing between their sons and quickly did some damage control via a
change of topic. “What’s with the sudden interest in art exhibitions, paintings and sculpture?” He
asked Sherlock who was scanning the newspaper page that reported the exhibition timings and
venues, “Never knew you’d be looking for these engagements.”
Sherlock laughed inside. The correct answer would have been something like ‘From my deductions, which are based on whatever I observed and noted during our conversations, my crush John Watson likes to visit such places and I am planning to run into him there, pretending it’s all by chance and not by design. But he knew such an answer would invite the family’s outrage so he lied through his teeth, “Just exploring new avenues.”

“I have to say this is an avenue I appreciate a lot and I am sure so does your mother,” Daddy Holmes beamed with pride at his son while Mummy Holmes looked on affectionately at her offspring, “Art and creativity has no substitute at all. Poetry, painting, sculpture, music, these are food for the soul and for once it’s heartening to see you feed the soul and not just the brain. But I must admit Sherlock, your achievement at the science fair was remarkable and in my circle some people have become quite a fan of yours. At the next party you will meet several such people, mostly ones your age.”

Mycroft looked dubious. “Just like that?”

“What do you mean just like that?” Sherlock asked irritably.

“Sherlock, he is your older brother,” Eugenia chided him immediately. She was someone who liked to get her nose into everything, sometimes without even considering the weight or futility of her actions. She alternately chided and mollycoddled her sons, sometimes expecting the world of them and then suddenly treating them like kids. Mycroft had lately started to escape that treatment due to his professional success and by moving out of the family home but Sherlock was not so fortunate.

He found his mother's unnecessary interventions into his life, most of which was well-intended but ill-timed, as smothering. But he usually never commented on it, mostly because his mother had a very longstanding and complicated disorder. She had clinical depression.

“C’mon darling,” Reginald stopped the whole fiasco before it could even begin, “I need to discuss some details about the dinner we have been invited to. The duke and duchess are planning on some charity which we are expected to contribute to. Let’s talk about that and leave the two brothers to have their own conversation.”

As soon as the parents had gone, Mycroft gave an arrow straight glare at Sherlock. “You seem different somehow.” he said in his usual cut and dry tone, “Spring in your step, staying confined to your room for a day and night, extending a trip by a day for no reason, what’s going on?”

“And here I thought my brother’s investigative work and searching for criminal behavior ends with
his MI5 tasks,” Sherlock replied with usual sarcasm.

***

A week into his attempts at hunting down John Watson, Sherlock was beginning to despair. He regretted his outburst at the end of their Cologne trip and blamed himself for the scenario he was stuck into, no idea about where John was and if he was ever going to meet the man again. If only he had not been so temperamental and actually asked John for his address and phone number, it could have been so much easier.

But just as he was about to give up, destiny smiled on him.

At one of the displays of avant-garde work by young artists under the age of thirty, Sherlock saw the familiar figure in the distance. He quickly made his calculations inside his head. It had to be John, even though he couldn’t see the face yet. But it was the same height, posture, the same kind of clothes, the same aura of quiet confidence around him. Here was a man who blended into a crowd and yet stood out in some way. Effortlessly noticeable and somewhat mysterious, that had to be doctor John Hamish Watson. Correction, soon to be surgeon John Hamish Watson.

Sherlock made his way through the crowd of onlookers, buyers, photographers, gallery workers and artists till he was standing three feet behind John. Before he called out to the man, he made it a point to observe what John was so keenly looking at. It was a clay sculpture of a child playing with fruits with razzmatazz explosions of color around it. A Japanese artist’s name was scribbled at the bottom.

“Depicts the innocence and curiosity of a wise but young soul,” he whispered.

John turned and for a moment there was genuine pleasant surprise and happiness reflecting in his eyes. Sherlock was about to say something when he noticed that those light brown eyes had become guarded again, as if they were almost appalled to be discovered like this.

“Sorry,” he breathed out, disappointed with his situation.

“How are you Sherlock?” John thrust out his hand.

“I am good. You?”
“As usual.”

“Busy with work and studies?”

“Yes, I would say so. How about you? You’ve gone back to college I suppose?”

“Summer holidays still on. School’s not opening until beginning of next month so I have three and half weeks to go.”
A date at last

Chapter Summary

John shows his famous lack of enthusiasm but Sherlock’s dogged persistence is far too strong for it to be effective

For the next hour they went around the exhibition together, analyzing paintings and sculptures and discussing possible interpretations of each piece of art. It was more like John moving around and Sherlock tailing him like a puppy, eager for attention.

He found that John had genuine interest in art and was also adequately informed about it. He also imagined well, giving some forms of art his own uniquely interesting interpretations. Even without his interest in John as a person, he could still find the man interesting simply from an art-lover’s point of view. Even though he acted half-interested, John still offered more fodder for Sherlock’s knowledge base than anyone else the young English aristocrat knew.

But true to his fears and apprehensions and mostly in accordance to his half-guess, the moment the tour was over John Watson turned to leave without as much as a goodbye to Sherlock. But this time Sherlock was neither going to give up nor going to walk away. He had found John for the second time and was determined to keep him close, keep a channel open to meet him again. He fell into step with the older man once they had stepped on to the streets and said, “I don’t suppose you have any further engagements today or any other commitments for that matter. So how about we do lunch again? This time my treat? Remember, I do owe you one.”

“I do have an appointment right now,” John said impassively, “I need to start in an hour to make it on time.”

Sherlock felt his heart drop. “Okay. So how about later in the day?”

“I am going to see my sister. I shall take the train. She lives in Birmingham so it will take me all day and evening to spend some time with her and return to London.”

“How about tomorrow?”

“I have school in the morning, work during afternoon and household chores and cooking and
laundry in the evening. Hard to squeeze out time.”

“Day after?”

“This is how my entire week will be Sherlock. I only have a Sunday off every week, not even the Saturdays are off-work for me since our clientele at the showroom mostly choose a Saturday to visit us with their orders and requests.”

Sherlock refused to let the growing unease in his stomach and the expanding bubble of disappointment in his heart cow him down. If John was fending him off or playing hard to get, then he had no idea just how persuasive and insistent Sherlock could be. He wasn’t going to give up without a proper fight. “Friday is a bank holiday and the start of a long weekend. How about Friday then?”

John looked resignedly at Sherlock and said, “Fine. We can meet on Friday.”

“Breakfast?” Sherlock was hyper excited.

“No, not breakfast, I need to spring clean the apartment, it has to be later in the day,” John was quick to show his famous lack of enthusiasm. But Sherlock was not someone who’d back off. The more John resisted, the more stubborn and insistent he became. Most people who couldn’t resist his charms, his intelligence or his obvious wealthy background, he turned his nose down at them. Such pathetic people! Succumbing so easily. Such doormats! But John was different, so different! He treated Sherlock like a normal person and, without even realizing it, Sherlock found it truly adorable. John Watson was like a challenge he was happy to conquer, no matter the price he had to pay.

“Lunch?” Sherlock switched immediately to plan B.

“I have to meet a professor at his place, he has offered some additional help for my upcoming exams. I need to have lunch with him.”

“Evening? Dinner?”

“Post dinner we can meet. Around nine. Do you want to take a boat ride on the Thames? About one hour and usually at that hour most tourists have gone home, so the last boat is usually pretty empty.”
“Just for an hour?”

“We can have some ice cream afterwards, take a walk.”

Sherlock’s eyes shone with happiness, “We will be together at least till midnight?”

John gave him a strange look, “Yes Sherlock, we will be. Now I have to go.”

“Wait,” Sherlock grabbed him, “Let’s exchange numbers and email addresses at least?”

***

“Lockie I am your friend,” Victor Trevor tossed the cushions aside and patted the spot on the chaise lounge next to himself, inviting Sherlock to climb in, “I am happy as long as you are happy. If this doctor Watson interests you and one date with him excites you so much then I am assuming he’s someone remarkable. In fact, when I told Jim about him Jim was gob-smacked! ‘But he doesn’t like people’ was all he said.”

“Jimmy likes to pull my leg,” Sherlock said about their common friend.

“At some point we all thought Jim and you were going to hook up,” Victor commented, giving Sherlock his laptop to show him a few photographs of Jim winning an equestrian medal, “You two were so good together, a few years ago. Then something happened and he flew to Stanford last year. Question, are you even in touch?”

Sherlock sighed, “Yes we are and he thinks I am making a mistake.”

“Naturally you have started to stay away from him or talking to him about your doctor,” Victor grinned, while Sherlock hit him with a cushion, “That’s extremely predictable Lockie. But Jim is a bit right as well. You do realize that doctor Watson and you have very little in common. He might be very talented and hardworking, he might have impressed you with certain behaviors, but you have to agree that you and he lead opposite lifestyles. He is from a working-class background while you have not had to work a single day of your life so far. He has practically no family while you have led a cocooned family life.”
“Do we have to marry clones of each other?”

“No I didn’t say that.”

“Jim and I are clones of each other. Science-obsessed freaks, sports enthusiasts, similar tastes in music and books, we will end up boring the hell out of each other.”

“The sex would have been hot.”

“Oh shut up,” Sherlock blushed.

“Now doctor Watson will gain where Jim didn’t,” Victor waggled his brows.

They playfully wrestled and it didn’t take Sherlock too long to pin Victor down on the chaise and ask him to yield. “I yield,” Victor admitted defeat happily and yelped when Sherlock gave him a last smack on the side before letting him go, “You are one strong mule!” He quickly grew serious again, “Hey, listen, whatever it is that you decide, give it a proper think-through okay? John and you have met only a handful of times. It’s not enough to be sure of what that man is!”

“Correction,” Sherlock said, a dreamy look in his eyes, “I have spent over a thousand minutes with him and known him for two hundred and fifty hours.”

“Whoa!”

“That’s it Vic. It’s not just about numbers. If that was the case we can easily re-present the numbers to make them look impressive, like I did just now. One day can be looked at as 86400 seconds, right?”

Victor rolled his eyes, “Jesus. I have to admit you are totally bowled over by him. There must be something real special about this man, ain’t it?”

“It is,” Sherlock said, flopping back down on the chaise again.
Sherlock decided to dress in smart casuals that evening, avoiding ostentatious labels and taking on the more affordable ones like Lacoste, Diesel etc. He deliberately wanted to dress down so his showy outfits and designer labels wouldn’t make John feel out of place again. He also planned to take the least expensive car the family owned, a BMW 7 series that was almost five years old, and park it somewhere far so it wouldn’t stand out amongst other smaller, cheaper cars parked next to the pier. The idea was to show John he could live frugally and modestly if needed and everything in his life was not about money and luxuries.

He was so excited about the upcoming date and had so many butterflies in his stomach that he mostly played with his food and left most of it untouched by the end of the meal. “I know I asked you to chew your food thirty times before swallowing but you’ve taken my advice to an entirely new level Sherlock,” Eugenia kept her hawk eyes on her son, “You probably chewed each morsel fifty times because you hardly took in more than three or four mouthfuls.”

“For Heaven’s sake Eug, leave the boy alone,” Reginald admonished his wife gently but firmly, “In fact, he is not a boy any longer but a full-grown man. He is twenty, not two. At his age Myc had started working already and had a civilian’s recognition under his belt, he was living on his own and earning his own money. Sherlock is also destined for great things but I doubt he can do any of them as long as he is tied to the apron strings of his mother. If he’s hungry he will eat up the carpet, no need to count his mouthfuls or chase him with a spoon.”

Sherlock scowled. Enough of that Mycroft worship.

“Was thinking maybe the food wasn’t really to his liking,” Eugenia commented.

“If I don’t like something I will ask for something else from Stacy,” Sherlock said, getting up from the table, “I am going to bed now. Goodnight.”

He ran from there without a backward glance, his mother’s protests of ‘It’s just seven pm’ and his father’s ‘For God’s sake Eug, leave him be’ echoing in his ears. If his mum was in the mood to coddle, she would somehow find a reason to hold him back and not let him go out that night and he simply couldn’t afford to miss his date with John because of his clingy mum and her ever-smothering ways.

When he reached the pier, he looked at his watch and groaned. He had arrived a bit too early. For a 9:00 pm date 8:25 am was a bit not good. It made him look desperate and foolish so he parked far away, as planned, and took a long walk around the docks before arriving at the appointed spot at five
minutes before nine. He was almost sure John would be on time but nine became five past nine, then ten past nine and finally fifteen past nine and there were no signs of John anywhere. Sherlock felt squeamish thinking he had been stood up for that night.

Suddenly he spotted him in the distance.

John was walking at a regular pace, obviously having spotted Sherlock but his face remained expressionless. He was wearing a pair of powder blue jeans, a checked shirt in pale yellow and moss green and dark green suede shoes on his feet. None of the items were expensive or branded but the colors were well coordinated, as were the styles, and every item had been cleaned or ironed or polished with care. Even while dressed within a modest budget, John Watson managed to look well-turned out and suave. Feeling his chest swell with pride, Sherlock quickened his strides and walked towards John with a huge smile on his face.

Then he noticed that John had neither sped up nor slowed down his own steps. Quickly he slowed down too, coming to a complete stop so John met him half way.

“Hey,” John said, showing two tickets, “I got the tickets to the ferry. Come on.”

Okay so he did take some steps from his side, like getting the tickets in advance. Sherlock beamed as he jumped on the ramp and stepped on to the boat which, much like the older man had predicted, was mostly deserted at that hour. It was the last tourist boat to go off the docks and for a vessel that could comfortably seat thirty, there were only three couples on board. Sherlock and John found their own corner.

“The city looks surreal at night,” John commented as they went along the Thames.

“Surreal? How?” Sherlock asked, shifting closer to John and hoping the doctor closed the rest of the distance.

“Calm, composed, glamorous, charming, even a slight bit mysterious as the lights and shadows play together, a silent witness to millions of people who live in and around it, their lives, their happiness and sorrows, thousands of small events and incidents. Think about it.”

“Yeah, I see it now.”
John took Sherlock’s hands and surprisingly bent down and kissed them. Sherlock sucked in an excited breath.

“You don’t have to agree with everything I say Sherlock,” John commented in an amused tone.

“I don’t,” Sherlock protested, then he quickly added, “I agree only when our opinions match.”

John smiled and nodded, “If you insist.”

Sherlock pouted like a typical spoiled twenty-year old who sometimes displayed behaviors that were even more childish than his young age. John chuckled this time and suddenly hard, firm fingers gently cupped his face and John’s his voice was a low, rolling swirl in his ears. It made Sherlock’s brain melt.

“Why is it so difficult to resist your charms?”

Sherlock was sure he was about to cream his pants. Every little step of approval or affection from John went a long way in messing with his body and mind and this time they were both doing backflips at an alarming pace. He felt unsteady on his legs and with the boat suddenly tilting a little, he nearly crash landed on John. Despite his smaller frame, the doctor was incredibly steady on his legs and grabbed him easily, holding him in his arms in a tender, protective embrace. Seconds ticked by on Sherlock’s omega watch and the boat went on its slow and rocking journey over the river, swaying from side to side while the stars glittered like jewels encrusted in the skies.

For Sherlock, this was the best moment of their relationship so far. He was pushed down to a sitting position but John remained on his feet, keeping his arms wrapped around the younger man who rested his cheek on the doctor’s chest and listened to his heartbeat intently. He wondered how it might feel if that’s how he slept every night, head on a certain John Watson’s chest, those protective arms wrapped loosely around him, assuring him, soothing him, keeping him safe from all the demons.

But good things never went on for too long. The boat ride ended and Sherlock felt his spirits drop.

“C’mon kiddo,” John said, “We gotta get off this boat.”

“Don’t want to.”
“We have to, don’t we?”

“Five more minutes.”

John somehow managed to buy that time from the captain of the boat but afterwards there were far too many intrusions from a particularly annoying man who kept reminding them that the ride was over. “Well, I guess it’s best if we move from here or else he will come over and join us,” John kissed Sherlock’s head, possibly feeling a bit sorry for him, “We don’t need to part yet though. We can sit in your car. Have you brought your car Sherlock?”

“I…um, yes I have.”

“Let’s go to the parking lot then.”
Sherlock is too sexy to be turned down, especially when he’s wearing nothing but black boxers and a smile.

It was well past noon and the barking of dogs downstairs that woke Sherlock from an exhausted slumber. The first thing he did was rush to the bathroom for a much needed piss, the second thing he indulged himself in were two cups of much needed Earl Grey tea before moving to the third and most important task. He had to call Victor and get his opinion on how to proceed with John Watson.

“Heya Lockie! How was the date night?”

Sherlock lay down in bed with one of his phones cradled between his ear and shoulder and the other in his hands, which he used to send some texts at the same time. “I dunno, I guess it was a mixed thing really,” he murmured, stretching his long legs, “The good things first! It went on till 2 am, which was quite a surprise for me since he was very firm on ending at midnight. He has work and school commitments this morning and whatever! But still, we went to watch a late-night movie and stayed till the end of it. Didn’t watch much of it to be honest, we were just happy to be together somewhere.”

“Hmmm, he gave you the time you needed. That’s encouraging.”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t go all dreamy now. Did you kiss?”

“Yes.”

“Proper, lip to lip?”

“Peck. More like a few pecks. He even touched me down there, just with his knuckles, then he withdraws his hand as if he’s touched a hot pan.”
“Hahaha, very funny. Must be treating you like a princess or some fragile object, something he doesn’t wanna break. Anyways, what happened after that?”

“Now comes the not so good part,” Sherlock sighed, tossing the second phone aside and rolling over on the bed, “He tells me we shouldn’t meet again. I asked him why and he insists it won’t work out. It’s best if we call it off even before it begins.”

“What?” Victor’s voice was incredulous, loud.

“I was flummoxed, to say the least. I mean, I can see he cares and he does want me. He could hardly keep his hands off me in the theater, though he remained a thorough gentleman as well. But then bam, he drops the bomb on me and says we better end it. End what? We haven’t even started anything man. Why do you think he is acting like this, all dodgy and careful?”

Victor thought hard and then replied, “I have no clue. Haven’t met him so….listen, the only way you can get him to break that ice wall he’s built up around himself is by giving him a taste of….you know what I mean…..don’t ya Lockie boy?”

“Sex?” Sherlock gasped, “Trap him with sex.”

“Awww man don’t say something so crude, call it something sweeter,” Victor almost trilled with excitement, “Like enchanting, or romancing, or seduction. Yeah, even seduction sounds better, right? Yeah right, that’s the way to go if you wish to truly figure out what he feels about you. Maybe he thinks you’re some frigid virgin who can’t really be fun in bed and for every man sex is an all-important part of who they want to date. He is twenty six, a much older guy, and if you want him to take you seriously you should offer him serious doses of sex. Do that and name your dog after me if he doesn’t keep coming back to you?”

Sherlock chewed on his bottom lip, “What if he comes back only for sex?”

“Good, that means he will keep coming back. Sooner or later, he will be hooked.”

“I am not sure.”

“Worth a try. What can you lose? You won’t get preggers like some girl, would you?”
Sherlock laughed, “Of course not. I do get what you mean. The best part of gay relationships is that men do know men, so we know what’s needed. But John is different from others. Whenever I tell him something like ‘most people do this’ his answer is ‘I am not most people’.”

“Oh that’s what they all say. But after the first time, he’s gonna fall for you hook, line and sinker.”

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“May I speak to John Watson please?” “Who should I say is calling?”

The female voice was polite and professional but it had a touch of curiosity to it. Sherlock simply gave her his name and waited for John to come to the phone. He wished John would keep a mobile phone but the man was such a sucker for simplicity and frugal living that a phone-on-the-go was nothing short of an extravagance and wastage for him. Sherlock would have bought him a phone but he knew better than to inundate John with presents, especially expensive ones. It would probably chase him off.

The female voice came back on the line, “Sherlock John’s busy, he can’t take the call right now.”

Sherlock felt insulted but he knew it wasn’t her fault. With a tinge of desperation lining his words he asked, “Can I call him later? Please ask him if I can call him in say, one hour?”

She sighed audibly and said, “He will be busy or absent no matter when you call. It’s perhaps best if you don’t call him at all.”

Good Lord, he had been cut off completely! John had not just refused to take his call but clearly made it clear to that lady that he wouldn’t attend any calls from him, no matter when he rang the showroom where John worked. Sherlock felt like smashing his phone to pieces but that wasn’t going to help, was it. John was being an obstinate mule. Why wouldn’t he understand that Sherlock was also not like ‘most people’ or ‘most rich people’ and he was safe to date? Or maybe, as Victor had mentioned, the sex was what he was missing and Sherlock was more than happy to supply that, but even then he had to have a word with John to get things going. Why wouldn’t John even speak to him? Why shut him off so very cruelly?

“Um….I have to disconnect now,” the lady said, clearly uneasy.
“Can you tell me what his shift hours are?”

“Listen, I am not…..”

“Please.”

He repeated the plea three more times and, at some point, his voice even cracked a little. Something about that desperate and sad voice of his convinced her to deviate just a little bit from her colleague’s instructions. Lowering her voice she whispered, “Monday to Thursday and then Saturday he works here between 12-30 PM and 5-30 PM. But if anyone asks me, I haven’t spoken a word of this to you.”

“333 Fleet Street?”

“Right.”

“Thank you, you’re very sweet. Don’t you worry, nobody will ever know how I know his hours. Not even him.”

“Goodbye now.”

Sherlock disconnected and rushed to stand in front of the mirror. He took in his own appearance, wondering if people had always called him good-looking just to get into his pants or because he had a rich dad. Was he really attractive? Did his skin look pasty white? Were his hairs a messy tangle of curls or did they really invite caresses? He sighed and bowed his head, filled with self-doubt.

No, this wasn’t going to help. He had to be confident and put his best foot forward. He had to act according to the plan he had made in his head.

He had to find John, convince John to meet him somewhere private and ensure the man never ever thought of breaking it off with him. He would read up books, watch videos and make his notes, prepare himself to offer John the most scintillating and life-changing sex a man had ever given another man.
The moment John saw Sherlock enter the grandiose reception area of the three level luxury showroom, he was flabbergasted. Clearly annoyed, he strode right up to Sherlock and grabbed his arm, literally dragging him out of the showroom without making too much of a show about it. “I told you we won’t meet again,” he said through gritted teeth as he walked Sherlock out, “Try to understand why I am doing this Sherlock. I am doing this for both of us. We have different paths in life, neither of us can walk the other person’s path because we are two entire worlds apart.”

“Mr. Holmes!”

John quickly let go of Sherlock and stepped aside a bit as the showroom’s general manager walked up to Sherlock with a beaming smile on his face. “I don’t think you would remember me but I had met you and your father once, at the vintage car rally last year. In fact, I owe an apology to your father for keeping him waiting so long but the wait is finally over. We have a Rolls Royce Dawn Drophead. I can show it to you right away.” He stepped closer and suspiciously eyed John, “You are here to check on that, aren’t you?”

Sherlock grinned. He had just found a way to outdo John’s plans. “Yes,” he said, “That’s what I am here for and maybe John can help.”

“Oh yeah,” the GM said, “He is one of my best consultants. He can even help customize the car for you with new added parts, decorations, bespoke items and all that. Over to you then John.”

John looked like he had just swallowed a frog. A total turn of tables and now he had to escort Sherlock deeper into the showroom and actually stick to him. As soon as the manager had left, he looked at Sherlock and asked sincerely, “You lied to him. Why?”

“Day after tomorrow, ten am, 63 Wood Street, Flat no 2-3.”

“What?”

“My friend’s brother’s bachelor pad. Be there on time or I might have to come back and complain to your boss that you aren’t exactly being helpful.”
Sherlock was more than a bit nervous when he reached the address where he was supposed to meet John in less than half an hour. This was Victor’s brother Vernon’s apartment and since Vernon was out of country for a month, Victor had no problems stealing the keys and handing them over to his bestie. “Just put things back in their place before you leave,” he had requested, “And ahem, change the sheets.”

Sherlock went from room to room, admiring the four-bedroom accommodation with a lovely shaded balcony lined with colorful flower pots and a cool swing to sit and bask in the meagre sunlight London had to offer.

The rooms were spick and span and decorated to suit the tastes of an upper class young man who lived alone. Vernon was straight and clearly interested in women so it was no surprise that the faucets in the bathrooms were shaped like naked women or the glasses in the bar were shaped like the hourglass figure of a ballerina. He avoided occupying the master bedroom and went to the largest guest bedroom instead, taking in the sight of the large comfortable bed with a headboard shaped like clouds. The wall above the bed was painted a bright orange with yellow patterns on it while the other walls were in a shade of cool cream.

Sherlock quickly placed bottles of lube at strategic positions and stripped down to his black boxers. Once done, he quickly mixed two martinis, put the olives in them and sat at the edge of the bed holding the glasses.

Do I look like a vamp from the fifties films? Oh yes I do!

Sherlock avoided looking at his reflection in the mirror next to him but the positioning in the mirror made him wonder why it had been put there. To watch of course! Vernon was a horn dog and he did think his guests deserved the same guilty pleasures! Good for him!

John was punctual this time, much to Sherlock’s delight and relief. When he heard the front door open (he had let John know where the key would be kept) he straightened his back and took a few deep breaths to compose his frayed nerves. He wasn’t sure he could hold on to his nerves for any longer than five more minutes so a fashionably late John would have found him hyperventilating by the time he walked in.

“In here Jawn,” he called out in his best seductive voice.

Half a minute later John appeared at the doorway clad in well-worn jeans and a light blue shirt, a
pullover draped around his shoulders. The moment he spotted Sherlock he paused, his jaw having dropped suddenly.

“Drink?” Sherlock held up one glass with a flourish. The other one he tried to sip from and nearly missed the rim. Quickly he took a gulp, hoping John hadn’t noticed.

John blinked, as if pushing himself out of a daze, and stepped inside. Keeping safe distance he extended his hand to take the glass. “Yes of course Sherlock, thank you very much.”

They clinked glasses lightly and started to sip their martinis. After almost five minutes of silence, John finally spoke up. “Are you not a bit under-dressed? Or am I over-dressed?”

Sherlock drained his glass and chewed on the olive in the dirtiest, most blatantly sexy manner ever, with much sounds of teeth and tongue. “Well, it depends on how you feel about this,” he climbed deeper on to the bed and lay down on his back, legs slightly spread and his arousal visible in his black boxers, “If you think we should just have a chat and some tea then maybe I am under-dressed. If you feel we could do something else, something we haven’t tried so far, then I think you should call yourself over-dressed. Then maybe you should even do something about it. What say?”

John closed his eyes for a brief moment and when he reopened them, the arousal was clear in his eyes. “I say I need to get out of these.”

“Good idea,” Sherlock winked.

He felt relief wash over him. While he knew this was a risk he was hoping John didn’t turn him down. He would have never recovered from that rejection.

He must have distracted himself with those thoughts because he suddenly found John in teeny tiny white briefs, or Y fronts, accentuating the manhood trapped behind them. And boy was he huge! Sherlock licked his lips in anticipation as his stomach began to flutter, much like his heart. “Like what you see I suppose,” John’s voice had taken on a predatory undertone which further enhanced Sherlock’s desire for him, “You asked for this kiddo and you’ll get it, just be prepared for what’s about to claim you.”

“I…I am…I never…..”
John’s look softened and when he climbed on to the bed, he was shorter than Sherlock’s but far more muscular and strong, and he pulled the younger man on to his lap effortlessly. “I will never hurt you Sherl,” he used a nickname which thrilled Sherlock to no end, “Never ever.”

Sherlock felt John’s hardness under his bum and unknowingly he let go of a moan and started to grind his bottom on it. John let out a growl and suddenly Sherlock found himself on his back, John on top of him and pinning his hands on to the sheets on each side.

“First, a kiss. I have waited for this.”

Sherlock nodded and almost said ‘Me too’ when firm, caressing lips met his lush, soft ones and all thoughts shot out of his head at once.
The Deluge

Chapter Summary

Sherlock and John consummate their relationship. Still, John's demons aren't gone, nor are Sherlock's insecurities!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

John was an excellent kisser.

All Sherlock could do was writhe and moan and thrash underneath him as John literally devoured his lips and left him breathless for long periods of time. Sherlock’s eyes fluttered shut every single time he opened them, slowly his body went lax beneath John’s as he got drunk on their lip-lock. He had no idea when John’s hands had divested him of the last remaining item of clothing on his body.

He was naked! Good heavens he was naked. John feasted his eyes on his body as he sat on his haunches next to him, eyes darting over every single part that had been exposed to his eyes for the first time. “Beautiful,” the older man murmured, “God you are so beautiful. HE created the rest of us like clones of each other but with you he created a masterpiece. Unique and so very gorgeous. Sherl, you’re just…..beautiful!” John followed those words with kisses all over Sherlock’s chest and then sucked hard on his nipples, the right one first and then the left one, leaving Sherlock gasping like a fish out of water.

“Please,” he begged, not sure what he needed, “Please.”

“Mmmm, so gorgeous,” John murmured as he watched the now-hardened nubs slick with saliva, standing out as proudly as Sherlock’s long cock which was now flat against the hollow of his stomach. He began to kiss the flat and somewhat sunken planes of the stomach fervently.

Sherlock squirmed.

John looked up, “What happened?”

“I am too thin, aren’t I?”
“No, I like you this way.”

“Not too pasty white?”

“Um, no, not at all. As I said, I like you this way.”

“You really do?” Sherlock asked wondrously, unsure of whether this was the truth or merely John’s arousal talking.

John gathered him in his arms and kissed the corners of Sherlock’s mouth, first one and then the other. “I may be a lot of things but a liar and a sugar-coating little manipulator I am not. I have always found you to be jaw droppingly attractive but I held out on the praises, mainly because I didn’t want you to get encouraged. I was not sure if we were…..never mind that now, just believe me Sherl. There is no one as beautiful or as desirable in my eyes as you are.”

He went back to kissing Sherlock again and this time Sherlock couldn’t hold back on the moans that had been bubbling up. And oh boy, did he moan loudly. It sounded too loud and somewhat embarrassing even to his own ears, still he couldn’t help himself. John’s mouth and hands were like magic on his skin, keeping him effortlessly aroused but not letting him fall over.

“Please make me,” he begged eventually, unable to take the sweet torture anymore.

John grabbed the lube closest to him and coated his fingers. But just as those slick digits touched his hole and Sherlock began to tense, a hot mouth descended on his erect dick and the younger man screamed with wanton lust. Gosh, that felt so good. More-more-more-more, he wanted this and so much more, he wanted all of John Watson. Thrusting up into the hot mouth, he was met with an approving chuckle from John who, rather naughtily, inserted his first finger inside Sherlock’s body at the same time he began to suck hard on him. Sherlock tore up the feather pillow in his hands and shuddered all over, orgasm rushing up on him.

He couldn’t even feel the intrusion, so engaged was he in the process of the first orgasm John was about to give him.

John sucked him harder and faster, his light brown hairs fluttering in the breeze as he bobbed his head up and down between Sherlock’s open legs. Sherlock raised his head and stared at the sight of John fellating him, eyes wide, heart thumping hard in his chest, body tensing up in anticipation of the
biggest ever climax he had ever enjoyed. The moment the three fingers inside him nudged some spot hidden in there, Sherlock exploded with a loud shout of ‘Jawwwwn’ followed by a few curses and groans.

To both his shock and satisfaction, John didn’t spit.

“Um….should I have warned you?” Sherlock asked shyly, body buzzing with the after-effects of his huge orgasm.

“Do me a favor,” John grinned, his mood considerably improved since he had walked in stone-faced, “Never warn me. I like being surprised.”

A few minutes later he got another taste and sample of John’s prowess and his caring side as he waited on his hands and knees, fingers till clutching the pillow, while John slicked himself up and slowly introduced his rock hard penis into Sherlock’s now loosened hole.

“You okay?” John asked with concern lacing his voice as Sherlock tensed.

“I will be fine…just gimme a moment,” Sherlock tried to relax.

“Breathe baby,” John reached between Sherlock’s legs and started to stroke his cock. Soon the tense muscles around his cock relaxed, Sherlock let out a sigh and John slid all the way inside.

“Mooove,” Sherlock demanded, every nerve straining to get more friction from the immensely endowed member lodged deep inside him. He felt so full but in a very good way!

John bent down, covering Sherlock’s back with his chest and rubbed their skins together. “Sure,” he whispered and began to rock his hips back and forth, biting down on his bottom lip as he felt spikes of arousal take him dangerously close to his climax. Nope, way too soon! He had to hold back for now.

But his lover was relentless in his demands and a complete mess of moans and groans and wails. He kept begging John to do him harder, even reaching behind to grab John’s hip and pushed him deeper inside. One part of John wanted to take this to completion while the other part wished to continue this, so he could witness another grand peak from his sexy young minx. Sherlock was a virgin, his inexperience clearly showed in bed, but he was also a quick learner and had great responsiveness.
John had never felt this much pleasure and satisfaction before, not even from the person who was older and very skilled in bed. What was it about this kid that hooked him so much?

Sherlock kept moving back and forth the moment John slowed down, eliciting appreciative grunts from the older man who slapped his buttocks, leaving soft pink imprints on the pale, smooth flesh of his hip and tushy.

“Eager are we?” He asked in a barely controlled growl, “Can’t have enough?”

“I’m….I am close….please don’t stop.”

“I have no intention to.”

“Keep going, fuck me harder.”

“Oh yeah baby.”

John whipped his hips back and forth like a piston on a mission, fucking Sherlock so hard the curly haired brunette nearly toppled over from the sheer force of it. He clutched at the pillow so hard his knuckles turned white and when that stage arrived when he was about to shoot, he pulled the feather pillow apart and tore it into two pieces. The same moment Sherlock shot his load on the pristine sheets below, John growled out his release and emptied his balls inside his young lover. Scarcely a second later, feathers flew all around the room in the most dramatic manner.

“What?” John grinned.

Sherlock chuckled.

They kept chuckling and laughing as they landed on the bed, carefully avoiding the sodden spot where Sherlock had shot his semen. They kept laughing and trying to grab the feathers which kept flying around the room like a mini indoor snowstorm. “That is the most gorgeous encore to sex that I have ever known or seen,” John said, absentmindedly playing with Sherlock’s hairs. They were so soft and twirled naturally around John’s fingers.
“It’s my first,” Sherlock admitted, “So I can’t say what you just said.”

“It’s not like I had many opportunities Sherl,” John gathered him in his arms and stroked him all over, like Sherlock was a cat that needed petting, “It was mostly women though. Till a couple of years ago I was in denial and had girlfriends, none of whom would last. They kept saying I was an absent boyfriend, only mildly interested in them and sometimes downright insensitive. I wasn’t really all of those, or maybe I was, but that was all because none of them gave me the kick that another man could give.”

“A literal kick?” Sherlock quirked an eyebrow.

“Oh yeah, a harder one than those ladies, who were all good people in their own ways,” John said, letting out a soft chuckle again, “But what I mean was something else.”

“You did fuck men then?”

“One man. Didn’t last long. We weren’t interested in a long-term relationship.”

“Oh.”

“It was going nowhere so we moved apart. He is in Istanbul now, he was a journalist.”

“Okay.”

John turned towards Sherlock and flicked back some of the sweat damp locks from his face. “Hey, let’s not discuss people who have long exited my life. Let me ask you this first, did I hurt you? I hope you’re okay. I went a bit overboard I think.”

“No,” Sherlock said shyly, “You didn’t do anything I didn’t want you to do.”

“Thanks Sherlock, for being so wonderful and so……I can’t find the right words now, sorry.”

“Sometimes words are not needed. Silence can be a beautiful thing between two people too.”
“Damn right.”

Sherlock nestled himself in the older man’s arms, a huge grin breaking through his face. Finally, finally, he had John hook, line and sinker. And he was not letting him go anywhere.

***

Sherlock realized he had fallen asleep at some point because when his eyes opened, the late morning sun had traversed across the skies and it was late afternoon almost. The bright rays had turned into a mellower yellow. The room smelled of sex and their combined scents and a residue of their arousal. The feathers had settled down and lay in disarray on the floor.

“You look unearthly gorgeous Sherl.”

John’s voice indicated wakefulness and control, hardly the voice of a just-woken man. Sherlock turned in those strong arms, slowly becoming aware of how he was now spooned tightly by his older lover. With a sigh of bliss, he let himself snuggle into John and murmured something that even he couldn’t quite hear. It was almost like the purr of a kitten or the soft rumble of a pet that wanted to be stroked and coddled. “If you’re going to ask me if I slept for all the four hours you did, then no I didn’t,” John murmured into his hairs, “I was tired too but watching you was far more important than falling asleep and wasting time.”

“So we are boyfriends now?” Sherlock asked softly.

John tensed a bit, “Excuse me?”

“We are committed now, aren’t we?”

“Sherl, we have only just met a little over a month ago.”

“So? Does it always need to be one whole year before we even think about each other as boyfriends?”
“I don’t know about a year but one month is hardly enough time to know each other. So far we have only seen each other at our best. Best foot forward, as they say. But best foot forward also means ‘worst foot backward’. We need to know each other in all colors, all seasons, for all reasons. Let’s not hurry and destroy things kiddo. Let’s give this more time. I have my work and my studies, you have your studies…..”

Sherlock sat up abruptly, sheets sliding down and revealing most of his naked body. John gasped softly, the effects of that sight going straight to his cock.

“Now you are finding reasons to avoid me, to let me go,” Sherlock couldn’t prevent a note of accusatory bitterness from creeping into his voice.

John sat up too, “No, you are getting this completely wrong. Kiddo, life is complicated and so are relationships. You are still living under your parents’ roof and your life is still somewhat under their feathers. Decisions like these need time, need careful consideration, they need approval from families. I have seen too many young people jump into things that burn them out completely later. I am speaking more for your benefit than mine, trust me.”

“Just because I can’t get pregnant,” Sherlock’s voice broke and he felt so disheartened his face crumpled to a near-crying contortion, “Just because a man is supposed to be ‘playing’ the field and can never be the ‘victim’ of abandonment.”

“Oh God, where do you get these phrases from,” John was appalled at Sherlock’s distress and quickly made him lie down, climbing on top of him, “I said all of these things because I have your goodwill in my heart, Sherl, stop it, don’t get upset now, c’mere…..” He kissed Sherlock, who had started to snuffle by then, all over his face and tried his best to calm him down but the younger man was too upset to listen. He kept alternately pouting and fuming before he began to snuffle once more, this time on the verge of tears. He tried to push John away feebly but the older man stayed put, pinning Sherlock down bodily and kissing him on the mouth this time.

Sherlock raised his hips and suddenly, as their semi-hard manhoods touched, John pushed his legs apart and entered him again.

“Oh fuck,” the older man cried out, eyes shut with pleasure.

“Ohhhh,” Sherlock pushed back. He was not ready for John this time and felt him even more, which gave him a different kind of pleasure. His long pins wrapped around John’s strong hips that had already started moving back and forth in a steady rhythm.
John quickly grabbed a pillow and pushed it under Sherlock’s bum before he grabbed another one and added it to the pillow under the younger man’s head. *Even in his aroused state he cares about my comfort. Then why, oh why would he not commit to me? Why wouldn’t he take this seriously and consider me his boyfriend?* Sherlock put his arms around John and pulled him closer, resting his chin on his lover’s shoulder as he was fucked into the mattress.

It felt good, too good, and once more Sherlock found himself rushing towards another climax. John had found his sweet spot and was hitting it so well, so regularly and so immaculately that there was no way Sherlock could stop the massive orgasm that came hotfooting at him.

John grabbed Sherlock’s calves and placed them over his shoulders before he pushed inside some more, digging deeper into the hot tight sheath that closed snugly around him. A couple of thrusts were all it took and the older man let go with a loud grunt followed by a ghost-whisper of Sherlock’s name.

Sherlock came instantly, desperately jerking himself off as ribbons and ribbons of cum coated him all over.

They kept moving and rocking together till the aftershocks died down and Sherlock’s legs dropped back on the bed. John took a few deep breaths and stayed inside Sherlock, panting.

Chapter End Notes

It's not as rosy as it looks for the JohnLock relationship because John still has a wise head on his young shoulders and won't get carried away!
Chapter Summary

Sherlock's stubbornness clashes with John's quiet determination and wins the battle

“You all right?” John asked after a prolonged silence. He lowered his head to rest their foreheads together briefly before pulling back.

Sherlock nodded.

John gently pulled out of him, a muted little grunt escaping him as the connection snapped. Sherlock also felt a pang of loneliness and his first instinct was to cuddle into John’s arms, when John gently moved away a bit. It wasn’t a harsh move, John had barely moved a few inches and still had one of his hands on Sherlock’s bare thigh, still Sherlock felt as if he had been pushed away. “John,” he spoke impulsively, letting the words tumble out before he could even think through them, “I have never been in a relationship before and my parents would be delighted to know I am dating someone. No rush, but can you come over to my place for dinner? Maybe in one or two weeks?”

John took his hand back. “Dinner?”

“Yes. Dinner with my mummy and daddy.”

“Sherlock, you just said no rush. Then you’re putting a time frame.”

“Fine, then you set the time frame.”

“What if I don’t want to? More importantly, why do we even have to?”

“I just told you.”

“Kiddo, you are taking this down the wrong path. I suggest we get to know each other, just remain friends for now, see how things work out and at least give ourselves time to complete our studies. I
have worked hard to come to this point and I don’t need any distractions.”

“I am a distraction,” Sherlock felt gutted, “Great!”

“Oh God, that’s not how I meant it man,” John got out of bed and wiped himself quickly with a couple of tissues before picking up his Y fronts from the floor, “You aren’t a distraction baby, but the pressure of a relationship and meeting parents isn’t exactly a walk in the park. We are from two different worlds and you gotta be blind not to see that this could cause several problems in the future. I am trying to slow us down so we can decide if this is really viable or not. That is all I meant.”

“You think this is not viable,” Sherlock lashed out as he watched John get into his Y fronts and then his jeans, “Yet you chose to sleep with me.”

“I didn’t do anything you didn’t want me to do,” John started to put on his shirt. His voice had become deathly cold and stern.

“You didn’t seem to say no then,” Sherlock frowned, crossing his arms over his chest, “Like you’re saying ‘no’ to meeting my parents in the near future.”

John looked mortified for a few moments before he started to button up his shirt. “Look Sherlock, you can call it whatever you want but I was knocked off my feet by your looks, sensuality and aura.” He paused and put on his belt, “I did try to hold back but it didn’t work. But that doesn’t mean one mistake needs to become two. This isn’t the right time for either of us to get into a serious relationship and I am not yet ready to meet your parents. In fact, I shouldn’t have even come here. I knew exactly what you were angling for when you invited me to a friend’s bachelor pad.”

Sherlock felt hot fury and hotter shame envelop him. This wasn’t happening. This couldn’t be happening to him! This was humiliating.

