Mouth of Babes
by Morgan_Stuart

Summary

Several weeks after the explosion at the pool, Lestrade visits the recuperating Sherlock and John at 221B Baker Street. He brings case files and food... and a visitor in tow.

Notes

This takes place after (and refers to) the Sherlock episode "The Great Game."

This universe does not belong to me; I'm just an appreciative visitor. I make no profit from this fan work.

See the end of the work for more notes

"That should be Lestrade," John said.

Sherlock continued to glare at his laptop, his fingers a blur above the keys, his body splayed out across the sofa in the awkward lines dictated by his recent injuries.

"Lestrade," John repeated. "With the files." He drew in a deep breath and released it. "The files for those cases."

Perhaps a lightning bolt of interest flashed across Sherlock's gaunt face for an instant. John wanted to believe he had seen it, but he couldn't be sure. With a death grip on his cane, the doctor began the painstaking process of levering himself to his feet. He felt every pull of the still-healing burns across
his arm and shoulder and back, every complaint of re-knitting muscles and bones.

He grunted like a man twice his age, but he was on his feet and square-shouldered by the time the detective inspector had climbed the stairs and reached the doorway to the flat.

Lestrade carried a thick stack of hard-copy files tucked under one arm, and in the other he cradled a bag that smelled of curry takeaway.

"Hello, John, Sherlock. Thought you two might fancy some lunch." The older man paused at the threshold. Since the aftermath of that night at the pool, he had become a regular fixture at 221B Baker Street, unobtrusive and steadfast in his support of the recovering men. There was little need for him to wait for an invitation to enter.

"Sounds great, thanks." John said, gesturing toward the bag. "Come on in."

"I, um..." Lestrade's features showed uncertainty, shifting the familiar lines and hollows that work and weariness had drawn on his face. "I'm not alone." He darted a quick look at the furiously typing Sherlock, and then returned his attention to John. His gruff voice softened as he said, "I'd like you to meet my daughter, Sofie. Come on, Sweetheart."

From behind him appeared a little brunette girl, as delicate and grave and finely drawn as a porcelain doll. Enormous brown eyes blinked up at John.

"They're trying something new in her class, 'Take Your Daughter To Work Day.'" Lestrade offered. Then, hurriedly, "She won't be any bother."

"No, no," John said, hiding his surprise as best he could. "It's fine. I mean, it's really good to meet you, Sofie." He leaned forward, closing the distance between their heights. "I'm John."

She glowed with a smile in answer to his, and she stepped forward readily to grasp his square hand in her slender one. "Hi, John."

"This is Sherlock," John waved toward his flatmate, who nodded once sharply without looking up from his screen. "He's not at his most talkative at the moment," John added. "Don't take it personally."

"Okay. Hi, Sherlock." She seemed unperturbed at the lack of reply.

"Right," Lestrade said, releasing the word as a sigh. "Let me get this all sorted. I won't be long, Sofie."

With a nod she stepped out of his way, drifting across the room to stand a discreet distance before Sherlock. Every line in her small body radiated alert interest.

John followed Lestrade into the kitchen.

"I cleared off the table, so you can stack the files there." Dropping his voice, he said, "I owe you one for these. It's worse, the last couple of days. Sherlock's not exactly cut out for a quiet convalescence."

Lestrade began to organize the files into stacks. "It's a favor to us, as well. None of these is up to his usual standard of excitement, but God knows I'd welcome the chance to get his thoughts on them. How about you? How are you managing?"

"Fine, thanks." At Lestrade's doubting look, he had the urge to shrug, but he caught himself in time before his body could protest. "As well as can be expected. No one heals overnight. I know that."
He nodded toward the other room. "She's very sweet."

Lestrade's expression turned wistful. "She lives with her grandmother now, has ever since..." John's gaze fell on the man's wedding ring. The doctor had pieced together enough of Lestrade's history to know he had been widowed several years earlier, but the loss remained like an open wound, aching and vulnerable to the slightest touch.

"I should be grateful that she's only on the other side of London, and not the whole country. I see her every chance I get. It's not enough, though. I have to wait until I can... well." He gestured vaguely toward his temple. "Don't want to take my work with me, you know? She deserves better."

"Speaking of deserving better," John tried for a wry grin, hoping to take the sting from his words, "no offense, but you look like you underslept a little."