John slid on his socks and slipped his feet into his navy-blue and white canvas shoes. He started padding towards the doorway when something stopped him and he gave his young lover a pleading look. “Call it off right now if you want anything more than pure friendship Sherlock,” he stopped at the door and put his hand on the knob. When Sherlock said nothing he sighed and added, “Well, goodbye then.”

Sherlock stayed still and stayed put there till he heard the front door open and close. His chest was tight, his throat was hurting and his head felt light and weird. The stress of this relationship and the
sudden breakup was tearing him apart.

“WELL, FUCK YOU TOO,” he yelled into the silence of the flat before collapsing back on to the mattress and curling up on his side. He pulled the covers over his head. Hiding from the world seemed like a very good idea right now.

Time ticked by in the form of seconds, then minutes, then hours. Sherlock remained where he was, eyes open and unseeing.

It was only when his mummy started calling him every five minutes that he finally got out of bed. He staggered to the shower and stayed under the spray for almost half an hour. Then he stood there and dripped for an eternity. Somehow he lacked the strength to go from chore to chore, preferring inaction of both body and brain. Everything seemed so listless, so dull, so very boring at that point that he didn’t see the point in doing anything at all.

He managed to put the sheet in the washing machine, clean up the feathers on the floor and chairs and set the room somewhat back in order. Then, at nearly ten in the night, he finally left the flat and headed back home.

***

One month later Sherlock was sure that John had meant every word he had said.

In spite of the very succinct words used by John to indicate their breakup, Sherlock had not believed him completely. He had assumed that the young doctor was merely letting his anger govern his tongue and in a few days he would either come crawling back or at least contact Sherlock and ask him about their next date.

But as it turned out, John not only stayed out of touch he didn’t even agree to take Sherlock’s calls or answer his emails. After a while, John’s colleagues at work and all the administrative staff at the medical school started making hackneyed excuses on John’s behalf. Whenever Sherlock called John at his school or work, ‘John isn’t in’, ‘John isn’t working here anymore’ and ‘John isn’t well and absent for classes today’ were so oft repeated that it felt very annoying and insulting to Sherlock. Damn, those crazy-arse excuses were so lame he wanted to slap the person on the other side for insulting his intelligence.

John had clearly made up his mind. Sherlock was out of his life.
But he had no idea how determined Sherlock was when it came to pursuing his goals and objectives. If John didn’t want to speak to him over the phone, then he would land up straight at John’s doorstep and force him to have a conversation.

So, on a Saturday afternoon, as it rained cats and dogs around that area and a seriously chilly wind blew around London, one of John’s colleagues named Beric came running towards him with an anxious expression on his face. “Hey what’s up,” John said whilst cleaning one of the bikes that was due for delivery in an hour, “Finally I met my target! Full incentive for this month, plus an additional bonus for exceeding my targets this quarter.”

“John you better come outside.”

“Why? What for?”

“It’s your boyfriend.”

“Sherlock???”

“He has been standing on the sidewalk. Out there, in the open rain right outside our showroom, drenched from top to toe. I think it’s been almost an hour since he started this crazy act. We tried to make him go home but he stubbornly refuses, he just won’t listen. Look John, he is asking for you and if you don’t do anything and just let him stand there I can assure you the poor boy will be very, very sick.”

John’s face paled.

“Christ, you have turned fucking blue in the mouth,” he gasped when he rushed out with an umbrella and saw Sherlock’s condition, “Sherlock what the hell man! What do you think you are doing? Have you gone completely crazy?”

“I wanted to see you,” Sherlock said in a weak voice, shivering badly and his teeth chattering from the cold that seemed to seep into his bones, “But I am not crazy Jawn. I am nothing like that. Just desperate.”
“Luckily this is not a case of pneumonia or serious bronchitis,” the doctor said as John and Victor stood silently, absorbing his words, “But his fever is very high and he has heavy chest congestion. His throat is also raw and infected and it seems like a bad case of ear infection as well. He doesn’t need to be admitted but someone needs to look after him and ensure he stays in bed and rests, takes medication to keep the fever down, keeps up his fluid intake and takes his antibiotics on time. Yeah, I am not taking chances with the ear and throat infection. I am prescribing antibiotics.”

“It’s nothing serious, right doc?” John asked.

“Oh c’mon sir, not by a mile,” the doctor replied with an assuring smile, “You’re a medical practitioner yourself Dr. Watson! I think you know that already but yeah, with our own people we tend to worry a lot more than we should. Our friend here is young and strong and will throw it off quickly. But for a week he needs rest and recuperation, the antibiotics will also kind of upset his stomach so he needs light and small meals at short intervals. Does he have someone to look after him? Where is his family?”

Victor replied, “I am his friend. This is my brother’s house.”

“Yeah, that’s all good. But where is his family?”

“I am his family.”

“Good then, my worries are over. A doctor looking after him day and night, that’s the best care he can get.”

“Thanks Dr. Whittaker.”

“You’re welcome.”

Sherlock moaned and murmured something and John immediately stepped forward to wipe his forehead with a cold towel. The young man kicked at the covers and John quickly tucked him in properly, securing the sheets on all sides so they didn’t fall off.
“Call me if anything changes,” Dr. Whittaker said as he picked up his bag and mobile phone, “It’s best if I am on my way again.”

“I know you usually don’t see patients at home but thanks for doing this favor to a neighbor and a colleague,” John said thankfully, pointing at Victor and himself. The doctor raised his hand in acknowledgement and exited the room.

Victor decided to show the doctor out, telling John that he would run down a block and get the antibiotics within the next fifteen minutes. John stayed back, sitting down next to Sherlock who was laying on the same bed where they had had sex about a month ago. This was the same room where they had the post-coital argument and then John had walked out on Sherlock. Now, less than a month later, Sherlock had literally made John eat his own heart out of guilt. “You crazy little thing,” John kissed Sherlock’s hand and cringed when he felt the heat radiate off the pale skin and on to his lips, “You crazy, beautiful thing.”

“J’wn.”

“Sherly. Hey, can you hear me?”

“I g’t flu J’wn. I’m n’t deaf.”

“Shhh, don’t talk. Sleep as much as you can. Rest and plenty of fluids is the best way to heal quickly. Okay?”

Sherlock blinked hard and cleared his throat, making a face when he felt the sting there. “Why did you call me family?”

John bowed his head.

“Why?” Sherlock asked again.

John took a deep breath and answered in a gentle voice, while wiping Sherlock’s face and neck down with the cold cloth, “Because we are family! Believe me, I wasn’t sure about that till this morning but after seeing your crazy and wild side, I am almost convinced that I deserve you. I had a rather loony side once and people use to call me a ‘freak’ at the drop of a hat. Now try to sit up a bit and take your paracetamol.”
“I won’t.”

“Sherly…”

“You stopped talking to me. You said you don’t want to be my boyfriend. You refused to meet my parents.”

John nodded, “Yes, I do know. I said all that. But I have changed my mind since then.” He cupped Sherlock’s face with both hands and kissed his forehead, “I will be your boyfriend Sherly and as soon as you get sufficiently better, I will meet your parents.”

Sherlock sat up, ignoring the giddiness and pain he felt in the head. As they hugged, resting their chins on each other’s shoulders, their expressions were the complete opposite. While Sherlock was near teary from happiness and relief, John’s face was tensed and anxious from the fears he harbored about their ‘mismatched’ social status and upbringing.

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Since Reginald and Eugenia Holmes were visiting relatives in France, John decided to be the caregiver for his young lover while he recuperated from the severe bout of flu and cold. Sherlock initially wasn’t sure why John was so dutiful and caring, was it his deep-seeded guilt about pushing the younger man to this crazy act or, as a doctor, his genuine concern over a patient? But the act of kindness was more important than the reason behind it so, since John had tirelessly looked after him while he was unwell, whatever anger Sherlock had over John’s earlier behavior was wiped clean with the affection and care he had been showered with.

They had sex again and it felt just as wonderful as the first two times. Once again Sherlock was fully hooked and, from the looks of it, so was John.

Things got better from thereon. It took Sherlock almost a week to fully recover, post which he went back to college which had reopened a few days ago. At Cambridge the Holmes family owned a neat little three-bedroom cottage where Sherlock stayed during the weekdays, with a housekeeper to cook and clean for him. John drove Sherlock to college in Sherlock’s car and visited him once every mid-week for the next three weeks. On weekends, he visited Sherlock again and stayed with him on Saturday nights and cooked for him since it was the housekeeper’s evening off.
“Mummy and daddy are back from vacation as of last week,” Sherlock said as they lay together one night, “Next weekend is an extended weekend, with a bank holiday on Monday. Shall we meet over dinner next Sunday?”

John was so quiet that Sherlock suspected he had dozed off.

“Jawn? You’re awake, aren’t ya?”

“Hmmm….mmm.”

“I said…..”

In a rather resigned, somewhat downbeat tone John replied, “All right. Let’s do this.”
Meeting the Folks

Chapter Summary

John’s visit to the Holmes household for dinner turns from Sherlock’s happy dream to John’s nightmare

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sherlock was angrier than angry and very disappointed with his parents. It was supposed to be a dinner between them, Sherlock and John. Two hours before John was due to arrive, his mother coolly told him she had invited Mycroft as well as two of their cousins, Lucille and Peter. Lucille and Peter were twins and the children of Reginald’s younger brother Rodney. Sherlock hated their vacuous, pretentious nature and the superficial way they looked at everyone and everything. This wouldn’t go down well.

“Come on,” Reginald said when Sherlock complained to him, “They are also family. You wanted John Watson to meet your family, right?”

Sherlock felt like pulling his hairs out. Of course they were family but with Mycroft’s snooty attitude and the well-known idiocies of the twins, they weren’t the right people for John to meet on his very first occasion at the Holmes household. But then Reginald never really overruled his wife, no matter how wrong she went at times. Before the kids they were one unit, no exceptions there. Poor Sherlock had no other choice but to accept things and hope John would be able to cope on his own while the entire Holmes clan descended on him with their various eccentricities and snobbishness.

Right at six in the evening, the doorbell rang.

Sherlock was at the door before the butler could get there. “I’ll take this,” he said and answered the door, his eyes widening at the sight of John.

Despite his apparent indifference to the occasion of meeting the parents, he had clearly made an effort to impress. Maybe his nonchalant attitude had been just a façade. He was wearing his best suit, a dark brown pin striped one with a dark green tie. His hairs were well-styled and he had shaved recently, taking off the five o’clock shadow. His shoes had been polished till they shone like a mirror. He looked attractive, sophisticated and upper-class, not the working class orphan who had to work hard to support himself.
“You look great,” he said as John kissed him on the cheek.

“You look stunning,” John replied sincerely, “As always.”

With rosy cheeks, which were a result of that compliment, Sherlock showed John to the family room where five heads turned towards him in unison. If John felt a bit weirded out by then, then he did a remarkable job concealing it.

Conversations started with introductions and Sherlock was happy at the way John dealt with everyone. He was confident, cordial and didn’t seem overwhelmed by the obvious show of luxury and ostentation in the Holmes mansion.

Mycroft went on grilling mode shortly, as Sherlock had half-expected.

“So Dr. Watson, when do you get your surgeon’s permit? What are your plans after that?”

“In a year, around this time,” John replied, confidence tinging his voice as he spoke clearly and, “Then I become a surgical resident and one year after that period, I get to do surgeries on my own. My plan is to associate myself with Barts for at least five years before I start out on my own and become a visiting surgeon with multiple hospitals. Once I establish a reputation there, I can become a consulting surgeon with international healthcare groups. Eventually when I am old, past fifty-five or so, I plan to become a professor and an author. There are not enough of professors and mentors today for young surgeons, I think.”

“There is good money in surgery,” Peter quipped.

“Yes,” John looked at him with patience, “There is.”

“But there is surely more money in law or business.”

“Yes, depends on an individual’s merit of course.”

“Well John,” Eugenia chimed in, “It also depends on where you begin and if someone is there to give you a push. As we see it, you don’t have the push.”
“You are right ma’am,” John said without any expressions or emotions, “I have to do the whole thing on my own. But therein lies the challenge of being self-made. I guess people who rely on pushes don’t even know how to spell that word.”

Sherlock had to rein in the bubble of laughter that threatened to break through.

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When dinner time arrived, Sherlock could feel the tension that was rife in the air. One could easily slice it with a knife, if one tried.

John was no doormat and every time the Holmes family made disparaging comments at him, he shot back in a civil but suitably assertive manner. Not being used to being spoken to like that, Eugenia completely stopped talking to him. It made Sherlock cringe.

As they entered the dining room, John’s guard slipped a little. For the first time Sherlock noticed a look of awe and disturbance on John’s face. The room was huge and adjoining the ballroom, through which they had to walk to reach it, and John looked at the expensive ceiling work, floor work and paintings that hung on the wall. In the dining room was a super-expensive dining table that could comfortably seat forty people at one go. The cutlery was pure silver and the food was gourmet at its very best.

“We have two chefs at our beck and call,” Eugenia said proudly.

“So John,” Lucille began to speak in her annoyingly shrill voice, “So is your life all about work and study? Do you have any hobbies, like riding? I mean I can’t even imagine there might be people who don’t ride or don’t like horses.”

John looked at her with amusement mixed with pity, clearly realizing just how vapid she was. He did exactly as Sherlock had expected him to do, he didn’t dignify her with an answer. But his silence was not appreciated by everyone at the table, particularly Sherlock’s mummy and Lucille’s twin brother Peter. An annoyed Eugenia shot a glare at John, as if she was disillusioned by his behavior. Of course, she wouldn’t acknowledge just how stupid a question it was but she had to judge John because of his lack of answer. Sherlock saw this and quickly came to his boyfriend’s defense, answering his cousin sharply. “Riding isn’t everybody’s idea of fun, nor does everyone share your love for equines Lucy.”
Lucy’s jaw dropped. She hadn’t expected this answer.

“What’s wrong with riding?” Peter asked.

“Nothing wrong,” John replied, “Just that it’s not compulsory to like it.”

“Then what do you do with your free time?”

“I don’t have much free time.”

“Ah, working to support your education. I get it.”

“How would you? You never had to do it. Anyways, I don’t support my education in any manner aside from being very good at it. I am on a complete scholarship, 100% of my course fees, books and projects are funded by the school. I won the merit program years ago.”

Mycroft quickly interjected, “What’s for dessert mummy?”

The topic came to a halt but the hostility remained. Rest of their time at the dinner table became somewhat stuffy and uncomfortably silent, with no one making an attempt to initiate a conversation. Mycroft spoke some about his own work while Reginald checked whether everybody liked the dishes or not, playing the gracious host. But other than that, there was mostly silence at the table. Sherlock felt stifled and was extremely happy when the meal came to an end and they shifted to the study.

“How long have you been seeing Sherlock?” Reginald asked the moment Lucille and Peter had left the room to smoke a cigarette in the garden outside.

“Close to two months sir,” John replied, nursing the nightcap he had been handed.

“So tell us a bit about your work. Which stream have you chosen?”

Well, at least daddy is talking about something normal, without any tinge of malice or snootiness
concealed in them. Sherlock was a bit more relaxed as the rest of the evening went on without any further remarkable incidents or unpleasant exchanges. But just as he was about to see John off at the door, Eugenia made a rather unfortunate comment. “You work at the same showroom where they customize cars, don’t you John? I have a friend who wants to see some samples of what you can do with a Ferrari. Is it possible for you to drop by at her place and maybe drive a live sample for her to check out?”

Sherlock dug his nails into his palms. *Oh no mummy, please no, what are you saying?* He noticed that even Mycroft looked shocked at that statement. Reginald was not there but Sherlock wished he was, so he could silence his wife lest she committed a bigger faux pas. John let a scowl flicker on his face for the briefest moments before he replied, his voice stone cold and dipped in sarcasm.

“We can send her a catalogue. Live samples are not sent to any customer, nor do we deliver at doorstep. Where I work we have acquired a reputation of excellence which makes customers come to us, not the other way around. Of course, I mean educated customers who really know about cars, not the ones who have more money than sense.”

Sherlock nearly did a facepalm. This was going from bad to worse.

Eugenia was livid. “Excuse me, I’ve an important call to make,” she said, “Hope you enjoyed the gourmet meal we served today John. We usually treat one-time guests with extra care when it comes to food and beverages. After all, as a family we have a reputation to maintain.”

“She…See him out,” Mycroft whispered to Sherlock, “I’ll take care of mummy.”

“Don’t worry, he was leaving anyways.” Sherlock retorted but in a whisper even softer than his elder sibling’s, “I am sure he isn’t too keen to stay back, considering the excellent welcome and outstanding behavior displayed by my family.”

“Sherlock I……all right, no problem, we will talk later.”

Suddenly nobody was there at the foyer except for Sherlock and John. It was the worst end to the evening by any imagination and Sherlock had no temerity to look into John’s eyes. In fact, he dreaded meeting him the next day and asking him about it.

“Goodnight Sherl,” John said in a somber tone, putting on his coat by himself, “I best get going now. Take care.”
Sherlock was so disappointed about the evening and so worried about his future with John that he chose to stay in his bedroom for the rest of the evening. He retired early that night but it took him a long time to sleep. Eventually around 2 am he managed to doze off, only to wake up an hour later after a nightmare. He kept waking up every hour thereafter and around eight-thirty in the morning he was so fed up he decided to get out of bed. Maybe he could head to Cambridge by ten. What was the point in staying here when he was so irritated by his family that he hardly wanted to talk to them.

The door opened and Sherlock groaned. His mummy was here. This couldn’t be good.

Eugenia clearly had an axe to grind about John and she looked rather eager to let Sherlock know just what she thought about his boyfriend. Without as much as a good-morning or any other word, she began to address Sherlock in a terse and purposeful voice. “Your father and I were not too happy about last evening Sherlock but we held off discussing it till we had slept over it. This morning we had another discussion and we felt the same as last evening, hence it’s important to let you know. I mean, we should tell you exactly what we think about Dr. Watson and his visit yesterday.”

Sherlock winced visibly. *Dr. Watson she said.* That didn’t bide too well for John, according to his deductions.

“Your verdict is?” He asked, bracing himself for a fight.

Right at that moment his father came in, dressed and ready for the day and looking dapper in his sharp suit and tie. Eugenia got encouraged and bolder by his arrival and began, “For starters, we already thought you had rushed into this. Two months is nothing when it comes to getting to know someone. You need at least a year to truly understand the other person and figure them out.”

“It’s very important to figure them out,” Reginald said sternly.
“After meeting him we realized it’s simply not a match made either in Heaven or Earth,” Eugenia continued, “It’s a match made by a child who has never had a boyfriend or a relationship before. One doesn’t need to marry or go steady with the first person one meets.”

“Daddy was your first and only love,” Sherlock shot back, “You married within six months of meeting each other. Yet you are saying this?”

“Look, you don’t need to take a hasty decision here. How about you concentrate on your studies for now? This is a shorter term and soon Christmas holidays shall start. We will take you skiing to Aspen and dad has decided to buy you a bigger accommodation near your Uni. It will have an entire room converted as a laboratory, with the latest instruments and an abundant supply of all materials necessary for your experiments.”

“Why don’t you buy me a teddy bear too?”

“That’s enough Lockie,” Reginald scolded and, recognizing the authority in his voice, Sherlock backed off. He watched as his father walked closer to the bed and joined his wife at the foot of it, both of them displaying a united front to him. Their usual way of cowering him down and having their way, outvote him two to one. Sherlock squirmed when his father spoke next. “You are only twenty. It’s time for you to grow up and prioritize things in life. Your dad won’t always be around to support so complete your education first, do justice to the intelligence and presence of mind you always had, and relegate affairs and men to the backburner for now.”

“Daaad,” Sherlock whined, begging him with his eyes to reconsider.

“This won’t work out Lockie. I observed him yesterday, he isn’t ready for this either.”

“I am not saying we will be married tomorrow.”

“You asked him to meet us, one doesn’t need to do that unless one is dead sure of the other person. Are you really sure he will fit it?”

“Look I am just….”

Eugenia interrupted him, “If this isn’t serious then keep it distant from family and don’t let it affect your studies or your regular life. Have fun, go out, but don’t put all your eggs in one basket. And
please, don’t compare him with your dad.”

“I compared situations mummy, not people,” Sherlock was slowly getting frustrated.

“If you keep calling him home or keep seeing him, it might set wrong expectations there. He might just….”

“…..Acquire habits above his station? Mummy, I can’t believe you consider money as the most important thing in life.”

Eugenia sighed, “You can’t deny its importance. You were born with a silver spoon in your mouth and you haven’t had to work a single day of your life. He has been through the grind. He works hard to simply stay comfortably solvent and pay his rent. His world is so different.”

With that she turned and left, as did Reginald, leaving a distressed Sherlock behind.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, not trying to make John the villain here. He is just being practical. For a self-made middle class man with student loans and no support, marrying a rich kid who's regularly mollycoddled by his parents isn't exactly a bright idea.
The moment Sherlock met John the next week, he knew things had gone downhill. He had tried to contact him the very next day, before he headed out to Cambridge, but John had clearly told him he was busy and would remain busy for the entire upcoming week and the next weekend. Still Sherlock made a point to arrive early at London the next Saturday and heading straight to Barts where John was to assist in a surgery mid-morning.

He waited until John was done, patiently sitting in the waiting room, until the doctor appeared.

The look on John’s face said enough. He was still in his scrubs and had a rather annoyed look on his face, the stern set of his mouth indicating he was less than thrilled to see Sherlock there. Determined not to be put off by that, Sherlock got up and gave John a clinging embrace which John returned somewhat customarily, like an obligation rather than happiness. It also reminded Sherlock that he missed the other part of their relationship, the sex they usually had every week but which had gone missing that week and the weekend before that.

“I told you this weekend isn’t a good idea,” John said plainly, coming straight to the point.

“I am not here to disrupt your schedule, I just need ten minutes, that’s all,” Sherlock answered.

“Okay,” John relented a little, “I will see you at the café in ten minutes.”

*Something is better than nothing.* Sherlock nodded, “Sounds good.”

Later, as they sat in the café, Sherlock decided to take the bull by its horns. “Last Saturday evening was a bit of a disaster. It didn’t go well at all, for either of us I suppose.”

John scoffed, “Your pretentious airhead cousins I could handle, after all they are not concerned about your wellbeing or associated with your future like your parents are. But your mum and dad, well, let’s say they didn’t exactly take a shine to me.”
Sherlock gripped the edge of the table. He had nothing to say. He just wanted to hear out John, gauge how he was feeling.

“I don’t blame them though,” John sighed, somewhat resigned to the situation, much to Sherlock’s distress. He had expected John to rant and curse at his parents, say he disagreed with them and didn’t mind defying them, but to hear the doctor actually accept Sherlock’s parents’ disapproval of him was something he had not quite been prepared for. “They are looking out for you and your happiness Lockie,” John added after a prolonged silence, “Anyone else in their place would have done exactly the same.”

“What? You actually believe that?”

“Yes, I do. Don’t you see the reason and rationale behind it?”

“No, I don’t understand this at all. What are you trying to say?”

“Sherlock, look at me, I am not a man who will be rich very soon or rich enough for someone like you. I am perhaps not even going to be half as wealthy as your parents are, even if I become one of those greedy doctors who work only to earn the next quid. I will earn enough someday to be able to lead a comfortable and affluent life, with my own house and a car and an odd vacation once in two years. But I won’t be able to afford St Tropez, Aspen and Sicily in the same year. Neither will I have friends who will allow me to stay on their private yacht when I am in Monaco. I can’t buy you a couple of horses so you can ride them once a month and I certainly cannot blow up a thousand quid on a charity dinner.”

Sherlock was astounded. John had tracked his lifestyle and habits. He had always shown little interest in those things but deep down he had made a note of them and retained them in his memory. Indeed Sherlock enjoyed all those perks the doctor had just spoken about. Not a man to give up, he argued, “What if these things are not what I need? What if I need only you and a roof over my head to be happy?”

“Easier said than done. This can be temporary, but after a year or so you will miss those luxuries. Think hard Sherl, for you a hundred dollars means an ice cream and a tip to a valet. For me it means the week’s groceries.”

“I will also earn someday.”
“Then we will regroup then. When you have earned your first pound and understand the value of money.”

“What do you mean regroup? Where are you going now?”

John gave him an arrow straight glance. “Nowhere. I will be right here and you will be where you belong. But we have to call time out on this relationship. Trust me, there were moments when I felt like shit when I knew I was avoiding you but it felt even worse when I couldn’t afford to do things I know you’d enjoy. That’s why I am choosing the lesser of two evils. It would kill me to stay away from you but it would absolutely gut me like a fish if you were with me, but unhappily so.”

“No,” Sherlock grabbed John’s wrist, “No Jawn, no please, no!”

“My mind is made up,” John stood up and gently, but firmly, extracted his hand from Sherlock’s grasp, “Be mature. I am trying to be so for the sake of both of us. You try a bit, at least. If we are meant to be together we will find each other again. If not, then this was not even right.”

Sherlock’s voice cracked with emotions, “So you are letting me go?”

“Yes,” John replied, his voice steady as his posture, “I am.”

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“Hi this is William from England, James’ old frenemy. Can you please tell him he needs to call me back urgently? This is like, really important?”

The decidedly unfriendly man on the other side probably relented a little because he didn’t immediately hang up. Sherlock, even in his broken state, was still sharp as ever and he instantly launched a tirade, a very well deduced one at that. “Listen, if you won’t help me then I have other ways to make your life miserable. From the way you speak, macho one moment and all cute and fawning the next, it’s fairly evident that you like to bone with rich guys and rich girls at the same time. Does James even know you’re bi? Or have you been telling him you do this only when there’s a foursome with a couple of bisexual women involved in bed?”
“What the fuck!”

“I saw your pic on his photobucket. You wear expensive clothes and cheap shoes, designer watches but fake undergarments, you have expensive tastes but not so much money, oh yeah you are the quintessential American whoreboy who likes to play the field but only with the ones that are literally loaded both ways. Huh? Want me to let James know all of this?”

“I…I will tell you to call…I mean I’ll tell him to call you back. Just one thing…you still love him?”

“I do. But not the way you think. By the way, why this question?”

“Because I am falling for him.”

“Take my advice. Don’t.”

Sherlock tossed the phone aside and lay down in his lonely bed at the cottage. Cambridge was so far from London, so far from his John, and yet he had no choice but to continue his academic session even though all the nerve ends of his body ached to go and seek out John Watson. He had even gone as far as sitting in his expensive convertible, an overnight bag packed along with toiletries and some cash, all set to barge into John’s workplace or school and demand that he take him back.

But something had held him back each time.

John had shown no inclinations to patch things up with him. He didn’t seem to even feel their breakup. Sherlock had tried to call him a few times but he had steadfastly refused to take the call. He had even waited outside Barts and outside the medical school where John studied. The older man seemed normal from a distance, talking to his colleagues and fellow students, walking around as if nothing happened. Sherlock was at his wits end trying to figure out how their breakup had not affected John at all while it seemed to be eating him up from inside. How was John able to stay so calm and keep his focus on his studies and work while Sherlock felt like a de-feathered chicken that had been running around blindly, scarcely able to think of anyone but John Hamish Watson.

There was only one person who could pull him out of this ditch. He never failed to do that, thanks to his crazy and completely unpredictable side. James Isaac Moriarty.

The sudden buzz on his phone caught his attention and he smiled for the first time in weeks when he
saw who it was. Jim was calling and on the screen flashed the selfie they had taken on Jim’s last vacation in England, a pic that Jim called ‘dualfie’ because there were two people in it and both taking selfies at the same time. Dark hairs, dark eyes that were a sexy mossy brown in the light, full kissable lips, compact but toned physique that many ballet dancers would feel jealous of, Jim Moriarty was the sort of man one could love and hate at the same time. He was a boy who did everything wrong but still managed to get everything right.

“Hellooooo Sherrrrly, you big bad boi.”

“What’s that terrible accent?”

“Aha, as they say, when in Rome do the Romans.”

“No Jimmy, it’s when in Rome do as the Romans do….oh God, why do I even…?”

“Yeah right, why do you?”

“I need to talk to you. Might take some time.”

“Oh is that why you scared poor Nick shitless. But what a spectacular look he had on his face man! Like he had been shit upon. I owe you one by the way, he agreed to bail out finally. FINALLY. He was sticking to me like a chewing gum under my shoe, even though I gave broad hints now and then to ship out. Anyways, what sort of shit with Mycroft this time? You got caught snorting coke?”

“No, I don’t do that anymore. In fact, since you left not even once.”

“Okay, then I’m waiting for the right reasons for you to call me.”

“Just promise not to laugh.”

“No promises but I’ll try not to laugh my arse off when you make one of your silly confessions like killing a squirrel or flattening someone’s tyre. They are not really sins, do you realize that by now or not?”
Taking a deep breath, Sherlock started to give Jim all the details about his ‘failed’ relationship with John Watson. From the time they met at Cologne to the disastrous dinner with the parents, he left out nothing for assumptions. Even little nitty gritties he included, like whatever his cousins said, how John’s colleagues at the showroom reacted to him, how Mycroft was watching Jim like a hawk watches a prey etc.

Jim listened calmly, not saying a word until Sherlock had finished his entire babble. “Is that it?” He asked when Sherlock had nothing further to say, “Now listen to me.”

After a brief pause the Stanford student replied, “It seems Dr. Watson loves you very much and doesn’t want to hurt you, or himself, by skipping the queue. By skipping the queue, I mean ‘doing things ahead of time’. He has had a tough childhood and he fears your sheltered upbringing makes you see unicorns where he only sees hardships and problems. To add to his fears, your mummy came across as a woman who respects people according to their net worth. The rest of your family was also either hostile or silent, making them look like allies to Mrs. Holmes. So the problem here is not love, it’s inhibitions and a class difference…..I mean change in societal status.”

“What do I do Jimmy? Walk out on him?”

“It seems he walked out on you.”

“I want him back.”

“You really do?”

“Yes. Oh God, yes, I do.”

“To what extent are you willing to go for that Will?”

“Any extent.”

“Why?”
“What do you mean why? I told you, I love him and I want him back. I know we are made for each other, even if he doesn’t see it just yet.”

He heard a sigh on the phone and Jim was uncannily quiet instead of being his talkative, teasing, cocky self. “William Sherlock Scott Holmes,” he began in a rather serious tone, “Since John does love you, the only way you can get him back is by hurting yourself. His current fears are big so he must get a bigger scare to make these fears seem insignificant, little, inconsequential. You need to give him an impression of overdosing or doing something that makes him feel he’s about to lose you.”

“You mean….”

“Yes, but ensure you don’t really overdose or bleed out. This is dangerous.”

Sherlock was quiet but not because this scared him. It was because he was already planning the whole drama in his head. Should he do this at Cambridge and have someone call John and inform him? Or should he do it in his house….no-no, that would mean his parents would get to know and he didn’t want to involve them, or his brother, in any matter related to John. Then he had a lightbulb moment! He would do this at John’s workplace or school, somewhere John least expected him to create such a scene. Nope, not the showroom but the medical school would be a better idea, or maybe Barts. That would also ensure John could get him the help he needed. He didn’t really want to die. He wanted to live, but with John by his side.

“William Sherlock, I am talking to you,” Jim sounded irritated by Sherlock’s silence.

“Oh…sorry Jimmy, I had zoned out.”

“You’re not wasting your brilliant mind on this stupid doctor, are you?”

“No, I am not compromising my academics…..”

“Don’t lie.”

“I am not lying. Why should I? Why would you even think that way?”
“Because, love makes people do weird, silly things and you my friend have started to sound silly. I doubt you’re thinking about anything but John right now. To tell you the truth, I do agree with that scaredy-cat doctor and his vision of the relationship. He and you are poles apart. He is trying to be mature, for your sake and his own, even if that seems cruel at this point.”

Sherlock was annoyed, “I am sorry but I don’t recognize you. I called a friend, not a critic.”

“Oh-kay go ahead, play with your life, get him to bend the knee out of shock and regret. I hope you’re aware of what you’re doing and what’s waiting around the corner. Remember, what goes around comes around. Chances are someday he might do the same. Deliver a shocker.”

“I have made up my mind Jim.”

“Good luck then.”

“How are you doing?”

“As usual. I’ll be over for Christmas. So see you in three months or so.”
Incorrigible Stubborn Sherlock

Chapter Summary

John eventually gives in, setting his common sense aside

John was working on a car that was to be delivered soon, giving instructions to the designers and decorators on how to get the Beetle done up exactly like the way a multi-millionaire’s 18-year-old daughter had described, pink seats, pink dashboards, pink anything and everything. Suddenly the lady from the front office, a new employee named Caroline, came running to his section and nearly collapsed on her knees. “John please come immediately,” she said, “You need to take this phone call urgently.”

“Look, I told you I don’t want to answer any phone calls……”

“Yes, it’s about your boyfriend,” she said, her face white as a sheet and her hands trembling, “He hasn’t called you this time though, it’s a call from your school, one of the guys from administration. He was sitting there all morning and waiting for you but when he heard you had left without meeting him, for the third day in a row, he sort of did something to himself……they had to admit him in one of the rooms…..he’s refusing to give details of his family so you’re the only one they could call…..just go already before you end up regretting the whole thing.”

John felt his heart stop and a sharp pain run up his chest.

“No. No this is not true.”

“Don’t be in denial man. Go.”

“It was not him? Did you speak to him?”

“No. It was someone called Brandon. I know your boyfriend’s voice. It wasn’t him. It doesn’t seem like a trick John. Trust me, you may end up regretting this hugely if you don’t go and see him right away. At least go and see what the truth is.”

John was out of there before she could say another word.
“Where?” John shouted, panting from the mad dash he had made for the mile that separated his work and school.

Brandon scowled, “You are impossible John. How can you treat anyone like that? Poor kid, we have taken him to room number four. Go fast.”

The medical school had an out-patient department and a few rooms in one of their wings where they did medical counselling, diagnosis, tests, treatment and some minor surgeries. Usually they didn’t charge the full amount any other private hospital would have charged because this was a way for their senior students to practice their newly learned skills and for the junior students to test their knowledge. Mostly insolvent people or victims of accidents and overdose were brought in there, where healthcare benefits and medical insurance were not immediately available.

In one of the five private rooms Sherlock lay, barely conscious, with one of the professors attending to him and three students watching and taking notes.

The moment John entered, tripping against a table and knocking against one of the students, the professor turned and gave him a scowl identical to the one Brandon had given. John had officially become public enemy number one and everyone was a Sherlock sympathizer. “He has snorted an insane amount of coke and smoked some pot on top of that,” the professor spoke to the students and ignored John for the most part, “Plus he’s taken some sleeping pills, and these combined abuses have taken their toll. In short, his heartbeat is alarmingly slow and his temperature is sub-normal, we have pumped out his stomach but whatever is in his blood stream will need to be expelled naturally, through sweat and waste.”

“Professor Hendrix,” John said in a shaken voice, “I would like t…..to take over from here.”

“You do?”

“Yes sir.”

“Why?”
“He….he is my boyfriend.”

“Really? Brandon told me you had dumped him and abetted his suicide. It was a half-hearted attempt this time but these tendencies can be chronic and repetitive. The next time we might not be so lucky, correction, he might not be so lucky. You get that, don’t you Dr. Watson?”

John steadied his voice as much as he could and nodded, “I do sir. This won’t happen again. I will ensure he doesn’t make any such attempts again….that he doesn’t have to make such attempts again.”

“Good. Do you need help?”

“Just the notes.”

“Here they are.”

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Sherlock woke up after a slumber that must have lasted many hours because it was pitch dark and quiet outside. When he had collapsed in the waiting area, it was around noon time and the sounds of the traffic outside had been quite loud. Now he could barely hear one or two vehicles whooshing past.

“What-time-izzit?” He asked, immediately regretting it because his mouth felt like saw dust his throat felt like nails and pins.

“Shhh don’t try to get up and try not to talk until you have sipped some water,” a soothing, affectionate voice floated into his ears as two strong arms gently held him while the recliner bed was adjusted to a semi-sitting position. Sherlock blinked hard and tried to move but the same hands kept him pinned to the bed while a straw poked at his lips. He sucked on the end, immediately a cool stream of delicious water flowed into his mouth. Sherlock was about to push aside the straw and sip directly from the glass when the same voice, which he now recognized as John’s, whispered again. “No gulps, just keep sipping. If you take in too much at one go it might just come back up.”

“J-Jawn….”
“Sherlock, why?”

“I….I missed you and….”

“God, I am so sorry. I know it’s all my fault.”

Sherlock smiled slightly at the guilty tone but reined in that grin before it got too wide. He did feel a little woozy and weak but it wasn’t really so bad. Already the room was coming into focus and his mouth and throat felt so much better after drinking that water. He knew he could talk and sit up. He was also a bit hungry and he longed for a biscuit or a sandwich. “You-you were really….worried for me?” He asked innocently, feeling thrilled inside.

“Worried?” John’s voice was incredulous, “I was fucking dead.”

“I am sorry. I shouldn’t have put you through all this.”

“No Lockie. It's me who shouldn’t have put you through this. If I had been a bit more reasonable with you, this wouldn’t have ever happened. I blame myself. You are just a baby but I should have been wiser.”

“I love you Jawn.”

John looked haggard, tired and badly in need of some sleep. His hairs were unwashed, all askew and he needed a haircut and a bath. There were dark circles under his eyes and he had clearly lost weight in the past six weeks. Now that he was fully awake and feeling slightly more clued in, Sherlock noticed that John had been just as impacted by their separation as he was. He had just been less expressive about it.

“If you don’t love me or never want to see me again, I promise not to disturb you in the future. I should have never come here, sorry. Just do me a favor, don’t try to save me if I do whatever I wish to do with my own life.”

A hand grabbed his hand and squeezed, somewhat with assurance and somewhat with an underlying possessiveness.
“Don’t say that ever again Sherlock,” John’s voice was loaded with emotion and tears appeared in his eyes, rattling Sherlock’s heart and even the ribcage it was enclosed in, “You haven’t disturbed me, not even once. I was acting like a jerk all through, thinking that maybe at some point you will get upset with me, curse me, threaten me and tell me you never wanna see me again. But I was doing this for you, for us. I am a poor man Sherl, I don’t possess the capacity to give you the lifestyle or even half the comforts you’re used to, nor am I the sort of man who’d accept charity from his wealthy in-laws. I thought it wouldn’t work so…….”

Sherlock whimpered. He didn’t wish to break down but he was very close to that stage.

“I understand now that I might have gone overboard. I compromised your present by thinking about your future. My bad. But this will change now.”

Sherlock’s eyes glittered with hope. “You mean?”

John leaned forward and kissed Sherlock’s forehead. “I love you too Sherlock. I always did. Right from the moment I saw you I have been madly in love with you.”

He wiped off the stray tears before they could fall and took Sherlock’s hands in his own. “I will be your boyfriend, your fiancé, your husband, whatever you wish me to be. It’s all in your hands now. I won’t be my usual asshole self again. If I had lost you today I don’t know what I would have done. I might have probably overdosed myself too.”

“NO,” Sherlock was laughing and crying at the same time, “Don’t be stupid like me.”

“So you admit this was stupid?”

“Yeah, a bit.”

“I was stupid too,” John looked bogged down by guilt, “I should have taken your feelings seriously. I was always half-sure that one fine day you’d lose interest in me and walk off with someone who’s more commensurate of your status and society.”

“If that was the case,” Sherlock murmured, letting John hug him, “I would have never approached you after Cologne, or after we first had sex. You had never concealed your social status, your income or your family details from me.”
“True, I haven’t,” John admitted, caressing Sherlock’s cheeks and hairs, “But there is a lot more that you need to know. For example, you need to know where I live, you need to understand how our lives would be once we move in together.”

“Sure,” Sherlock said eagerly, “I would most definitely like to know. As soon as I am out of this place of course.” He closed his eyes and sent up a prayer, then made a mental note to send a special thanks to James Moriarty. The mad little Irishman had once again proved to be the devil in the flesh, giving him just the sort of capricious idea he needed to salvage his relationship with John Watson.

***

The neighborhood where John lived was the first shocker Sherlock got. It was congested, crowded and the streets were neither clean nor orderly. Old, used vehicles and numerous two-wheelers and bicycles were parked here and there, adding to the already overpopulated area’s inconvenience and confusion. Beer bottles lay here and there, as did scraps of paper and chewing gum and spit. Thug like men and quarrelsome women thronged the place, which was noisy as hell and where nobody even bothered to say a ‘sorry’ if they elbowed you out of their way on the sidewalk.

“Careful now, out of our way,” John spoke roughly, a clear difference from his usually polite and polished speech, “Let us through, move man move!”

He somehow guided Sherlock into the building where he lived. It was old and dilapidated and its foyer was dark with peeling plasters on the walls and the corridors and staircase stinking of overcooked cabbage and cheap alcohol. There was only one elevator, the old fashioned one, and a big ‘Out of Order’ sign was hanging on its collapsible door. John sighed and groaned, “This fucking thing is always out of order. No matter how often we complain, it’s the same story always. We will need to climb the five floors, ten flights in all. I live on the top floor of the building unfortunately.”

“It’s ok. I can climb.”

“This way.”

They went up the stairwells and Sherlock drew more than a few stares and curious glances from the other residents. He stuck out like a sore thumb and John hovered around him like an overprotective mother hen.

Finally they reached John’s bedsit.
The moment they walked in, Sherlock felt partially relieved. Though it was a very modest flat and the décor was cheap and unimpressive, it was neat and clean and the place smelled fresh.

There was a bed on one side with a single rickety nightstand, right next to which was a big window with an extended outer ledge. There was a clothes horse kept there but even without it there was not enough space for even a single person to stand out. So no balcony.

The bed was covered by a green duvet, well-worn but clean and smoothed down to the last wrinkle. Even the pillow covers were clean and ironed. The lampshade on the nightstand was old and faded but there was not a speck of dust on it. Sherlock breathed easy.

The rest of the bedsit comprised of a slice of a sitting area with a wall-mounted television, a couch and a bean bag, a tiny kitchenette where a two-burner stove top was flanked by a toaster, a blender and a mixer-grinder. No oven anywhere or a dishwasher. There was no washing machine to be seen anywhere either. “There is a launderette down the street,” John said in a slightly hesitant voice, “I have no help around, I live a bachelor life you see, but there is a very nice lady who lives across the hallway. She and her husband are the only people I speak to in this building. Mr. and Mrs. Fleming. She can, upon payment and advance notice, provide us with a simple hot meal for dinner or breakfast.”

Sherlock was slowly beginning to feel nervous. He had seen such living conditions, but only in movies. Even then he had never bothered to notice details.

“Where is the bathroom?” He asked.

“I just have a toilet and a sink attached to this flat,” John opened a narrow plastic door Sherlock had not even noticed and showed him a shoebox space at the corner of the bedsit, “The shower and proper wash areas are common for all tenants. On every floor there are two such sets, one for this wing and the other for the opposite wing. I share that with six other tenants who live on this floor, on this wing.”

Luckily for Sherlock he was looking the other way because no way could he have hidden the horror that came over his face. Shared bathroom! But…..no way was he going to back out now. His mind was made up. Anything for John, anything to keep their relationship intact.

“Sherl,” John said solemnly, “This is where you’ll spend weekends. I can’t afford a better place nor am I okay to live in one of the mansions or penthouses your parents own. During holidays all I
would be able to afford are movies, theater and an odd meal out. No Maui, Swiss Alps, Monaco.
You can continue driving your car but if you park it on this street it’s most likely going to get stolen.”

Sherlock shrugged, “I shall park it in the next street, which is slightly better.”

“You sure you want to do this?”

“Yes. I am surer than I have ever been before.”
A Marriage made in Belgium

Chapter Summary

Sherlock and John tie the knot. Mycroft is none too happy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Mr. Holmes?”

“Yes Anthea, what’s it? I have a conference call coming up.”

“I know, didn’t really want to disturb you but the news is such,” Anthea, Mycroft Holmes’ assistant, sounded sufficiently serious for the MI5 chief to take her tone seriously, “You had asked us to keep an eye on your younger brother lest he lapses into his coke habit or gets into any trouble whatsoever. We have been doing just that and, three weeks ago, he evaded our surveillance and disappeared for forty-eight hours. When we investigated further we found out that he had been admitted for two days due to the after-effects of an overdose. He is absolutely okay now but…..”

“Hold on. My brother has relapsed?”

“No, that is the funny thing. He took just enough to test positive and supplemented it with over the counter drugs to induce the dozy, woozy effect of a substance user. But he wasn’t really into resuming his earlier habits.”

“What in the name of God are you trying to imply?”

“It looks like a staged suicide attempt with no real repercussions or relapse.”

“Oh….where did this happen? Who admitted him?”

“The London Medical School sir. He was there when he collapsed. We checked their records and camera footage. It was very much him, your brother.”
“Jesus! Anthea we are looking at the wrong problem here. I know my brother very well and I know why he staged that drama. It is about the doctor buddy of his, John Hamish Watson. Dig a bit deeper and you might just find out they have started living together. Have you checked with his college? Has he been attending classes? How often does he and Dr. Watson see each other? I need all those details.”

“Um…err…I…..Mr. Holmes, we did that. By chance rather than design and the real news is this. Your brother is marrying Mr. Watson today.”

“How can he do that?”

“He can. In Belgium. They allow same sex unions for foreign couples now. It’s no longer a requirement that they can marry only as long as it’s allowed in their country of origin. Belgium allows homosexual couples to exchange vows irrespective of their nationality. So that’s where he’s headed, with his doctor and friends who will serve as witnesses, best men and guests.”

Mycroft wanted to yell out an expletive but his work and his innately cold, emotionless personality had taught him to handle even big setbacks with minimum expressions. He just remained silent for a minute, taking deep breaths and debating the pros and cons of the situation, before he finally issued a diktat to his Anthea. “I am not happy we missed this but let’s focus on what we can do immediately. Dispatch a team, which I shall lead, and make arrangements for our travel.”

“Sure, in one hour you can depart for Brussels.”

***

Sherlock felt thrill, happiness, amazement, anxiety and some amount of nerves as he drove to the venue of their marriage with Victor by his side. This was by far the biggest risk he had taken in his young life but to his utmost surprise he didn’t feel any inhibitions or regrets about it. He was sure of what he was about to do and he knew he could back up his decision to anyone and everyone who asked him about it. A strange kind of confidence bubbled inside him as he sat in his immaculate charcoal grey suit, a white rose sticking out of the pocket of his coat. The start of a new journey, a new adventure.

When they reached the registrar’s office, where they had called a priest to ‘bless’ the union, they found John waiting there with James Moriarty, who had especially flown down from the Big Apple to support Sherlock with his clandestine wedding plans.
“Why, don’t you both look handsome?” Jim beamed, looking at John with the same curiosity with which one observes a lab rat who had just taken a shot of the latest drug invented, “My most insular friend, someone who makes despicable me look like a social butterfly, finally hitched. It wasn’t so long ago that you were just an innocent virgin and suddenly boom, you are about to become someone’s husband. So, how did you really perform this miracle Doctor Watson? Is there a magic pill or something?”

“JIM,” Sherlock blushed.

John grinned, “No, it’s ok. I quite like him.”

“One hour with him and you like him?”

“Oh yes, he is a very interesting boy.”

Jim elbowed Sherlock, “C’mon, you jealous little mite. I am not stealing your husband.”

“If we keep standing here they might never become each other’s husbands,” Victor warned, “Let’s hurry up.”

“Why not?” John asked, surprised, “This office doesn’t close for several hours and the priest has just arrived. Not that I want to keep him waiting but he won’t really run off in five minutes, would he?”

Sherlock paled, “Oh no! Mycroft?”

When John looked puzzled, Jim explained all about the elder Holmes sibling to him and in the most hilarious manner. “You see doc, Mycroft is the sort of elder brother who thinks he’s top dog, James Bond, Cunt Dracula and super-alpha all combined into one. As the head of internal security in Britain he unethically leverages resources at his disposal to spy on his fiancé and also on Sherlock. From what my sources confirmed earlier this morning, he’s found out about this wedding and is on his way here to stop it. Of course, he will be with an entourage and not alone, because pretend alphas don’t hunt on their own. They need a pack to support them, a pack of wolves and a pack of cigarettes.”

Sherlock chuckled, “All right, enough about him. Why didn’t you tell me?”
“I am telling you now.”

“You told Victor?”

“Go inside and get married already man. We can discuss these trivialities later.”

The group went inside and, even as rings were exchanged, papers were signed and the priest made them exchange vows, Jim kept staring at John from the corner of his eyes. Sherlock noticed it but his head was too deep into the clouds to give it much of a thought. When the whole proceedings concluded the priest benevolently declared. “I now pronounce you husband and husband. You may now kiss your….I mean kiss each other.”

“I love you,” Sherlock whispered as he dipped his head slightly for the kiss.

“I love you too,” John replied with genuine warmth and honesty.

They had just stepped outside when three cars drew up and Sherlock groaned, “He is here.”

Mycroft Holmes came running up the steps of the building, saw Sherlock and John and froze in his tracks. Then he turned his accusing eyes towards Jim Moriarty and Victor. While Victor lowered his eyes and cowered behind Sherlock, Jim was his usual wicked and naughty self.

“Always a day late and a quid short, eh Mycroft?”

Mycroft scowled for the briefest of moments before he turned his attention towards Sherlock. “How could you?” He asked, “Mummy and daddy deserve better.”

“As do I,” Sherlock said.

To his surprise John stepped closer, took Sherlock’s hand and looked right into Mycroft’s eyes. “He is an adult, as am I, so as two consenting adults we have the right to get married in a land where this is legal. As for you Mr. Holmes, I don’t suppose it’s a very respectful thing to do when you decide to
cuff your brother behind the ears in public. There are a dozen of your colleagues standing close by so
this isn’t respectful at all.”

Sherlock couldn’t believe his ears. This was the first time he had been supported. So far it was
always about mummy, daddy and Mycroft ganging up against him and force-feeding him his
decision. But now he had John, his John. And….Did John really just say all of that? His respect and
admiration for the man shot up several notches. Not many people dared to reply to Mycroft like this
and it somehow felt like poetic justice that his newlywed husband should give it right back to his
bully of a brother. Victor looked alarmed at the situation and backed off slightly while Jim chuckled
audibly, evidently enjoying the scene.

Mycroft cleared his throat, “I would like to speak to my brother, alone.”

“No,” John insisted, “Whatever you have to say, say it in front of me. We are one unit now.”

Sherlock stepped forward, “What is it Myc? Did mummy and daddy ask you to stop this or have you
come here of your own accord? Trying to be a hero all over again? The proverbial ‘better son’ who
stopped his stupid little brother from committing the biggest mistake of his life?”

“You are stupider than I thought,” Mycroft said, “I had only come to warn you that you were rushing
into things. No fool gets married at twenty and that too to a man he’s scarcely known for two and
half months. All I would have asked was for you to give this more time.”

Sherlock snorted and stayed silent.

“I guess I shall leave then,” Mycroft said in a tight voice.

“At least congratulate them,” Jim said in a wicked voice, eyes twinkling.

Mycroft gave him a dour look and then extended his hand towards John, putting on a sugary smile
that was obviously fake. “Good luck joining the Holmes family Dr. Watson,” he said, “If mummy
and daddy are lucky, you’d put some effort into becoming a Holmes too someday.”

With that he turned his back on them and walked away, his minions faithfully following him.
Suddenly one of them came running back, handed Jim a piece of paper, and went scuttling back to
join his boss and the rest of the team.
“What an unpleasant man he is,” Victor made a face.

“What did he even mean by that last statement?” John looked at Sherlock, bewildered.

“Never mind,” Sherlock was clearly shaken and hurt by his brother’s behavior, “Let’s go.”

***

As the two of them rolled on the bed, kissing madly and trying to touch as much of each other as possible, Sherlock wondered somewhere in his head space if the concept of a perfect wedding night could be exactly what he was living. After a nice laugh packed meal with their best men Victor and Jim, their time alone as newlyweds had begun. John had put in a serious effort to be romantic and hired a suite at a medium expensive Brussels hotel, along with strawberries and champagne. He had even bought a toy for Sherlock, a pair of leather and feather handcuffs and stocked up on lube.

Then he had spent an insane amount of time giving Sherlock a foot massage.

And now, as he was pinned to the bed and kissed all over by his husband, he was so happy he could cry with joy. Indeed, the whole concept of ‘I am so happy I could cry’ was slowly coming across as believable to him. Never before had he felt so complete, so happy, so content. He lustfully parted his legs as John nudged him with the toy and moaned with pleasure when it was slid into his well-prepared hole. The vibrations against his prostate were already maddening and when John unexpectedly slid inside next to the toy, Sherlock screamed out and came immediately.

“One done, more to go,” John said in a possessive tone as he started to thrust, causing Sherlock to start moaning again, “God Lockie, you are so beautiful. I love you so much, you’re perfect, just perfect, my little Lockie.” “N…Not little….”

“Oh not down there. But you’ll always be my little darling.”

A kiss to his forehead sealed the tender words and Sherlock fell into the warmth and pleasure of the huge hard muscle working inside him and the hard, work roughened hand stroking him in the same rhythm.
“J-Jawn….” He arched off the bed, disbelief written all over his face as he realized he was ready for a second orgasm.

“Let go,” John whispered, “Don’t worry about me. Just let go and take your pleasure.”

Sherlock hissed as a stream of milky white cum spilled out of his cock, leaving him exhausted and drained in its wake. He was sure there was nothing more left in him, his head was spinning and his limbs felt like jelly.

He was so wrong.

John made him cum at least two more times before he passed out from sheer exhaustion.

***

When Sherlock woke up the next morning he was a little sore, a bit cramped up in the legs but otherwise so incredibly relaxed and refreshed that he didn’t want to move for the longest possible time. He had slept so well that he was totally rejuvenated, he was held in the strong and protective arms of his beloved John and his sense of wellbeing was so high he felt almost reborn. With a soft sound of bliss, he turned in those arms and burrowed deeper into John’s embrace, breathing in their combined scents on the sheets and pillows.

John slept on and Sherlock didn’t wake him. He enjoyed these peaceful moments when he was awake and John was not, so he could gather his thoughts together, reflect on the past day and night and just smile away goofily.

For half an hour or so he just lay there, clinging to his John. Then his bladder complained after a while and his stomach rumbled at the same time. Sherlock made a frustrated sound. No, not now, I don’t wanna leave this bed and this man. He didn’t really want to head to the loo for the big job, but his body was relentless in pushing him out of bed and making him sprint to the bathroom because of the uncomfortable feeling. He hurried through the morning routine as much as he could and, in fifteen minutes, strode out of the bathroom in a fluffy bathrobe. He had showered and brushed and felt fresh as a daisy.

The phone began to beep. It was the hotel intercom. “Shit,” he leapt forward to answer it before it woke John, “Hello.”
“Lockie.”

“Mycroft? I suppose there is no point in asking how you know this room number.”

“Listen, I won’t tell them you got married. You will. For that I am giving you a week. That’s all.”

“Of course I will tell them but don’t put me on a timeline. You can’t control my life Myc, no.”

“I am only trying to protect everybody’s interests and ensuring no one gets hurt in the Holmes family. Does this seem ‘controlling’ to you?”

“It sure does. I will tell mummy and daddy but only when I am ready for it. They are out of country in any case so there’s no hurry really. Since you so charmingly put forth an ultimatum let me give you one too. If you talk to our parents about this I will be forced to tell them you have been fucking my BFF Jim Moriarty for the past year and half.”

Chapter End Notes

There is no JimCroft here. Jim is, at this stage, a playboy bachelor who screws anything that moves. Mycroft also moves, so..... :-D
As luck would have it, Mr. and Mrs. Holmes returned home a little later than they had originally planned. It gave Sherlock enough and more time to make up his mind and think through various scenarios of breaking this news to his parents. It was also a happy coincidence that the day Eugenia and Reginald were back was the very last day of Sherlock’s summer term at Cambridge and the start of a two and half week autumn break.

“I hate to let you face the music alone,” John said as he drove Sherlock back to London in the latter’s car, “I could go with you.”

No, that isn’t going to work, they will freak out and then flip the lid right in front of you. Sherlock was so tense that he didn’t even realize he had spoken the next words that had come to his head. “Seeing you with me while I break this news to them will act like the red rag to the bull,” he heard himself say, “I’d rather not let things worsen to a point where my husband and my parents stop taking to each other. Let me talk to them first and you can meet them the next time we visit them.” He winced and apologized, “Sorry, that came out completely wrong.”

John looked a bit baffled, “Did they think their son should take all his decisions in conjunction with them? It is twenty-first century Sherl, not the eighteenth.”

Sherlock was about to respond to that saying ‘parents sometimes do expect their children to involve them in big decisions’ when he realized John was not in a position to understand. Having been on his own for quite a while, the whole concept of a family was alien to him.

Would John be okay if I had a close connect with my parents or would he consider it as an intrusion or obnoxity? “They will come around,” he murmured, hoping he was correct.

“Will they?”

“Yes, I am sure. Eventually they will.”
“Just don’t grovel and don’t expect me to do that either.”

Sherlock swallowed. He was not prepared to cut off contacts with his mum and dad. He knew they loved him and he was also attached to them. If there were differences they would sort it out and clear the air and not just give up on each other. So if he had to grovel at some point, he actually would do that without hesitation.

As the stone colored mansion loomed in the distance, Sherlock rubbed his hands together to keep them warm. John brought his car to a halt on the street and waited while the security at the gate eyed them curiously, wondering if they would drive in or stay put there. “I’ll go to our flat and wait,” John said categorically, indicating where Sherlock belonged now, “Finish this quickly and come home.”

***

Sherlock felt as if he was entering a stranger’s house. How different things had become suddenly! The same place he had grown up in, felt alien to him and was filled with an unseen aura of rigidity and unease.

“Master Sherlock,” the butler said with a big, welcoming smile, “Just the person Mrs. Holmes wanted to see. Your parents are in the conservatory, having some tea.”

“Thanks Albert,” Sherlock said and kept walking, not wanting to look into the man’s eyes and exposing the stormy soul he held within. With every step he took, the tension cut right through his veins and made his temples throb. By the time he reached the conservatory, he must have looked pretty washed out because his doting mother got up and came rushing over to him to give him a big hug, murmuring ‘oh you look tired Lockie, not sleeping well?’ His father, true to his more restrained nature, simply smiled and nodded at him in greeting. Sherlock smiled back blandly at them, thinking through all the points he had noted in his head and hoping he got the flow correct.

“I am fine mum,” he said stiffly, pulling back a little.

“You seem thinner,” she insisted.

“No, I am just fine.”
“No, it’s….”

“For Heaven’s sake Eug, he is a man now and not a boy. He knows when he’s under the weather and when not. Besides, he has always had a slimmer build than most of the overweight boys of our friends.”

His father’s tone made Sherlock smile, albeit for a brief moment. “How are you both?”

“We are fine, it was a productive trip,” his father replied.

“I have something to say to both of you,” Sherlock decided to cut to the chase and get straight to the point, “Only one request, please hear me out till the end.”

Eugenia was about to say something when her husband stopped her by pressing down gently on her hand with his own. Sherlock took that as a cue and started his story, right from the beginning where he had fallen for John and then right up to the point where he and John had married and started a new life together, with their own terms and conditions. He saw the color drain from his father’s face and his mother almost break down into tears but managed to push the guilt aside and complete whatever he had to say.

Finally, he took a pause and looked down at his hands resignedly.

His mother began to cry. His father, always the more mature and restrained of the two, put his arm around his wife and stared at his phone for a few moments, trying to digest the whole information. Then he abruptly got up and said, “Stay here. Your mother and I have some things to discuss before we give you an answer.”

Sherlock had no choice but to agree and he stayed put, filling and refilling his cup of tea and drinking it all without tasting it. After having told his parents, he didn’t feel as burdened or nervous anymore. Now it was all about waiting to hear what they had to say and though his nerves had stabilized they were nowhere near to their normal stage yet. Minutes passed and he stretched his legs, then thought about calling John to check what he was up to, but then realization dawned on him that John didn’t have a mobile phone yet. He made up his mind to buy him one soon.

Surprisingly, his mum and dad reappeared much sooner than he had thought, in less than ten minutes. Eugenia looked more composed than before but still somewhat distressed while Reginald was stern faced and tight lipped. They took their seats while Sherlock squirmed in his chair, feeling torn apart by their gaze. He wished he wasn’t there, that he had John next to him, or maybe a supportive sibling who would take up for him. But alas, he was on his own!
“Sherlock we are highly disappointed with what you have done,” Eugenia started, “We had expected better from you.”

“I have the right to marry whoever I want,” Sherlock’s stubborn side came back as quickly as those words were said.

“We are not your enemies Lockie,” Reginald said in his deep voice, shutting Sherlock up instantly, “Now listen, whatever has been done is done. It cannot be changed, though I have to admit that if it was within my power I would have requested those changes from you. But you are someone’s husband now, so I won’t tread there. However, your mother and I are of the opinion that we can’t just let you live the life of some working class hero.”

Sherlock winced. Working class hero? John would blow a fuse if he heard that. He personally didn’t agree with that either.

“So here is what we would like you to do,” his mother took over the conversation, “Tomorrow evening bring him over for dinner and your dad would have a chat with him. Don’t worry, the conversation would be around the best way forward.”

“You won’t be around for that though,” Reginald warned, “This will be a one-on-one chat.”

“But dad I…..”

“Sherlock, you have taken a decision that impacts your whole life and all of us in general. We are powerless to correct something in retrospect. But the future is in our hands and there we will have to intervene. Otherwise in six months you will be at our doorstep, begging to be taken back in.”

“I will never do that,” Sherlock snapped, feeling insulted.

“Really?” Eugenia intervened, “First of all, don’t talk to your father like that. Furthermore, tell me what do you know about living in a dump like that? You wake up and go out, head to college, or just laze around and everything else gets taken care of for you. There is food on the table, laundered clothes in the closest, money and cards in your wallet, even your mobile phone is charged and kept ready for you to use. The car is driven from the garage to the portico, so you can simply sit in and drive off. You have no idea what it takes to prepare breakfast and iron your clothes, take a public transport to work or school and come home hungry but with nothing on the stove top. Do you really
have any idea what you’re getting into?”

Sherlock sighed, “I will get used to it.”

“No, you will break down from it.”

“Mummy, why don’t you understand…..”

“I do. I really do. I had a love marriage as well. But over a period of time it’s not just about the person you marry but your living conditions as well. Then there is your bank balance, your comforts, your dreams and aspirations, lots of things which you haven’t even given a thought to. But that doesn’t mean those things don’t exist. Now don’t be stubborn. Do as your father tells you to do.”

“What will you tell him daddy?” Sherlock asked, almost fearful.

“We will parlay.” Reginald Holmes said, “My suggestions will of course be made keeping you as the central point of the discussion. That is all I can reveal at this point. If I say any more, you will tell him everything and he will come prepared. Instead, I want him to give me a natural, spontaneous response and a decision that’s not contrived or manipulated in any way. That is about it.”

“He isn’t manipulative,” Sherlock murmured, feeling nervous again.

“Well, he got hold of a handsome young man who is worth many millions,” Eugenia said bitterly, the expression on her face a clear indicator that she intensely disliked John, “I am sure he knows a trick or two.”

You are so wrong, he wanted to stay away, he pushed me away, it was me who trapped him with that faked suicide attempt which I didn’t really elaborate much about. Sherlock wanted to argue and convince her but his inner voice told him not to sweat the small stuff. Finally he nodded in agreement and said, “Fair enough, we will be here for dinner tomorrow. And John and you can have the discussion in private, I will make myself scarce at that point.”

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As John’s thick cock entered Sherlock, the youngster forgot all his worries and fears and melted into a sweaty bundle on the sheets below.

“Fuck, you’re huge,” he cried out as he felt nearly ripped into two. Still he didn’t regret telling John to not prepare him and ‘let him feel John’. An apprehensive John had lubed himself liberally but with his girth, it was still a big intrusion for Sherlock who felt pain and pleasure mingle to the point where the lines blurred between them. He bowed his back and turned his head and immediately John captured his mouth in a scorching kiss. Those strong, work-roughened hands reached for his cock and gave it a few tugs, causing him to moan out loudly into the kiss.

“That’s because you’re so tight baby,” John whispered hotly into Sherlock’s ears as he peppered the side of his face and neck and shoulder with kisses. In this position, with both men on their knees, he could only make short and quick thrusts into Sherlock who got his prostate hit every two times out of four. Slowly he adjusted to the intrusion and his faltering erection became rock hard once more. Floating in bliss and excruciating pleasure, Sherlock allowed John to take him flying at first and then setting him right up on cloud nine, where everything seemed cotton candy fluff and rainbow colors to him. This, here in John’s arm, was true happiness! What was a big luxurious house and a sports car in comparison with that. Nothing, absolutely nothing!

A sudden hit to his prostate and everything started throbbing in his body. His spine tingled, his ears buzzed, his loins felt overheated and his heart thumped loudly in his chest.

A few more thrusts and Sherlock came with a roar, shooting all over the towels his husband had placed strategically on the bed. John stroked him through his orgasm and then groaned loudly as he let go, filling Sherlock up with his seed.

It took them a long time to settle down and breathe easy. John kept stroking Sherlock’s hair and face as they lay face to face, most of their bodies and even their noses touching.

“Sherl?”

“Hmmm?”

“You really want me to accompany you for dinner tomorrow?”

“They’re my parents Jawn. Sooner or later you will have to meet them. Why not now, when we have only just begun our married life together?”
“I guess you have a point. Yes, I will. And don’t worry, even if your mum and dad say something I don’t like I will try and let that slide.”

***

The evening went off much better than Sherlock had expected and with every passing hour the young man relaxed and felt more confident of the outcome. His parents were determinedly friendly and his mother actually took time and effort to understand John’s work and academics and appreciated him for his degree and the current effort he was investing in becoming a surgeon. If John was taken aback by the kindness then he didn’t show it on his face or words and replied to all queries politely and thoroughly, showing his in-laws the respect one reserved for their spouse’s family.

As they had decided earlier, Reginald Holmes took John to his study post their dinner while Sherlock remained back with his mother in the parlor.

“I must say I am worried about you son,” Eugenia said tenderly, stroking Sherlock’s arm like she usually did when he was a child and unwell for some reason, “You haven’t seen how cruel life can be and how relentless time can be. When times change and situations change, we suddenly find ourselves in a conundrum from which we just can’t dig our way out. The only way to handle things is to remain there, bide your time, do your duty and survive. Sooner or later you will emerge from it, perhaps even victorious, but be prepared to be bloodied as well.”

“I know what I am getting into,” Sherlock said determinedly.

“You haven’t been there before. How do you know?”

“I am young. I have energy. I have the flexibility that disappears with older age. This is the perfect time for me to change.”

“My worry is….too many changes. New life, new partner, new expectations, new living conditions, new financial status, everything is new.”

Sherlock remained silent. “Look at Mycroft,” his mother said, “He is very clear about what he wants from life. He is also extremely self-aware. He won’t marry until he is sure he has found the right person and the time is also right. I am aware he likes someone but he’s not taken the step yet, simply because he believes in giving things enough time. All I wish right now is that you should have done
“You forgot one little detail,” Sherlock said, no bitterness in his voice, only a small note of conviction, “That I am NOT Mycroft.”
Chapter Summary

John and Sherlock start their life as a couple. Ups and downs ensue, mostly downs for Sherlock.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Almost an hour into their disappearance into the study, John and Reginald emerged from it. The look of satisfaction on his father’s face and the resigned look on John’s told Sherlock what had transpired behind the closed door. He was happy and immediately rushed to be by his John’s side but while they walked out through the door to return home he also felt a strange desolation at leaving his parents behind. In some way he felt as if he had abandoned them.

This was no longer his home. He felt the separation pangs for the first time. He hoped his mum didn’t shed tears because he was close to tears himself.

Fortunately for Sherlock, Eugenia didn’t demonstrate any extreme emotions at the ‘symbolic farewell of their younger offspring’. She and Reginald were easygoing, smiley and courteous even as they bade goodbye to their son and son-in-law. John was also properly polite and respectful while Sherlock hugged him mother and shook hands warmly with his dad before getting into the vehicle. Around nine-thirty pm the two men left the Holmes mansion in one of Sherlock’s cars, the Ferrari Testarossa, with John behind the wheel and Sherlock seated next to him and constantly turning his head to take one last look at his home and his parents.

“You’d get a crick in the neck Lockie,” John commented.

Sherlock let the comment pass. Once the mansion was out of sight, he turned towards his man and asked, “How did it go?”

“Your father is a great negotiator.”

“And?”
“He knows we had only one common factor. We both love you and want the best for you. He milked that point dry. He wanted me to agree to five things. First, we live in an apartment owned by him and transferred to my name to give the impression that I am a man who is affluent. I said no. His next condition was that you should be allowed to take all your cars. I agreed to one, this one. Third point, your academics should not be compromised so you’d stay in your cottage in Cambridge during weekdays and return to London on weekends to be with me, or I go over when you’re too tired or tied up. I agreed.”

He went quiet afterwards.

Sherlock tugged at the sleeve of John’s shirt. “The last two?”

He was almost afraid to hear the answer.

“He wants me to work with him in one of his companies and hence he wants to send me a brand-new wardrobe. He feels that proper attire is very important and the new wardrobe will ensure I get the due respect for my position and talent. Well, it’s a bit of a joke to say this but the only reason he is buying me expensive new clothes is so I won’t let him down before his peers. I am sure work has nothing to do with the clothes you wear or the shoes you have on your feet. His son in law can’t attend work without designer labels dripping off every inch of his body, can he?”

“What did you say?” Sherlock gritted his teeth and braced himself for an answer.

“I said yes to both because earning extra cash means you will be comfortable and your lifestyle won’t be compromised too much,” John loosened his tie and gave him a forlorn look, “I had anticipated this Lockie. You come from a society that represents the top 20% of the wealthiest folks in England. Maybe not a Mittal or a Goldsmith or even an Elton John but your father’s net worth is close to fifty million pounds. He is only fifty-five now and by the time he retires, say in another ten years or so, he will be worth about seventy or more. No mean feat for a man who was from a wealthy background but nowhere close to the millions he’s playing in. Anyways, for you to adjust to the life of a self-made, struggling, middle class man…..nah, it was never meant to work that way.”

“We will make it work,” Sherlock grabbed his arm, “We will. I promise you I will try.”

Something about his tone made John slow the car down and give him a strange look. “I didn’t say our marriage won’t work out. I simply meant the arrangement won’t, or rather, might not.”
Sherlock looked so demotivated that John reached out and placed a hand on his thigh, gently pressing down on it. “Relax kiddo, don’t read too much into my statements. I am going to try and make this work as much as you would.”

Sherlock relaxed and fell asleep before the ride was over.

He woke up in bed and John was tucking him in. “Huh?” He looked around, “How did I…..”

“I found a parking slot just underneath our window,” John said, stroking Sherlock’s hairs, “Sheer luck. Carried you in and into the elevator because you were sleeping so soundly. Luckily the bitch of an elevator worked tonight.”

“I didn’t even wake up?”

“Nope. Now go back to sleep.”

“Come to bed.”

“Can’t, I have some studying to do.”

Sherlock rolled over and curled up in bed, eyes closing again. He knew a challenging task lay ahead of him and adjustments had to be made, but he breathed in John’s scent in the pillow, heard him humming a song somewhere in the room, and nothing seemed challenging or difficult anymore. With a smile on his face he went off to sleep, slipping easily into dreams of a future with his new husband.

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As it turned out, things didn’t exactly go downhill immediately but they didn’t turn out to be the way Sherlock had expected either.

John didn’t seem happy working with Sherlock’s father and even less enthused in visiting his mother. The initial friendliness his mummy had shown had worn off within days and sometimes Sherlock felt like pulling his own hairs out when he heard the sarcastic exchanges between his mother and his husband. He tried to ignore and not take sides but both John and Eugenia spoke to
him alone about their grievances with each other and Sherlock felt trapped and miserable in their midst. He escaped to Cambridge every Monday morning and even though he missed John terribly, he was glad he didn’t have to stay in the bedsit every day of the week.

As months passed and December arrived, Sherlock found out that John was the only silver lining in that horrid place that was their ‘home’. The heating system was so poor that he shivered through the night and froze even during the day. People around them drank like morons to keep themselves warm and fought like cats and dogs in their intoxicated state. One night, Sherlock woke up to find John’s naked form against the wall at the foot of their bed, the wall that separated their flat from their neighbor’s. He was hammering on the wall and calling them all sorts of names.


“Those idiots,” John growled, “Yelling and shouting in the middle of the night.”

“That’s okay. I am fine. We will fall asleep. The noise doesn’t matter.”

“I am going to punch this fellow’s nose in when I see him tomorrow.”

Sherlock went over and stood right behind John, molding his naked body against John’s equally nude form and resting his chin on the shorter man’s shoulder. John felt so solid and stable that despite the difference in their height Sherlock leaned against him fully. At the same time the muscular body of the doctor was so filled with anger that he nearly buzzed from it, like vibrations were coming out of his pores.

As they stood like this for a little while, slowly that tension evaporated and a new kind of tension filled John. He turned around abruptly, backed Sherlock off on to their bed and proceeded to ravish him with such vigor that the curly haired man passed out from sheer bliss after two orgasms in under fifteen minutes.

Their bliss in bed continued and the brilliant charge of their sex life was enough to knock their brains out every time they got it going as a couple. But that was one of the rare reliefs amidst a number of other problems and hassles that plagued their newfound couplehood.

When Christmas holidays arrived, Sherlock was under tremendous pressure from his parents to spend some time with them and stay in their house so he relented and agreed to stay there for a week. John of course was less than pleased and the two had a blazing row over that. “Whatever you want
to do, just go ahead and do it,” John said angrily after they had bickered long enough, “What am I even? A puppet husband who has no say in even simple things like where you should be spending your vacations. It’s just a month and you want to spend a week there? You didn’t even ask me.”

“I would probably ask you if you behaved less like a boss and more like a partner,” Sherlock shot back. He was miffed at the way John had made a mountain out of a molehill. After all, three out of the four weeks he was going to spend with John.

“I don’t boss you around,” John was fuming, “I am merely asking my husband to respect the sanctity of our marriage. We have been married for just four months and already you’re starting to miss those luxuries, aren’t you?”

“You never seem to notice how much I have to adjust here,” Sherlock groaned with frustration, “How I do that without a complaint. All you wish to notice is when I wanna spend time with my mummy and daddy.”

“Mummy and daddy,” John parroted, much to Sherlock’s chagrin, “Really? Are they suffering from the empty nest syndrome? Did they expect you to live with them forever? “If you are going to miss me so much then why don’t you also come and live with me there? It’s not like they didn’t invite you. You refused outright. Whenever they want to offer anything, you act as if you’ve been insulted and betrayed in some way.”

Sherlock was livid and held back the words that came to his mouth. But John said something that broke all his dams and barriers instantly.

“Maybe you shouldn’t have married anyone at all, not just talking about me, I mean any man. Then they could have kept their precious son under their feathers.”

“How would you know what parental love and attachment is all about, John?”

“I swear Sherlock I will…..” John advanced on him angrily and Sherlock startled. Was his man going to get physically aggressive with him now? Unknowingly he cowered a bit, the shock written large on his face.

John also paused mid step, realizing what he had done. “I am sorry,” he said, walking towards the door, “I shouldn’t have…..sorry.”

As usual they made up in bed and all was forgiven. Nothing was forgotten though and tempers
continued to simmer under the surface of an uneasy truce.

They attended Sherlock’s parents’ Christmas bash together where John was appalled to be introduced to many guests as a young businessman who was minting millions. “Why the hell is he lying about me?” A furious, red-faced John who had been forced to play along complained to Sherlock after pulling him into a corner, “If they are so embarrassed about me and my reality then why the hell did they even invite me to this party. They could have been happier without my middle-class presence and I am sure they wouldn’t have missed the one quality that I possess and they lack, my honesty.”

“Can we not discuss this here?” Sherlock gave a fake grin at his brother who was observing them curiously.

“I am a surgeon, almost. How is it that they are so ashamed of introducing me as one?”

“They are not lying John. You work with dad now, that makes you a young and successful businessman.”

“Hello! I am seeing a unicorn here.”

“John I……”

“Hello gentlemen,” Mycroft appeared and handed them both their drinks, “Why are you not having your favorite tipple? It is a party, just leave the problems behind and go have a dance together. Moods might improve considerably as a result of that.” He motioned with his right hand at the dance floor where several straight and homosexual couples were dancing to the beats of the most amazing music played by a live band.

“I have two left feet,” John said with a grimace and walked away with the drink.

Sherlock stared after him in dismay.

“All well Sherlock?” Mycroft asked, eyes narrowing as his tone grew a bit darker, “How is your man doing?”

“He is doing great, thanks,” Sherlock responded in a cutting-edge voice, “How is your boy, aka
“Joining me tomorrow at my boat in Ibiza,” Mycroft declared, much to Sherlock’s chagrin.

There was an uncomfortable silence between brothers before Mycroft spoke again. “Listen Sherlock, I am observing what’s going on and I can’t say I am happy. He is refusing to climb up the ladder and you can’t climb down the ladder any further without compromising your identity. It’s best if you concentrate on your academics and let him concentrate on his, so when you regroup after a few years both of you have well-paid, rewarding careers.”

Sherlock startled and looked at Mycroft as if he had sprouted two heads. “You are asking me to break it off with him?”

“No, dear God, no, absolutely not,” Mycroft shook his head and moved his finger side to side to show he was misunderstood, “I am not asking for anything like that. While I am really not an advocate of marriage, since you’ve already made that mistake I am not going to ask you for a reversal. Corrections can’t always be retrospective, they need to be done with a futuristic thought. And this is one way you can stay on the correct path. See, you’re already husband and husband. Nobody takes that away, nobody can. Just cool it off, live your separate lives and meet up once in a while till you’re earning enough. Otherwise it might be a disaster, you trying to live on his salary.”

“He’s well-paid,” Sherlock was headstrong, “He can afford my keep.”

“It’s our dad paying that salary and that too, disproportionately high as compared to his work or degree,” Mycroft replied, “Sooner or later either dad will get annoyed and fire him or he will get irritated and quit. Remember my words, try and live apart, like friends, till the time is right for domestic bliss.”

Mycroft could have looked at the crystal ball and spoken those words because by the end of February, when John came down to Cambridge to be with Sherlock for the weekend, he looked glum and filled with some invisible energy that was most definitely not positive.

“What’s the matter?” Sherlock asked, curious.

“No, nothing.” John took off his shoes and leaned back against the couch, closing his eyes, “Just a bit tired, that’s all.”

“No, it’s something else, isn’t it?”
“Yeah, well, I didn’t want to start our weekend with this piece of nondescript news. But since you might have guessed already…..”

“Guessed what? Tell me Jawn. Is everything okay? Are you not well?”

“What? Me? No, I am fine. It’s just that….things are going to change a bit for us. This evening, before I started from London, I resigned from your dad’s company.”

Chapter End Notes

All those who have commented, thank you. Your take on the story and characters is very fascinating and while this story is already planned out in my head, it's really good to see how others respond to it.
Someone’s Husband Now

Chapter Summary

Wobbly-Wobbly first year of JohnLock marriage

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sherlock’s head reeled from the recollection of his brother’s words only two months ago. Mycroft might be a real pain in the ass, a smug bastard who loved to control others, but he did have a head for certain things. He understood people and their behaviors to a point where he was able to predict their actions and even dissect their past. He had read into the office dynamics between John and Reginald and predicted the split correctly.

“But why?” Sherlock was dismayed.

“Your father might be very fond of you and very supportive of his family,” John spoke without malice, only honestly lacing his voice, “But he is a tyrant at work and the worst listener I have ever met in my life. A big idea submitted by one of the teams was binned by him without even a proper glance at it. The entire team quit out of frustrations and so did I. I was supporting them in the best interests of the organization but your old man is more interested in the verdict of his sycophants than the genuine opportunities submitted by some of his most talented employees. Someday I swear one of your dad’s so-called trusted advisors will stab him in the back.”

“What a horrid thing to say,” Sherlock was offended.

“It is the truth,” John shrugged.

“But why did you have to quit?”

“I don’t want to be his puppet….wait, you’re worried about our financials, are you not?”

“I didn’t say that…..”

“No, you didn’t. But I have to think about it. Don’t you worry Lockie, I shall take up additional work in the evenings to ensure we have the cash we need. It’s a matter of a few more months. As a surgeon I will not just get much better pay but also my own lodgings close to Barts. Much better than
the one we have now. You will have a better, more comfortable time over the weekends as compared to now."

Sherlock remained quiet and apprehensive and, true to his suspicions and doubts, the financial challenges hit them hard. Sherlock was relieved to see his mum send over cash discreetly to him in Cambridge so he could live the weekdays in proper comfort. Even then, the weekends were tough and cash strapped and with John working and studying sixteen to eighteen hours a day, it began to take a toll on his temper. He became increasingly irritable.

One day he spotted the tiny pot of caviar in Sherlock’s luggage and dangled it before his face, like it was something disgusting and repulsive. “What is this?” He asked angrily.

“Daddy gave it to me,” Sherlock said defensively, “I didn’t buy it.”

“What’s the occasion?” John looked miffed, “You graduated? Or is it that habits die hard?”

Sherlock snapped back in anger, “Why is it that I need to get rid of all my habits while you stick to your guns and live the same life? I am your husband but I am still my father’s son and if he gifts me something I shall accept it. That’s that.”

As always, they made it up in bed but there were no apologies exchanged and none of them made an attempt to sort out the differences they were constantly facing, leading to innumerable bickering and arguments, fights and name-calling. When he was at school, Sherlock missed John terribly but the moment he joined him over the weekends, things soured at some point or the other. Aside from being perfectly compatible in bed and having the most vigorous, awesome sex life, the two of them shared little peace and understanding. John kept taunting him over his former lavish lifestyle and his inability to compromise on certain things while Sherlock defended his parents even if he felt some of John’s opinions about them were absolutely correct.

One day Sherlock’s mother had a nervous breakdown, followed by a prolonged period of severe depression. Sherlock had to take some time off from school to support his parents at that point. John was less than pleased about that.

“They have another son, don’t they?” He said as Sherlock packed his bags to stay with his parents for a week, “You should be at school Sherlock, you can visit them over the weekends.”

“For Heaven’s sake John,” Sherlock said incredulously, “Why is it such a big deal? Even my principal has agreed to grant me this leave. We have to look after our families, especially when they are going through bad times. In any case, I wouldn’t have spent this time with you so you’re losing
“You think I am so selfish I’d only think about me?” John looked stung.

“I have to look after mum,” Sherlock argued.

“This isn’t going to get solved in a week. Take my word for it, she is suffering from an empty nest syndrome. Go visit her every weekend but let a professional care-giver and a proper therapist handle her situation.”

“No John. I have to do this.”

John’s words proved to be prophetic this time and as weeks passed, his mother’s situation was slow to improve and she constantly depended on Sherlock to help her with his company and constant attention. When he could no longer take leave of absence from the Uni, he had to spend the weekends with his mum and was able to return home only late in the evening. It was very tiring and taxing balancing his responsibilities, his marriage and his studies and after two straight months of this situation, Sherlock was at his wits end. Mycroft had gone to Asia for work and was deputed there for several months, hence any option of asking him for help was impossible.

To help him with quick cooking and reheating options, Reginald bought him a microwave.

As usual John blew a fuse over it. The moment he returned home one evening and saw the appliance he woke Sherlock, who was taking a nap, and demanded an explanation. “What is this? Why is a microwave here? I don’t remember giving you any money for this so it has to be another ‘gift’ from your rich daddy, isn’t it? Sherlock-Sherlock-Sherlock, there are many women and some men who don’t work or are still studying and don’t earn, if they choose to marry at that stage they manage within the income of their partners. Why can’t you do the same? Why keep taking help from daddy?”

“For Heaven’s sake,” Sherlock was cross on being woken up, “He bought me a microwave, not a mansion. Why are you creating a storm in a teacup?”

“I am creating a storm in a teacup?” John snarled, “I am the one working my arse off to get us a better life but then there is no ‘us’ at all. For two and half months all you have done is attend Uni or to your mother. How long is her illness going to last and for how long will you play nursemaid to her? Didn’t I tell you this kind of depression needs something more than a son sticking to your back all day?”
“She is undergoing therapy,” Sherlock was desperate to end this conversation. “These things do take time.”

“Look, I want you to support,” John said, “But Mycroft needs to do his part too.”

“He does,” Sherlock said, “He organized medical care for her which isn’t easily available in London. He is assisting dad with his business requirements. I can’t do that yet, I am neither trained for it nor do I even know how to handle those responsibilities.”

“Your dad wouldn’t have had to worry about those things had he listened to me,” John said in a tight voice, “He is too high handed and too ensconced in his own space to imagine that a world exists beyond his nose. I told him there is too much dependency on him at work and he should delegate to people who are faithful, honest and capable. In today’s world you need to empower people, not oppress them.”

Sherlock did try to cut back on his time with his parents and a temporary relief arrived when Mycroft returned from his tour of Asia but, as if someone was waiting to deliver the next blow, Reginald Holmes got into a vicious argument with some of his direct reports and fell ill.