Grimacing, Lestrade ran a hand through his silvering hair, leaving strands standing out in all directions. "She had her heart set on this. I spent half the night doing paperwork, so I could take some personal time off today. Wanted to give her a quick tour 'round the office, but get her away before new reports came in of some bloody crime scene. Can you imagine?"

They both shuddered in unison and glanced back into the main room. Sherlock frowned at his computer, still stabbing at the keys, while Sofie looked on from a polite distance, utterly silent.

"I really know how to show a girl a good time, yeah?" Lestrade said, shaking his head. His scowl erupted into a yawn.

Fondness and sympathy warred in John's chest. "Quick coffee before you go?"

"That'd be great, thanks."

"I’ve got it, then," John said and hobbled toward the cupboards. Since the explosion, John often had found himself grateful for Lestrade’s company. The man helped in a number of quiet ways, but he also seemed to grasp how much John needed to do some things for himself, even if accomplishing a task took twice as long as it would with assistance.

Lestrade turned back to the stacks on the table.

"He's brooding," John said. "The files will help. He needs a distraction."

"Moriarty," Lestrade breathed.

"Every moment of every day. Like he's here in the room with us," John agreed. A sudden thought struck him like a blow. "Is it safe to have her here?"

"John, this flat is probably the safest place in all London. Whatever the Yard hasn’t thought of, you can be sure Sherlock’s brother has." Despite his words, he frowned. "I think we can assume Moriarty’s been watching everyone who's associated with Sherlock in any way. If so, he already knows about her." His eyes fell. "At any rate, I’ve doubled the security at her grandmother’s."

John nodded grimly, feeling faintly sick as he measured out the coffee.

A strong hand squeezed John's good shoulder, and then Lestrade moved toward the far cupboards. "I can get this ready, if you want to eat now."

"Sure, thanks."
"She got your genes, you know," John said after a beat, almost without thinking. He felt rather than saw Lestrade's questioning expression. "She's going to be a knockout."

"That's all her mother. You should've seen her," Lestrade said, and his words sounded as if they came from half a world away. Despite the naked longing in Lestrade’s voice, the doctor couldn't help but smile to himself. Rumour had it that Lestrade was clueless about his own appeal, and everything the man said seemed to confirm this as fact.

As John reached for a mug, he heard the sound of voices. Balancing with a hand on his cane, he willed himself to be as noiseless and inconspicuous as possible, unrepentant in his eavesdropping.

"... and so that's why you're wearing pyjamas in the daytime. Because you were hurt," came the little girl's voice.

"Obviously." That was Sherlock at his most scathing.

Sofie's voice returned, dogged. "But you're getting better?"

A snort. "So I'm told."

"Was John hurt, too?"

After a pause, "Yes." Softer, "Worse than I."

"And is he getting better?"

A heartbeat, and then another. "He says he is."

John dared to back away from the coffee pot until he could make out the reflections of Sherlock and Sofie on the door of the microwave oven.

"How did you get hurt?"

An impatient, familiar huff of air. "It's complicated." After several seconds, another huff followed. "There was a criminal mastermind. With explosives. Their detonation collapsed the building on us."

The child's eyes narrowed. "The building blew up? With you and John inside?"

"Isn't that what I just said? Try to keep up."

After a moment, her words came in a low whisper. "That must've been scary."

"Well, yes." Long fingers slowed their dance on the keyboard. "It was."

John watched as she gazed at Sherlock with her wide, somber eyes.

"It was dark, and I couldn't see," Sherlock added in a subdued tone. "I couldn't move." Quieter still, "I couldn't find John."

"I think I would've cried," Sofie said.

A haughty sniff. "Yes, I think you would have done."

She remained undeterred. "I'm glad you're safe now. You seem nice."

"No," Sherlock answered, acid in his voice. "No, I don't."
She giggled.

Sherlock blinked, as if focusing his attention on her for the first time. John wanted to fold her into his arms and hug her senseless. The beautiful child actually had giggled at Sherlock, drawn him out of himself. It was the loveliest sound John had heard in ages.

"Fine. Your curly hair is very pretty, anyway." Sofie said, and she folded her arms across her chest, suddenly a miniature portrait of her father. John bit his lip to keep from laughing out loud.