His condition grew worse and it was diagnosed as a mild stroke. Sherlock and Mycroft reached the hospital immediately and tried to shield their mother from the situation. She was already quite vulnerable thanks to her depression and medication, suffering from the side effects of the latter. But she soon got wind of it and lapsed into a condition of absolute silence. “Someone needs to be with her day and night,” was what the doctor advised, “At least till her husband is better and back home by her side. She is very nervous and has a heart condition so we need to be careful and vigilant here gentlemen.”

“You take the days,” Mycroft said with a sigh, “I am not married so no one waits for me at home. I will take the nights.”

“We will interchange Myc,” Sherlock suggested to his elder brother, “In fact, we have to. You need to get your rest as well and I have to attend school too. This year I have missed enough classes already. John will have to understand, though I feel hugely guilty about him too. Over the past three months we have barely been able to spend much time together because I am either studying or with mummy. But better times are coming up, I suppose. Summer vacations start next month, so maybe then I will take two full weeks off from this routine and just be with him, celebrate our first anniversary together.”
“Wow, almost a year,” Mycroft smiled and shook Sherlock’s hand, “Congratulations in advance. I must call and congratulate Dr. Watson too, he and I haven’t spoken in a while. How many jobs is he doing besides his training as a surgeon?”

“Three,” Sherlock replied, suddenly overcome with guilt. John’s own needs were limited and had Sherlock not been with him, he wouldn’t have needed to overburden himself with so much. “Now that I am so busy and stretched thin,” he murmured, “I am beginning to see how hard it has been for him. I am so not used to having any time for myself or to relax, or even sleep for at least six hours every night.”

After a brief pause he asked, “When is John getting his license as a surgeon?”

Sherlock gasped, “Oh! Yeah, it was supposed to happen around this time. I have to check with him as soon as I am home.”

That evening he got home early and, using some of the money he’d earned working summer jobs and winning science and other talent competitions, bought a nice meal for the two of them for dinner. He was in no mood to cook and he knew John would be tired as well.

“Sherl,” John seemed noncommittal and unemotional as he entered the bedsit, “All well?”

“Yeah,” Sherlock said enthusiastically, “Came back early. Hey, what about your surgeon’s license. You were supposed to get it…..”

“I got it two weeks ago,” John replied, taking off his jacket and boots, “I have started my work at Barts as of this week.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I would have, if you are ever around and have enough time to exchange a few words with me. Usually you are at Uni, or with your family, or you are so soundly asleep that not even an earthquake can wake you. So I waited.”

Sherlock paled and looked down at his feet, ashamed of his behavior. John was right this time. He had ignored his partner for long enough to make him feel unwanted and naturally John hadn’t shared a news as good and important as this until he was asked. Now he had to set things right. “It’s been hard times for me Jawn,” he admitted, “Mummy being unwell and then dad falling ill, the situation at home has given me little time to look at anything or anyone else., including you. I am sorry about
that. I’ll try harder, I am going to be at home with you more often and we will do those things you like, cooking together, going to plays, grocery shopping together and taking long drives late at night.”

“That would be nice,” John said, “Because even I will have time now.”

“How so?”

“I don’t need to work at the showroom or at the lawyer’s office anymore. My salary going to be three times that amount I earned earlier. I will also get housing assistance so we can move into a better accommodation next month. Lockie, things will look up. One day, we will earn enough to afford the lifestyle your parents gave you. Just give me and yourself some time and stay on track, don’t let anything throw you off it.”

Sherlock hugged John hard, feeling relieved and happy after a long time.

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That night they celebrated in bed.

Sherlock lay writhing as John poured dollops of ice cream on him, at spots which were super-sensitive, and kissed and licked and sucked it off him. The crucifix around his neck, which Sherlock had gifted him on his birthday, dragged all over Sherlock’s body, making him scream.

“My beautiful, gorgeous husband,” John admired as he stared at a naked Sherlock who was now sticky all over with residual ice cream, “I can never get enough of you. I love you so much!” He didn’t just say the words, he proceeded to show Sherlock that he meant every word he said by ravishing him for so long that the young student was dizzy with arousal and literally begging him for some relief. “Want me deep inside?” John hissed as he sat propped against the headboard and impaled Sherlock, who had his back to John’s chest, slowly on his thick cock.

“Y-Yeah, deeper.”

“Move now, show me what you want.” John proceeded to keep his hands behind his head, letting Sherlock set the pace for now.
Sherlock moaned loudly as he started to move, the moan turning to a screech when his prostate was brushed. Since he was free to make all the difference, he quickly found the angle that suited him the best and in just two minutes sprayed semen all over their bodies, experiencing a voluptuous orgasm of epic proportions.

John stayed still while Sherlock recovered from his orgasm and then he started to move slowly inside the younger man’s spent body. At first Sherlock squirmed and shifted but soon those thrusts began to arouse him once more and in five minutes he was once again wailing moaning, clutching at the sheets, pillows, John, anything he could reach. But this time John controlled the pace and didn’t let him fall over the edge, instead keeping him on the brink for so long that Sherlock’s brain melted along with his body. There was nothing he could think of beside this bed, this man and the thick cock moving inside him.

“Jawwwwn,” he whined, “I need to cum.”

“Patience kiddo,” John kissed his ear and started to stroke him with a light hand, keeping his touch extremely light.

“I can’t….”

“You can.”

“Uhhnnnn….”

Eventually John kept him teetering on the edge for almost half an hour, making him scream, moan, beg and curse alternately. Only when Sherlock was totally exhausted and almost on the verge of imploding did he relent. He pushed Sherlock down on all fours and began to fuck him in all earnestness, moving in and out of him at a rapid pace and stroking him in the same pace and rhythm.

When Sherlock came he felt like he was floating in mid-air. He had no strength left to say anything or even move. He felt John cum inside him, fill him with his heat, and just dropped like a dead man on the mattress, fingers and toes twitching from the intense experience.

He was cleaned and laid down on the sheets, then tucked in with a comforter. John even served dinner in bed and fed Sherlock his food, then guided him to the bathroom to brush his teeth like one would do to a small sleepy child.

Later that night, as he fell asleep in John’s arms, Sherlock made up his mind to consider John’s comfort and expectations in the larger scheme of things and not allow himself to only look at his
parents and their needs. After all, he was also someone’s husband now.

Chapter End Notes

It's easy to get angry at one or more characters. I have tried to keep them real. If you look at yourself from other people's POVs, trust me we are all annoying in our own ways :(
Near Disaster

Chapter Summary

Sherlock has an accident. John gets a scare. Then things return to status quo.

“Damn it Sherlock, you’re alive,” Victor hugged him warmly and pulled back, “Man, you’ve lost weight. Lots of weight. Your cheekbones are poking out like blades and I think I just got stabbed in the gut by one of your breastbones or something.”

“Prick,” Sherlock smiled and grabbed the beer Victor was drinking, “Yeah, it’s been a bit of a tough time, the last four odd months. First mummy was unwell and she still is, then dad had a stroke and Mycroft has suddenly been asked to report to a classified location in United States.”

“Yeah, I heard from Jim,” Victor said, pouring another mug of beer for himself. He saw Sherlock guzzle his beer and extended the mug for a refill and his eyes narrowed. Sherlock seemed eager to drink, something he did only when he was nervy and unsure about something. “As I was saying…..” He said as he filled Sherlock’s mug, “Even our Jimmy has no idea what that location is so I am thinking this is serious and Mycroft might have to be undercover for several weeks and months maybe. That means it’s all on you buddy, your mummy and daddy won’t have anyone else to turn to, so I am hoping John will be helping you in some way.”

“On the contrary,” Sherlock said, licking the froth from his lips, “John wants me to spend more time with him.”

“Whoa!”

“I sort of agree. For the past four and half months we have literally been leading separate lives while living under the same roof. It’s our anniversary soon. He deserves attention, my time, my presence in our new flat.”

“Congrats. You bought a flat?”

“No, John was given one by the establishment he works for. His salary and bonuses have also gone up by leaps and bounds. Nothing close to dad or Mycroft but it’s more than enough for us, the two of us. In three more years I plan to start working too, while doing my research, at least a part time job
that will supplement my husband’s income. John is really very finicky about finances and doesn’t like me accepting any help from my family.”

“You’ve hardly ever accepted any,” Victor said, “Gifts are not charity.”

Sherlock sighed.

“Listen, please tell him he might think it’s charity but for you it’s your legal right. Which son doesn’t accept a bit of help or support from his dad? If he was not born into money, it doesn’t mean that you should end up apologetic about your good fortune of being born rich.”

Sherlock stared at his half-finished beer, “I am tired of fighting Vic.”

“I can see that,” Victor stretched his long legs under the table, “Listen man, I hope you didn’t compromise yourself with this rushed marriage. Now even I feel guilty about not stopping you or at least putting a doubt in your head. The truth is that…..I had expected John to be better.”

Sherlock smiled wistfully, “It is certainly not his fault. He tried to be wise, for both of us, but I insisted that we go ahead and get together immediately. Then I almost trapped him and cornered him into marrying me. He never told me he’s going to change himself completely for me yet I just assumed he would…..like a fool. It’s my fault. He does love me, you know…..!”

Whatever Victor was going to say next was interrupted by Sherlock’s mobile phone ringing. Both he and John had mobile phones now, Sherlock’s Nokia phone gifted by Mycroft on his birthday (the earlier one he had abandoned a little after marrying John) and John’s Siemens phone provided by the hospital because he was needed for emergencies at any time of the day or night. “It’s John, give me a few minutes buddy, kay?” Sherlock said and walked to the balcony to receive the call. “Hey John, I am at Victor’s house for a chat. When are you back home this evening?”

John’s voice was cold, ice cold. “I went home. Nobody was there.”

Sherlock almost did a facepalm, “Oh….you have a night shift….I am sorry I forgot.”

“You promised to cook dinner this time.”
“I-I did….but no harm done, I will come home right away with takeout.”

“Takeout? We had takeout last night as well, and the night before.”

“I can get something you like, something homely. Salmon in a puff pastry, quail egg salad or a prawn cocktail?”

There was silence on the call for so long that Sherlock almost thought the line had gotten disconnected. Then he heard harsh breathing sounds and knew John was still there, just upset once again over something he had said. His anger also started to well up. How long was he going to live like this? Always wary of when John would lose his temper, John would disapprove of something he had done or John would point out another mistake with a finger dangling right in front of his face.

“I want a home cooked meal Lockie,” John replied at last, his tone grim and low, “I am a hardworking professional, not some social butterfly.”

“Why can’t we ever have a discussion without turning it into a class war?” Sherlock yelled, then realized he wasn’t at home. He abruptly disconnected, then regretted that thoroughly and quickly texted John to pacify him.

Network problem. Returning home right away. Will cook something for you – Sherl

“See you later Vic,” Sherlock ran out of his friend’s luxury pad, shocking Victor thoroughly with his sudden and unexplained departure. Victor looked at the half-finished beer, the untouched plate of beef crostini, then yelled after him. “Drive safe Sherlock, unless it’s a real emergency.”

The emergency was in Sherlock’s head of course and he drove at breakneck speed to reach home in half the time it usually took to close that distance between West and East London. Twisting and turning the car through narrow gaps and narrower lanes, racing ahead to prevent stopping at signals and taking some daring cuts and turns to save time, he threw caution to the winds. He was a young man with good reflexes and an excellent knowledge of the city’s streets and lanes so he was sure he would be able to pull this off. No way was John leaving their flat for his night duty before he had had dinner with Sherlock.

Over-confidence and his distracted state of mind made him commit a huge mistake.
It was peak traffic hours for most routes so he chose to take one offbeat route that was avoided by most motorists at that point of time. It was a route where the main junction was closed for repair work and Sherlock unwisely thought that he would be able to take a detour before the ‘road closed’ sign actually showed up. As his car zipped out of a lane and hit the street under repair, he suddenly found a road roller right in front of him.

The road closed sign was there, but he had missed it. The miss was partially because he was calling John and John wasn’t answering, causing him to glare at the screen more than the road ahead, and partially because the signage had been put behind a large advertisement board, obscuring half of it.

He swerved his vehicle to the right and then the left, managed to avoid a pillar and a lamp post, then the car went over a kerb and hit something. In no time it turned turtle before skidding down five hundred meters and coming to a noisy stop, tires still smoking and spinning.

It was still upside down and Sherlock was unconscious by then.

***

Sherlock blinked and stared at the white light that flooded his vision before he scrunched his eyes shut and groaned from the pain it caused to the back of his skull. Panic settled in as he tried to process the information and memory together and make sense of it.

He was driving the car recklessly, then he hit something and then…..nothing! He remembered nothing at all after that. Did that mean he was dead? Was that why that white light was all over the place?

Then his rational mind woke up and slapped him with logic and proper analysis. No, the white light was a myth propagated by humans. Nobody had died and then come back from the dead to tell the tale, validate the theory, or even suggest what else could be expected. It was all pure speculation! And he was breathing, wasn’t he? He could hear and feel himself breathe! Oh and yes, someone was holding his wrist and he could hear voices. Yes he heard voices! People were talking around him.

“Mr. Holmes,” a woman was calling out, “Mr. Holmes can you hear me?”

He wanted to respond but he was too lazy and spaced out to do so. His lips moved but he didn’t put in the effort to let the words come out aloud. Suddenly he felt a sharp pain on his right forearm and hissed out. “Good,” he heard the same female voice, followed by a male voice whose words he
couldn’t quite figure out, “That means you can feel the pain. You are awake Mr. Holmes, please try to open your eyes slowly and speak a few words. Come on, or I might need to pinch you again.”

“No,” he croaked out, “Stop.”

“There you are. Good boy!”

“Wh-where am I?”

“Try opening your eyes first.”

Sherlock did, then closed them again and winced, then reopened them. Slowly the room became visible to him and he knew immediately he was in the hospital. He had survived whatever accident he had gotten himself into. The female voice belonged to his doctor, who was now checking all his vitals while an assistant stood close by and took notes on a tablet. There were also two nurses who were sponging him down.

“Whoa,” he exclaimed, “Not there.”

“They are professionals,” the doctor smiled a little, “They see people naked every day. Not as attractive as you though. Besides, you are our colleague’s husband so we will take special care of you.”

“John….”

“I will call for him. He’s asleep in the doctor on duty’s bed I think. He stayed up all night last night by your bedside.”

Sherlock was silent. While it warmed his heart to know that John had been monitoring his condition and keeping an eye on him all through the night, he also knew it was John who had indirectly caused this accident. Had he been a little more understanding….

“You are lucky,” the doctor was saying.
“Funny thing to say to a man who is in hospital,” Sherlock said, coughing slightly.

The doctor signaled to her assistant who raised Sherlock’s bed to a slightly higher position and offered him water from a cup. He sipped several times from a straw and let out a sigh of relief. Water tasted so much better than any wine or whiskey right now. Like the drink of the Gods! His parched throat no longer bothering him, he looked down at his body, at the IV attached to his arm and the heart monitor beeping away by the bedside. “How bad is it?” He asked the lady, “Have I broken anything? Am I bleeding inside? Please tell me the truth doc, I am a big boy and can take it.”

“That’s why I said you’re lucky,” she replied, expression clinical and neutral as ever, “No broken bones. Just a badly sprained ankle, some scratches and a mild concussion on the head. Oh yeah, a split lip too and a bruise around one of your cheekbones. Nothing permanent, nothing even long term, no scars at all. When I heard about the accident you had, I actually called out on it to John. He was panicking so much that I had to tell him just how worse it could have been.”

As she finished, he heard footsteps and John burst into the room.

Sherlock saw his face and knew the man had suffered already. His eyes were red and puffy from lack of sleep, he looked haggard and worse for wear, his hairs were unwashed and stood up at odd angles. John was not vain about appearances but he wouldn’t be caught dead like this.

“Lockie,” John stepped closer to the bed and looked at the lady doctor, “How is he Lisa?”

“Very good, he is awake and alert and all his vitals are steady. In fact, tomorrow you can even take him home. Needs a week for that ankle though and for a few days, maybe three or four, he might feel a little sore from the bumps he got. Other than that, all fine.”

“Thanks.”

“I’ll leave you two alone for some time then. Nurse, vacate the room. Sponge bath is over, right? Okay so let’s give Dr. Watson some time with his husband.”

As soon as the others had left, John tried to put his arms around Sherlock but the younger man brushed them away and turned his face to the other side.

“Sherlock….I am….sorry.”
“Yeah, of course you are. But for how long?”

“You’re going through a lot. I should be more patient. But at times water crosses the nose level and I feel suffocated with my situation. I just want to enjoy a quiet life with my husband…..”

“Great. So now the marriage is stifling you.”

John was about to say something when Eugenia descended on them with a retinue of people. Her friends, her cousin Amelia and even a dietician she had brought along to speak to her son. Sherlock watched, mortified, as they literally pushed John behind and took over fussing and fretting on him, six people talking to him at the same time, his mother making it a point to call out John as a reason behind Sherlock’s condition. Well, he was in a way, but eventually it was Sherlock who had driven like a maniac and caused this, so it wasn’t fair to call John out like that and that too in front of a group of people.

Eventually Eugenia prevailed upon John and Sherlock moved in with his parents for two weeks to recuperate. Even though he knew he would never admit it aloud, he actually felt bliss as he limped over the plush carpet that was at least six inches thick and made his feet sink into it. All the comforts and luxuries he had grown up with seemed unattainable for now in the life he had chosen with John and, while he was willing to deal with that, for now in his weakened condition he could think of no better place to be than this.

John repented truly and visited Sherlock morning and evening and even ignored the small-minded comments made by Eugenia at times, or the high-handed ones made by Reginald. Sherlock cringed sometimes and sometimes he stopped his parents but the damage was done.

He could see it in John’s eyes. He was letting it all slide off but he would never forget.

Eventually Sherlock went back home and the moment they were in the privacy of their flat, a horny John attached his neck with his lips and tongue and took him right there on the couch. They had not even stripped fully, just pushed enough clothes out of the way to get it going.

Then proceeded to have the next round on the carpet and finally on their bed, a trail of clothes, shoes and socks on the floor indicating just how much things had heated up between them. When Sherlock came for the third time, he was so exhausted he stopped John apologetically. “No, can’t take it anymore,” he whispered, eyes fluttering shut, “You fucked my brains out.”
“I love you,” John said emotionally as he kissed the bruise he had sucked on Sherlock’s neck.

“I love you too,” Sherlock replied spontaneously. He knew John meant it. He meant it too.

“Missed you so much!”

“Don’t let me go again then.”

“I won’t. You belong to me.”
Sherlock fell asleep in John’s arms that night, satisfied and sated, happy and content. He dreamt brilliant dreams of becoming a nuclear scientist, a published author of books on biochemistry, winning accolades with John by his side. He dreamt of them living a quiet life in the country on weekends and sharing a snazzy apartment in London during work week, returning home to each other and enjoying long, hot evenings in horizontal position.

Maybe he had slept lots during his stay with his parents and wasn’t so tired anymore, because he woke up earlier than John for a change.

He took some time out to stare at his husband’s reposed face, which was only inches from his own on the same pillow. How young and vulnerable John looked! Like a twenty-seven-year-old who had not enjoyed any childhood and was forced to grow up for his own sake. There was a slightly harsh, tight curve to his mouth which was no doubt the result of a life filled with challenges and extreme hard work. His hair, still damp from the after-effects of their lovemaking was splayed over his face and……streaked slightly with silver? He was succumbing to stress, clearly.

Trying his best to play his own part in the overall scheme of their couplehood, he quickly brushed, showered and dressed, before heading to the kitchen. He brewed the tea well enough but forgot to watch the toast while he prepared the scrambled eggs.

“Well, I love waking up to the smell of burned toast,” John teased as he padded to the kitchen, naked, then wrapped his arms around Sherlock.

“I will make two fresh ones for you,” Sherlock immediately offered.

“No, just scrape off the worst bits and slap on extra marmalade and butter.”
“All right.”

“Hey, thanks for this. The tea is nice!”

“Thank you.”

An uneasy truce prevailed between them over the next two weeks and Sherlock was once again caught up between his filial duties and his duties towards his marriage and husband. His father’s business had suffered major losses and the man’s health was growing more and more suspect. That didn’t help his mother whose recovery from depression took a hit as she watched her husband’s situation at work and saw him grow anxious and tense.

Sherlock kept fleeting between his parents’ mansion and his house, trying to keep both sides happy as much as he could.

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One day, Reginald called Sherlock and said, “Son, I was wondering if we could all go for a month’s cruise on the Caribbean.”

Sherlock’s heart leapt with joy. He loved such vacations. But then there was John and his work. He couldn’t commit just like that on his man’s behalf. “John can’t take that time off,” he said, “I know I still have some time left on my summer vacation but he is working, you see.”

“We would love to have him with us too,” Eugenia interjected, “I am aware we haven’t been very kind towards him either. Maybe this is a gift from our side, an olive branch. Let’s make a fresh beginning, all of us together, as a family.” She took Sherlock’s hands in her own and smiled, “Of late I have noticed that he genuinely cares about you and loves you. We saw him at the hospital, he looked like a train wreck. Then, all these days you were here, I wasn’t very nice to him and not even once did he answer me back or throw in a snide remark. He seems to have truly repented for his earlier behavior.”

Sherlock was silent. He felt awful to even doubt his parents but he wanted to be sure which way this was going. He was seriously concerned for his marriage and didn’t think it could receive one more blow and still remain intact.
“Lockie, we were not too happy about your decision to marry him but now we have accepted it,” Reginald added in a genuinely humble and caring tone, “He is now with you for life and we believe in the sanctity of marriage. We want this to last and grow happier with every passing year. This situation we have here, with my business and my health, your mother’s illness, then the accident you had, it’s sort of shaken us to the core. Why do we have to fight and bicker and disagree all the time? Life is short, too short for such negatives. Please talk to John and figure out a way to convince him. We would like to use this time to know him better, away from the normal set-up we have which keeps sucking us in all the time.”

“Yes,” Eugenia requested, “This is the perfect opportunity.”

“His studies are over, no more exams for him,” Reginald was insistent, “He can cite a family reason and take this time off. Both of you can enjoy on your own on the cruise liner and take in the sun while it’s still summer.”

“Some time off from the daily humdrum helps,” Eugenia suggested, “It will help me and your father too.”

“At least three weeks,” Reginald said, “Tell him we will book suites on different floors and we won’t be in your face all the time.”

“All right,” Sherlock said, “I will talk to him.”

***

Sherlock had been cooking for the past few days and whatever he rustled up, John had eaten that without a complaint. If the veggies got soggy or the meat got charred, he would add ketchup and swallow them but he didn’t blame Sherlock, not even a bit.

He appreciated him for his efforts, for which Sherlock was both elated and grateful.

Still, that meant a lot of work for a man who was brought up in the lap of luxury and who had varied responsibilities in life right now, so Sherlock was quite happy to step into their flat that evening to the appetizing aroma of chicken roasting in the oven and two glasses of martinis standing on the dining table, ready to be clinked. A nice garden salad with a homemade dressing on the side stood next to those glasses and John was seasoning rosemary and pepper roasted potatoes and cooked clams in two Tupperware bowls. The clams looked delicious, garnished with cilantro and sprinkled liberally
with a butter garlic and tabasco sauce.

“Hey,” he kissed John on the cheek and hugged him.

John hugged him back, “Hey yourself.”

“What’s this all about?”

“No special occasion really. You have been looking so tired of late that I decided to cook dinner as a surprise for you.”

“You cook breakfast, I cook dinner, that was the arrangement.”

“To hell with the arrangement. If I wanna do something for my husband, I will. Okay?”

Sherlock tasted a potato and smacked his lips, “Okay Your Highness. Wow, these are really delicious. Very nice Jawn.”

To his surprise, John pulled him down and kissed the corner of his lips. “There was a bit of seasoning there. I had to taste it.”

Sherlock blushed. He loved it when John flirted with him, wanted him, seduced him. “If there was something on my thighs and chest, would you lick that off too?”

“Fuck yeah, of course.”

“Then why don’t you?”

“Yeah, I say let’s christen the kitchen!”

***
Sherlock was on his back on the dining table, within touching distance of the food, completely nude and his long pins raised high up in the air as John drove into him with single-minded devotion and dogged determination. Nothing seemed to matter to him, not the fact that someone could see the through the open kitchen window or that part of his carefully prepared meal could topple down on to the floor.

The tight heat he was buried in was scorching him from within. “You’re so handsome,” his hands ran up and down Sherlock’s naked chest and abs, “You have melted my brains and reduced me to a slave. I could fucking kill for you!”

Sherlock wanted to come up with a smartass response to that but a sharp nudge to his prostate made him gasp and open his mouth wide in a silent scream that never came out. He was aware of the paper-thin walls and the proximity of the next house, how easily people could hear them if they went overboard. But John’s husky voice and those declarations were doing wonderful things to his brain and loins and he couldn’t stay quiet anymore. He let out a barely muted howl through his fist, which he had stuffed into his mouth to keep the racket down. It didn’t really appear to be working in his favor.

John bent down and kissed him into silence.

Sherlock’s eyes widened. John, his Jawn, he always knew what Sherlock needed! Like this romantic, dinner, the martini, this rough sex in the kitchen. They had a telepathic connection which he was so proud of.

“Puh…leez Jawn.”

“Please what Lockie?”

“Make me. I want you to make me cum!”

“Fuck, your begging is hot.”

“Touch me there!”
John licked his lips as he looked at the erect pole between Sherlock’s legs and gave it a few tugs and pulls. Sherlock’s eyes rolled to the back of his head and a great jerk went through his body, ending with a super spasm of his hips before a plume of pearly white liquid splattered on to his abs and chest. A couple of shots even landed on the wooden table and John let out a chuckle at that sight.

Next moment an involuntary loud groan came out of him and warmth spread inside Sherlock.

***

“It’s our anniversary next week doll,” John murmured as he lay spooning Sherlock for a small post-coital lie-in before they started eating dinner, “Ask for anything you want. If it’s within my power to give it to you, I promise that I will.”

“Another martini,” Sherlock grinned and was swatted on his arse by his husband who playfully slid under the covers and bit his butt cheek, “Oww….ok there’s something I wanted to ask for.”

John lay back down on the bed and Sherlock turned to face him this time. This was now or never. John was in a good mood and this was the best time to get him to say a ‘yes’, or at least convince him to join them for at least some period of time on that luxury liner. “You know, my parents want to make it up to you for the way things have gone awry between them and us…..over the past few months,” he felt John’s body tense and hoped he was using the right words, “They want to take us on a cruise on the Caribbean. A one month cruise where we can spend time together as a family and reconnect at so many levels. Mum wants to know you better, dad actually wants to listen to your ideas about how to curb his business losses and……”

“When is this planned for?” John sounded serious. His face was unreadable.

“End of this week.”

“Date?”

“20th, Friday.”

“So, three days from now. You do realize I have a job.”
“You haven’t taken any time off over the past year. You can sure take some time off.”

“I barely began as a surgeon. It’s not the time to take a vacation, not yet. We can do this over the winter, when I am settled in more.”

“But…..mummy and daddy need this. They are both going through tough times.”

“Well, then let them take it,” John sat up and reached for his underwear.

Sherlock sat up in alarm, “No, I cannot. They are both unwell, they need us around.”

“It seems they always need you around,” John gave a scoffing laugh, “I am now beginning to wonder if they were against our relationship because they didn’t want you to be with someone, or because they didn’t want you to go out with ‘anyone’. Since their first son is always away and busy, they have simply started to cling to you for comfort. Okay, so you’ll now say I have no idea what family commitments mean, and probably you’re right, but I have seen enough people with their families to know what’s usual and what’s irregular. This is unusual, irregular and unhealthy Sherl, you ought to see that.”

“They are taking us on a vacation,” Sherlock said in a dismayed tone, “Why are you analyzing and dissenting their character over this?”

“It is our anniversary next week, our very first anniversary,” John said angrily, getting into his trousers and zipping it up, “I had plans too, just not the flashy, money-greased sort of plans which involve yachts and champagne and caviar. I had booked us for a holiday at the Cotswold for four days. Just you and me, the good old-fashioned English countryside, we could have gone hiking and dirt biking and just spent evenings away drinking and cuddling. Isn’t that what we always wanted? Tell me I haven’t got this wrong, you did want me to plan a holiday for the two of us around our anniversary date, right?”

“I-I did want this.”

“I have booked it. You are coming with me.”

“John, please don’t do this to me.”

John pulled on his T shirt, then the light summer jacket over it, “I am doing nothing this time. This is when you need to grow up, man up, stand up to your parents and tell them you have plans with your
husband. Can you do that for me?”

“John, I can’t. Dad had a stroke a month and half ago and mum is severely depressed and on heavy medication. There have been several losses in business and a mass exodus of senior folks who have been baited by a competitor in the market. My folks need me. If something happens to them while I am having a jolly good time with you at Cotswold, I’ll never forgive myself.”

“Oh is that so,” John slid his canvas shoes on his feet and laced them up. “As always, Mr. and Mrs. Holmes decide to do something, they don’t bother to tell me and then expect me to be a part of it, and you act more like their son than my husband and tell me it’s either your way or the highway. Fantastic! John Watson is nothing but a name on the horizon. He can never be at their level, so why bother to think about his conveniences and principles.”

“John……”

“Enough Sherlock. If you go on that trip, you’d prove yourself as someone with divided loyalties and I for once refused to play along. Be a husband and stick to me. But if you cannot……” Without finishing, he stormed out of the bedroom.

Sherlock collapsed back on the sheets as he heard the front door slam. Something told him that this was their worst fight so far and he didn’t even want to think about the consequences.

Chapter End Notes

Before you blame John…..consider his feelings at constantly being taken for granted.
Chapter Summary

A decade has passed and things have changed, except for Sherlock's feelings for John

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Year 2012 – London*

Sherlock set down his duffel bag and backpack next to the door and walked straight to the kitchen to drink some water. The flat was dark, quiet, the only light present being those from the streets and the moonbeams that filtered in through the windows.

Sherlock navigated through the dark rooms and easily found the tiny bar cabinet in the sitting room. He poured some sherry for himself and leaned against the wall, taking a sip and letting out a deep sigh. Like always, he didn’t turn on the lights nor did he call anyone for a chat despite having spent the entire day traveling and keeping almost entirely to himself. The primary reason was that he didn’t want his mother to wake up at this hour. The secondary reason was that he was so used to the darkness by now that lights and illumination scared him.

The deep, dark, black hole in his soul had consumed him a long time ago, leaving him a pale shadow of his former self. At 31, he was a sullen, dour, insular man and nothing like the brilliant, ebullient and confident 21-year old that he used to be. Personal setbacks, losses of various kinds and a broken heart had changed him irrevocably and caused more than a few stumbling blocks in his life. From the wealthy, Cambridge going, chemistry genius of 2002 he was now a small-time forensic expert at a small lab who were associated with the MI5 team. He could have been a field agent and climbed the ladder but he had lost the zest and verve to grow and succeed in life. Besides that, he had his mummy and needed to take care of her.

“Lockie?”

“Mummy. How are you?”

“So glad to have you back son.”
“Glad to be back mummy. It’s not like I travel too much but it’s nice to be back with you.”

Sherlock didn’t want to say the real words ‘I am so worried about you while I am away that I’d rather be home where I can see what you’re up to’. Mummy didn’t need one more person to pull her down. She had suffered enough and he didn’t want the fragile, old woman to have one more reason to be distressed about.

“Victor called. He was asking about you.”

“I will call him.”

“Can you take some time off from your duties. Tell Mycroft…..”

“I don’t answer to Mycroft. He is not my boss.”

“If you can take some time off…..”

Sherlock remained quiet. Truth was that he had taken enough and more time off from work and hence, despite having a decent leave balance, didn’t want to take any more of them now or in the near future.

Time off meant staying with his mum who had, over the past several years, become so clingy and insecure that she was now beyond all means of therapy and medications. On that fateful cruise which Sherlock had embarked on with his parents, his father had died in his sleep leaving a shattered, broken Eugenia behind and a completely distraught Sherlock. By the time they had somehow managed to handle the setback, another big blow had landed on them in the form of legal notices from several employees, clients and customers. One of Reginald’s trusted men had fallen for a trap set by a rival and squandered the company’s money and future with some really unwise decisions.

This had left them penniless and totally dependent on Mycroft. But Mycroft and Sherlock had clashed and locked horns over how their mother should be treated. Mycroft wanted her committed while Sherlock was adamant that she was not someone issues big enough to warrant such a drastic step. “If we look after her, ensure she has therapy and meds and the right company, she will improve. Don’t give up on her.”

“I am not giving up on her,” Mycroft had said, “Just doing the right thing.”
The brothers had broken off their cordial terms and lapsed into being barely civil with one another. Sherlock had regretted his decision later, seeing his mum collapse more and more into her world of darkness, but he realized deep down he didn’t want to let her go. Didn’t want to see her in some institution, alone and surrounded only by other patients. But being outside meant she needed to take too many meds and slowly they had started impacting her in several ways. Heart and kidneys had been impacted and her eyesight was also compromised.

All Sherlock had done during his twenties was to look after his mother, work, study and work some more. He needed the money now. More for mummy than for himself. But earning big bucks meant devoting long hours, which he couldn’t do since Eugenia couldn’t be left alone.

“That boy who lives downstairs,” Eugenia murmured, stumbling and blinking towards her room, “I thought he’d be….nice.”

“Nice, in which way?”

“As your boyfriend. I mean, you are now twenty-five….”

“Thirty-one, mummy.”

“Yeah, twenty-five years old. You have to also….date. You have never been married before, right Sherlock?”

Sherlock swallowed the lump at his throat and exhaled slowly. Once again she was losing touch with reality. “Yes, I will talk to him. His name is Duncan. Now off to bed mummy, it’s too late and you need to rest.”

“I could have made something for you, to eat….” She mumbled, caressing his cheek and then suddenly turning and walking away, “I can cook…..pasta…..Reggie liked pasta, Myc too. Call Duncan for dinner….I will make pasta for him….” And she was gone, disappeared into her room and closed the door on his face without completing the sentence. It was nothing new for Sherlock who was used to his mother spacing out and not being able to remember things properly, but every time such an episode happened he felt like crying his eyes out. The same beautiful, elegant woman who was the queen bee of socialite parties, now in a modest flat in a modest, less than impressive neighborhood, half out of her mind and frequently sick. How the mighty had fallen!
Sherlock made some instant ramen and managed to eat only three-fourth of the meal, even though it wasn’t something big in the first place. Sherlock had suffered from a bout of anorexia some years ago since he so frequently forgot to eat and even though he was better now, he still had trouble keeping food down if he ate beyond a point. He topped off his meal with lots of water and one more sherry before hitting the sack.

Thankfully for him sleep came instantly, all thanks to his hard work, long hours and limited time for rest. He was constantly tired but that also meant he didn’t have the luxury of lying awake in bed for more than a minute.

The nightmares continued in varying frequencies, sometimes occurring every night, sometimes reappearing once in a week or so.

That night they were way too real.

He saw those days clearly, days that still tore his soul apart and ripped through his heart. He had tried to contact John even while on the cruise but his number had been switched off. He had called the hospital and they had told him he hadn’t reported to work.

He couldn’t get in touch with John even as he landed back in London with his father’s coffin. To his shock when he had gone to the flat he found someone else there. John had vacated the flat, left the job and disappeared.

Simply disappeared in thin air.

A month later a lawyer had sent divorce papers to a shell-shocked Sherlock to sign under the ‘separation by mutual consent’ and ‘seeking divorce due to incompatibility issues’ context. At first Sherlock had resisted and insisted that John and he meet to talk things out at first. But his appeal had been rejected repeatedly by John, through his lawyer of course. Unable to afford either the time or money to contest the divorce, a tired and heartbroken Sherlock had finally signed the papers six months later. He had not heard from John or seen him even once, it was as if the man had cut him out of his life completely.

Sherlock had long stopped feeling sorry for himself or cursing his luck. What was the point in doing something as self-defeating as that?

He relived those days in his nightmare, seeing himself running around like a headless chicken trying
to organize a place for him and his mummy to stay, look for a therapist they could afford, finding a job and changing universities so he could study and work at the same time. He remembered and felt the despondency from those days, those long periods of denial and equally long periods of depression and hopelessness. It had been a very tough three and half years for him and his mother. Mycroft’s charity had been refused by Sherlock on the grounds that he had nothing to offer but money and hence it wasn’t even needed, but in spite of everything Eugenia had kept in touch with her elder son.

The last thing Sherlock saw and heard before he woke up with a jump was Mycroft looking at him disapprovingly and once again reiterating his favorite quote. “Caring isn’t an advantage. One day, you will face heartbreak again.”

***

“Sherlock, hey!”

“Hello Duncan.”

Duncan Chapman was their next-door neighbor, a forty-year-old man who had divorced his wife five years ago after embracing his homosexual side. He worked for Microsoft corporation as a project manager and earned a good package from that. His flat was slightly bigger than that of Sherlock’s, he had an extra bedroom and a bigger balcony. He also owned a slightly bigger and new car, unlike Sherlock’s well-used ten year old BMW 3 series. Not a rich man but reasonably well-off, not a good-looking man but decent looking and very toned and fit.

Sherlock knew Duncan liked him, a lot.

“How was the trip to Liverpool, Glasgow and Manchester?”

“Good. Hectic but good.”

“Listen, I was hoping if you’d join me for my company’s annual bash at the Four Seasons. It’s on Sunday evening. You do have Sundays off, right?”

“I do. But I will have to take a rain check on this one.”
“As you have been doing for the past whole year, right from the day I moved in.”

Sherlock smiled blandly and tried to walk past his neighbor when he almost ran into Mrs. Hudson, the fifty-five year old affectionate and capable caregiver lady who looked after his mother when Sherlock was out for work. “Hello Sherlock, welcome back,” she said warmly, gently touching his face in a motherly gesture, “And here he is Duncan, back after a loooong tour of three whole days. At least this means you won’t show up every day, at least three times each day, asking me ‘Mrs. Hudson, can I have some sugar please, and oh yeah, when is Sherlock back from his business trip?’ You are one persistent man.”

Duncan blushed. “Mrs. Hudson, you have a flair for drama.”

“So I do.”

“My dogged persistence doesn’t work on Sherlock though.”

“Well, either respect his decision or try harder.”

Sherlock coughed, “You realize you’re talking about someone who’s standing right next to you.”

Duncan bowed with a flourish and said, “So, I am asking again, will you be my companion for the party on Sunday? Ed Sheeran is a guest, he might even sing a couple of numbers.”

“He charges a lot, doesn’t he?” Sherlock tried to skirt around the topic.

“A close pal of one of the executive committee members. So, yes or no?”

Sherlock hated to say no to Duncan, not so many times anyways, but saying yes was not an option either. The last thing he wanted to be was dishonest and fake. Duncan was a nice man, attractive enough, successful enough, interesting enough. But he was simply not John.

“You better not get late at work,” he finally said, “Neither should I.”
A slightly hassled looking Duncan quickly got into the elevator while Mrs. Hudson chuckled and watched Sherlock get busy on his phone, so he wouldn’t have to share elevator space with his infatuated neighbor. As soon as the elevator doors had closed, she grabbed Sherlock’s elbow and said, “I heard he just got a promotion. He likes your mummy, will even take care of her. And he just adores the ground you walk on. Maybe worth a thought, a try, one date perhaps?”

“No,” Sherlock’s jaw hardened and he rushed downstairs by the staircase.

“God, when will he move on?” Mrs. Hudson sighed and went inside the flat.

***

“Sherlock?”

“Hey, Lestrade.”

Gregory Lestrade, about forty years old and handsome in a sophisticated and suave way, looked more like a theatre actor with a natural charisma and excellent voice than a member of the MI5 and one of Mycroft’s closest aides. Sherlock knew Mycroft kept in touch with their mother through Lestrade and also had Lestrade spy on Sherlock but he didn’t see any reason to let this man know. Lestrade didn’t do this for money and opportunities, he did that because he loved Mycroft. In a way Sherlock felt sorry for him and understood his reasons, though he always remained tight-lipped around the man.

“Mycroft asked me to give this to you.”

Sherlock startled and set aside the test tube in which he had collected a certain sample of a body fluid from one of the murder victims. “Seriously?” He asked in a voice laced with disbelief, “Now you are actually delivering messages from Mycroft? How did you even agree to do this?”

“He had expected you to get married or migrate to some other country by taking up a lucrative job. In that case he would have looked after Mrs. Holmes like any elder son should do. But you decided to remain a bachelor and he never got a chance to make it up to his mother for the mistake he made in the past. That’s it Sherlock, all of us make mistakes. I am sure you might have made one or two.”
“No,” Sherlock said, “It wasn’t a mistake. I couldn’t make it work, that’s all.”

“Okay, then make this thing work. Join MI5, your pay will double and you will have your brother looking after your career interests. And let him take care of his mummy. He misjudged her situation in the past, doesn’t mean he can’t make amends.”

“I need to think about it Lestrade.”

“You could call me Greg.”

Sherlock cocked an eyebrow at the older man, a smirk forming at the corners of his mouth. “Has Mycroft agreed?”

“What?” Greg pretended to be surprised but he was mostly flustered from the unexpected revelation.

“Never mind,” Sherlock said, then added in a telling manner, “Lestrade.”

Chapter End Notes

Leap in timeline. All that happened in between will be told in bits and pieces as the story proceeds. Sorry about the angst!
“You are only thirty-one Sherlock,” Dr. Louise Mortimer, Sherlock’s shrink, shook her head as she studied her notes, “You need to look at a life of at least forty-five years which is ahead of you. You’re living on the ‘memories maketh the man’ motto which drags a person backward. Now tell me, can you change the past?”

“No,” Sherlock was quiet, stoic.

“But you can change the future, create it according to your wishes and your aspirations,” she said, smiling a little and looking him in the eye, “If you dwell on what cannot be changed then you’re trapping yourself in a well that’s suffocating, regressive and depressing. Work, mummy, work, brooding, work, mummy, more brooding, this is not the healthiest way for a thirty-one year old, or anyone for that matter, to live their lives. Shunning company, shunning any possible enjoyment in life, you do realize you’re just punishing yourself. And for what? Nothing you did in the past was a crime.”

“John tried to be wise for both of us,” Sherlock’s green eyes looked faraway, “He knew it wouldn’t work immediately. He tried to stay away, tried to warn and advise me, but I was to taken in by him that I wanted him no matter what the consequences could be. Even Mycroft saw it coming, even he told me that John and I were ill-matched at that point. I think my biggest crime was……”

He paused. The shrink waited and then gently prodded, “Listening to your heart?”

“Being impulsive.”

“You didn’t want any of this to happen Sherlock so it’s best not to blame yourself for something that was sheer bad luck. Matches like yours and John’s, sometimes they work, often they continue till both partners mature and thereafter things get better. You both got caught in circumstances beyond your control. See, we have been talking for a year now. Unlike your mother, you don’t need meds or anything intensive. You are a strong-willed person, the same person who stood his ground and married the man he loved. Let this quality of yours to spill on to other areas. Soon you won’t even need me.”
Sherlock sighed.

“Okay, so what do you want to do Sherlock?”

“Corporate investigations.”

“Oh, I have heard about it. It’s something very ‘in’ nowadays, isn’t it?”

“I wanted to start my own work actually. I know several people who would like to join me. At the same time I wish to continue my work as a research scientist. There is this chemical I am trying to discover that can be very useful in treating any radiation exposure in humans and animals. Sort of like an antidote.”

“Go ahead then, do it……okay, would this need lots of capital? Do you have a plan on taking a loan or something?”

Sherlock nodded, for the first time looking a bit more hopeful than before. “I was not used to living poor doc. Initial days were very tough for me and mum and her treatment was expensive. But I have, over the years, curbed my expenses and reduced my former lavish lifestyle to a very modest and low-maintenance one. I managed to get a good insurance for mummy, save most of my salary and still I continued to live frugally. I do have the capital I believe, there is just one little thing we need to sort out now. An office space. You see, my maternal uncle had occupied an office space that actually belonged to my mum a long time ago. He will vacate it soon, then….”

“Great,” Dr. Mortimer smiled broadly, “Happy days are coming up.”

Sherlock wished he could say a ‘yes’ to that and smile a genuine smile. He wore a plastic smile and thanked the doctor, before hurrying out of her chambers. Damn! It was raining cats and dogs. The cold wind blew strong enough to be called a gale, rendering umbrellas useless.

Sherlock stood at her doorstep, taking half the spray on his face and half on one side of his body. He could go back in but he didn’t want to. For some strange reason, he just abhorred company nowadays, even the doctor’s and his friend Victor’s.
Nothing wrong with them. Plenty wrong with me.

He saw a man and a woman standing on the balcony of a house opposite the street. They were enjoying the rain and giggling, looking deep into each other’s eyes, obviously lost in their own private world. Sherlock swallowed down the hurt that bubbled to the surface.

John had once dragged him into the rain and made him dance, somehow managing to make him hear a ‘rhythm and tune’ in the falling raindrops, and they had ended up making love once the rain was over.

He had no idea how long he had been standing there when a familiar voice shouted at him.

“Sherlock! SHERLOCK!”

He squinted his eyes to see who it was but the rain made it difficult for him. Then he heard the man say ‘Hop into the car man, don’t stand there getting soaked’ and knew it was Victor.

***

“Stop thinking about him. Forget him.”

Sherlock cradled his cup of tea and blew on to it, dispersing the vapors rising from it. “I don’t remember who said this but the words resonated with me. Forgetting someone you have known is similar to remembering someone you have never met. It’s not really possible.”

“I know, right?” Victor attempted to make the atmosphere lighter, “I remember all my ex-girlfriends. But none of them rule my life and thoughts. It was good while it lasted but now they are no longer part of my life, my future, my plans. I agree, you cannot completely forget the man you had once loved but is there a point in remembering him at every step of your life and letting that once incident rule your thoughts and actions? It’s been so many years Lockie. Why aren’t you dating again? I know for once there are several interested parties. At least try to see if you get along with someone.”

“No Victor,” Sherlock said, “I am not ready.”
Victor rolled his eyes.

“Besides, if I get into a relationship what happens to mummy?”

He didn’t mention how dependent his mother was on him. While he worked she was quite distraught if he kept long hours and on his days off from work she stuck to him like glue. Even if he took longer than usual in the shower she would knock on the door, insisting they should talk. He didn’t know many men who would willingly accept the baggage he carried, not just of his past but also his present responsibilities.


“He will commit her to some institution. NO.”

“Maybe he is right.”

“Vic, what the hell?”

“Sorry, I was out of line there,” Victor said with genuine regret, “I was only looking out for you, my friend.”

“I know,” Sherlock replied, “Don’t worry about it.”

“Maybe she needs to be occupied somewhat,” Victor insisted, “Meet people, do some work around the house, go out once in a while.”

Sherlock didn’t answer that. How could he? He knew for a fact that letting her do those things would be dangerous and pointless. If she tried to cook she could easily end up setting the flat on fire. She had once left a frying pan on an open, high flame and nearly caused the disaster. Sherlock had tried to take her out but while he was picking up fish and chips for them, she had wandered off somewhere on her own and he had a hard time finding her again.

Meeting people was not an option either. Except for her cousin Amelia and her brother, Sherlock’s maternal uncle Joseph, nobody really understood her illness. They either ended up avoiding her,
lecturing her or laughing at her. Even if not done openly, she understood what was going on and it worsened her condition.

*No self-pity, no self-pity, no self-pity,* this is going to eat you inside out. Sherlock offered his friend a bland smile and said, “I have plans Vic. I want to start my own work, do something I actually enjoy doing, and I have created a plan to kickstart both. Unfortunately, the timing isn’t correct. Any new venture will need a lot of time and I frankly can’t afford that right now. I know I can ask Myc but he and I have fallen out a long time ago. I am not desperate enough to approach him, at least not yet.” He took a deep breath and added, “I hope I never have to. He didn’t exactly act like a good, caring son earlier, what’s the guarantee he will do so now?”

Victor was about to say something when Sherlock’s phone went off.

“Mrs. Hudson is calling,” he frowned, setting down his half-finished cup of tea, “Did I forget to buy mummy’s new medicines. The doctor changed them recently as she was complaining of breathlessness and mild nausea all the time. One second.”

The moment he heard Mrs. Hudson’s voice, he shot up from the chair.

Victor shot up from the couch, “What happened?”

Sherlock listened, his face pale and ashen and his hands trembling. After a minute he shakily disconnected the call and looked at Victor, “It’s mummy.”

“Where?”

“Barts.”

Sherlock hated to visit Barts. It brought too many memories and caused too much heartburn. But right now none of those thoughts occurred to him as Victor quickly got into his coat and tossed Sherlock’s coat at him. “Come on buddy,” he said, “I will drive you there.”

“Th-Thanks.”
“How bad is it?”

“She’s not telling me.”

“Then I shall stay for as long as it’s needed.”

***

The drive to Barts had been a bit of a blur for Sherlock. Memories from his childhood and teenage years came flooding to him and he could see those moment, frame by frame, playing before his eyes. His mummy as a young woman, beautiful and dressed to the nines, cheering him on as he won a long jump competition. His daddy tossing him high in the air and effortlessly catching him. They had always been his biggest cheerleaders and his safety net. Yet he, despite his best efforts, couldn’t do as much for them as he would have liked. As much as they needed. He felt terrible that while he and his friend discussed his future and more or less singled his mum out as the biggest deterrent on that path, the poor old woman was suffering.

Mrs. Hudson came running to see him right at the reception. “I couldn’t wake her from her afternoon nap. Got her to the hospital as quickly as I could.”

Sherlock wanted to say something but the words were stuck at this throat. “You did the right thing Mrs. Hudson,” Victor said, putting an arm around her shaking frame and handing her a handkerchief to wipe her tears, “Please inform others, as appropriate. Relatives, any friends, even Mycroft. Give me numbers so I can make some calls while you make the others. Hey Sherlock, please go and see Mrs. Holmes and speak to the doctors, find out how things are. I will handle things here, including paperwork and insurance. Don’t worry, you go on ahead and be with your mummy.”

Sherlock cast a look of gratitude at his friend and ran towards the elevators.

The moment he reached her room, he saw three doctors, one nurse and two attendants huddled together at the doorway. A horrid foreboding feeling flooded him and he put a hand against the wall of the corridor to support himself.

“Mr. Holmes,” the senior most doctor approached him, “You’re the deceased’s son, right?”

Sherlock made a distressed sound and staggered towards the room. Deceased. Dead. Gone.
Departed. His mother was no more. But how could that be? He had spoken to her only a few hours ago? She seemed fine then. She had even asked him what time he’d be home.

She lay there on the bed, peaceful, seemingly asleep, a small smile at the corner of her mouth. There were no signs of disturbance on her face at all. The machines around her bed had all flatlined and made strange, creepy noises.

“It was a massive heart attack and death was instantaneous. When they brought her in, the paramedics told us they couldn’t revive her but we still tried our best. Tried for almost an hour before we declared her…as…..Mr. Holmes, don’t you have someone with you? Are you entirely on your own? Should we call somebody? Someone needs to sign the release of the body, settle the insurance and complete the paperwork.”

“No,” Sherlock was used to handling every grief and every problem alone, this time was no exception, “I will handle this. Just tell me what to do.”

***

One month was all it took. Sherlock bore the shocking news of his mother’s death with stoic silence and amazing dignity. He single-handedly organized the funeral, completed all paperwork and other documentation related to the demise, handled the relatives and friends and kept them at bay, not letting them overwhelm him while ensuring he politely thanked all for their condolences. He went back to work within a week and put his futuristic plans into proper action. He resigned from his job, registered the name of his new company with the right authorities, got in touch with people who had the skillset he needed and who had expressed a desire to work for him.

Staying busy meant he had little time to think about mummy or the fact that he was now alone. Even though she had been physically and mentally ill, her presence had been enough of a cocoon for him to fall back on during tough days.

The final thing he did was sell the flat he shared with his mother, so he could use that as the final bit of capital he needed to kickstart his venture. Fortunately for him, his maternal uncle Joseph vacated the tiny space which Eugenia had given him for his use, telling him ‘I should have done this a long time ago’. Better late than never, Sherlock thought as he took the keys from him and got the place cleaned, painted and decorated to accommodate his cabin, a reception and waiting area, two meetings rooms, a pantry and a workspace that could accommodate about six or seven people. That gave him the all-important office space for his new company.

“So,” Victor said as he helped him shift his luggage to his new accommodation, “Is the bedsit
furnished? You sold all your furniture.”

Sherlock bit down on his bottom lip and stared at his feet. A sudden pang of loss hit him full force as he remembered the bedsit he had once shared with John. In another life…..

“Stop thinking about that prick,” Victor chided him, “Just throw him out of your mind. How long did you know him anyway?”

“You’re right,” Sherlock said with fierce determination, “I have to move on. If I can handle mummy’s demise then this is……”

“Yeah,” Victor said, not letting him finish, “Let’s go now.”
Moving on

Chapter Summary

Sherlock finds two flat mates and starts his own work on a good note.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In three months Sherlock had managed to steer his newfound company towards its first bit of success. Not only had they landed seven clients, they had also got all their legal paperwork in order, recruited the right talent and started off their initial assignments with reasonable success. Sherlock had called his company’s services as ‘niche’ and demanded an upfront amount in every contract signed.

Thanks to that, he didn’t have to dig into his now meagre savings to pay the employees. He had created a nice little pool of funds to run the day to day and monthly business operations.

At the same time Sherlock had started working on his research project, developing a patent compound that could be easily used to treat radiation exposure and it was coming along nicely. Aside from the monthly rent for the furnished-bedsit he now lived in (which was in a better location as compared to where John and he lived and somewhat bigger with its own attached bathroom), he had no other expenses. He hadn’t accumulated loans nor incurred any losses through any speculation during all these difficult years. There had been the temptation, but he had resisted.

“Refurbish your wardrobe,” Mrs. Hudson advised him one evening when she had invited him over for dinner and a chat, “You are approaching big organizations and senior executives to sell your company and services. These people need to see a thoroughbred professional at their doorstep and your attire makes a big first impression. Also, buy a new car. Surely you have enough money for that.”

“It will be about four or five more months before we make profits,” Sherlock said, “Right now all payments are being ploughed back into advertisement, salaries and running costs. But yeah, I can buy a new car. Maybe a used one in a decent condition.”

“Oh I have an idea,” she said, “My nephew bought a BMW 5 series last month and he suddenly got a transfer order to Abu Dhabi from the construction company he works for. He is doing a distress sale. You can get a new car, with hardly five hundred miles on it, for 60% the price.”
Sherlock got the car that very week. It was sleek and shiny, not a scratch on it. Deep burgundy in color, it also had stylish cream colored leather seats and plenty of wood paneling inside to give it a rather grandiose and elegant look.

Sherlock lay in bed one night, thinking about his situation. Things had definitely taken a turn for the better suddenly, even if that had come at the cost of a great and irrevocable loss. He missed his mother terribly and blinked back the tears that welled up whenever he thought about her.

“You are happy now mummy,” he murmured softly, thinking about the ill-fated woman who had more or less died the day her husband had passed, “You had wanted nothing more than to be with daddy again and now you are.”

He remembered putting his arms around her frail, bony shoulders and helping her into bed after nervous spells and shattering nightmares. Sometimes he even got irritated, having to wake up several times during the night and not being able to go back to sleep again. Right now there was nothing more he wanted than to hear his mother’s voice again, calling out to him and asking him to sit with her for some time.

He closed his eyes and was about to turn to his side when his phone went off next to the pillow. It was an unknown number but then some client reps did call from numbers so far not saved on his phone, new leads and prospects, so he felt obliged to answer. “Holmes here.”

“Sherlylocks!!” The cheerful, ebullient, sing-song tone that could belong to one and only one man alone. James Isaac Moriarty, his onetime bestie who had drifted apart from him due to work related constraints and of course the insular personality developed by Sherlock post his father’s death. But somehow the Irishman had tracked down his new number, the one Sherlock had activated about two years ago, and called him. Before Sherlock could answer Jim started talking again, as was his habit. He just didn’t like silence much. “Hey, I can recognize you from your breathing sounds baby boy, you ARE Sherlock Holmes.”

“Of course,” Sherlock’s voice cracked from emotions, “Jimmy….is it really you?”

“Asshole, it is me. What the hell is wrong with you man? Why have you forgotten all your old pals? I had no idea you still existed…..”

“Sorry, but it has been just too…..you know….it wasn’t intentional…..”
“I know Sherly,” Jim’s voice mellowed, “I heard. I am so very sorry man, this shouldn’t have happened to anyone, forget a man like you. The last time we met was at your dad’s funeral and then for a couple of years I got to know about you from Myc. Then that too stopped.”

“Yeah, I can imagine him supplying little bits of information about me,” Sherlock felt a bit better, talking to an old pal always helped, “Until you kicked his arse into the next century. He even had the wedding planned and the ring purchased.”

“I never committed to him. He was still willing to take a risk. Anyways, where do you live now.”

“Brunton Street.”

“No, your new address will be Conduit Street.”

“Jim, I can’t afford even a square foot space on that street or anywhere close to that area.”

“I have a triplex there,” Jim said generously, “Skylight Apartments, 17th to 19th floors. You, me and Irene can share.”

“Irene???”

“You don’t remember her? She was briefly in school with us. The girl who turned up in hot pink pants for the sports practices, swing both ways with boys and girls and an ace rider. I hear she uses that whip for other purposes now.”

An image of the old school flame who used to titillate both men and women (though she leaned heavily towards women those days), dressed in leather and brandishing a whip with bright red lipstick on, flashed before Sherlock’s eyes. Before he knew it Sherlock had started to laugh, a sound that came across as alien to even his own ears. When was the last time he had laughed? When was the last time he had responded to a joke? When did he even feel happy? As far as he could remember, it had been forever since he had laughed out this loud. “Jimmy,” he said emotionally, “Thanks a lot man.”

“You’re welcome. For what exactly?”
“It’s been a long time since….”

“Since you laughed?”

“Yeah, you can say that.”

Jim’s voice had empathy this time, not just humor or a teasing undertone. “I can’t say I am able to position myself in your shoes Sherlylocks. My old man is very much alive and looking for a fourth wife and a sixth mistress while my mam is happily single and runs a music school in Dublin and stays in the stately home owned by her grandpappy. But I can feel, somewhat, the sense of bewilderment you must have over the turn of your fortunes. Losing wealth is still okay but losing both parents like this and falling out with the brother, that’s a big loss.”

Sherlock said nothing.

“Listen, come and live with me. You know my old man has oodles of money but over the past few years I have made my own. I am an astrophysicist by profession but beyond that I have also been doing some business. Today I own a clothing line, a travel company that specializes in Mediterranean cruises and I am also into real estate. I have homes in New York City, Chicago, London, Paris, Dubai, Singapore and Cape Town. But they’re all way too big and lonely. Here, in this London triplex apartment, I have more than enough room for half a dozen friends.”

“Jim….you know I hate to take favors.”

“I have plentiful space and no company. If you don’t stay with me, I have everything to lose. If you stay, I have everything to be happy about. Now tell me, who’s actually asking for a favor.”

“God Jim, nobody can win a war of words with you.”

“Oh,” Jim sounded playful, “I thought you could and you used to. This Friday then, noon time, I will be at home waiting for you. Three days enough to pack up, pay off the landlord and come over to live with me?”

***

Dot on time on a sunny Friday morning, Sherlock stood outside the doorstep of the Conduit street
apartment whose address Jim had texted him. After a long time he felt like the old days were back. A posh and sophisticated neighborhood, plenty of affluence around, chic women and suave men walking or driving late model sports cars and sedans, it was a throwback to the days when he lived with his parents in their spacious, elegant property. Skylight apartments was meant for only the super-rich and for a reason too. The foyer was all marble and wood, decorated with rich colors and expensive artifacts. The security system was expensive and state of the art. The elevators were all mirror and carpet, fit for royalty.

One of the concierge’s assistants came up to the appointed floor with him, to help him with all seven items of baggage he had. Sherlock rang the bell and waited.

Soon he heard footsteps hurrying to the door and the faint clicking sounds of a security code being punched in. Seconds later he was enveloped in a crushing hug by a man five inches shorter but with the strength that belied his midsize frame. Jim Moriarty, aka Jimmy his friend, looked even more dashing and handsome in his early thirties than he used to in his teens. Clad in a super-expensive Westwood suit, a Gucci tie, bespoke shoes, sporting a Rolex watch and smelling of Hugo Boss cologne, he literally dragged Sherlock inside and tipped the concierge boy generously for bringing in the bags.

“Oh boy,” Sherlock said, “Unearthly gorgeous!”

“Yeah,” Jim made an expansive gesture with his hands, “This place set me back by about two and half million quid. Took me almost half a million more to get it done exactly the way I wanted to. It better be gorgeous.”

“This flat too,” Sherlock said, “But I meant you.”

Jim cleared his throat, “Tell me something I don’t know.”

Sherlock swatted his rump and lapsed into his old habits. “You feisty and vain little Irishman.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Now, let’s look at you! Reed thin and pasty, dark circles under your eyes and wearing clothes befitting a forty-five year old. I need to put you under the tanning lamp and feed you ice cream at the end of every meal. Then a new wardrobe is due. In a month or two you shall have a makeover my friend.”

The triplex was beautiful and decorated with a minimalistic approach, with elegant pastel furnishings,
polished teak wood flooring and huge wall length French windows. Unlike most triplex apartments, this one was designed to operate at an independent level for each occupant with privacy provided for three separate units. The first level belonged to Irene and had a kitchen, a laundry room, a foyer, a sitting room, two bedrooms with attached baths and a kitchen with an attached dining space. Sherlock was on the upper level which had a similar layout but instead of the foyer and the laundry room there was a home office. Jim’s space was bigger and on the third level, with a separate formal dining room and a large terrace with a plunge pool on it, surrounded by recliners and a wet bar.

Sherlock settled in quickly. The rooms were immaculately furnished so there was no need to do anything other than put away his clothes, shoes, toiletries and other personal items. Within two hours he was done.

He went out to work a bit later than usual and came back late, nearly at ten in the night. He had to meet a finicky client and they had kept him back pretty late. In a way Sherlock was thankful for the location Jim had provided him with because it had much closer proximity to offices and commercial complexes. When he parked his BMW 5 series amidst the sea of Bugatti, Aston Martin, Lamborghini Aventador, Porsches and Mercedes cars, he was happy to note that it had taken him only fifteen minutes to get home. Only then he realized that he was hungry. He hadn’t eaten anything since breakfast.

He had the security code now so he easily entered the triplex and came face to face with ‘The Woman’ aka Irene Adler.

“Hiya Sherlock!”

The slightly too small eyes carefully enhanced by two different shades of eyeshadows, the immaculately coiffed hair, the slightly too thin lips expertly plumped up with a lip plumper and gloss, sky high heels and cat claws in bright red color, she was exactly what she had been many years ago. But there was also a difference. She stood taller now, more confident, with an almost regal aura of self-assurance about her.

“Irene,” Sherlock let himself get wrapped up in an awkward hug.

“Ummm……still playing hard to get?” She winked.

“Oh dear…..”
“It’s so cute, seeing you all flushed and unsettled, I couldn’t resist.”

“Good to see you. I suppose Jim and you had kept in touch all through.”

“Only the past year,” she said, literally pushing him down on the couch and taking her seat next to him, “When he told me he would be in London for about six to eight months this year, I changed my work plans to be here at the same time. As you know, nobody entertains and hosts like Jim Moriarty and the man is loaded, boy oh boy, is he loaded. I heard his net worth is in excess of five hundred million dollars.”

“I know,” Sherlock said, “Who knew the catfight expert had such an eye for business.”

“Oh Sherlock, he is also a genius. Just like you are. But he patented and sold his inventions while you worked for others and let them make money off it.” She stopped and took his hands, “I know what happened to you Sherlock. Sheer bad luck and wrong timing I would say. I have no idea if there is any man in this world who would let go of a jewel like you, unless he is an absolute ass. I don’t know who this man was, I don’t even wanna know his name because I spit on such cowards. They give all men, especially gay people, a very bad name. Disgusting and really shameful if you ask me.”

Sherlock sighed, “Leave it. There are always three sides to a story as they say, what A says, what B says and what the real truth is. If you dig, you might find me at fault too.”

She smiled, “Oh man, please don’t tell me you still love him.”

“Love was never the problem between us. Now, after all these years, I just feel sad.”

“Forget about sad. Let me tell you something that will truly make you laugh.”

“What sort of nonsense is the bitch feeding you,” Jim came down the sweeping staircase, “Go make a sandwich, the woman!”

“Already made you bastard,” she grinned, “You two remember Janice Dillon, our principal.”
“Yes,” Sherlock and Jim said together.

“Well, remember how she charged our parents such a grossly indecent sum for our education, no doubt all the other parents whose kids went to the same school were fleeced too and she filled her coffers right up to the brim. Old Miss Moneybags has now retired to a penthouse apartment in none other than Monte Carlo, overlooking the marina. Beat that!”

After a moment’s stunned silence, all three burst out laughing. “Careful Sherlylocks,” Jim said, spasming from laughter still, “You have laughed twice today. Irene, bitch, take his temperature. I think he might be coming down with something.”

More laughter ensued and Sherlock felt almost normal as he walked to his bedroom on the upper floor. As he finished his sandwich, prepared rather well by Irene, he silently thanked God for small mercies. It was nice to live in an apartment like this, with two childhood friends.

Chapter End Notes

Patience, patience, John will be back soon!
The return of a lost love

Chapter Summary

Sherlock faces his past in the most unexpected way

A month passed and Sherlock started believing seriously in the saying ‘after bad times comes the good, after good the bad’. It was all karmic and cyclic and with him taking charge of things now, the results were much better than he had expected. He was on the verge of breaking even thanks to three large deals he had managed to secure, one of them his very own. It had taken him long hours and he had burned the midnight oil often, but the rewards were sweeter than honey. Two months from now and six months from the start, he would actually make money from the business.

He had neglected his experiments though and wanted to get back on an even keel there. He made up his mind to check with Jim if he could convert his home office into a lab. His own equipment of course.

It was a Sunday morning and Sherlock had ordered breakfast from a nearby deli for all three of them, plus brewed tea to wash it all down with. Jim and Irene earned a lot more than he did and contributed to the house much more than he could. This was his way of showing he too wanted to contribute, even if it was in a modest way initially. When he started making money, he would probably indulge them much more. A huge tray loaded with Eggs Benedict, bacon, gourmet sausages and fried vegetables, the fruits Jim and Irene preferred, three types of fruit and vegetable juices, he had it all on a platter.

“Goody good morning,” Irene greeted him as they sat by the poolside.

“Fuck you for being so cheerful and productive in the mornings,” Jim groaned, curling up on one of the recliners.

“I ordered in actually,” Sherlock said, “Wanted to cook but slept through the alarm.”

“You do need more sleep sweetie,” Irene drawled.

“Mmmm, kiwis,” Jim woke up somewhat, “By the way, the woman has some news.”
Sherlock looked at Irene who was adding a top coat to her toenails, “Really?”

“Uh-huh,” she said, tossing her dark locks back with a flourish, “A certain Mr. Knoxville.”

Sherlock’s eyebrows shot up, “You are marrying a town?”

Jim laughed out so loud that Irene’s cat Byron meowed and jumped off the recliner, rushing inside the apartment. “Some places are also last names, or surnames,” Irene showed mock-annoyance, “Like Austin, Guzman, Kolakowski.”

“Toponymic surnames,” Jim snickered, “Yeah, got it. Does your intended own Knoxville?”

She looked smug, “He could own a large part of it if he so wished. His net worth is a hundred and sixty million and while he’s no Jim Moriarty and his half a billion, he is certainly not some small fry with a tiny pecker.”

“So he has a large pecker?” Sherlock chuckled to which Jim joined in.

“Seriously guys,” Irene looked at them crossly and folded her arms over her chest, “He is a big man in his own right, a man of few words but enormous charm, a man who never throws his weight around much but gets things done in a jiffy. He is resourceful, well-connected and very suave. His father was a plantation and ranch owner and started a small time spice production company twenty years ago. But ever since he took it over, he trebled the company’s profits, opened four branches, spread their market to Canada and Europe and Latin America instead of limiting it to US and Mexico.”

“Tell us the truth,” Jim asked, “What is a bisexual, leaning towards gay, woman like you trying to get out of a seemingly straight and successful businessman who has a big pecker and bigger charms? What do you really want?”

Irene shrugged, “Social Protection is Plan A and plan B is deep pockets and family name. Plus he’s a busy, self-assured man who wouldn’t be jealous or tie me down at home. It is a win-win.”

“How is it a win for him bitch?”
“He wants to start a family and wants the tag of a married man, I guess. I suspect even he is gay, at least an occasional cock-lover, so we can both have our own little ‘private time apart’.”

“Wow! You did strike a great deal bitch.”

Irene laughed merrily and Jim kept up with her till their eyes fell on a glum Sherlock. “Hey,” Jim reached out and handed a cup of tea to the lanky Englishman, “The tea is turning to river water man. Please drink it….and stop sulking. The only person stopping you from having another relationship is YOU. Otherwise look at yourself, you can get a date on demand and one proposal every month if you just make yourself available. One dating app, a few appearances at some select pubs and, as I said, a change in wardrobe. That’s all it takes.”

“It’s not that,” Sherlock said, “I wish I had thought like you both do and rationalized my attraction towards my ex-husband. I think I am ruined in a way, damaged beyond repair, but the same might be the case with him. For all I know, he could also be alone somewhere and unable to date again. Some relationships are no intense that when they break up, they leave a twister-like trail in their wake.”

“Time heals it all,” Irene said in a serious tone, “Don’t try to defeat time Sherlock. Let it heal you and resolve those issues.”

“I just wish I had closure.”

Jim quickly changed the topic and turned it towards breakfast instead.

“I wish one of us could prepare Hollandaise sauce like this deli does,” he smacked his lips and dug in with great gusto, “Thanks for this Sherlock and the kiwis and dragon fruits too. My absolute favorites they are! Oh by the way, a couple of things to share before we get busy with our Sunday. On Wednesday I will be travelling to Milan for some meetings. I will be back next Tuesday or Wednesday. Sherlock, I wanted to introduce you to someone who might be able to get you half a dozen new clients. A very capable, smart and sharp man, not as sharp as me but still…..better than most.”

Sherlock gave him a crooked smile, “Ah, no one as wise as Moriarty.”

“I accept your compliment,” Jim winked, “So this man, you need to meet him on your own. I just texted you the number. Call him tomorrow and take my name, he will know what to do.”
“Really, Jim, I don’t need any favors…..”

“Don’t be silly. I owe them suggestions about companies that do data security plus corporate vigilance, so I’m suggesting names I know. The deals come only if you present your case well.”

“Thanks nonetheless. What is this man’s name?”

“Sebastian Augustus Moran.”

Irene exclaimed, “That dude? He is so…..yummy.”

“Mr. Knoxville is listening,” Jim and Sherlock said together.

Irene rolled her eyes and elegantly popped a strawberry into her mouth. “I am on diet, doesn’t mean I can’t check the menu. Anyone who has seen Sebastian Moran will be taken in by him. But Jimmy, I thought you will be at home on Friday evening so I can introduce my soon to be fiancé to you. Yes, he just confirmed last night that he is flying down here on Thursday and will join us for dinner on Friday.”

Jim did a facepalm, “Ohhh, that is sad. But I can’t delay this so…..how long will he be here for?”

“Two months, plus whatever time it takes to complete the work he’s coming down for.”

“Then don’t you worry. We have plenty of time to catch up. We have a gourmet chef on call, a housekeeper who comes in every day aside from Sundays, so you’ll be able to organize dinner even without my help.”

***

When Sherlock arrived at the glitzy Dorchester Hotel at Hyde Park, his eyes fell immediately on Sebastian Moran and he instantly saw the truth behind Irene’s normally exaggerated words. That man was a delight for sore eyes. Six feet four and half inches, ruggedly built like a footballer, long
shapely pins and arms like a swimmer’s, baby blue eyes, his luxuriant mane the color of sparkling champagne, he could have easily walked off some painting or the silver screen. Sherlock was sure he saw a young woman stare so hard at him she tripped over the edge of the carpet.

“Mr. Moran,” Sherlock shook hands with him.

A nice, firm grip that conveyed confidence and determination without the usual touch of one-upmanship. A rare combination of looks, elegance and self-assurance which impressed Sherlock, even though he didn’t want to give the final verdict on the man unless and until he had spoken at length with him. If he didn’t appear as bright when he spoke, Sherlock was ready to take back all of his first impressions and corresponding compliments. “Mr. Holmes,” Sebastian said with a broad smile, “Just the man I wanted to catch up with. Shall we sit at the coffee shop or the bar?”

“Too early for the bar,” Sherlock said.

“Okay, coffee shop then.”

Once they had settled in and Sebastian had ordered for both of them, cappuccino for himself and latte for Sherlock, along with a wrap and some salsa and salad for each, they began with the introductions. Sherlock introduced himself briefly, then spoke at length about the work he did, and from the questions Sebastian asked he was already sure the man was not really a dunce. Then came the part where Sebastian spoke about the work he did and it was lucid, clear and very detailed. He had brains, that man!

“So you see Sherlock,” they had lapsed into first name terms by then, “We can work several deals together. Where you have a foot in, give me a lead, where I have a foot in I return the favor. For now, there are nearly ten deals we can work on, together.”

“Ten?”

“Yeah, I am sure this will go up soon. I started this part of my business only about a year ago. My core business is….well, my father was a Lord, so it’s more like inheritance.”

Sherlock nodded, “It’s nice to see a man, whose father had left him a million pounds a couple of years ago, actually start something of his own and succeed on that too.”
“I could say the same about you,” Sebastian replied with a lopsided smile, “The son of a wealthy father losing all his wealth and his family and yet continuing to persevere and create a fresh identity for himself, a new beginning, a business concept so fresh and filled with growth opportunities, that’s quite rare.”

Sherlock smirked, “It seems we have both done extensive research on each other.”

“Never get into bed or business with someone you don’t know too well,” Sebastian said with a hearty laughter. Over the next two hours, they had a productive conversation as they gained lots of insights on the proposed clients, discussed each other’s business proposal and professional expertise and even made some proposals around their joint business plans. Sherlock found his brain opening up like an umbrella as he provided input after input and soon Sebastian was staring at him in absolute admiration and awe. “Oh my God,” he murmured, “No wonder Moriarty says you are one of the few friends he has. Only the really intelligent can hope for such a compliment from him.”

Sherlock nodded, “He is an excellent friend too.”

Sebastian looked at his file, “The first client we can sign on immediately is the ‘Clove-Tac’ group. Their CEO and Managing Director will be here shortly and hem will surely sign the deal as soon as I am able to get an appointment with him. You are in, right?”

“Yes I am, but my calendar is so full this week that…..”

“No worries. Share your terms and conditions and I can speak for both of us. We are one team.”

“Yes, I agree we are.”

“So Sherlock,” Sebastian’s blue eyes bore into Sherlock’s soul. “You live with Moriarty. I know sometimes childhood friends become sweethearts in their adult lives. Not meaning to pry into your privacy but are you two like….together….as in……together-together?”

In another life, another time, another parallel universe, Sherlock would have felt enormously flattered by Sebastian’s interest in him and jumped at an opportunity to ask him out. But right now he only felt a lack of interest that came with years of practiced and self-imposed celibacy, solitude and his underlying fears and apprehensions about trusting another man. While he missed John terribly, he had slowly started to feel more anger than grief over that period of their lives. How could John just cut him out of his life? Why hadn’t he been man enough to sort the problems out rather than escape
from them? And why didn’t ever think about Sherlock’s need for closure?

“We aren’t exactly boyfriends,” he replied cautiously, not wanting to add anything extra, “Just good friends who are temporarily sharing lodgings. I know this might sound funny, but there is a lady-friend of ours who also occupies the triplex and all of us have separate bedrooms.”

The look of relief on Sebastian’s face was comical at the best and slightly perturbing at the worst. He was a very nice man, a great business partner and collaborator too, and Sherlock didn’t want to upset him with a refusal.

Fortunately for him, Sebastian Moran didn’t ask him out immediately though he did check Sherlock’s preferred pastimes and favorite haunts, his likes and dislikes when it came to socializing and parties and his interests over the weekends. By the time they parted, Sherlock missed John even more. If only, *if only* John had been as interested in him back then as Sebastian seemed to be at this moment……

***

“I am not even sure he loved you Sherlock,” Irene said as she carefully put on her stilettos and checked her appearance on an ornate seashell encrusted mirror on the wall while Sherlock worked on his laptop, “If he did, he might have put in some additional effort in holding it all together while you went through hell trying to help your very sick parents. Sometimes you need to replace your grief with some true disappointment and relevant anger. Who knows, that might just convert your undying love to borderline dislike.”

“And are you going to ask ‘mirror-mirror on the wall’ now?” Sherlock said dismissively.

Irene was about to rebuke him for being loyal to a man who had deserted him a long time ago when the doorbell rang and brought the conversation to a halt. She squealed in a rather childish manner ‘He is HERE’ as if the Pope or the American President himself had shown up at the door. “Yeah, your American boyfriend is here,” Sherlock said with a one shoulder shrug, “Go greet him and finish your PDA’s and I will be right behind ya. Need to send this email to Sebastian before I close my outlook.”

He sent the email while half listening to Irene’s heels clattering on the marble of the staircase and the polished wooden floor, then heard her greeting her man gleefully. He wasn’t even sure she loved him but she was clearly quite taken in by him.
Must be a remarkable fellow, he thought as he quickly closed the laptop, took off his sweatshirt and swapped it for a Tommy Hilfiger T-Shirt (a gift from Irene), pulled on his croc leather moccasins and made his way downstairs. He didn’t want to let Irene down by staying in grunge clothing. She’d tried to talk him into wearing 1 of his 4 suits but he had steadfastly refused since he needed them for meetings.

On his way he picked up the bottle of bubbly Jim had bought for the occasion. They were supposed to pop it open to welcome Mr. Knoxville. But, as he reached the bottom of the stairwell, his entire world turned upside down and he nearly dropped the expensive Dom Perignon. For standing there at the foyer, trying to extract himself from Irene’s clinging embrace, was John, his John.
Sherlock had faced several nerve-jarring situations in life but none as unsettling, shocking and soul-shattering as this scene that played out before him. For a second he was even willing to consider the fact that Mr. Knoxville was a dead ringer for John, or maybe John’s long lost twin who somehow landed up in the States, because…how could this be? How could the simple, handsome yet unassuming surgeon from London become this high-flying businessman in a twenty five thousand dollar Ralph Lauren suit?

He gaped at John and realized that the color had drained from his face, as it had drained from his own, and the two of them locked gazes for the longest moment while Irene yapped on about something to her ‘soon-to-be fiancé’. Little did she know she wasn’t even present as far as the two men were concerned.

Sherlock struggled to find his voice and composure. No doubt this was the same John he had married otherwise why would he look at him as if he had seen a ghost! After his initial shock, he noticed John properly and noted those subtle changes in the man even more. He stood at the same moderate height but, just like Jim, his confidence and debonair disposition added several inches to his frame. There were fine lines on his face which made him look more attractive and wise and his frame was more toned and athletic underneath those pricey clothes. Definitely gym toned and trained by a personal trainer. He was tanned, not spray tanned but properly tanned in the sun, his hairs had more sparkles of silver in them and somehow made him look like a DILF and a foxy Casanova in his late thirties.

Three things hadn’t changed. John’s right eyebrow twitched, just like it always did when he was uncomfortable or unsettled. His posture was the same ‘I stand up for myself so get outta my way’ kind of arrogant. Thirdly, he still looked at Sherlock with the same kind of wonder as he had done many years ago on their wedding night. It was a look that said ‘All of you is mine, only mine’. Possessive, passionate, protective…..

But hell, why would he be so now? Sherlock and he were divorced and he was about to…..

…….get engaged with a woman!!!
“Oh Sherlock,” Irene said excitedly, “I hadn’t noticed you join us. Jack, oh well….that’s his first
name but more like a nickname….his name is actually….um John Henley Knoxville. Jack, this is my
high school buddy Sherlock and Sherlock, this is my boyfriend Jack. We have been…..”

John surprisingly interrupted her. “Can I get a glass of water Irene?”

She didn’t mind, “Oh yes, of course. Give me a moment. Sherlock, please be a darling and take Jack
to the sitting room upstairs. I’ll join you both soon…..oh, you got the champers, let me also get the
flutes then.”

Suddenly left alone, the two men struggled to form words. Memories hit them full force, hammering
them with conflicting feelings of denial and hurt, thrill and joy, shock and numbness. They couldn’t
take their eyes off each other and yet they didn’t know what to say, now that they had met 10 years
later.

Eventually Sherlock was the one who broke the silence. “This way please, Mr. Knoxville.”

Without waiting for a response, he turned and walked up the staircase. After a brief pause, he heard
John following him and, acutely aware of his presence and his eyes on him, he found himself near
stumbling on the steps. He kept his hand on the bannister for support, lest his legs gave away any
moment and made him look like a prized fool. Finally they were upstairs and, letting out a breath he
didn’t even realize he was holding, he quietly led John to the sitting room on his floor. Irene wanted
them to entertain her boyfriend there because Sherlock’s sitting room was more attuned to a man’s
tastes. She had put chiffon-y curtains in hers, along with loads of scented candles, a rather
humongous wind-chime and cushion covers in exotic floral prints.

“How have you been Sherlock?”

John’s words threw him off balance. A simple question to which there was no simple answer.

“Good.”

“It’s….well….a surprise to see you!”

*Surprise. Not pleasant surprise. Or joy. Or even simple happiness. Just surprise. Perhaps a politer
form of ‘shocking’.*
When he didn’t reply John spoke again, “Your apartment….I mean flat, it’s nice. I had no idea Irene was your guest.”

“We are both guests,” Sherlock said coldly as he sat down on a divan and gestured for John to take a seat on the pearl white, leather upholstered, tuxedo style sofa, “This place belongs to our common friend James.”

“Moriarty?” John’s eyes widened.

“Yes.”

“Is he around too?”

“Not this time. He’s traveling, for business purposes.”

John cleared his throat but said nothing. Sherlock too stayed quiet. The silence was tedious.

“Irene told me when I arrived that….her friend is into corporate vigilance and information security.”

“Yes I am,”

John gave him a look that suggested he was interested in knowing more so Sherlock obliged. Without giving any smaller details about how he started the company he went on to talk about his interest in the field, the kind of talent he had recruited, the work he had started to do for his clients and several other things associated with the business. The more John listened, the more impressed he seemed. Sherlock saw it from his point of view. From what he was a decade ago to where he had reached now, there was certainly a world of difference. It also reminded the younger man that John could have easily been part of that journey, but he had chosen not to be. His voice became colder as he ended his monologue.

“So you are not a society gentleman whose profession is enjoying his leisure?” John asked.
“Hey,” Irene walked in at that point, “Don’t be rude to poor Sherlock. He was from an extremely wealthy and educated family, in fact his brother is a very influential and senior official in the government and his father was a rather successful businessman. But he has had shitty luck of late and had to risk almost eighty percent of his savings and assets to start this initiative. Fortunately, he is about to start raking in the profits from next month.”

“Good,” John raised an eyebrow, “Since you come from such an illustrious family, no help from your parents?”

Sherlock felt stabbed in the gut. Even Irene squirmed a bit.

“They are both dead,” Sherlock said without batting an eyelid. No need to skirt around this topic. Let him know the truth so he can shut up about it.

It worked and John looked aghast. His eyes widened and his jaw dropped. “They’re…..but they were quite young, weren’t they?”

Irene and Sherlock both sat up straighter on hearing that unexpected comment. While Sherlock knew that was a slip of tongue, Irene looked puzzled at the sudden burst of familiarity. But John showed presence of mind by quickly twisting the topic around and adding a clarification. “I mean, if Sherlock is around thirty then his parents can’t be seventy years or more. And why only seventy, nowadays people do live up to eighty, sometimes more.”

“Ah,” Irene said, “I get it. But John, no matter when you lose your parents, the sense of loss is more or less the same.”

“I disagree,” Sherlock said, deciding to get back at John, “Some lose their parents so early that they hardly remember them. Then they expect everyone to be okay with the loss of a parent, just because ‘I coped with it and so should you’. ”

The words hit home and John looked stricken for a moment. But before Sherlock could enjoy that moment that look was gone and replaced by a mask of icy aloofness.

Thereon, John concentrated completely on Irene and more or less ignored Sherlock to the point where the latter thought he was invisible. But the more he ignored Sherlock, the more Sherlock knew John was conscious of his presence. It showed in the way his forehead crinkled, his fists clenched and how he ground his heels on to the thick, plush carpet. Irene on her part kept Sherlock involved in
the conversation until Sherlock decided to pop open the bottle of bubbly and fill three flutes. “Let’s celebrate Mr. Knoxville’s arrival at London and Irene’s happiness on reconnecting with him after two and half months.”

“Amen,” Irene grabbed her glass.

Sherlock extended the glass towards John, holding the stem and leaving plenty of room for his ex to grab it. Still, John grabbed it over Sherlock’s fingers, causing the green-eyed man to jerk his hand away. His eyes darted immediately towards Irene but she was looking at her phone, checking her messages.