Pale grey eyes pinned her in place, and then Sherlock straightened a bit, almost preening. "Do you think so?"

She answered with a vigorous nod of her head.

For a heartbeat they appeared to share a grin, almost as secret and fleeting as a thought.

Lestrade drew up at John's side, stacking the plates and silverware on the cabinet. With a finger to his lips, John retreated several steps, pulling them both back from the doorway, deeper into the kitchen. The rich aroma of coffee filled the room.

"He's said more in the last three minutes than he has in the last three days," John whispered. He leaned forward slightly, shameless to overhear the conversation, and beside him, Lestrade followed suit.

After several seconds had passed, Sherlock sighed. "What is it now?"

"How did you and John get out? After the building fell on you?" she asked. "You said you couldn't move."

The response sounded more measured this time, almost patient, at least for Sherlock. "Your father saved us. The emergency teams told him that no one could have survived the explosion, but he refused to believe them. He went into the wreckage himself to be sure. He found us in time. The others... wouldn't have."

"Oh!" Sofie's delight was clear. "I should've known that. Gran told me that's what he does: he saves people."

"Well... yes. It is."

A rustling sound followed, and John realized that Sofie was climbing up onto the sofa to sit beside his flatmate.

"He has... that is..." The words came haltingly, grudgingly, with effort. "Your father's done it five times now, if I remember correctly. Six, if you count the incident in the sewers. Which I don't."

"Hmm?"

"Saved me."

Beside John, Lestrade shifted his weight.

"Oh. He told me that you're very clever, and you always give him good ideas." A muted whimper followed a loud gasp. "And he told me not to tell you he said that."

"He's correct. I am, and I do," Sherlock replied, matter-of-factly. Then, "And I won't let on that you told."

"I solve mysteries. Your father saves people. There's a difference."

"Oh."

"And, like you, he asks a lot of questions. But to your credit and his, you both actually listen to the answers. That's more than I can say for most."

"Um, okay."

Once more, the sound of Sherlock’s typing began. "I have to give a report to the class about going to work with Daddy." The keystrokes halted. "He told me not to interrupt you. But I am, aren’t I?"

"Yes, you are."

John scrubbed his hand across his face.

"I'm sorry."

"Your assignment is dull. Your classmates no doubt will say their parents are hardworking and dedicated, that they do important things and make the world a better place. But your classmates will be wrong. Most people accomplish nothing. Most people live lives of quiet desperation, breed more to do the same, and then die. Most people are" – Sherlock paused dramatically – "boring."

Lestrade groaned.

"At least when you say those things about your father," Sherlock continued, "you'll be correct."

John ducked his head and closed his eyes, savoring the unexpected moment.

Then, feeling lighter than he had in weeks, the doctor moved to pour Lestrade’s coffee, pretending to ignore the detective inspector as the older man stared at the floor, blinking suspiciously bright eyes.

“If your daughter’s ever looking for babysitting work,” John said at last, as he pressed the mug into Lestrade’s hands, “please give her my number. She’s obviously good with Sherlock, and God knows he needs a minder.”

Lestrade raised the mug in a mock toast, grinning. He looked at least a decade younger than when he’d arrived.

By the time John and Lestrade had curry-laden plates ready for the sitting room, Sofie was tucked between the consulting detective and the arm of the sofa as if this were her customary perch. Both she and Sherlock were leaning forward, peering with absorbed attention at his laptop.

“... but what if it fell from a third floor window?” Sherlock asked, pointing an elegant finger at the screen.

“Well, it wouldn’t bounce. It would” – Sofie gestured animatedly with her hands as she searched for the proper word – “splat, really. Quite a lot.”

“My thoughts exactly,” Sherlock agreed.

“God help us,” Lestrade murmured to John.
Sherlock aimed a scornful look at John and Lestrade both. “About time, you two. I want tea, and Sofie wants cocoa.”

THE END

End Notes

Read the sequel story "Facing Forward."

Notes:
1. The mention of Lestrade going "into the wreckage himself" after the explosion originally was inspired by prettybirdy979's lovely story "Mobile Phones, Rubble and Shock."

2. The mention of Lestrade saving Sherlock other times in the past is a reference to this wonderful story.

Vital Stats:
Originally written in March 2011.

Originally written for this prompt on sherlockbbc_fic.

Works inspired by this one Frames by methylviolet10b

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