One glass led to two and three and by the time the bottle was finished, Irene declared that she wanted to take John out for lunch to a nice seafood place she knew. John seemed neither exhilarated nor unhappy at this, just nodding his head in a manner that could mean yes or no.

“Come with us Sherlock,” Irene asked, winking at him to suggest he should say ‘no’.

“I have something to take care of,” Sherlock replied.

“C’mon honey,” John put his arm around Irene’s waist, “He has someone else to go out with. Why would he want to stick to us like a third arm?”

The statement expressed both curiosity as well as disdain and Sherlock felt his blood pressure rise. But he continued to maintain a calm outer façade and replied, “Believe me, I won’t miss you for even a moment.”

John’s gasp was audible.

Irene looked at him, “Sorry.”

“Huh? Sorry for?” John asked, eyes still on Sherlock.

“I think I stepped on your toe. I heard you gasp.”
“No, it’s fine, I am fine. Shall we?”

“Yes sure, let’s go. Bye Sherlock, see you in the evening or maybe….tomorrow!”

***

Sherlock had spent a strange few hours that Sunday. He had decided to keep himself busy so he didn’t get a chance to mope over his situation or think about John and his sudden reappearance in his life. He did the laundry for all three of them, then cooked dinner for himself, completed some work for one of his employees who was unwell and on leave and then took a long, hot shower. He sat down for a meal but couldn’t get past a few forkfuls of the fusilli pasta with garlic cilantro prawns on top. Half way through he gave up, stashed the food away in a Tupperware container and took the glass of wine to bed.

He was already in bed, wine over, dozy but unable to really sleep, when he heard a knock on the door. “Come on in,” he said.

The doorknob turned and, as he had expected, Irene padded in. She didn’t exactly look or sound upbeat. Her breathing was faster and slightly ragged, indicating a certain amount of stress. For a woman who could practically get into bed with her fake eyelashes on, she had taken off her stilettos and let her hair down from its half-up-do style within minutes of entering the apartment. Sherlock tried to turn on the nightstand lamp but she stopped him with her hand raised and a mild sound of disapproval.

“You okay?”

“Yeah, more or less.”

“What happened?”

She sat at the foot of the bed, her silhouette clearly visible against the backdrop of the hallway light. She tugged at the edges of the duvet and crossed her legs. “Nothing happened. That’s what is so disappointing.”
“You lost me there.”

“We went for lunch and he suddenly remembered he was allergic to seafood. So I ate while he nibbled on salad and stayed glued to his phone. Then we went to see a play and he was out of the theater for the most part, saying he had important phone calls to make.”

“He might have been genuinely busy.”

“Bollocks. It was he who made these plans. Seafood lunch, theater, long drive along the river.”

Sherlock felt a shiver run down his spine. Seafood lunch, theater, long drive, these were precisely things that John and he loved to do together. It flattered him as well as made him mildly jealous that John had chosen to replicate what had once been ‘their joyful Sunday routine’ with someone else. How easily had he been replaced!!!

“Tomorrow will be a better day Irene,” Sherlock added, deciding to remain tight-lipped about it.

Irene didn’t even hear his words of consolation. She went on with her side of the story. “You know, after everything collapsed one by one and no plans remained intact, I suggested that he take me home. I mean c’mon, we have known each other for six months and isn’t it about time we took our relationship to another level? When we were both in the Big Apple, at least there were kisses and cuddles and some soft touches, dances, but here he was almost shying away from even a casual shoulder bump. He flat out refused to take me home saying he is too tired and needs some rest.”

Sherlock remained quiet. There was nothing to say. “It is such a letdown,” she sighed.

“Go to bed Irene,” Sherlock advised, “There is some pasta in my fridge.”

“Yeah, I think I will take you up on that offer.” She remained silent for a moment and then added, “He kept asking about you and Jim all the time, about Mycroft too. Didn’t bother to ask me much about me or anything me-related. And he’s supposed to be my fucking boyfriend.”

“You’re gay Irene. You like women and bad boys, like Jim. It’s not like he’s your type, is he?”
“Um….I am marking my territory here Sherlock. This man will do very well in the future, a solid, stable, capable and non-controversial man who will leave me alone once I give him two kids. I work as much and as often as I want. No pressure, no obligations, that’s it.”

Sherlock remained silent again. *If you have nothing nice to say, say nothing.* “I’ll go have a bite and then head to bed,” she got up and stretched her shapely arms above her head, “It’s been such a waste of a day I tell ya. No Monday morning blues after this disaster Sunday.”

“Hardly a disaster as compared to what my ex did to me,” Sherlock demurred, “I might not have taken some wise decisions back then, I may have even made my fair share of mistakes, but I was not the one to quit and run. Being a man I will admit to one thing, I stopped trusting other men since he did that to me….just left and never came back, no explanations, no reasons, no closure, not even a word of condolence when mummy and daddy passed.”

“Yeah, I know,” Irene kissed his forehead, “Go to sleep Sherlock. I guess I was overreacting.”

Sherlock closed his eyes and nodded. Overreacting? *Wait till you get to know who this ‘John’ really is.* But then, he knew he’d never reveal it from his side.
John Knoxvile

Chapter Summary

John tries to become friends again but Sherlock avoids his advances as old wounds open up.

WHAT?”

Sherlock leaned back against the chair and smiled, “Yes, true.”

Monday had been busy till his bestie had dropped by to pick up something he had forgotten at Sherlock’s apartment a week before. Sherlock had decided to share this with Victor and only Victor, since he was absolutely sure that man would never share this with anyone. After hearing the startling news, Victor looked like a man who had swallowed a live frog. He opened and closed his mouth several times before he finally managed to form a decent sentence. “You mean to say this is the same John Hamish Watson who married you, ran off like an insensitive bastard and has now returned with a girlfriend in tow. What the fuck? Is he homophobic now or has he decided to beard?”

“Don’t know,” Sherlock shrugged.

“Why would he need to beard? He is not some Hollywood A lister who needs to maintain a certain image.”

“Maybe he has his reasons. What amused me is that he is now rich. The same man who sort of hated the rich and affluent dressed exactly like those people he considered ‘vain and insufferable’. His suit, watch, shoes, cologne, everything with designer or bespoke and super-expensive. I saw he spends much time on the beach, his tan is splendid. Also, regular gym workouts with a proper dietician and fitness trainer.”

“The same things he thought were a waste of time and money?”

“Yes. Isn’t it cute how people change?”

“Sherlock,” Victor grew serious, “On a serious note, are you planning to just let this slide? I mean,
shouldn’t you at least confront him and let him know what happened to you during all these years? Aren’t you interested in finding out what he had been up to? I mean, it’s not normal for a struggling young surgeon to suddenly become a multi-millionaire businessman.”

“That too under a different name,” Sherlock added.

“Yeah, that too,” Victor tapped his chin, deep in thought.”

“But I have decided to let it go. Leave him be. I can’t let myself latch on to a ghost. He isn’t real anymore Vic, at some point I didn’t even feel as if I was talking to the same man I was married to ten years ago.”

“Completely different person. Yeah, best you avoid. Though, not sure if he will also avoid you.”

***

As three days passed and there was no contact from John, Sherlock found himself relaxing and at the same time feeling a bit of despair. He had no idea if he was being stupid or just human, but John evoked conflicting needs in him. He wanted the man to stay away and let him move on but he also wanted him to come looking for him and seek him out. Aside from what he wished for John to do, he was also surprised at what he desired to do, how eager he was to take the next step and find out what his ex was up to.

Just plain curiosity and nothing else. There was no need to get so excited about John’s presence in England, especially since the man had clearly not come here to see Sherlock but to visit his ‘girlfriend’ Irene. Sherlock had just happened to be there, by sheer chance.

Sometimes he found himself lying awake in bed at night and wondering if John still loved him. At other times he went through brief moments of emotional upheaval where he had to fend off a strange willingness to throw himself into John’s arms and tell him to forgive and forget, so they could go back to their days as a couple. But those moments inevitably made him ashamed of himself. Forgive him? What for? What had he done? Like many young spouses he had been a bit silly and maybe a tad bit demanding but he wasn’t the one who had walked out and never looked back.

Yes, it had to be John Watson…John Knoxville, who had to do the apologizing.
That Thursday Sherlock did the unthinkable. He was a workaholic who put in some hours even on weekends and never even thought about taking a day off. But that day, as he woke up, he simply didn’t have the energy to head to work. Four nights of fitful sleep and the constant strife and stress about John’s reappearance in his life had caused him to have a mini-breakdown. He felt tired, irritable and giddy.

He decided to work from home and start work late, allowing himself to sleep in.

After leaving a message with his receptionist that he was not to be disturbed till at least 2 PM, he curled up in bed once more. It turned out to be a very good decision because when he woke up it was half past noon and he was much fresher, energized and even a little hungry. The physical discomforts and mental anxiety had diminished, even though they were not fully gone. The five hours of sleep-in had worked wonders and recharged his batteries.

He took a nice long shower, shaved, brushed, dressed in shorts and a T-shirt and pulled on flip-flops on his feet. Not suits, no ties and not shoes today. He indulged himself with spicy instant noodles and low-fat ice cream for breakfast, pampering his soul more than anything else.

He started work at 2 and the next two hours whooshed by within a few blinks. Suddenly he saw Irene was calling him. “Hey,” he answered, “Not my turn to cook tonight.”

“No, no, not really, it’s not exactly what you’re thinking,” she was a little flustered and not her usual measured, smart-mouthing self, “Thought it is also a bit like what you’re thinking. Listen, you know I work in PR right? A sudden call to attend a big diplomatic event has come up and I need to be in Birmingham for that. My boss and client are both going to be there and I cannot, CANNOT miss it. The problem is…..I had invited John for a home cooked dinner and now his phone is unreachable. He will be there at seven. Can you do one of the three things, manage to send him off without giving me away, cook dinner for him and give him company, finish things off with a few shots of whiskey and some takeout food.”

Sherlock felt his throat go dry. John here, him cooking for John, just the two of them, oh no.

“Irene, send him a text and he’ll see it when he’s got network. Even if I can host him, he will be here
for you and not me. Why would he be happy to see his girlfriend absent her housemate greeting him instead? And even if I were to try to make some excuses why will he buy them? Maybe he will end up getting more offended if I make excuses on your behalf or offer to host him for the evening.”

“Oh you don’t know my Jack. He isn’t so mean and spiteful, besides, he also understands business commitments. He ditched me on Sunday, stood me up on Monday and yesterday he took a rain check before we even met at the appointed hour. He, of all people, can’t blame me if I have a commitment one day, for a change.”

“But Irene….”

“Please Sherly. Do this for me. I will owe you one!”

Sherlock thought hard. Irene had already done him one favor and introduced his sales manager Marlin Landau to several of her clients. Thanks to that introduction, Marlin was making tremendous inroads into newer business avenues. In fact, Sherlock was the one who owed her.

“Fine Irene, I’ll do it.”

“Thanks a ton man. I will be late tonight, so ask him not to wait for me. I will call him tomorrow morning.”

Sherlock hung up and stared at the ceiling. Oh boy! He hadn’t seen this coming at all. Why the hell was the universe bringing him and John together again and again when it was pretty clear that nothing was going to emerge from this reconnection. Hell, it wasn’t even reconnection.

Ten years later, just a coincidence, just a chance meeting, just a set of awkward encounters. He wasn’t allowing himself to dream or even hope.

He gave himself a small pep talk. *John isn’t going to be here for you. Chances are that, if he knows Irene isn’t in, he will turn his back and leave. You don’t have to worry about anything. Just chill and do your work.*

Yet, when the clock struck six, he found himself in the kitchen fixing dinner. Thankfully that day his employees had done his share of the work, knowing fully well that when they took time off from their duties Sherlock always pitched in for them. It was liberating in a way and very relaxing, a nice
change from his usual 12-hour 9 am to 9 pm workdays. Sherlock didn’t half-mind the effort he needed to put in to cook dinner. Neither did he have to spend much time deciding on the menu. He knew what John liked and what could be quickly fixed in the 60-minute window he had to cook dinner.

Luckily for him, Irene had stocked her fridge to the fullest and Sherlock’s relatively bare fridge didn’t let him down. After fixing a few cocktails for John and himself, a choice of frozen daquiris and martinis to be precise, Sherlock quickly put together the ingredients for a spicy crab soup with shitake mushrooms and scallions. He set the soup to simmer on a low flame while he chopped red cabbage leaves, red onions and toasted walnuts for a slaw.

For main course he chose fish, since any meat would have taken much longer to cook. A honey and mustard baked salmon. With the cocktails he planned to serve some cheese and cold cuts, which took barely five minutes to arrange on a nice, crystal platter.

He laughed a bit when he imagined his high and mighty elder brother Mycroft seeing him like this. He could almost see the disdain and snobbery on his face, the way he would crinkle his nose and then look down it, ticking Sherlock off in his polished but condescending manner.

“Here is my brother, who could have been a scientist, a philosopher, a Booker winning author or the most effective field agent in MI6. Lookie here what he’s up to. Cooking and serving food for someone who doesn’t even belong to him anymore. Emotional fool.”

Shaking his head and chuckling, Sherlock went about his job while trying to think about how he would handle a conversation with John. The food was the easier part, the company would be much more tough to manage.

He was so lost in his thoughts that he had no idea it was past seven already and, just as he had picked up an apple and an orange from the fruit bowl to prepare some fruit salad as dessert, he saw someone enter the open plan kitchen area.

JOHN!

The fruits dropped from Sherlock’s nerveless fingers and he stared in astonishment at the man who was standing there with a sheepish look on his face. “Um…..Irene had given me a key,” he explained his sudden appearance, “Sorry, I shouldn’t have intruded.”
“It’s….all right….Irene didn’t tell me you had a key….umm….excuse me.”

Sherlock picked up the fruits and went to the sink to wash them, all the while feeling John’s eyes on him. Damn! Why did he startle so easily? He was just taken aback and nothing else but the way he had dropped those fruits could easily get misconstrued by John as a sign of nerves. Rebuking himself silently, he took out the chopping board and lined up the fresh fruits next to it, ready to slice and dice. John surprisingly took off his jacket and tie (Dolce and Gabbana, Sherlock noticed), then rolled up his sleeves and stepped right up to the kitchen bench. “Here,” he tugged at one of the knives Sherlock was holding, “Let me do this for you.”

“Why? I am hosting you, not the other way around.”

“You will cut your finger.”

“What???”

“Look, when Irene told me I am invited for dinner, I had no idea she was planning to include burned offerings.”

Sherlock’s head jerked towards John’s direction. The shock might have shown clearly on his face because John backtracked immediately and smiled at him. “Was just a joke. I don’t want you to end up nicking your fingers, that’s all.”

“If a car salesman can run a business, then I can sure hone my skills in the kitchen.”

“I was also a surgeon. A surgeon needs to be precise, steady, decisive in a split-second even in critical situations. I suppose many of these qualities also help in business.”

“I was also a talented science student with multiple awards and recognitions under my name. that required analytical skills and eye for details. I suppose these qualities also apply to culinary work in the kitchen.”

A newfound respect came into John’s eyes and he backed off, “I apologize, I shouldn’t have intruded and then interfered.”
“My apologies too,” Sherlock said, “I should have offered you something to drink first.” With that he went to the wet bar and got back with the martinis and daquiris and placed the large tray on the kitchen island. “Strawberry daiquiri, watermelon daquiri, martini with three olives. I also have Scotch aged 40 years and some pure Russian vodka that Jim had brought from his trip to Moscow. Take your pick.”

“Watermelon daquiri,” John picked up both the cocktail glasses containing the drink, “If you don’t mind, I’ll be drinking these, both of these.”

“No problem,” Sherlock said nonchalantly, “I’ll just have a martini.”

John settled down happily at the kitchen table and started to sip his drink. He didn’t say anything at first, instead watching closely as Sherlock expertly chopped the fruits, de-seeded them and tossed them with cream, cinnamon powder and some brown sugar to create a yummy dessert. As he put the dessert away in the fridge to chill it before eating, John suddenly opened his mouth and showed how clueless he was about Sherlock’s present condition. “I must say I am a bit taken aback, seeing you like this. Shorts, hairs disheveled, flip flops which couldn’t be worth more than three pounds. Are you living the ‘rich boy slumming it out’ kind of life?”

“No,” Sherlock said, “Your statement is wrong at so many levels. First, I am no boy. Thirty-one now. Two, I am not a man of leisure, as I said the last time we met. I have a business now and it’s doing pretty well. I also work as a freelance scientist, if I may use that term, creating a new compound in my private laboratory. Third point, what you see me as, is exactly what I am now.”

John’s hands visibly shook on his glass. “What have I missed Loc….Sherlock?”

Sherlock took a few deep breaths, picked up the second martini and sat down on a chair opposite from John. Keeping his eyes fixed on a spot on the table and not letting his voice waver even a bit, he recounted the story of his life from the moment he had embarked on that fateful cruise with his parents to the day he had moved in with Jim at this house. He left no details out, aside from the way he had ached for John and longed for him to come back.

By the time the story ended, John looked strangely stricken. But whatever sympathy, apology or reconciliation Sherlock was expecting didn’t come at all. A prolonged silence later, John simply said, “You have indeed come a long way. Wish you the very best with the business.”

“Thanks,” Sherlock cleared his throat, “I’ll set the table for dinner.”
“Can I help?”

“I am used to doing things on my own now.”

“Yes….I can see that you are.”

Sherlock quickly set the table and, despite his several protests, John helped him and even brought the food over from the kitchen. As they sat down to eat, Sherlock decided that he had had enough attention on himself and it was John’s turn to tell his tale. “So, how has your journey been so far?” He asked, looking directly into John’s eyes and wondering if the man would tell the partial or the whole truth.
“It started one day when I was working at the hospital and saved the life of a senior who was feeling unwell but who hadn’t been given any proper diagnosis despite multiple consultations with doctors. When I checked him, I realized he had a serious intestine condition and could easily contact the worst form of pancreatitis if not treated immediately. His life was saved at the nick of time and we spent a long time talking while he recovered.”

Sherlock listened patiently, taking bird bites of his food.

“It turns out that I had a father who abandoned me and he had a son who abandoned him. The poor fellow was a massive drug user and died young, leaving his father all alone at the age of seventy. Ten years on, he was lonely and needed someone not just to look after him but also to take over his business which he had painstakingly created from scratch. He didn’t want some of his greedy, incapable workers to destroy the whole thing he considered his ‘second baby’. We talked and talked and then he proposed that I move to US with him and help him with business. So I did.”

Abandoning your husband, you forgot to add. Sherlock exhaled and remained silent.

John also avoided eye contact as he went on, “At first I was his employee. Then I moved into his house in six months. A year later he legally adopted me and paved the way for me to get a green card. But I repaid him with equal effort and results.”

“You did?”

“Yeah. Ten years ago he entrusted me with his company and its future. Ten years later I have trebled the profits, helped it expand to new geographies, doubled the number of employees and opened four new branches. His net worth was sixty million then, it’s a hundred million now, all thanks to my efforts. Anyways, he passed away a year and half ago and now I, as his legal heir, own it all.”

There was no conceit or arrogance in his tone or choice or words, merely facts. Confident man, as always. Very sure of his talent competence and crystal clear about his goals.
“Yeah,” Sherlock said, “So I heard.”

“That’s a very underwhelming answer Sherlock,” John sounded a bit hurt.

Sherlock shrugged, “You were at the right place at the right time and made the most of it. Well done. What about your surgeon’s license? Among other things, have you also abandoned your career as a doctor completely?”

“No. I do treat people for free once a week. Won’t call it charity, it’s just a small return to society and the underprivileged. But that’s more as a doctor/physician. I don’t suppose I can call myself a surgeon anymore.”

“I suppose you don’t even want to call yourself a homosexual man anymore.”

The retort simply slipped out of Sherlock’s mouth, a tinge of bitterness and taunt added to it. At that point John was eating dessert and somehow ended up upsetting some of the jelly, cream and strawberry slices on to his pristine white shirt and coffee colored pants. “Excuse me,” he said stiffly as he got up, wiping his shirt with his napkin, “I need to go to the washroom for a few minutes.” He hurried away, as if avoiding the next bit of the conversation, while Sherlock sat there for a long moment and wondered if he had said too much. The last thing he wanted was for John to think he was even interested in the John and Irene relationship.

“Who cares,” he said finally and started clearing the table.

He didn’t want the evening to be prolonged any further. The longer John stayed, the more chances were that they’d end up talking about all sorts of things and Sherlock wasn’t willing to give his ex-husband any further insights into his head. Maybe if he started washing the dishes, John would take the hint and leave. No need for him to stay back or give Sherlock company till Irene returned.

He began to wash the dishes, pots and pans. He was half way through when he heard footsteps in the kitchen and looked over his shoulder.

“I…Um….uh….” John lingered there, clearly not leaving yet.
“I hope you enjoyed your meal,” Sherlock said coolly.

“Do you have an early start tomorrow morning?”

“Yes. I always do. Up by 7-30 am and in office by 9 am.”

“Okay.”

“Are you also working here or is it a holiday?”

“Working, of course. I will be taking a chopper ride to Edinburgh tomorrow, a two stopper. Business meetings and all that, plus a property….anyways, thanks for dinner.”

“No problem. Just shut the door on your way out. My hands are all soapy.”

“Oh….yes, I will do that.”

But when he heard the door shut, Sherlock dropped everything and slid down on the shiny marble kitchen floor. Tears burned at the back of his eyeballs but the moisture refused to escape his eyes, like he really needed to cry but was incapable of doing so. It was one thing to miss John and hope there was a chance than to meet him and have all his doubts removed. John had simply dumped him and moved on to a better life. Sherlock was happy for him and knew the man deserved that success but it hurt him profoundly to see how little he had thought about Sherlock all this while.

After all they had been married once.

“I know you have everything now,” Sherlock spoke aloud to himself, letting all his anger and grief and loneliness pour out in buckets through those words, “You have gone up the ladder just as I have come down. You are now enjoying all the perks of being rich which you used to taunt me earlier for. You have changed, you have become a completely different person, someone I cannot even identify with. But maybe I had never understood you at all, maybe I was the juvenile, stupid one even back then.” He paused and leaned back against the woodwork, trying to swallow the pain, “The question is, are you happy John? You have everything now but are you really happy?”
Sebastian had called him the next day and asked him to meet him at a business center where many large organizations booked cabins, conference rooms and bullpens for temporary assignments.

Sherlock managed to reach the spot quickly, with about five minutes remaining, and was instantly almost enveloped in a big, warm hug.

“Sherlock, I have a new deal for you,” Sebastian sounded rather excited, “Sorry to have called you over in a hurry but this deal is like the perfect one and we need to sign on the dotted line and start work today. 100% payment in advance, they agreed on the first price I quoted and their work is neither tricky nor tedious. Just looking through data on a secure server to spot chances of any hack or manipulation and keeping an eye on one disgruntled employee who might be sharing information about the company with a competitor.”

“Sounds too good to be true,” Sherlock said, smile tugging the corners of his mouth.

“Let’s go in and find out.”

“Who are we meeting?”

“Alan Kauffman. He is the man who heads the European business for this company.”

“What do they do?”

“Spices and condiments. Lately started a meat packaging business as well. Household name in US, Canada, Mexico, Latin America and southern Europe. The business hasn’t picked up that well or that quickly in northern and western Europe, and there might be a good reason why.”

“Because they’ve a moll who’s selling their secrets and supplying it to the competitors?”

“I think so it is,” Sebastian said and led Sherlock to the meeting room where a tall, lanky, hawk nosed middle aged sat poring over some files and matching them with some information on his laptop. “Alan Kauffman,” Sebastian whispered and cleared his throat to draw the man’s attention.
After introductions, during which Sherlock deduced through his observation powers that Alan was a man who had fine tastes and expensive habits, they were given files and data to look through and the name, photograph and details of the person who was supposed to be watched. Sherlock finished asking his questions and, much to Sebastian’s surprise, accepted 50% payment once the contract was signed and only 75% of the fee initially agreed upon.

“What did you just do?” Sebastian asked him, astonished, “You made both of us lose money man. Your fees and my commission. Also, you could have taken the entire money today but you flat out refused. This is the first time I have seen someone do this.”

“I don’t want any favors from anyone Sebastian,” Sherlock said briefly, not elaborating reasons, “I have taken a fee that is appropriate for this level of complexity in the job and I usually take 30% - 50% of the fee in advance. I have stuck to both of my principles.”

Sebastian raised his brows, “Unbelievable you are, man.”

“Yes. Sorry about your commission.”

“Oh that’s fine. I am rolling in money in any case. Business has been good.”

“Let’s make hay while the sun shines! By the way, I don’t know if I am oversharing but our job for our latest client is almost done. I know who’s been doing the company those disfavors. An insider’s job, someone who’s not down the food chain, he’s rather perched on top.”

“How did you get that?” Sebastian looked at him appreciatively.

Sherlock tapped his temple and smiled an enigmatic smile. “Oh well then,” Sebastian said, “This Saturday please keep yourself free. Let’s spend some time together outside of work, in a relaxed atmosphere, getting to know each other better. That’s been on top of my agenda for two and half weeks but I never got around asking you.”

“Is it a date?” Sherlock grinned. Deep down he was thinking, why not.

“Maybe it is,” Sebastian said, then grinned disarmingly, “Just two friends going out together.”
The moment Sherlock opened his closet, a body fell on him. Even for a man like Sherlock, who was iron-willed and had nerves of steel, this was a shocker and he couldn’t hold back the groan and the gasp that escaped his mouth. While still supporting the dead weight of the ‘corpse’, he somehow reached out and flicked on the lights in the room.

He saw two gleaming dark eyes smiling silently at him. “Jimmy you diabolical, macabre, adorable bastard!!!”

“Happy to see you too,” Jim sang and then climbed right up on Sherlock’s bed, clad in a pair of boxers and a cropped top that showed plenty of flat abs. Like a hyperactive child he bounced a few times on it and then flopped down, throwing cushions and pillows all over the place. “My trip was super productive and I made a neat profit of forty million euros on it. And now I am about to sign on the dotted line for a beautiful countryside property which is being sold to me for one-fourth its market price. Life is good, business is good, romance is good…..oops, did I just say that? Well, it seems I might be human after all.”

“Stop, stop, stop,” Sherlock joined him on the now messed up bed, “Not so fast. Yeah, business is good and I get that! A new and lucrative property deal at a low price, get that too. But what’s this about romance? I thought you were a-romantic! Wait….my brother or someone else?”

“I don’t reopen books I have closed,” Jim gave Sherlock a rebuking glance, “You should have known better.”

“All I know is that my brother has excellent persuasion skills. He can convince even a pot plant to move and a cat to stand guard outside the door.” *Like I did, like I pursued John, the biggest mistake of my life because I probably chased him away in a way.*

“Nope. Mycroft Holmes failed years ago. This is someone else. But never mind, I think you have a lot to discuss with me too, right?”

“Yeah….no, what do you mean?”

Jim gave him a ‘duh’ look. “Isn’t it obvious or should I spell it out? JOHN HAMISH WATSON!”
“H-How did you know?”

Jim tilted his head to one side, “He called me. Actually he called my secretary and then chased her for my number, then left his coordinates with her. Eventually she contacted me and passed on the message, so I called John the moment I touched down at the aerodrome. He is meeting me tomorrow at a common friend’s place, along with Irene. But what really happened man? From your husband to Irene’s boyfriend, how much can really change in a man in 10 years?”

Sherlock sighed, “I don’t think people change. They’re revealed bit by bit when they stop hiding behind their masks. As far as John is concerned, it’s a past chapter that I’ve closed already.”


“I don’t think so,” Jim tapped his chin and pretended to think, “I haven’t seen you date someone, nor have you shown any interest in any man, woman or animal, you have least interest in how you look or what you wear and your sex life is zero. Your only sex partner in the past ten odd years has been your purple dildo and your right hand. Jokes aside, if you think it’s worth it, I can be a mediator between you and John. I know you very well and him to some extent at least. I believe I can help. He’s rich now, he’s changed, he’s from the same society that you’ve grown up in, give it a try!”

“No,” Sherlock said, “His monetary status doesn’t matter to me now. There was a point when I didn’t know how to live on a budget and now I am so used to living on a budget that even if I have money at my disposal I can’t really spend it. There was a connection between us, a love and a bond which held us together, which snapped a long time ago. Now, after seeing him try to get into a heterosexual relationship and marriage, I am not even sure if I ever understood him properly.”

“Don’t be a drama queen.”

“Jimmy, I am merely stating facts.”

“Have you told Irene about John’s reality and past?”

“No, if John wants to, let him be my guest.”

“Irene deserves to know.”
Sherlock shook his head, “It doesn’t have to happen that way. If John hasn’t told her anything then I believe neither should we.”

“John is a known deserter and an insensitive character,” Jim’s eyes glittered with anger, “You want Irene to find out about him when it’s too late?”

“No….but….”

“Let me think through this.” Jim yawned and stretched like a Cheshire cat, “Goodnight then buddy. I am tired as a three-year-old after a whole afternoon in the playground.”

“Sleep well,” Sherlock said, debating inside his head about whether he should let Irene know her ‘Jack’ was his ‘John’, or just keep his trap shut and let the chips fall as they may.
Oh the drama

Chapter Summary

Destiny and the universe keep bringing John into Sherlock’s path

Chapter Notes

Chapter dedicated to HamishWH. Thanks for your constant support with this story my friend :)

Sherlock was woken up the next morning by a rather annoyed, flustered and irritable Irene who was standing at the doorway and knocking repeatedly on the wood to wake him up. “What?” Sherlock sat up, rubbing his eyes, “What’s going on?”

“Why Sherlock?” She asked, “Why the hell didn’t you tell me John was the same man you had been married to earlier?”

The residual sleep shot away from Sherlock’s eyes and the young man carded his fingers through his curls to tame them from the wild, bed-hair state. “I didn’t think it was something important enough to let you know about,” he sat up slightly, letting the lower half of his body remain under the sheets, “Whatever existed between us was a long time ago and it ended, truly ended, abruptly. Since then we haven’t been in touch, so there’s nothing for you to really be wary of. I did plan to tell you about John, but at a later date, probably because I wanted to give John a chance to talk to you about it.”

She sat down on a chair with a sigh, rubbing at her damp hairs with a towel and looking disgruntled. “He didn’t. Jim did.”

Sherlock simply nodded.

“You sure are okay with us going out?” Irene asked, “Especially since I am planning to propose to him if he doesn’t propose to me on this trip. I am not a very patient woman when it comes to such things.”

“It doesn’t matter if I am okay or not. My experience with him hasn’t been great so there’s precious
little I can add about how good a husband he might be.”

“But people do change.”

“Yes but to what extent. Most people change as maturity sets in but changes in John have been enormous. From his social status and wealth to his profession, from his marital status and even his sexual orientation to his lifestyle and habits, I don’t recognize the man I had once exchanged vows with. He may have his own reasons for each change but it’s up to you to decide if you’re okay with someone who is seen in different feathers every week.”

“Listen,” Irene said, “I don’t care what he prefers, men or women or both, as long as he treats me well at home and gives me the liberty of an open relationship, I don’t mind him having his own fun on the side. He is someone I have been chasing for a while because together we can be a power couple and it’s a marriage of benefits. Telle me now if there are any chances of a reconciliation, or if you want him back really badly, then I would like to know right away. I am not going to take a step back once I have started talking about our engagement.”

“It’s not going to happen Irene,” Sherlock said wistfully, “We’re not getting back together.”

“Is that because you don’t want to reconcile or you feel that he wouldn’t want it? What you wish to do is more important to me Sherlock.”

“Look Irene, he came over to this apartment and we had dinner together,” Sherlock explained to the visibly distressed woman, “We spent a whole evening together, with no one else around. Nothing really happened and I didn’t even see a chemistry between us or catch a hint of a desire in myself to initiate intimacy. He’s been here for almost a week and he’s never made plans to meet me alone somewhere. Am I stupid enough to think this indicates a possible reconciliation. We have both moved on quite a bit. By all means go ahead with your relationship, I am not going to ask you to hold your horses because my ex-husband is back in town 10 years later.”

“Very well then,” she seemed finally convinced, “I have a date with him this weekend. I’ll talk to you when I am back tomorrow evening.”

“Enjoy,” Sherlock replied and was about to get under the sheets again when he remembered his promise to Sebastian. Handsome, charming, friendly, eager Sebastian who always made it a point to be attentive and kind towards him. “Shit,” he got out of bed and rushed for the bathroom, “Shit, I completely forgot.”
When Sherlock stood at the portico of Skylight Apartments, waiting for Sebastian to pick him up, he caught a glimpse of his own reflection in the window of a passing car of a fellow resident.

He was surprised, to say the least.

The newfound financial wellbeing and professional success of the past few months, coupled with the smarter wardrobe he had acquired of late and the way he had carefully set his curls after a long time, gave him the same kind of attractive, sexy and debonair look of his early twenties. His skin glowed with more vitality too, thanks to sufficient sleep, regular meals, and the comforts of this apartment and his overall life in general. Feeling a lot more confident, he strode down the stairs to meet Sebastian who had just rolled in his ink-blue McLaren road car, the 570GT.

“Wow,” he exclaimed as he got in, “This car is such a beauty.”

“She is a head turner, isn’t she?” Sebastian asked. He looked rather dishy and fetching in his smart casuals, jeans and neutral shirt plus a trendy jacket thrown on top, but somehow his behavior was a bit subdued.

“So is my brother,” Sherlock snorted, “Every time I talk, he turns his head away.”

Sebastian laughed.

Sherlock looked at him with a start. It was not the usual ‘Sebastian’ laughter. It was measured, controlled and somewhat guarded, like he had other things on his mind and had only half-concentrated on the joke. He observed some small things about the man that told him he had, in fact, a lot on his mind. He had shaved distractedly, causing certain parts of his jawline to be smoother than the rest. Haphazard strokes, multiple strokes since they were not done right the first time. Yet, Sebastian seemed like a man of precision. Not clumsy at all. He was also wearing a watch that didn’t match with the rest of his outfit. A steel strap Hamilton, not a leather strap watch where the leather had to be of a tan color, to match his Polo Sport T shirt and Lacoste belt. Once again, not the traits of a man who did take care of his appearance and attire with a good degree of seriousness and earnestness.

“What’s bothering you?” He asked.
“Nothing much, just work,” Sebastian shrugged.

“It’s not just work,” Sherlock stated confidently.

“You going detective on me?” Sebastian smiled but kept his eyes on the road.

“Okay, let me guess,” Sherlock began, “You are a man of steady nerves, ready to take the rough with the smooth, so any small business or work-related hassle wouldn’t have even bothered you. Any brush with the law, tax or other authorities? I say not, then you wouldn’t have planned this trip. So I can safely assume this is something beyond your control, doesn’t impact you immediately and yet it it’s niggling you at the back of your mind.”

“Oh Good Lord,” Sebastian exhaled, “What else?”

“Some sort of revelation.”

“Um…..”

“Saw this, in a more extreme form, in my friend Irene this morning. As a woman, and also as one who is also directly in the line of impact from this news, she was more hassled and restless. I guess it’s the same thing which you heard and from the same source, James Moriarty.”

Sebastian remained quiet.

“You got to know I am….I was John’s ex-husband.”

Long, narrow fingers tightened on the steering wheel and Sebastian cleared his throat, as if wishing to say something but holding back half the words. Finally, he made the statement. “Yeah, it’s quite a coincidence you are now working for him as a service-provider, isn’t it?”

Sherlock’s turn to exhale this time, that too noisily. “Come on Seb, I am not taping this conversation nor am I going to call you out on this. You are bothered by this, are you not?”
“Look, I can’t say I am not,” Sebastian confessed, steering the car expertly through the traffic, “But, just as you said, I can’t change anything about it nor can I just let it slide. So I am digesting it, processing it and slowly realizing a thing or two about your decisions earlier. You didn’t want to take the entire money as a full and final payment because you felt it was a favor. You didn’t wanna charge him more than other clients because you didn’t want to fleece him in any way. Makes you an honest man, a not-spiteful ex, someone who might have been wronged earlier but has forgiven and……”

“And?”

“Moved on?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sure?”

“He is here and my friend is about to get engaged with him. What does that mean to me? Nothing but a piece of news. I am not losing it, freaking out or experiencing mood swings and violent temper outbursts. I am cool with it Seb, even though I have to admit that being around him isn’t really something I relish. Too many memories, which can’t just be wiped off with the press of a button.”

“In that case, let’s go somewhere else.”

“What do you mean? Where were we going?”

“Surrey. A friend’s beautiful lakeside property with a few acres around. It was supposed to be an overnight stay but I thought we’d come back at night. Just the day and evening…..but Jim….I mean John would be there, as would be Irene. You wouldn’t be comfortable.”

Sherlock sighed.

“I didn’t plan this after knowing what the truth is,” Sebastian made a face, “Apologies. I should have changed plans immediately after I got to know earlier this morning.”
Sherlock felt a number of things at the same time. Anxiety at the prospect of facing John again, apprehension at seeing John and Irene together, the uncertainty of the outcome of such a visit.

But then a stubborn realization came over him. Why would he change plans? Why would he hide? He had no reason to hide or stay away from them? If John was going to be uncomfortable then so be it. He had as much right to be there as John did and if Sebastian had made this plan for them, then they’d just go ahead with it.

*I am not a coward or a convict. I don’t need to fear anyone.*

Sherlock placed a hand on Sebastian’s knee and gently pressed down, making the blond man turn his head with a start and then smile with a sense of amazement. That touch had conveyed Sherlock’s decision to the quick-witted man who had easily read into his body language and eyes. “You are really okay with this?” He asked, smile getting wider when Sherlock nodded and winked at him, “Wow, just wow Sherlock! Oh man, you are one hell of a sassy lad! I daresay, the one who marries you next is sorted for life. Which gay man doesn’t want a low-maintenance, high-intelligence, poised and confident bloke in his life? Okay, Berlanti estate, here we come!”

“Berlanti Estate?”

“Vito Berlanti and Matilda Berlanti. Nope, not the Vito from Godfather but rather close if you see how powerful he is. Real estate shark, works closely with Jim and got him a rather juicy deal for the property next door. Decided to host him and of course Irene and John for the weekend. I was called too, since Matilda Berlanti is a famous hairstylist and I have been her client for several years now.”

“Sounds great.”

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The initial confidence and defiance Sherlock felt sort of started to seep out a bit when the estate came to view. Rows and clusters of tall coniferous trees and lush green vegetation with a narrow road that cut through them, followed by a sudden sharp turn and voila, Berlanti Estate.

John was there.

Sherlock quickly blinked and straightened his back, taking a few deep breaths to compose himself.
So what if John was there! If he could co-exist next to John without batting an eyelid for the entire weekend then more power to him! There was no better way of saying ‘I don’t really care anymore’ than standing right next to your ex and smiling a genuine smile of happiness. Sherlock quipped impulsively, “We should be here till tomorrow evening, like the rest of them.”

Sebastian gasped, “What?”

“Yeah. I like the place. And why drive so many hours on the same day? Let’s chill.”

“Fantastic. As long as you’re okay.”

“Oh believe me, I am,” Sherlock said and took in the sight of the property. He would be lying if he didn’t feel a little desire in his heart to own something like this. Posh countryside, the nearest town close by, a tranquil water body right next, nature and her bounties all around, peace and quiet, who wouldn’t like this place! Then there was the property! Not too old, maybe about fifty years or so, and excellently maintained. Built over three levels in the Edwardian style, with a seven-foot grey and ash stone wall surrounding three sides and the fourth side guarded by the lake waters, the property had expansive lawns, a majestic kitchen garden, a pretty gazebo next to the water, a small boat house, a barbeque area with benches and seats and a flower nursery.

There was also a conservatory with glass facades on three sides, which no doubt served as a breakfast room because it would be sunlit throughout the morning and early afternoon. Sherlock felt a bit wistful as he remembered a time when he could have easily asked his daddy for this as a wedding gift. But those days were gone and so was his desire to get married. Once bitten, twice shy!

A uniformed butler opened the door for them and offered to park Sebastian’s car. An equally well-attired housekeeper led them into the house, which was just as beautiful from the inside as it was from the outside, and took them straight to the gazebo where the others were. “Mr. Moran and his friend Mr. Holmes,” she announced politely and withdrew.

Vito and Matilda came forward to greet them warmly and Sherlock returned their greetings in the same warm manner, though his eyes darted to the three others seated at the garden table and chairs placed there. They were drinking, smoking and eating finger food. Small bites.

Irene looked openly displeased by Sherlock’s appearance but quickly hid her discontent behind a fake smile. Jim’s dark eyes glowed and glittered and he playfully showed Sherlock the middle finger and mouthed ‘welcome’. John kept his head down, his body language really stiff.
Sherlock felt a sharp ache in his chest. Was it really so hard for John to be around him?

*Maybe because he does realize he was the one who had done the majority of the ‘wrongs’ back in those days. Guilty minds hardly ever rested in peace.*

“What can I get for you both?” Vito asked. A middle-aged, handsome bearded Italian man who had lost his accent after twenty years in England but retained his Mediterranean perma-tan.

Sebastian requested for both of them. “Whiskey for me and beer for Sherlock.”

Sherlock had the satisfaction of noticing how that affected John who scowled at Sebastian.
The Claws of Temptation

Chapter Summary

Does sex ruin or rescue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At first the conversation was pleasant and jovial but, as the morning progressed into noon, the topic moved more towards segments of interest. Irene and Matilda began to talk about fashion, art and the disastrous situation some socialite had gotten into the past week. Since both women were in professions that brought them into contact with socialites and celebrities, they found a common thread of conversation.

Jim was somehow rather rude to Sebastian who, despite the jibes and snarls from Jim, didn’t seem to get the least bit angry. He must be trying to get a plum deal from Jim, Sherlock thought to himself, turning his attention towards Vito.

Vito was explaining several things to John who kept asking him a barrage of questions. The neighbors, the neighboring properties, the town nearby, the amenities and services available on phone, the nearby hamlet which had a merry brook next to it where angling was a popular activity. Since several ponds had formed in the vicinity during the monsoon season, those were the very spots were trout, eel, catfish, perch and striped bass. He kept asking about the availability of retainers and groundskeepers and also ‘helicopter service’ to London so one could attend work without having to spend hours on the road.

So he is also angling for a property here. Why not, he is loaded now!

But Sherlock felt no jealousy or resentment over John’s newfound wealth. He had gotten lucky but he had also proved his worth at business and earned most of it. If he was fortunate then so had been Sherlock, when he was born into wealth. Resentment and envy would be a horrid thing to do, especially since they shared similar blessings. However, seeing others have what he once had and lost was a bit hard on Sherlock.

“I think I’ll hit a few balls at the tennis court,” he announced, spotting a hardcourt on the western corner of the property.
“Oh I will gladly be your hitting partner,” Vito announced.

Slowly the group slowly got scattered. Jim and Sebastian went off somewhere, Irene and Matilda went on cycles for a ride around the lake while John went inside the house to explore the library and the snooker room.

“Lunch will be at two,” Vito announced, “Sorry for the delay.”

“No problem,” Sherlock said, “Those small bites were quite filling.”

“You and your boyfriend should think about acquiring property here,” Vito dropped his voice to a whisper, “Prices are low and I can organize a good deal. Like I did for Jim. I asked Sebastian but he said he likes the city life better.”

“Sebastian isn’t my boyfriend really,” Sherlock felt the need to clarify. Better not jump the gun and second guess things before they matured. Vito gave him a strange look as if Sherlock had underestimated his intelligence. “Of course Sherlock, he is not. I didn’t mean it that way at all.”

Sherlock didn’t quite get that reply until much later.

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Summer Hall, the property Jim had just purchased with Vito’s help, was a truly majestic one. When Jim took them for a quick tour of the huge British castle style house later in the afternoon, everyone almost gasped with delight and awe. A thirty bedroom house with art deco style combined with true Victorian elegance, it had a ballroom comparable with a royal mansion, a dining hall that could comfortably accommodate fifty people at the long polished silver laden table, three kitchens and galleys, two formal and two informal sitting rooms, a large library and art room, three studies which had been converted to home offices, a gym, a sauna room, an indoor heated pool and a mini private theater.

The outhouse could easily accommodate up to sixteen guests and the quarters for the retainers were big enough to accommodate about ten. There was an outdoor pool, a mini golf-course, a koi fish pond, acres of landscaped gardens, walkway bridges over manmade mini waterfalls and ponds, a basketball court and a tennis court.

“He is a lucky man, Mr. James Moriarty” Matilda said as they made the half mile walk back to the Berlanti property next door, “All this for just four million pounds. Can you believe it? This place is
worth at least ten million quid, even in the state the market is currently in, but Vito got this for a steal since the previous owner had run into financial and legal problems. Jim helped solve the legal hassle while we helped with the financial one, giving him an immediate and upfront payment, some of it in hard cash.” She whispered the last bit and laughed, which Irene also joined in.

“I think his husband will be lucky,” Irene echoed, “To enjoy this, perhaps as a wedding present.”

“You think he’ll marry soon?

“Yeah. I think he has just bought the wedding present for his husband.”

“Oh is it Irene? Who is that gentleman?”

Irene made a rueful expression, “I have no idea really. But I am damn sure there is someone and Jim has been keeping matters under wraps because that way he’s a very private person. Also, you do know his work involves its own set of risks and speculation and he doesn’t want anyone, not even a soul, to take advantage of him through his partner. Sooner or later we will know, like one day before the marriage really happens.”

The two women again laughed.

Sherlock, who was right behind them, wondered if it was a young Swedish prince whom Jim had dated for a while, or a British Lord who had just become a member of the Parliament and wielded considerable power, or was it his brother Mycroft who had eventually gotten through Jim’s tough resistance and conquered his heart.

“You have not settled for anything less than envy-inducing, my friend,” Matilda looked at Irene with a salacious smile, then pointed with her eyes at John, “British American sophisticated and educated man, with dual passport status, very rich and clearly single. If you so wish you can even buy a property like ours around these parts. My husband can easily fetch you one for around three to four million. In fact, Vito and I have been thinking about moving to London and keeping a base in Paris from now on. He wants to work abroad and I have plans for expanding my brand. This house could give us the capital we need to kickstart the work in France.”

“Oh fantastic,” Irene said, “Just asking….what would be your price for the Berlanti Estate?”

“Four to five million pounds, give or take. We bought it fifteen years ago for nine hundred thousand and since then we have invested another million or so on the interiors and minor changes here and
there. A 100% profit would be nice! But we’d be okay for three and half million as well. Not a bad deal considering what you’d get. Ten bedrooms, eight baths, kitchen, galley, quarters for four live-in retainers, expansive grounds, the boat house, a five car garage.”

Sherlock was all ears till he realized that he sadly didn’t have that kind of money. It would take him five years to reach there unless he struck gold somewhere, or had a sudden windfall, or won the lottery.

“Sherlock,” Irene looked over her shoulder, “I am going to the theater tonight, with Matilda and John. Would you want to join us? I know you like theater but then Sebastian isn’t going, so….”

Sherlock smirked. Typical Irene. Offer something but only on her own terms. “No thanks,” he said, “I’ll just hit the gym I guess.”

“Try a swim to cool down if you wish,” Matilda suggested, “Even if you fancy a late evening adventure in the pool it’s perfectly fine. The water is heated. About thirty one degrees, steady and comfortable.”

“Makes sense,” Sherlock walked on ahead of them to catch up with Sebastian, “Thanks a lot Mrs. Berlanti.”

Sebastian had slowed down to let Sherlock catch up with him and the moment he did, those blue eyes turned on him with a silent admiration in them. “What?” Sherlock asked with a curious smile.

“You are doing well Sherlock,” Sebastian lowered his head and whispered, taking Sherlock’s hand, “Really well! Considering that he is right here with us and constantly stealing glances at you, you seem to be pretty much within your depths. Good show.”

Sherlock blushed and accepted the compliment but the words ‘he is constantly stealing glances at you’ stuck to his head like glue. Was John really interested in him after all these years?

***

Dinner was early and a light affair. By six-thirty it was over and around seven John and the ladies left for the theater. Jim disappeared somewhere with Vito while Sebastian got a call and said he needed to work for a while. That left Sherlock alone with nothing to do but make good on the plans
he had made earlier. Giving a decent gap of about two hours post dinner, Sherlock took to the pool straight away instead of hitting the gym. He was in the mood for physical exercise but not something gym-like. A swim would do.

He hadn’t brought any swim shorts so he selected from the few that his host had provided him with. He had to choose a cadet blue one with a speedo fitting instead of board shorts or longer swim shorts, since all the others were either too big or too small around the waist for him.

He was in the water (Matilda had been right, it was nice and warm for an evening swim indoors) for nearly thirty minutes and was doing a gentle backstroke along the full length of the twenty-meter pool when he heard the sliding glass door open and footsteps approach the pool. Thinking it was the butler Jean Luc, he was about to ask him for some protein shake for the night when his eyes fell on a familiar yet unexpected figure standing on the edge of the pool with a look of open admiration on his face. Sherlock’s head went under the water and he emerged with a splutter, cursing himself for getting caught off-guard like this by his ex.

“Hi,” John said briefly.

“Hello,” Sherlock swept the water off from his face.

“Didn’t feel like watching theater so came back home earlier than usual.”

“I see. Where’s your girlfriend?”

“My girl…..Irene and Matilda are at the theater. Not likely to return before midnight as they plan to have a drink post that.”

Sherlock just nodded his head to acknowledge. “I was looking for Jim but he seems to have gone somewhere,” John continued, “Vito and Sebastian are with him I suppose, or maybe elsewhere. Anyways, do you mind if you joined you for a swim?”

“Not at all,” Sherlock said, “It’s our host’s pool and we both have the right to be in it. Nobody need ask the other.”

John opened his mouth as if to say something but evidently thought it better not to. “I’ll find myself some swim trunks and come back in a few minutes.”
Someone had once said to him, or maybe to his mother in his presence, that when something was unavoidable it was best to enjoy it rather than get upset by it. That evening in Surrey, at the Berlanti estate, in the indoor heated pool at the basement, Sherlock found that proverb to be truer than true. Once John had joined him in the pool, the sexual tension between them had spilled out from their carefully restrained personas and Sherlock found that he could no longer hold back the signs of his arousal, not in those trunks. At the same time John’s board shorts had tended so much that one could make out the outline of his cock in them.

After a playful race of six laps, which John had won by a whisker (mainly because Sherlock had already done quite a few laps and was a bit more tired), they had accidentally collided in the middle of the pool. One thing led to the other and their first kiss in 10 years finally happened.

Sherlock hungrily devoured John’s mouth and was super happy to feel the kiss being returned by his ex. John’s hands had begun their exploration too, roaming all over his back, pinching and grabbing at his shapely bottom and then running down the back of his thighs. The more John touched, the closer Sherlock got to him. The more he stood body to body with the shorter man, the more John’s monstrous erection jerked against his thighs. Sherlock hooked a leg around John and moaned when the sandy haired man sucked on his Adam’s apple, sending raptures through him that were so powerful he could have come without even a touch or friction.

When he felt the point of no return approaching him, he jerked back his head and put some distance between them.

“What?” John asked, dazed, still holding on to Sherlock’s twin globes over the lycra material of his swim shorts.

“I-I am not…..”

“Neither am I.”

“Huh?”

“None of us were prepared for this Lockie. I know that. But that doesn’t mean we don’t want it. C’mere now.”
Sherlock tried to protest but all words died on his lips when John’s hands slid under the elastic waistband of his shorts and touched the sensitive springy flesh of his bottom. His cock was so hard it was threatening to escape the confines of the pants. He couldn’t hold back the loud wail that came out of him when John started to rut against him, letting him feel his hard length just as much as he enjoyed experiencing the fullness and solidity of Sherlock’s excited dick.

Hands and nails clawing and smacking against John’s back, Sherlock allowed his ex to push him to the corner of the pool and prop him against the edge.

With a swift and cunning little kick that caused no pain but made his part his legs, Sherlock suddenly found himself straddling John’s middle. His long legs were wrapped around the older man’s torso and somehow his swim shorts had disappeared. He was so giddy with arousal that he hadn’t even noticed when John had divested them of their clothes and his huge cock was now nudging Sherlock’s opening. Breathing heavy and ragged, his cock achingly hard, his eyes fluttering shut with anticipated pleasure, Sherlock surrendered completely to John. He couldn’t think anymore, couldn’t protest, couldn’t stop himself, all he could do was go with the flow.

A great deal of kissing and groping later, John grabbed their twin erections and began to jerk them off.

“N-No,” Sherlock moaned, “Not like th-this.”

“Lube,” John said in a raspy voice, “We have no lube.”

“Uhnnnn…..”

“Just let go. Let go Sherl.”

“Ohhhhhhfuckkkkk!”

It was over way too soon. All those years of forced celibacy and longing for John had been wiped away by that potent touch and those powerful strokes. To feel John this close for real, after seeing him like this in far too many dreams, was rather overwhelming. Sherlock could hardly keep a control over himself as he came and came and came, realizing John was cumming too and had somehow lifted him higher up using the buoyancy of the water.
Panting hard, he suddenly found himself seated in the edge of the pool, the tiles feeling way too cold underneath his bare bum. “Oh…this is…..how?”

“There,” John emerged from the pool with a sly grin, “Now we have lube.”

Clever bastard, Sherlock smiled as he saw what John had done. He had gathered quite a bit of their essence in his palm and now, coating his fingers with the pearly essence of their combined pleasure, he began to gently rub circles around the younger man’s tiny little entrance.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for the lovely comments, questions, suggestions. Appreciate all the kudos too. Cheers!
The Aftermath of a Mistake

Chapter Summary

Sherlock finally gives John a piece of his mind

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Ah Jawn!”

Sherlock’s hissed cry was followed by a wail of pleasure as John’s engorged member, which had not lost even a little bit of its original turgidity due to the earlier orgasm, breached his body and slid in smoothly, inch by inch.

Sherlock was on his back on one of the recliners, a fluffy towel placed under him and John kneeling between his legs. His opening had been kissed, caressed and thoroughly loosened up by John’s skillful fingers, preparing him properly for this activity. It had taken quite a while and on more than one occasion he had seen the surprise on John’s face. Sherlock must have felt just as virginal to him as he was back then and the older man didn’t take any chances entering his body before he was completely open for it. Even then, as he entered Sherlock, he remained slow, cautious and very watchful of any change on the younger man’s face.

“You….okay?” He asked in a tight voice.

“Y-Yeah….okay,” Sherlock gasped, rocking his hips back and forth to feel that thick muscle against his prostate.

“My beautiful, handsome, gorgeous angel,” John hissed with pleasure and his eyes closed briefly as Sherlock’s warm body gripped him tightly, “You cast a spell on me back in those days and I haven’t been able to throw it off. I don’t think I can. I don’t think I ever will.”

Sherlock wanted to say something but a sharp nudge to his sweet spot made him delirious with joy and pleasure. John was inside him and the aching void and emptiness he had lived with had totally disappeared. Ten years later, he was finally with the man who had staked claim to his heart and still held it in the palm of his hands. Sherlock lifted his legs higher, tilted his hips and pushed back hungrily.
“Patience little one,” John whispered hotly into his ear, “The whole night is ahead of us.”

“But….”

“No if’s and but’s. I have taken care of things. Oh fuckcckkk, so tight.”

John pulled out almost entirely till only the head dipped inside Sherlock’s now open and moist hole. He wanted to pierce Sherlock again and feel those amazing contractions around his erect dick, groaning loudly with ecstasy as he began to push inside. The velvety heat made him dizzy with lust and he started to thrust uncontrollably, making loud grunting sounds as the recliner almost collapsed under their combined weight and movements.

“So tight, so gorgeous, so hot,” John kept muttering as he fucked him hard and fast, “Missed…”

Sherlock moaned and howled, legs and arms wrapped tightly around John, his body arching up and his hips jerking upwards to meet John’s powerful thrusts. He heard what John had just said but had no clue how to interpret them. Did he miss Sherlock, or did he miss sex, or did he just miss the sex between them? As a man he knew many men were capable of having sex without a zilch of a feeling for their sexual partner.

Then John began to stroke his cock and Sherlock exploded with a litany of curses and a barrage of moans. He was so wiped out that aside from hearing John’s loud shout and then the soft whisper of ‘that was so good’, he remembered nothing else. He drifted off.

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An itch to his neck woke him up and he found himself in a soft, warm bed and covered with a snowy comforter. After a long, long time, he wasn’t alone. He was snugly wrapped up in an embrace. A pair of strong arms were holding him tight and his head was on someone’s chest. The steady heartbeat drumming into his ears acted like a strangely soothing lullaby and all Sherlock wanted to do was go back to sleep. His backside was a bit sore, he felt tired beyond tired and he was so warm, so comfortable, so nicely hugged, that waking up and facing the day seemed like a preposterous proposition.

Then it hit him like a hurricane.
He had lost it completely the previous night and gotten intimate with John. Not just sex, they had ended up having a marathon session of sex, one which had lasted several hours and several rounds. It had started with a hand-job in the pool and gone on to the recliner and finally John’s bedroom. Sherlock began to shake all over as he remembered those moments, some hot and instantly arousing, others tender and romantic and soul stirring. John’s mouth on him, those scorching kisses, the hard, firm hands stroking his thighs and nipples, those shouts and cries of pleasure as they came again and again.

Sherlock sat up with a start, dislodging those arms from his body and causing the sleeping man next to him to groan with annoyance.

He didn’t even want to look around. He knew what it would seem like, a throwback to those days when they were married and woke up like this every morning. God, he had tried hard enough but never stopped missing those days. If he thought he had moved on then he was merely fooling himself, yes, he had been fooling himself.

A pair of sleepy but smiling, twinkling, shining brown eyes stared back at his light green ones.

“Morning,” John said and raised himself on his elbows and threw the covers down to his waistline, “Time to get up already?”

“I….I fell asleep here,” Sherlock mumbled, resolutely keeping his eyes away from John’s naked upper torso. It was not a question, just a statement of shock expressed at his own action.

“Yeah, so?” John asked, yawning and reaching for his bathrobe.

Sherlock was baffled by that and, along with trying to find out where the hell his clothes were, he found himself in the most puzzling, peculiar situation. Ex-partners sleeping together was not so uncommon, people did do ‘booty calls’ sometimes and kept things just to that, but doing so with the current lover of one of them possibly sleeping in the next room, that was horrendous. Horrible, insensitive and very reckless. “Why did we do this?” He blurted out before he could stop himself, “We should have never done this. I-I spent the night here, people must have….they must have found it. Irene…..”

“Wait,” John said firmly, tying the sash of the bathrobe around his waist and slipping on his flip-flops, “No need to panic. Nobody knows. It’s still early in the morning and no one aside from the servants would be awake. Last night we went to bed pretty early too, so that’s what everyone would assume. That we were both tired or unwell and retired early. There is a second bathrobe in the bathroom, you can go get it.”
Seeing Sherlock’s hesitation he nodded and padded to the bathroom to fetch the robe, tossing it gently on Sherlock’s covered lap. Sherlock’s cheeks were flaming and he absentmindedly fingered the bruise on his collar bone, trying to keep his breathing under control.

“Irene….”

“She stayed back late for a girl’s night out and retired for the night at the house of one of Matilda’s friends. She should be here by eight, about half an hour or so.”

“How do you….”

“She texted me. But why are we talking about Irene?”

Anger suddenly flared up inside Sherlock. Wasn’t this John’s biggest flaw? Get into a relationship with someone and suddenly abandon them and walk away as if they had never existed? He had done that to Sherlock, he was doing this to Irene and soon enough he would surely do this again to Sherlock and escape to America to resume his life there. No, this time he wasn’t going to let John get away with this kind of behavior. He had made one mistake the night before, he would make no more.

“Oh I forgot,” he said as he picked up his swim trunks (which he didn’t remember bringing to the room) and slid his feet into the sandals he was wearing by the poolside, “John Knoxville is the same John Watson who suddenly forgets he is with someone.”

John’s eyebrows shot up, “What did you say?”

“Did you just say ‘why are we talking about Irene’?” Sherlock lashed out this time, unable to keep the anger under control, “The woman for whom you decided to visit England, temporarily leaving your perfect life back in the United States of America?? Remember? The same woman who you’re about to get engaged to. The woman you betrayed by sleeping with me last night. Does that ring a bell?”

John seemed struck by a hammer. “Sherlock, sleeping together involves two people. You were into that too.”
“Yes, but I am single and I can do anything I want,” Sherlock scoffed, all the pent-up annoyance, frustrations, hurt and exasperation of the past 10 years surfacing like a volcano, “You don’t hold that privilege Mr. Knoxville. You have someone in your life, a woman no less, you seemed to have changed your sexual orientation to lead the conventional life with a wife and kids in future, and yet you ended up fucking a man’s arse. Still the same fellow eh? The one who thought escape from reality is an art form, just walk away and go incommunicado, forget that someone ever existed in your life?”

The expression on John’s face was near comical for five seconds before anger narrowed his eyes and he spoke in a snarl, “I see that you want to start the blame game.”

“I don’t blame anyone but myself,” Sherlock retorted, “I accept the blame for whatever we were ten years ago, I-I had even faked a suicide attempt to get you….now I realize that was stupid-stupid-stupid…..and I paid for it, paid for that immature move many times over…..and I accept the blame for last night, I should have walked away. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Nope, I won’t let my heart fool me this time.”

“What are you saying? You got it wrong?”

“No, on the contrary, I finally got it right, I got it together.”

“Sherlock wait…..”

“Forget last night. Go back to her. If she doesn’t guess, then no need to tell.”

“Lockie…..”

“Stop,” Sherlock paused inches from John who was literally blocking the doorway, “Don’t call me that and stop inducing familiarity where there is none.” He saw the look of rejection-related hurt on John’s face and somehow it perked up a corner of his browbeaten heart, “Irene is my friend and if I were to remain your dirty secret, I would be doing a disservice to her. As for you John, you are a competent and talented businessman, you obviously had the merit to get a surgeon’s license, you are now rich and powerful. Too bad none of these attributes could give you enough courage to stay loyal and committed.”

John gaped at him incredulously, as if he had never expected Sherlock to even say one-fourth of what he’d just heard. His fingers twitched, his cheeks reddened and the corners of his mouth twisted.
downwards in a look of unhappiness but he couldn’t utter a single word. Sherlock grabbed this opportunity and walked past him to exit the room. Their shoulders brushed lightly, a sign of arrogance from Sherlock that a touch or proximity to John no longer mattered to him.

Resisting the urge to turn or look over his shoulder, he firmly but softly shut the door behind himself and rushed towards his own room.

It was only after he had reached his room and locked the door that he broke down and cried hard for half an hour. Initially he kept his face buried in the pillow to stifle his sobs but despite that he was sure anyone passing by could hear his sounds of distress. After ten minutes he moved to the bathroom and turned the shower on, letting the sound of the twin sprays drown out the whimpers, gasps, wheezes and choked sounds that came out of him. When he caught a reflection of himself in the mirror on the opposite wall, he cried even harder. His body was a map of their moments of joint pleasure from the night before. Bruises, sucking marks, scratches, finger marks, he could hardly bear to look at them.

Then there were those things that the eye couldn’t see but he could feel. The sweet ache in his backside that reminded him of the moments of ecstasy, the faint tingle in his right nipple which had become sore from John’s frenzied sucking and the tremors that went through his balls the moment he remembered John’s mouth on his manhood.

He sucked your common sense out through your dick Sherlock, never let that happen again. Where the hell is our dignity?

I hadn’t had sex in a long time and it was Jawn after all……

The same John who abandoned you during the most difficult phase of your life and didn’t even give you a chance to explain your perspective. Where is your dignity?

I am single, he is not…..

Does that make it okay for you to fuck Irene’s boyfriend behind her back? Just because you are single? And Sebastian, what about Sebastian? He was your date for this weekend, wasn’t he? Where is your dignity?

Sherlock covered his face with both hands as the sobs finally died down. Only four words kept circulating around his head constantly.
“Hey Sebastian,” Sherlock called out to the tall, blue eyed blond who was standing on the pier, clutching a coffee in one hand and a cigarette in the other.

“Oh hey,” he blinked and startled as he saw Sherlock standing only a few feet away from him, “Hi, sorry, didn’t see you walking up. Listen, about last night…..”

Sherlock had to stare at his feet in shame. So Sebastian had got to know. He was probably thinking Sherlock was some unhinged idiot who couldn’t keep his dick in his pants. Maybe he had already slut-shamed Sherlock after guessing what he had been up to the previous evening. The best thing to do right now was to own up to it, call it as a genuine mistake and assure him it would never be repeated. Then softly add that he wasn’t ready for a relationship, possibly he would never be. John had destroyed his heart so badly he wasn’t able to find all the scattered pieces, forget gluing them back together with the healing touch of time.

“I am sorry,” he said, “I know what you’re thinking but I take full responsibility for that.”

“You do?”

“Yeah. Sometimes we do things first and regret them later. One must always assess their expectations before they get into anything, even a date.”

“I know Sherlock that we came here together and while it was also my intention that we stay in one room, it so happened that you had already gone to bed and I was up till late night and slightly drunk……”

Oh, so that's what he was apologizing for! Feeling slightly relieved, Sherlock interrupted him and gave him a watery smile, “Don’t. Just don’t say anything more please. It’s hard for me and it must be hard on you as well. Believe me, I am not such a man, neither am I in agreement that any of that should have happened.”
Unexpectedly Sebastian gave him a hug and Sherlock found himself hugging Sebastian back. He was facing the house while Sebastian was facing the lake and he spotted something Sebastian missed. Up there on the mezzanine floor terrace, filled with potted plants and beach umbrellas with wrought iron tables and chairs underneath them, he caught a movement for about two seconds. Someone was watching them and had rushed indoors when Sherlock had looked up.

Someone who looked a lot like John. He pulled back from the embrace and cleared his throat. “If you don’t mind Seb, I’d like to head back to London to my apartment.” I want to go back somewhere where I can think, rationalize. I am beginning to lose my sanity here. I want to go.....

Sebastian nodded slightly, “I understand that. Maybe it hadn’t been a good idea to come here.”

“You stay here if you wish, I’ll hire a cab. Please, it’s something I’d prefer rather than feel forced to do, so indulge me with this please. I’d like to be alone today. Sometimes solitude is all we need to cleanse our souls and clear our heads.”

“Fair enough Sherlock,” Sebastian said amicably, though he did look worried about the lack of color on Sherlock's cheeks and the dead look in the man's eyes, “Then I guess I shall see you later this week.”

Chapter End Notes

Just a note - We are reading Sherlock's story. We don't know what's going on in John's head, his reasons etc :)


“Such is life”

Chapter Summary

Irene makes a big reveal

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After spending the whole day sleeping, Sherlock found himself wide awake a little before dawn the next morning. He started work immediately, putting a thermos filled with strong black coffee with a hint of sugar in it right next to the laptop. As he worked and cleared his mailbox, updated brochures, checked on workflow statuses, he heard a knock on the door.

“Jimmy,” he smiled as much as he could without looking ghastly fake, “Awake at five-forty-five? What’s up?”

Jim and Irene had returned around midnight and, while Irene had just said goodnight and moved to her floor, Jim had plonked down on Sherlock’s bed and had a brief conversation with him. It was mainly around his business, his plans for expansion in the future and also the newly acquired property. Then he had retired to his bedroom suite and Sherlock had slid back into slumber, his depression making it impossible for him to stay awake and think. “I think I might have found someone,” Jim said as he sat on a chair after pulling it up right next to Sherlock, “Someone I might not be willing to let go of.”

“Aha,” Sherlock teased him, “So that’s why Mr. Moriarty can’t sleep.”

“I did sleep, about five years…..”

“Hours you mean.”

“Yeah-Yeah, five hours. I also slept on my way here, I didn’t drive so a solid one and half hour nap was possible.”

“Hmm,” Sherlock offered Jim some coffee and the Irishman gratefully accepted, “It seems you need some advice for a change? Or have you come to lecture me about finding a new love just
“because you finally realize what it’s like to be into a relationship?”

“Second one is correct.”

“I am not ready Jim. Also, I am happily single.”

“In that case,” Jim stretched his legs and then touched his toes with a wince, “Go for gold man! The business you have started is doing well but you’re still taking on too much on yourself. Delegate to people who work for you, leverage their skills and execution, and spend your time just managing profit and loss and improvising the overall business plan. The time you save, should ideally be utilized in the lab.”

“Oh yes,” Sherlock did a facepalm, “I have put that on the backburner for a while.”

“I have heard through some reliable sources that someone in Copenhagen is going after the same thing and he might beat you to the finish line. It’s a fast-moving world Sherlock and you have to close things quickly, be the first one to launch products and patents, get your foot into the door before it closes down on you. Don’t allow distractions to slow you down if they don’t mean much to you.”

“Sebastian isn’t a distraction, he is a business partner,” Sherlock offered by means of an excuse.

“He is a business partner, but John isn’t one,” Jim said as he poured more coffee for himself, “I can clearly see you still have the hots for him. Don’t even try to deny that because your eyes don’t lie. I saw the fucking longing in them whenever you looked at him and I saw him stealing glances at you too. I think you’re both fools, chasing your own tail and getting blindsided by the past. The present and the future, my friend, are what we should look at. If things are not going to come back together in some shape and form then let go and live your lives man. You are both grown-ass men now, not college kids in love. Be decisive.”

“I am not doing too poorly Jim,” Sherlock felt bad at being rebuked though he understood his bestie’s concern about him.

“Then do really well, not average,” Jim retorted.

“I shall get back to the drawing board and thereafter to the lab.”
“Good boy.”

“Can I ask you something Jim?”

“Sure, anything you want.”

“Why did you tell Sebastian and Irene about me and John.”

Jim frowned, “Are you complaining?” His hand was moving towards a paperweight which Sherlock promptly removed from his reach.

“Depends on the answer you give,” he replied, smiling a bit to soften the blow because an angry Jim was a very dangerous Jim.

“People deserve to know the truth,” Jim said as he sucked on the edge of the cup, licking the droplets of coffee on the rim like a cat relishing cream, “Especially the truth that will come out sooner or later. You should have told Irene yourself. How would she have felt if John would have told her what she should have heard from you? Same goes for Sebastian, he needed to know some truths before he started building castles in the air.”

“Everything in good time,” Sherlock said.

“Yeah, your kind of good time? Your time to move on hasn’t arrived even after ten years. Seriously Sherlylocks, get a hold over yourself. If a man like me, heartless and cruel and fiendish, can still see the advantages of having a relationship and a man in his life, then you perhaps need one too. You’ve always been the kinder, more conscientious one.”

“I am no angel,” Sherlock huffed.

Jim chuckled, to which Sherlock playfully grabbed his chair and pulled him closer. “Listen, I know you’re on my side but the breakup with John was not all his fault,” he saw those Bambi eyes widen and knocked their foreheads together mildly, “Yes mister, I made my share of mistakes too. I wasn’t prepared to live a life that I had willingly signed up for. The difference in wealth I could handle, what I hadn’t considered were the lifestyle and priority changes that hit me on the face. My parents
were overtly demanding and I gave in more to their needs than John’s requests. His self-respect was of paramount importance to him and I compromised it a few times with my requests and mistakes.”

“Okay enough.”

“No Jimmy, I speak the truth. John had tried too, he had tried enough, he had just not tried for long enough.”

Jim took a deep breath, “I am your friend and while my ways are not conventional, I am always trying to have your back. Never forget that.”

“Never,” Sherlock grabbed Jim and pulled him forward, pecking him lightly on the corner of his mouth, “Believe me Jimmy, once you marry I will make you sign a contract stating the only extramarital affair you’re allowed in this lifetime is with William Sherlock Scott Holmes.”

***

Three days later, on the Thursday of that week, Sherlock finally managed to pin Irene down to a conversation. She had been busy, leaving early for work and returning very late, leaving no room for Jim or Sherlock to catch up with her. On Thursday the scenario changed and she seemed to have slept in and was still home around 9 am. “Hey Irene,” Sherlock called out as he dropped by her bedroom on his way out, “Can I come in?”

“Since when do you need to ask,” Irene called out, laughter evident in her voice, “By all means just invade.”

“You have been busy for most of this week or we’d have had this chat on Monday,” Sherlock stayed at the doorway, not stepping inside since Irene was still in bed and wearing a skimpy black negligee. She sipped her tea while she read something on her phone and Sherlock didn’t intend to intrude into her privacy, even if they were longstanding friends. “I wanted to have a word with you,” he said awkwardly, “Last weekend, I didn’t really mean for certain things to happen. I’d rather that you find out from me than from John, or anyone else, hence I wanted to let you know that……”

“Oh wait,” Irene cooed, looking rather happy, “Before you get there, look at this!”

She suddenly pulled out her hand from under the comforter, which was partially covering her as she
reclined on the bed and showed a huge rock like diamond on her fourth finger. Sherlock’s breath caught in his throat! The ring finger! RING FINGER. That had to be the engagement ring from John. A pink diamond with dazzling clarity and cut and at least a solid seven and half carats or more, set on a chic and elegant platinum thick band. Very pretty and very expensive, something John could certainly afford for his future spouse. Sherlock’s mind went back to those days when he and John had married and the silver band he had received as a ‘I promise you’ ring.

He still had it. Now of course, it had no meaning.

*Don’t be silly Sherlock, it lost its meaning the day he left you. One fuck doesn’t mean he wants you back….or that you should go back. That was a booty call, nothing else, and you were a true idiot who was way too eager to oblige.*

“You look like a deer caught in the headlights,” Irene grinned.

Sherlock recovered admirably and said, “Well, it so happens that your rock emits light like a thousand electrodes.”

“Oh it does, doesn’t it?” Irene looked pleased as punch, “Oh Sherlock, I am so happy you’re here because there is a lot for me to share with you. I wanted to talk to Jim as well but he, like the true Scorpio man that he is, took off this morning in his private jet without letting any of us know where he’s off to. Anyways, look at these presents I got from John, he’s been most generous and caring!”

She rushed to the closet and opened a drawer. Then she grabbed something off a hanger. Then something else.

“Here,” she laid them out on the bed, “Three Stella McCartney dresses, a pair of exquisite Valentino shoes, an elegant necklace and earrings in Basra pearls, a Louis Vuitton purse and an Omega Ladymatic watch. Besides this Chopard ring of course!”

He fucks me multiple times, spends the entire night with me, then goes ahead and gets engaged to her. Sounds very John-like to me. The ability to move on no matter how deep into things he is, that’s what makes him the ‘prick’ that he is. Just a flick of a switch, the flip of a coin, and you are history. *Why does it not surprise me anymore,* Sherlock sighed and wondered.

“Sherlock,” Irene’s voice dropped a few notches, “Listen, I am aware this might be difficult times for you. I never meant for any of this to happen. But sometimes things proceed on a track different to the
one we had originally expected. Such is life.”

“Yes,” Sherlock said, putting on a brave face, “Such is life. Please accept my congratulations and I wish you the very best for the future.”

***

Over the next twenty-four hours, Sherlock made several decisions about his future. Jim was right, either he went after John and got him back into his life or he had to just let it all go and move on with his career and his life. There couldn’t be a middle path or a mid-way. Stepping on two boats, indecisiveness between two priorities, that had been his weakness earlier and it had cost him his marriage. This time it was about to cost him his future, his career and his sanity. No way was he going to allow that to happen. For once, he was going to be in charge and decide in favor of something that truly suited his parameters.

During brief coffee breaks and while munching on a sandwich at his desk during lunch hours, Sherlock made a list of to-do’s.

He had to move out of that apartment as soon as possible. If John and Irene are together then chances were that he would visit her often, which was only going to pull Sherlock’s morale down further. Besides that, he needed a space to build his lab and it was not really possible to do it in Jim’s house. He needed his own place for that. The next thing he needed to do was spend time in the lab and develop that compound, test it, patent it and then market it. Finally, he had to get a life. More friends, fun things to do, hobbies he had neglected for a while, maybe even take a holiday.

On that Saturday, as he was about to head out to visit a real estate agent, he saw a very familiar face walking towards him through the foyer.

“Sebastian, hi,” Sherlock extended his hand.

“Sherlock,” Sebastian gave him a sunny smile and shook it.

“Did we have an appointment with some client? Maybe I missed it.”

“No, actually I had dropped in hoping to meet you.”
“Oh….”

“If you don’t mind, can we go somewhere and talk? Apartment? My house? A slightly uncrowded café?”

“Uncrowded cafes on a Saturday means a place with bad food and terrible drinks,” Sherlock said, “So let’s go upstairs and talk.”

“Sounds good to me.”

***

Sherlock had never been so surprised, pleased, relieved and puzzled at the same time. He had his brows knotted together and a smile tugging at the corner of his mouths at the same time, his eyes glowed and clouded over with questions simultaneously and his body language suggested happiness and awkwardness in equal measures. “So you are saying that you have been chasing Jim for years and he finally said yes to you?” He asked the embarrassed Sebastian, “He had actually asked you to get me there at Berlanti estate and then disappeared with you so I could have some private time with John?”

“Yeah,” Sebastian said, “I thought you had figured that out. Our conversation that morning on the pier made me assume that but I was off the mark. You were thinking you let me down since I was your date for the weekend. Sorry, I didn’t exactly mean to deceive you but I had never…..”

“Hey-Hey-Hey, hold your horses now,” Sherlock decided to do damage control immediately, “Throw that whole ‘deceive Sherlock’ thing out of your mind. There was no deception or lies or any other form of misunderstanding. It’s my mistake I had misinterpreted your friendship and willingness to help as an interest in dating me and, now that I think of it, you hadn’t ever made any suggestive statements that indicated such an interest. As I see it, no harm done at all since we were both assuming and no animals were harmed during this process.”

Sebastian chuckled, “I have to admit, that fellow let go of a golden boy. Your sense of humor is subtle but gold, as is your intellect and your ability to take the rough with the smooth. It’s his loss Sherlock. As for you, please let me help you in some way. I know you don’t think I am at fault but somehow, I still feel a bit guilty. We are still friends, right? Will you allow your friend Sebastian to support you with something, anything?”
“Well,” Sherlock shrugged, “Now that you’re telling me, maybe there is something.”

“Just name it.”

“A place for me to rent. I enjoyed the three months I stayed here but it’s time for me to get my new place, especially since Irene and John…..”

“Irene and John what?”

“Never mind. I just need a place to rent.”

“Why rent?” Sebastian said, “I’ll get you a good deal to buy your own place. Let’s begin today.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the comments, analysis and suggestions. Trying to incorporate some. Is Irene really engaged to John? I can say only one thing - Never underestimate the wrath of a woman scorned.
His pound of flesh

Chapter Summary

Sherlock finally gets to speak his mind

The next week turned out to be productive but filled with ups and downs for Sherlock. Thanks to his fierce determination to keep John off his mind, he started making notes and creating blue prints for his experiments and working his arse off for his business, leaving him little room to think or do anything except to eat and sleep a handful of hours. Whatever spare time he got was devoted to house-hunting where, thanks to Sebastian, he made considerable inroads towards a good deal.

“Yes,” he said with a beaming smile to Sebastian, smiling for the first time in full sincerity rather than for pretenses, “This one is perfect.”

It was a flat on Baker Street, a prime location in London, and spread over two floors. The first floor was the owner Mrs. Hudson’s residence and a café she ran, the basement had a couple of rooms from where she ran a catering company and also took culinary lessons. Sherlock had the second floor flat, one-bedroom, spacious sitting room, kitchen with dining space, a large bath and toilet and an additional room on the third floor, which he was permitted to convert to a laboratory. There were also two additional rooms there, both bedrooms with en-suite baths, which could be given to any guest of his on a chargeable basis per night.

Mrs. Hudson had been eager to sell those rooms too, making Sherlock the owner of the two upper floors while she retained the basement and first floor, but Sherlock had refused. He didn’t need so much space and he didn’t really want to take a huge loan.

“I am happy to sell part of my house,” Mrs. Hudson, a sixty-year-old lady who spoke a lot and noticed everything, thoroughly surveyed Sherlock with her wise eyes, “I have enough and more money for the remaining days of my life so the price isn’t important, the person is. The moment I saw you I knew there would be no trouble, no drama and no nonsense here. You seem a workaholic my son, are you going to live here alone?”

“For now,” Sebastian answered on his behalf.

“I see,” she said, “So, ready to move in?”
“I will need some time for repairs and decoration,” Sherlock insisted.

“Very well, from next month then.”

“Yes, that sounds nice.”

When they emerged on the streets, Sebastian grabbed Sherlock’s hands and said, “Sherl, this has been a steal. That old woman is extremely finicky. Berlanti told me she turned down fifty buyers and finally said yes to you. Nobody gets a property like this for this price. Good choice.”

“All thanks to YOU,” Sherlock said gratefully, “I would have never known a deal like this unless you showed it to me.”

“Anytime man,” Sebastian said cheerfully.

They hugged again and suddenly Sherlock noticed a car slow down, as if someone was about to alight from it, then speed up and take off again. His superior sense of observation and analysis told him it was someone who was either watching him or Sebastian but he didn’t think much about it. Corporate vigilance and vendor due diligence often involved putting private eyes on some individuals, a step Sherlock’s own company undertook, hence it was not a biggie for him. It didn’t seem like a threatening move either, so he let it slide and guided Sebastian into the café Mrs. Hudson ran. “She told me her chef, after copying her recipe, makes a mean roast turkey sub. Let’s find out if that’s true or not.”

“Yeah,” Sebastian patted his stomach, “I am hungry.”

“And tell me all about your and Jim’s sex life.”

“Sherlock! Since when have you become Mr. Potty Mouth?”

“Since I started living close to Jim. Be prepared for this to last a lifetime, he’s a dirty boy with very sneaky tactics.”

Sebastian slid his shirt a bit off his shoulder and pointed, “I know, right? He ensured he claimed me
as his ‘merchandize’ by doing this.” His finger pointed at a now healed mark which said ‘JM’, carved with a finely pointed knife right at the base of Sebastian’s long neck. The reddish purplish mark sat at a juncture between the neck and collarbone and contrasted sharply with the golden pallor of Sebastian’s skin.

“He is possessive,” Sherlock grinned.

“Tell me about it.”

***

The next day two strange things happened.

Sherlock was just about to get out of his office and head to Berlanti’s London office to settle the payments for the flat when Berlanti called him with a surprising news.

“Hey Sherlock, how are you?” The ever-cheerful man said in his usual ebullient tone, “You are Mr. Moriarty’s friend, you know I wouldn’t treat you like every other customer. There was no need for your elder brother to visit my London office with the payment. I could have sent someone to his office, or yours for that matter. Such a senior official stepping into my humble office, must say it was quite a surprise for us.”

“What?” Sherlock asked, “I….I don’t understand. My brother, you mean Mycroft Holmes?”

“Yes very much so Sherlock. He showed up with someone….I don’t remember the other gentleman’s name, and deposited the entire nine hundred thousand pounds for the flat you just purchased. He also deposited an additional hundred and fifty thousand to be used for interiors and repairs and checked twice with me if any other amount was needed. He was also making extensive inquiries about Mr. Moriarty, which angered the other gentleman, and when they left they were….I think ‘not on talking terms’.”

“Lestrade, Greg Lestrade.”

“Yes, now I remember, Mr. Lestrade.”
“So, if I am getting this right, my brother has paid for my flat and an additional amount to renovate and refurbish and furnish it?”

“Yeah. Full amount settled. I am sending you the keys this evening and the papers you need to sign. Mrs. Hudson has already signed on the dotted line.”

“Thanks Vito.”

Sherlock disconnected and stared for a long time at the phone. Mycroft had paid more than a million pounds. No, he should have never done that. Sherlock didn’t need his charity or his mercy. He had managed under worse circumstances so this was very much manageable for him, there was no need for any financial support, especially from his elder brother who had always been an absent figure in his life, also a condescending, wisecracking, annoying one.

As for the house payment, he had planned to pay off as much of the amount upfront as possible to avoid accumulating loans. The savings he had, plus the profits he had made from his fledgling company plus around three hundred grand in home-loan was what would have eventually footed the cost of the 221B flat. The costs incurred to paint, clean, renovate and decorate would have to come from somewhere else, which he hadn’t figured out yet.

No, even if he had to accumulate loans or move into a semi-furnished house with peeling plaster on the walls, he wouldn’t accept Mycroft’s help.

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“You better have a good reason for doing this big brother,” Sherlock snarled as he entered his brother’s plush mansion in central London, the housekeeper and a couple of cats scuttling after him as he burst into the elder Holmes’ study without any warning.

“But a matter of fact, I do,” Mycroft said coolly, “Please sit down and take a deep breath. Mrs. Fleming, please bring lunch into the private dining room for me and my brother. He will have his afternoon meal with me, as I had stated earlier. Now leave us please, that includes you two, Knight and OBE.” He looked at the cats.

Mrs. Fleming left obediently, even the two felines following Mycroft’s instructions to the T and tagging at her heals. On any other day Sherlock might have found the whole thing very funny but that day he was so furious that he barely noticed the little creatures, one ginger and the white and
black striped, with long furry tails. It was only when one slashed its tail against his leg before exiting the room that he jumped and stepped aside. “You actually named your cats Knight and OBE?” He asked, frowning at his brother, “What next ‘Queenie’ and ‘Duke’?”

“I bet your cats would be named Sodium and Potassium,” Mycroft said coolly, leaning back in his chair and smiling like a reptile at the flustered Sherlock, “We all have our obsessions brother mine, you have chemistry and I have my titles. Now please, sit and be comfortable. I suppose you are here to contest my decision to pay for the Baker Street flat which you were planning to buy. Yes, I have paid the real estate fellow a million and fifty thousand pounds by cheque about an hour and half ago. No, this is not charity and was never meant to be. This is very much your own money.”

Sherlock scowled, “How so? Just be candid Myc.”

“I have missed you.”

It was a genuine statement and Sherlock’s brows shot up, “What?”

“It’s been a long time. I missed you.”

Mycroft’s normally hard or ice-cold expression had changed. He looked, almost human. There was genuine regret and sadness on his visage and body language and Sherlock’s heckles rose. “What is happening?” He muttered, “You are unwell, someone is unwell, something bad has happened, what is it?”

“Nothing bad has happened now,” Mycroft explained, “And I don’t want something bad to happen in the future either. Which is why you need to listen to me very carefully. This money, which I paid for the flat, is your share of a small inheritance left for us by our father. He had made an investment some twenty years ago and forgotten all about it. His friend, who had managed that investment, got in touch with me and presented me with the matured sum of two million one hundred thousand pounds.”

Sherlock blinked.

“I can present proof, legal documents, paperwork, nomination papers.”

“You-You just gave me half of the amount…..so it’s technically my money?”
“Of course it is! I could have informed you before but there was no time. I got to know last night and, since you don’t take my calls or speak to me, I chose to contact Jim. He is in Helsinki but he was able to give me a critical piece of information, that you were about to buy a flat. So, before you took on any loan or encashed your investments, I quickly paid off for everything.”

Sherlock bowed his head and sat there, hands folded on his lap, unable to form a proper response. A decade after his father’s death, the man was still looking after his sons in a way. Suddenly he missed his old man terribly and tears welled up in his eyes, making him stifle a sob and swallowed hard. When he hurriedly tried to wipe them away, not wishing for Mycroft to see him cry, he saw his elder brother looked distressed too. “He…..” Mycroft began, clearing his throat repeatedly, “He was a great man, maybe we didn’t thank him enough while he was still around. We should have done that.”

“What about mummy,” Sherlock choked out the words, “You always wanted to institutionalize her. You refused to give her a chance.”

“I wanted to give you a chance,” Mycroft said, “I knew her case was beyond help. She needed 24/7 care and that is best given to committed patients at the best institutions. The last thing I wanted was for you to handle such a case at home, that too your own mother, when you were already coping with the breakdown of your marriage. Whatever I did Lockie, was keeping you at the top of my mind.”

“We….I….I feel like an orphan….” Sherlock broke down finally, “Everyone is gone….even you decided to stay away.”

Mycroft was not demonstrative; hence he didn’t walk around the desk to hug his sibling. But he reached out and placed his hand on Sherlock’s head, conveying all he wanted to convey through that simple gesture. “It’s you who stayed away. Yeah, I could have tried harder too.”

“No, my fault Myc. I was just…..”

“Upset? Disturbed? I understand. You went through a lot.”

“Let’s never be like this again. Let’s at least stay in touch.”

Mycroft put his hand on Sherlock’s and squeezed gently, “Without a doubt, we should. After losing
Jim, who had walked out on me one fine day, I understood your situation better. Not easy to see someone just toss you aside and walk away as if nothing happened. As you might have guessed, I now live with Greg Lestrade and I wish Jim and Sebastian the best. Jim and I are friends again, which is the most we could have salvaged from our broken relationship.”

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Sherlock was feeling fifty pounds lighter as he drove into the parking spot outside Skyline Apartments. Things were looking up. A growing business, a master plan for creating a patented compound that could be hugely popular in both nuclear research and medical fields, a sudden inheritance allowing him to become a homeowner once again, reconciliation with his estranged brother, it was all going well!

All except the broken heart he still nursed. If only John had been just a little bit interested in rekindling their relationship and not treated him like a booty call……

He got out of the car, almost hitting his head in the process as he kept checking his email on his phone and responding to some of the WhatsApp messages. Distractedly he opened the rear door and picked up his laptop bag, sipper and a packet of takeout food he had picked up on the way. Fish and chips and some assorted chopped vegetables was going to be his dinner tonight, before he started working on his patent again. As he tried to duck out of the car again, his head inches from the top of the door, he heard that unmistakable drawl which had been influenced by years of working and living across the pond.

“Watch out, your head.”

Sherlock jumped a bit, then straightened his back, eyes on the man who was sitting in the car parked right next to him. How had he not noticed the dark green mammoth of a car! It was a Bentley, customized number plate, bespoke roof design and body color, fully customized interiors. Of course, John Watson could now easily afford the same luxuries that he once worked as a salesman for.

“What are you doing here?” Sherlock demanded, fingers clenching tightly at the bags.

“We need to talk,” John said in a demanding manner.

“Do we now?” Sherlock scoffed. His growing anger, born out of the huge amount of letdown he had faced on seeing the engagement ring on Irene’s finger, now surfacing in a mad rush.
“Yes, we should,” John insisted, looking agitated, “Please don’t walk away. That’s rude.”

“That’s real sweet, coming from you,” Sherlock snapped at him, “You’re the best at it.”

“Must you repeat my mistake?”

“At least, you finally admitted it was a mistake. Now I am going back to my flat upstairs. If you choose to follow me, I might forget all about Irene and just call the security to remove you from the premises. Don’t let things get that bad, please John, don’t. Walk away now and accept we will never meet again. None of us have any further reasons to.”
Highs and Lows

Chapter Summary

Irene marries, John falls out of touch again and Sherlock tries to move on without much luck.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Three months went by with the quickness of a hummingbird’s flight from one destination to the other. The winds of change helping it all the way, those weeks were filled with various eventful moments for Sherlock who found himself in the midst of a flurry of activities.

His mornings were spent working from home and enjoying the delightful location of the flat, complete with streaming sunshine (on sunny days) into the bedroom and living room and lively noise from the street below, and eating breakfast with either Sebastian, Jim or Mrs. Hudson. Jim came to see him often, sometimes with Sebastian and the two men preferred the big English breakfast served at Mrs. Hudson’s café below.

In the afternoons and evenings, he went to visit prospective clients or looked after his growing company, speaking to his sales team, accounts team, client servicing team, or recruiting new members for their expanding business footprint. In the late evenings he returned to the flat, cooked a simple meal or brought takeout, and ate while reading a book or watching the news. Then, for half the night, he worked at the laboratory to perfect the product he was creating and created white papers for that. His life was a monk-like existence outside of work, no dating, no socializing beyond a monthly visit to his brother and brother’s partner and no more than an occasional glass of beer or wine to relax, in his own company.

He didn’t mind the solitude because he had lost confidence in his ability to form relationships or friendships and didn’t trust himself to make the right choice when it came to romantic partners. The other reason was more complicated. John had disabled his interests in any other man. After meeting him again, Sherlock had realized how much power the former surgeon had over him and knew he wouldn’t be able to shake it off.

Then why try and fail miserably?

“We worry about you Sherlock,” Greg said one day during a visit to 221B.
“You need more furniture,” Mycroft observed.

“He needs to eat more food,” Mrs. Hudson quipped.

“Kill me,” Sherlock scoffed.

“We are not your enemies Lockie,” Mycroft admonished him.

“Don’t go daddy on me now,” Sherlock said wearily.

“I know someone who is great boyfriend material,” Mrs. Hudson said excitedly, “He is a former Olympian who is currently working on his thesis on sports medicine.”

“No,” Sherlock said adamantly, “I am married to my work.”

“I thought so too,” Mycroft tried to explain, “But it’s not too bad an idea to have someone with you to share the day’s events, someone you can come home to. Even I have started living with someone, think about it Sherlock, this works!”

Sherlock had said nothing and moved the topic of conversation to the ‘married gay men next door’ who kept them up late into the night, sometimes with their violent fights and name-calling and at other times with their equally loud makeup sex. He warded off such suggestions by Victor Trevor as well, who had married and quickly impregnated his wife and was excited about becoming a father. If only all of you knew what a deep scar John left me with last time, you would have never expected me to even think about a relationship. Sherlock had been hurt the first time around but somehow knew that the faults from those times belonged equally to both of them. However, the second blow he had been struck with, ten years later, was unforgivable. John had used him and thrown him aside like a tissue.

There were nights which brought about deep pangs of anxiety and sadness for him, making him cover his head with the blanket to block out every sound and light of the world. There were moments of doubt and disappointment as he recollected those moments when he had realized John was two-timing him and Irene. Somehow the mere fact that John had considered keeping him, his once lawfully wedded husband, as a ‘dirty secret’ hurt him below the belt.

The cheek of the man, even showing up at his then residence and demanding they talk!
Irene had moved to her own accommodation shortly after Sherlock had moved. She had made it a point to mention to Jim and Sherlock that John had ‘bought’ her that cottage in a small quaint village not too far from London, which was her base whenever she was in England.

“Good for her,” Jim said to Sherlock one morning, “It seems she is sorted for life. I heard she is retiring from business, or taking a sabbatical, whatever you call it.”

“She always wanted to do the sort of work socialite homemakers do,” Sherlock had agreed.

“A failed fashion label and her own little store somewhere, paid for by hubby” Jim chuckled.

“Well, as you said, good for her,” Sherlock had agreed again.

“Any idea where John is?” Jim had asked.

“No. Must be back in the United States.”

“So is Irene.”

One fine day Sherlock received a text from Irene, making an announcement which made his heart stop for a second. He knew he should be expecting this but when the news hit him, the blow was harder than he thought.

‘Getting married on the 23rd of this month. Wish me luck. Small but lavish destination wedding, followed by honeymoon to Tahiti. My wedding gown is designed by Vera Wang and has a nine-meter chiffon train – IA’

Sherlock had tried for days, weeks and months to forget John and move on but all his carefully orchestrated efforts to do so were brought crashing down to earth by this single text from Irene. He felt his heart pound in his chest, each palpitation more painful than the one before, and slowly his vision blurred. He wasn’t crying, he just couldn’t see anything through the haze of grief that overwhelmed him. Even though he knew this was inevitable, he had somehow nurtured a hope that maybe, just maybe, John would see the futility of pretending to be straight and at least not rub it on to Sherlock’s face by marrying his former husband’s high school lady-friend.
But John had turned out to be ordinary, not unique. Strangely enough, at some point Sherlock was so sure John was different from everyone else.

“Stupid I was, stupid I have remained,” he sighed and went about this work. But the next few days were tough on him and he could hardly concentrate on anything. As the D-day came nearer, Sherlock felt more and more restless.

“You’re not stupid,” Mrs. Hudson told him a day before John and Irene’s wedding, “You’re just not wise. Intelligence and wisdom are two different things. One can be born intelligent, clever, sly, but acquiring wisdom takes some experience and time.”

“I got plenty of time to recognize the true face of my ex,” Sherlock snorted in self-pity, “I was still fooled.”

After a pause he looked at her and laughed, “And why am I oversharing with you?”

“Because you know I won’t judge,” the old lady said gently, “Don’t be too hard on yourself honey. As for this Irene, I must say she is quite the b.....girl-dog for sending that text. Perhaps she shouldn’t have.”

“I told her she had my blessings. She was being showered with gifts by John, pre-wedding presents, she had the ring, I knew what was coming up. Forget it, it’s all my fault for still not accepting it.”

“You will Sherlock. Sooner or later you will. And you’ll move on now for real. All these years, you were probably hoping for his return without even knowing it. Now you know the door has truly and firmly closed. Now you have only one way, forward and ahead.”

“Forward and ahead,” Sherlock repeated.

He went out with Victor and his pregnant wife on the evening of the 23rd and tried his best to distract himself and not think about the ‘destination wedding’ but when he fell into bed that night, drunk and dog-tired, he still saw an image of Irene floating on a cloud of chiffon and John showering her with diamonds and tiaras.
Funny, he thought as he fell into the stupor of a drunken sleep, *talk about a case of closeted heterosexuality*. John had somehow proved that with his second marriage. The first time, with a man. The second time, with a woman. Would there be a third time? Sherlock spitefully imagined John breaking up with Irene and choosing a trans man or trans woman the next time he decided to walk down the aisle. Oh well, it was his life after all. Sherlock had been cut out of it the day he had served him divorce papers and rudely cut off all communications with him.

***

“Where the fuck were you?” Jim demanded to know on the phone, “I have been calling you since morning. Sebastian and I are planning to get married in two months and I wanted to know if you would be my best man and not his.”

“You have first rights over me!!!” Sherlock laughed forcibly even though the very word ‘marriage’ gave him heartburn nowadays, “Seb will have to settle for someone else.”

“Yaaay, I win, I get the best man,” Jim sounded like a gleeful child, then his voice dropped several notches, “Oh damn, I am sorry man! I know this must not be the easiest thing for you to hear. First Irene, then me and Seb, Victor earlier, all of us getting hitched and you’re entirely on your own. Even that poker faced brother of yours has miraculously landed a partner who actually likes him! Listen, you don’t have to be my best man or attend the wedding if you don’t feel up to it, okay?”


“What?”

“I said peop…..”

“Who did John marry?”

“Irene of course.”

“She told you?”
“Yeah. Sent me a text two weeks ago. She even told me where she was honeymooning.”

Jim’s voice was laced with disgust, “Even for her, this is a new low.”

“On the contrary,” Sherlock kept up the brave front, “It’s good she told me. She was being honest and upfront. I would have hated to be informed by someone else, later. It’s all right Jim, it’s over and in the past.”

***

“Hey Sherlock,” Sebastian’s face came into view as the Skype call was turned to video mode. It was clear he was seated on a messed-up bed, bare chested, lap barely covered by crunched sheets, and sporting a variety of ‘spoils’ from his latest bed games with Jim. He had a bruise to his right cheekbone, a slight swelling at the corner of his mouth, a sucking bruise on his chin and a prominent bite mark at his right collarbone. He looked rather spaced out and his eyes were half closed. “Sorry man, so…soh….rry….” he yawned and paused as his words were almost cut off by that, “Been a long night with little sleep and lots of……you know what, it’s new love you see!”

Sherlock rolled his eyes, “You called to tell me that?”

“Nah, I need your help with something that might eat up your weekend,” Sebastian was pushed by someone (Sherlock knew who it might be and grinned, typical Jim) and the screen shook violently for a moment, “Ooops, okay I need to speak softly, hope you can still hear me. Listen, you remember the Berlanti house we visited a couple of months ago? I had organized for a weekend meeting with a rather important client and it seems Jim wants me to accompany him to Paris on this weekend instead. I can’t say no, please understand.”

“Actually I do,” Sherlock snickered, “Tell Jim I owe him, hence I am doing this.”

“Oh I will. Thanks a lot man. I’ll send you all the details on email and Joanna will give you the download on the client and his expectations from both our companies. Thanks a lot for representing me. Really, thanks!”

“If you keep thanking me, I might even change my mind and get busy this weekend.”

“With what? Your test tube or your old relic Mrs. Hudson?”
Sebastian giggled and Sherlock did an eyeroll again when he recognized the grumpy, somewhat sleep-scratched voice of his friend. “I am doing this Jimmy, go back to sleep,” he said loudly and showed Sebastian the thumbs up sign. Even before the call had been disconnected, Sherlock had the funny fortune of hearing the two men have a go at it again, with plenty of squealing from Jim and deep-throated grunts from Sebastian.

“The bastards,” Sherlock shook his head and smiled, “Insatiable.”

There was a point of time when he had been the same, with John.

No, no more thinking of John, remembering him, or missing him. He had to move on. John Hamish Watson was now John Knoxville and a married man on top of that. The young doctor he had fallen in love with no longer existed so there was nobody to miss.

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Though he had taken up the responsibility of meeting the client and wrapping by the business deal at the pretty and peaceful Berlanti Estate, Sherlock felt dread instead of delight as he drove towards the property. When he took the narrow road through the shallow woods and spotted the top of the countryside mansion, he felt no joy like he had felt on his earlier visit. The scenery was just as beautiful as before, the aura of that lakeside property just as amazing, but Sherlock noticed none of those things. He was too busy shutting out memories and thoughts of John, with whom he had spent that fateful night of passion at this very house.

And then, the very next day, John had put a ring on Irene’s finger.

“No, I am here to do business, not to rake up my past, concentrate Sherlock, focus on the job and eyes on the prize,” he muttered as he drove into the property, wondering if he should light a cigarette to calm his frayed nerves. The same butler and housekeeper greeted him and the same maids and groundskeeper could be spotted as he walked up he steps to the porch, but there were no signs of Vito Berlanti or his wife Matilda Berlanti. “You have been informed about my visit I suppose,” he asked the butler who was dutifully carrying his overnight bag, “Mr. Berlanti would have spoken to you, right?”

“Yes sir he did. But he’ll be away till tomorrow morning for some urgent family commitment.”

“Oh I see, in that case…..”
“The mistress is also with him. They had to go together.”

“All right. The client?”

“He is already here. We gave him a guest room on the same floor. He’ll see you shortly before dinner at the Renaissance room downstairs. Six-thirty pm.”

Sherlock didn’t understand why he had to sit around and wait all day when the client was already there. They could probably even finish the discussions by evening and leave for London before sunset.

But a client was a client. He called the shots.

"All right," he said, "I'll meet him then."

Chapter End Notes

Inserted the highly-sexed Mormor part to prevent this chapter from becoming a Sherlock pity party
Real or Surreal

Chapter Summary

Sherlock find his happiness after a decade of pain and losses
John explains himself

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sherlock was tempted to take a dip in the pool but he avoided that place like the plague. No, too many memories, too many distress signals associated with the pool. He didn’t want to stoke up those negative emotions again and wear himself out. As it is, he had been surviving on coffee, Red Bull, coca cola and cigarettes for several weeks now because he was sleep deprived and often ate not more than one meal a day. Where was the time? He had so many coals in the fire that he hardly had time to catch his breath.

But his lifestyle choices had started to take a toll on him and he was once again underweight, susceptible to frequent bouts of giddiness and irritability, sported dark circles under his eyes and felt tired all the time.

He tried to take a nap of two hours, failed miserably, cursed Dietrich Mateschitz for inventing Red Bull and got out of the bed in a huff. Confining himself to the bedroom he had been allotted, he paced around the room constantly, drank a gallon of water but refused food when the butler offered him some snacks, then stood on the balcony and drank the Oolong tea he had been served. The countryside was beautiful and the serene waters of the lake calmed him down somewhat, post which he decided to go for a long, hot shower. The client meeting was just an hour away.

He chose to wear tailored black slacks and an azure-shaded button-down shirt with a graphite gray single button jacket over it. With notch lapels and no tie, it was a casual yet sleek look for a business dinner in home comfort, it made the wearer appear smart and sassy and brought out the greenish blue colors of his eyes out rather well. He also looked pale as a ghost, thanks to his lack of time in the sun and spending most of his hours locked up indoors with work. But somehow his reddened cheeks and lips, mostly from the hot shower he had just taken, complimented the alabaster pallor of his skin and gave him a rather attractive look.

As Sherlock entered the private dining room, which was the more or less the size of his entire flat at 221B Baker Street, he noticed that the table had already been laid with the finest china and silver. Fragrant candles had been lit all around and on the center of the table were fresh, bright orchids in a cut-glass vase.
Next to it sat an ice bucket with a bottle of champagne resting in it, next to that a silver salver filled with juicy, ripe strawberries, and finally there was a pretty crystal bowl filled with the shimmery eggs of the rarest of sturgeons.

*Champagne, strawberries and caviar! Wow! The client had to be a very important one.*

Two neat little menu cards sat on the table and Sherlock picked up one. Wow, lobster, the best of cheeses on the side and truffles, then an exquisite dessert which Sherlock used to prefer a long time ago. The ingredients it needed were available only at select gourmet stores.

“The client has to be really, really unique and important,” Sherlock didn’t even realize he was muttering those words aloud, “Berlanti has gone over the top this time!”

“Actually,” someone whispered behind him, “It’s you who is the most important person this evening. Everything you see here are your favorites, or once were.”

At first Sherlock thought he was dreaming. He had often ‘seen’ and ‘heard’ John on days and in places where the man was nowhere around so he knew he could hallucinate things once in a while. But when he looked at John, who had grown a fashionable and neatly maintained French beard, he knew this wasn’t imagination. This was the real deal. His mind palace John didn’t have this beard, nor did he ever wear this combination of an exquisite dove grey suit with a subtle pink shirt and steel gray tie. He backed off slightly, almost by instinct since his mind was screaming at him that ‘This couldn’t be the truth, John must be in Tahiti, I am dreaming’.

“Watch out.” John said with an amused grin and reached out and grabbed Sherlock’s arm before the latter could crash into a narrow table on which a beautiful peacock statue was kept.

Sherlock cursed himself for his clumsiness and sharply pulled his arm back from John’s grasp, as if he had been stung there.

“Whoa, easy,” John said, taking a step back too, “Didn’t mean to shock you.”

“Somehow you have a propensity to do just that,” Sherlock bit back.
John raised both hands half way, “Not here to fight.”

Sherlock scoffed, “Why are you even here? Are you not supposed to be in Tahiti, with Irene?”

“As far as I know,” John pretended to think hard, a small smile curving the corners of his mouth, “She is there in Tahiti. But why will her husband, a French gentleman and couturier named Jacques Louis Cantona, take kindly to me joining them there? It’s their honeymoon after all.”

“What?” Sherlock’s world began to dance a jig, the room started spinning around him, “You-You are not….nor married to Irene Adler?”

“Evidently not,” John took a small bow, “Still a free, single man. But not free or single at heart Sherlock. Otherwise why do you think I am here? Why do you think I set this all up?” He pointed at the table and said, “There was a time when I couldn’t even spell them, forget about affording them. But today I can give you anything, I can ensure you live in six times more of the comfort you were used to. I am back here with you, in England, in this countryside house which holds special memories for us, for a VERY good reason.”

Sherlock was too afraid to hope. Too many years of aching and longing, too many unexpected heartbreaks, too much suffering. He wouldn’t be able to take any more of that. Without a word he turned and tried to dash out of the room but John was amazingly fast and blocked his way. “Please Sherl, please, just give me some time to explain everything and answer a lot of questions that you might have. If I have put in the effort to organize this and get you here, can’t you at least give me an hour in return? After an hour if you still feel you despise me and wish to leave, I will neither stop you nor ever try to contact you again.”

Awkwardly nodding his head and trying to find his voice again, Sherlock finally went over to the bay window at the corner of the room and sat down in front of it.

“Thanks,” John said, sitting right next to Sherlock and keeping a tiny little space between them, “I got to know that Irene had been giving you the impression that we had continued our friendship and taken it to the next level, a proper courtship and finally a proposal. Later, she even tricked you into believing that I have married her and am off on my honeymoon to some exotic holiday destination. It was only then that I stepped out of a room filled with the smoky confusion of lies and saw things in full clarity. I knew you were as much under a misconception about me as I was about you and your relationship with Sebastian.”

Sherlock’s eyes went wide, “Sebastian? Seb?”
“Yes, shocking isn’t it?”

“We are just business partners.”

“Just like Irene and I have always been friends with benefits. Those benefits didn’t include sex, but a few other arrangements in business and her accompanying me to some business dinner with some ‘conservative’ people. But as the years have progressed, so has the world, and I decided I didn’t need to beard. She told me repeatedly that she was a lesbian woman and didn’t mind marrying a gay man and being his beard as long as he was willing to be her mustache. It was like a quid pro quo.”

Sherlock was astonished. Oh how Irene had twisted words and spoken half-truths to give him the completely wrong picture.

John sensed his stunned silence and said, “I had no idea how she had portrayed our relationship to you. Usually it was more about being friends, business associates and yes, socially connected. She did broach the topic a marriage of convenience a few times and I was once even tempted to consider it, thinking it would give me a conventional social status of a wealthy businessman married to a good-looking, stylish senior executive, kids in future to complete the picture and all that. But then…..”

He cautiously took Sherlock’s hand and stroked it, “Then I realized a life of falsehood and pretenses didn’t suit me. I declined.”

“Yet you still came over to England to see her?” Sherlock’s voice was incredulous.

“No, I came over to look for you.”

“What? John, that’s a bit too hard to believe. You had not even taken a look this way for ten long years. Suddenly, ten years later, you came here to see me? You had no idea where I even lived. How can you expect me to even believe this?”

“I know it’s hard to believe,” John confessed, “And I don’t even blame you. Anyone in your place would have thought and said the same thing. But the truth is sometimes stranger than fiction. Since I parted ways with you Lockie, I might have acquired a lot of wealth, respect from peers, validation from society, even a father-figure, but my life was always lacking something. I missed you rather terribly and after a while that sadness settled down into a slow, boiling anger at the pit of my
I cursed myself for walking away from someone I loved truly, deeply, madly, someone I always knew I could never move on from. I started thinking, imagining, wondering about where you might be, what you might have been up to. Someone like yourself, I supposed that you would have a flock of people chasing you for a single date.”

“I-I never went on a proper date since…..” Sherlock choked on the rest of the words.

“Now I know. Jim told me.”

“Wait…..is it Jim who helped you organize this?”


“He is, isn’t he?” John continued, “In fact, he was the one who told me Irene had fooled you with her half-truths and that you were still single and a little bit upset about the whole thing.”

“A little bit is an understatement…..”

“Okay, quite upset. You had every right to be.”

“She showed me a ring, she showed me expensive gifts, that cottage.”

John made a gesture of helplessness with his arms, “You can hardly ever understand how women think, or comprehend a thousand different manipulative ways the woman’s mind works. When I told her, after our time together right here at Berlanti estate, that I was going to do all I can to get you back, she seemed very upset at first but then incredibly okay a short while later. I guess she had kept the French queer as a backup.”

“Same arrangement?” Sherlock’s eyes widened.

“Same. He is into men, she into women, they will have a couple of beautiful babies through a surrogate and live the conventional family image. No problems, more power to her, but the way she was misleading you had to stop. If only I had known earlier that you were as single as I had always been, I would have spoken at length with you months ago.”
Emotions swirled over Sherlock, but this time happiness was finally breaking through in his heart, like the proverbial ray of sunshine through the dark, storm clouds. “I never felt like dating, marrying or even having a relationship,” he finally admitted, “Never felt up to it.”

“Me neither, though I have to say I tried to move on and went on dates multiple times,” John grabbed Sherlock and pulled him closer, his eyes on Sherlock’s lips, “My green eyed gorgeous beauty, my life size Ken doll, my love, the only light of my life, you had cast a spell on me and I couldn’t move out of it. I saw everyone else as so ordinary, so not worthy of me, so unsavvy, I just couldn’t proceed beyond those first dates. That’s why I came back here to look for you. Had I not found you at Irene’s apartment I would have reached out to Victor or Jim and enquired. I wanted to bury your ghost, see you married to someone else, in the hope that it would enable me to move on.”

Sherlock moved closer. He so wanted to kiss John. Myths and walls were breaking down and the reality peering from behind that curtain seemed so much sweeter than what existed in his mind. John stroked his face and smiled affectionately, “Had you been happily married to some British Lord or a well-known celebrity, I would have blessed you from a distance and left London quietly. But then I met you and you were…..”

“Alone?”

“I didn’t think so then. I thought you were with Sebastian.”

“Oh Lord!”

“He was perfect. The son of a British Lord, a successful and moneyed businessman, tall and handsome, those baby blues, ripped and toned like a footballer, and he seemed pretty fond of you too. I saw you with him that morning, out there on the pier, after we had…..parted…..you two looked quite intimate…..then at Baker Street I saw something similar. I was following you to find you alone somewhere, to talk, and saw you two hugging on the sidewalk.”

“Jesus,” Sherlock looked stung, “If I was straight would you call every woman I hug my fiancé?”

“I realize that now,” John said sheepishly, “I wasn’t thinking ‘straight’ back then….no pun intended.”

They both laughed, sitting so close by now their knees were touching and their faces were inches
apart. “I was waiting for Sebastian, with whom I am in touch, to tell me he was marrying you. But a call comes to me from Jim, telling me Sebastian is marrying him.”

Sherlock blushed, “You thought Seb is marrying me, I thought Irene was marrying you, and yet here we are together at this beautiful property which…..”

John put his fingers on his lips and shushed him, then softly whispered, “Which I have bought, for you my darling.”

Sherlock gasped and squawked out in shock. This property, this four-million-pound property, now belonged to him!!! John had purchased it for him, even though he could very well refuse his advances and still keep the place! That was trust. That was truly a loving gesture, very generous too. Yet, a part of him that believed in self-respect, was not comfortable with this. “This….this is too much Jawn,” he murmured, resting his head on John’s shoulder and savoring the feel of those strong arms wrapped around him once more, “We are not married anymore. Accepting something as pricey as this house, I don’t think I can do it.”

John kissed his forehead, “Can’t say I blame you. I was the same person when we were married, interpreting generosity and a genuine desire to help as interference, charity and pity. I won’t force you to accept this from a stranger so I have a Plan B.”

Sherlock suddenly saw John fish for something inside his pocket. His expression went from happy and confident to tense and somewhat anxious. The pallor of his cheeks had certainly changed and he seemed to be excited and wary at the same time. Was it what he was thinking this was? Was John really going to…..oh yes, he was. The younger man stood up on shaky legs as John went down on one knee before him.

“My darling, I made the biggest mistake of my life by letting you go. My biggest shame of this life is running away from you. Luckily, you have a kind heart and I have the wits left to not let you go a second time. I wish to spend my life with you William Sherlock Scott Holmes. Please marry me, please give me one more chance to correct all those things I wronged, please let me do all those things for you which I always desired to do but couldn’t do because I was a young, penniless man.”

Sherlock felt a surreal moment happen around him. He actually saw his mummy and daddy standing close by, watching him keenly.

Their eyes met and they nodded in approval.
John was looking at him expectantly. “Sherlock,” he said emotionally, “Remember, this is a proposal, not a sense of entitlement I have over you. No matter what I say, you have the right to say no. I won’t stop trying though and I might propose to you again a few weeks down the line, but I won’t be upset if your answer does not change. I would understand your reasons to refuse. I really would.”

“You don’t have to go that far,” Sherlock extended his hand, “I accept.”

Chapter End Notes

Yes a bit cheesy but JohnLock happiness was long overdue. Not saying they won’t ever have stumbles and blinks but destiny gives them a second chance!
“Eat,” John pushed food into Sherlock’s mouth, “You are thin as a rail Lockie.”

Sherlock winced and looked down at himself to assess the comment. Oh well, yeah, he was thin. Floating in his clothes. He wasn’t really hungry, yet he accepted the extra bites his ex-turned-current partner fed him, stopping only when he started to feel close to full. John understood, stopped, but didn’t let go of Sherlock’s hand which he had held throughout the dinner, under the table. “You look handsome,” Sherlock said with genuine appreciation, his eyes fixed on his ‘Jawn’, “This facial hair suits you, as does the hairstyle, the rich yuppie businessman look and the clothes you prefer. Did you employ a personal trainer and a personal stylist? Tell me the truth.”

“I did,” John said, “What can I say? I realized it was easier to criticize people than to live their lives. I take back a lot of things I said back in those days.”

“Me too,” Sherlock said softly, “I also got to see life from the other side.”

“I am sorry for what happened to Reginald and Eugenia,” John looked guilty to the core, “I might not have always agreed to what they said or did but they loved you very much and wanted the best for you. Like most parents, their intentions were all in the right place and, as your partner, I should have respected that. I just wish I knew how little time they had left, especially Reginald.”

“Mummy didn’t have much left either,” Sherlock bit down on his bottom lip, “She was hardly alive after my dad passed. She was just functioning.”
“They’d be happy to see us back together, right?”

“I am sure they would be. Would you have asked them again, had they been around?”

“Absolutely. I realized, after I suddenly got a dad for a few years, that one doesn’t simply marry a person but also their family. In a way, at least. It’s best if you get along with them and they also happily welcome you into the family and their lives.”

“You really have changed Jawn.”

“As you have. I can’t tell you how proud I am to see how well you’ve done after all that you went through. Not many people can pick up pieces of their lives once shattered like that, time and again, blow after blow. I wish I was there with you then…..will you ever forgive me Sherl?”

“I already have,” Sherlock’s mesmerizing eyes twinkled with happiness after a long time, “I recognize a genuine man and a sincere apology when I see one.”

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It finally happened after they walked back to their bedroom, John’s bedroom rather, and the older man shut the door with his foot. In a flash their mouths were on each other’s and John literally tore Sherlock’s jacket off from his body. Sherlock ‘heard’ the ping of his button being severed and flying off somewhere before a handful of his soft locks were grabbed and his head was yanked down for the kiss. He kissed back just as eagerly and soon Sherlock found himself on his back, naked, with a very horny John shedding off his clothes and joining him in bed.

“Be gentle,” he whispered breathlessly, excited and a little nervous at the same time, “Have been without it for……”

“I know,” John looked uncharacteristically emotional and tender, “I know love!” He sucked hard on one of Sherlock’s nipples and the latter, giddy with arousal and almost cross-eyed, moaned out loud and arched off the bed. Keeping up the relentless suction on his sensitive nubs, first on the left and then on the right, John used his hands skillfully to massage and relax Sherlock’s opening. When his index finger slid in, Sherlock felt John’s dick jerk against his thigh. “Fuck you’re just as tight as I remember,” the older moved the finger in and out, “No, even tighter.”
Sherlock’s entire body shuddered at that moment and, embarrassingly for him, he came all over himself without as much as a touch to his cock. But before he could feel his cheeks flame or apologize for the killjoy, his lover surprised him. “Oh baby,” John interrupted their hot tongue kiss to bend down and lick off the cum, “You’re also just as tasty as I remember.”

“Still hard,” Sherlock begged, “Do me?”

“Of course.”

“Make me forget.”

“You will.”

“Tell me you……”

“I love you. I love you Sherlock. I’ve always loved you. I moved away because I mistakenly thought that you didn’t belong to me, but to your family. I was wrong. You were always mine, just as I was always yours. Never anyone else’s. I love you, love you, love you sooo much!”

***

Sherlock had tried to rein in his moans but after a point it became way too difficult to do so. After almost reaching a hyperventilating state, he let out a howl and thrashed underneath John who was fucking him with torturously slow yet deliciously deep thrusts. Even after being milked once, he couldn’t hold back his second peak and was almost about to shoot when John grabbed the base of his straining erection and squeezed painfully hard.

“Ouch,” Sherlock whined, then let out a breath of relief, “Thanks!”

John nuzzled his neck and continued to make love to him for the longest possible time, speeding up with Sherlock was in control and slowing down just as he was about to cum. When Sherlock had reached a level of complete desperation, he went for a surprise move and reversed their positions so the younger man was now sitting astride him with his eyes wide. “Come on baby,” John urged him to move by grabbing his buttocks and squeezing the mounds of flesh, “Ride me like you’d never stop, get me in so deep you’d forget where you end and I begin. Show me what ya got!”
Curls all askew and shrouding half his face, mouth open with moans tumbling out constantly, hands placed on John’s chest for leverage, Sherlock began to move atop John like a bitch on heat. Letting out sharp cries every time his sweet spot was hit, eyes rolling to the back of his head as John thrust up hard and his erect phallus slapping hard against John’s taut abs, Sherlock moved rapidly, repeatedly, constantly, relentlessly, not slowing down even as he felt John’s heat spread inside him and the older man growl out like an animal.

“Fuck, now,” he screamed and grabbed his dick, giving it a few tugs and shooting his load all over John.

John watched with eyes agape, licking his lips.

“What?” Sherlock panted as he fell on top of his man, “I need to rest.”

“This is what happens when you don’t eat or sleep well. Your stamina…what happened to it.”

“Can’t……”

“Yes you can. Just lie down on your stomach and spread your legs.”

“You mean you will do that?”

“Yes, I want to taste my cum as it drips out of you.”

Sherlock did as he was told, new tingles of arousal beating inside him already.

John proceeded to eat him out for nearly half an hour and during that Sherlock had cum so many times he had lost count. They were strange mini-orgasms that flashed through his body and fried his brains, making him shudder all over and sink a little deeper into a sex-stupor each time. By the time John finished and climbed over him, introducing his once again erect penis inside the slippery and well-used hole, Sherlock was not even sure he was awake or not.
“Stay with me,” he heard John whisper into his ear, “It’s been too long, stay with me till the end.”

Sherlock had no idea if John meant for him to stay awake till they had both cum again or stay with him till the end of their lives. Whatever it was, the green-eyed beauty surrendered completely to his lover and allowed him to take him flying. His entire life flashed before his eyes, especially those times when he was alone and ridiculously hurt by John’s abandonment, and he cried into his pillow while moaning with pleasure. Finally, finally, he deposited his final trickle of semen on to the sheets below and felt John empty his balls once again inside him. Eyes closing automatically, he slipped into a deep sex-coma even before John had had a chance of pulling out of him.

***

“Sherl! Lockie!”

Sherlock blinked, mumbled something and closed his eyes again, sleep once again pulling him in. He dreamt of John and him in 221B, drinking tea in bed together and listening to Mrs. Hudson running the vacuum outside and telling them ‘lovebirds’ to get out of the room.

The next time he heard his name being called and gentle nudges to his shoulder, he whimpered and then frowned, cracking open both eyes in slits and pulling the blanket over his head. No way was he going to wake up now, not when his body felt so sated and relaxed and his mind so much at peace. Not the time to be active, yet. “Come on babe, you need to wake up now,” he heard John calling out patiently, “It’s been way too long. Hope you’re feeling okay! I didn’t hurt you, did I? Lockie, open your eyes and look at me.”

“Ten more minutes.”

“I tried two hours ago. You said the same thing and passed out again.”

“T…..Two hours?”

“Honey you’ve been asleep fourteen hours.”

Sherlock threw off the blanket and opened his eyes wide, staring into John’s amused expression. “Yeah,” John pinched Sherlock’s cheeks, “And you looked so adorable like that, all cozy under the blankets, that I didn’t have the heart to wake you earlier. But once I started to try, I realized you were
out of it rather badly.”

“Yeah,” Sherlock stretched his arms and legs, “It seems like I hadn’t slept in weeks. Now I feel fresh, full of energy.”

John kissed his forehead and then peeked under the blanket and nodded, “Yeah, I can see that, all ready for more knockout rounds.” That landed him a playful smack on the side from Sherlock who shamelessly threw off the blanket and rushed to the toilet, giving his lover a generous view of his slender, tall and nude form. When he returned to the bedroom after taking a piss and brushing his teeth, he found John’s hungry gaze follow his every move. A warm roseate blush came over his prominent cheekbones and he quickly got back under the covers, smiling shyly. When was the last time he has had felt this happy?

“The ring,” he looked at the Versace rose gold set, blue and white diamond ring on his finger, “It’s beautiful. But I still have my older ring.”

John grabbed him and pulled him closer, “Wear both. Maybe on two different hands. But don’t take this one off. I bought it the moment I met you. I knew one day I was going to put it around your finger and that day could have been two and half months earlier had you not chased me away from the parking lot of Jim’s apartment building.”

“Do you have to mention that,” Sherlock hid his face in John’s chest, “By the way, why did you give Irene so many gifts. You never told me about that.”

“Oh yeah,” John said, “They were guilt offerings. Even though I had made no promises to her, she was very desirous of marrying me and settling down as my wife. To suddenly break the news to her that her high school buddy was my ex and I even had sex with him and wanted him back, all the while as she was waiting for me to propose to her, somehow it made me uncomfortable and a tad bit guilty. So I gave her some gifts, of her choice. But no, I never bought that cottage for her.”

Sherlock exhaled, “Another lie.”

“Do you even care anymore?”

“No. I have learned to let go a long time ago. When people do certain things to you, you must introspect and find out what you might have done to contribute to the situation. Jawn, I must confess today, I often wished I had waited longer and not pushed you into marrying me so quickly. Neither
of us were ready and my mummy and daddy needed me still, so it was a very wrong decision.”

John pushed the curls away from Sherlock’s face and whispered, “No, it was a hasty decision but not a wrong one. Given another chance, I would have still married you.”

They exchanged a kiss and that was threatening to turn into another round of sex when Sherlock’s stomach growled out rather loud. Almost comically, the housekeeper knocked on the door at the same time and asked if she should convert breakfast into lunch. “Coming,” Sherlock and John said at the same time and, realizing the pun, both men burst out laughing.

“I have a feeling Jim orchestrated many of our meetings, moves and sudden coincidental turn of events,” John said as they had lunch half hour later, “We need to buy him and Sebastian a very nice wedding gift.”

“I was thinking of buying them a nice small luxury fishing boat that can accommodate up to seven people, has a nice roomy cabin and a proper toilet for longer journeys, a walk around deck and a bridge on top of the cabin for the controls and also for a bridge, so one can do some hooking and pulling from the high-up position. They can use it in bays, lagoon, closer to shore spots, rivers, lakes and tributaries. I know Sebastian would love playing captain that and Jim will enjoy the river and seafaring trips. He loves the water, islands, fishing and both men would sure love grilling what they have caught on the shores of a small islet.”

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Sherlock and John didn’t rush into things this time. Their ‘re-exchange’ of vows happened a year later and was a small and intimate affair, hosted on a friend’s ranch in New Mexico. They honeymooned in Florence and Rome and were back to their work within two weeks.

Sherlock’s new patented discovery created some ripples in the field of medical and nuclear research. It got the young man a book deal and also a nice neat sum to share his patent with a large pharmaceutical company.

Jim and Sebastian got married much before Sherlock and Jim did and they did so in a grandiose fashion. They first had a grand engagement in London, Jim somehow hiring the entire Ferris wheel from ten in the night to one in the morning to host a party for his friends and business aides. How he pulled it off, nobody got to know. Their destination and themed-wedding happened in Italy, Venice. After that a proper reception and party was hosted on a private island at Mauritius.
Irene stopped all contact with John and Sherlock. Her eyewash marriage to the French designer lasted twenty-years and produced one daughter, post which she moved in with a celebrated women’s fashion magazine editor.

Sherlock and John divided their time between London (Sherlock’s base), Dallas (John’s base), Aspen (they had a ski chalet) and Berlanti Estate which they renamed ‘William Hamish Hall’. Needless to say they got teased to death about that name but they stuck to their guns.

Mycroft and Greg Lestrade never married but continued to live together, reasonably happily.

Chapter End Notes

That's it folks, this ride is over. But there are many more rides at the fair and we can take more rides together which will be, hopefully, as much fun as this was for me as a writer and you guys as readers. Thank you all for the comments and kudos and hits!

Next story coming up is simply named 'Sherlock' in which we see the titular character playing a 'gay escort for pay'

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!