A Study in Floodgates and the Art of Tipping Scales

by SincerelyChaos

Summary

“Very well” Sherlock says with exasperation. “I’m not interested in that kind of relationship since I lack the necessary emotions, interests and skills that would prove useful under such circumstances. You are not interested either, since you are - as you are rather fond of exclaiming- ‘not gay’!. Therefore, I would say that it’s highly irrelevant.”

“What if you got one or more of those parameters wrong in your assumption?”

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A story in which each chapter's illustrating a psychiatric symptom, diagnostic criteria or psychological term while two men struggle to find some sort of balance in that odd thing that's happening between them.

Notes
No one is diagnosing anyone in this fic. I’m using the fictive personality traits and behaviors to illustrate different psychiatric and psychological terms or diagnostic criteria. One diagnose criteria does not make a diagnose and is therefore not of clinical importance if not combined with a number of other matching criteria for the same diagnose.

--Trigger warnings--
This fic contains multiple topics that can be triggering. These topics are almost exclusively related to mental health issues. Some trigger warnings might appear in A/N in the beginning of the chapter, but most won't. Some descriptions of triggering subjects will be graphic.

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Consent/Problematic sex (mild spoilers)
After talking to some readers I've included tags for possible consent issues in this fic. This fic contains some possibly problematic sex, but the intention was never to write any kind of dub-con. However, both characters are doing things that are out of their comfort zone, and there are times where they are more than ambivalent to what they're doing. There's never any force or persuasion; it's more about a lack of communication and wanting to want something that you are not sure that you actually want, both for your own sake and for the other person. There's definitely things in this that ought to have been talked about and negotiated, but then I think that's the core of this story; fear of saying things out loud...

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This is the first fanfiction I've written, and it's also the first fiction I've ever written in English. My biggest thanks and my gratitude to my beta iriswallpaper, who read a few chapters of this scribble, said it was interesting and offered me help with The English Language, since it's not my native one.

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March 2017 - this fic is now renovated in the sense that all tenses have been changed to be (more) consistant. Next project; rewrite parts of it.
“Are you alright?”

John's words break the silence that's settled in the room. He's just turned away from the almost empty fridge and is now eyeing Sherlock suspiciously. Sherlock, who's reading a textbook on pharmacology and pointingly ignoring a plate of eggs in front of him, two perfectly normal things which couldn't by any means be a cause for concern, not even for John.

Sherlock raises his eyebrows inquiringly as his eyes returns to the page he's scanning for data.

“I mean, there haven't been a really interesting case for the last couple of weeks…” John begins.

“Not since the curry- and cocaine smuggling case two weeks and four days ago, no,” Sherlock helpfully interjects.

“...right. Not since two week and four days ago, then. And sure; you've kept yourself busy with the smaller cases from the blog, Lestrade's chain of robberies, the new website design, that... eh, thing you did with the carpet in the hallway…”

“It was to prove that the blood splatter on uneven fabrics-” Sherlock begins, but this time it's he who's immediately interrupted by John, who seems to want to end this conversation sooner rather than later. John also seems to want to do that without Sherlock's undeniably helpful and enlightening input.

“Yes, yes, case related and certainly not just out of pure mischief, right. I see.” John sighs, but it isn't a real sigh; it's just part of their daily bickering. The bickering seems to follow the same outlines most days, the content being the only thing that really varies. It ought to be dull, since it's so predictable, but Sherlock's found that he doesn't mind. Their almost daily bickering has become a game; a game of testing how much nonsense he can fit into the wrangle before John gives up and sighs one last time, signaling that the conversation is over.

“Anyway,” John continues. "There's been almost three weeks without an interesting case and the walls are still intact, no truly hazardous experiments have been conducted - at least not any that I'm currently aware of - and after the curry case you didn't even have your usual post-case crash.”

“Post-case crash?” There's obvious mockery in Sherlock's repeat of John's unimaginative term for the crushing boredom that sometimes - alright; regularly - hits him after a case is solved and life returns to it's usual tedious, uninspiring and brain-rotting mist.

“Yeah. Post-case crash,” John says, as if he’s completely missed Sherlock’s mocking tone. That's annoying, but so is the entire conversation. “You didn't have one. And the flat is still intact three weeks later. I don't mean to complain. Obviously I'm very pleased not to have to sleep at Harry's or Mike's due to acid incidents. But you have to understand; it's beginning to creep me out a bit. It's like knowing that there'll be an earthquake, but the seismographs are yet to pick up on any unusual activity.”

“If the seismographs aren’t indicating something; then how do you know that there will be an earthquake?” Sherlock's forced to inquire.
“It would... never mind. Just, answer this; Are you alright?”

Sherlock glares at John and lets his gaze rest at his friend in a way he's been told ever since childhood is very unsettling for most people. John, on the other hand, has never looked away in order to avoid his gaze, not even that first day at the lab at Bart's.

Sherlock debates over whether he might answer John's question, but decides against it on the grounds of it being a boring question based on a pretty half-hearted attempt at deduction. There might be another reason for not answering this, but that's left for later examination. Perhaps when John has left for work at that cough-and-puke place he choses to frequent instead of being constantly ready for something Not Boring.

The second reason might have something to do with Sherlock himself not being sure exactly why he is, in fact, alright. Because, he realises; he is alright. And he really shouldn't be alright after two weeks and four days without anything all-consumingly interesting to set his mind on.

Still, he is.

After John's hurried off to the cough-and-puke place for 8 hours of wasting his skills as a trauma surgeon, Sherlock lets his eyes drift from the page on different psychotropic drugs' effects on kidneys (not a particularly uplifting reading if you happened to have been treated for bipolar disease in the 50's) and lets his gaze rest on the kitchen cupboards. Not that he's more interested in kitchen attire than kidneys, but since it's impossible to literally stare into blank space, the cupboards will have to suffice.

His thoughts instantly turns to the question that was raised a few hours earlier. Why on Earth is he alright? He should by no means be alright. Yet; he isn't climbing any literal or metaphorical walls, he isn't crushed into apathy by the black cloud of boredom, he isn't manically running experiments meanwhile ignoring every irritating need of his transport and he's not on drugs. All of this is so unexpected that he grants it worthy of half an hour of analysis. The analysis, as it turns out, makes him no wiser. It doesn't provide him with any reason as to why he isn't destroying something or risking his or someone else's life simply because it isn't easy to be bored when there's lives at stake, not even for Sherlock.

Is this some sort of new phase in his life where he settles and his brain begins to unwind from the meta-meta-meta-thoughts it's usually running by this stage? No. Hardly likely. His brain has not changed in any significant way since he left puberty. It will likely continue to be brilliant, genius and quite frankly a nightmare to live with whenever there are no distractions or drugs within reach.

No. This is most likely a temporary deviation from what's 'normal' or 'expected' for him. A temporary relief, if you will. The cause of it still unknown, but the effects of it clear.

He's alright. For now.

Of course things couldn't continue to be 'alright'.
The following day Sherlock begins noticing a recurrent bodily sensation which may or may not be psychosomatic. It is evident that diagnostics must be run.

The sensation makes its third appearance that evening as Sherlock's sitting with John's laptop (the keys of that laptop feel somewhat nicer to his fingers than those of his own laptop, oddly enough, but he would never explain to John that that's the reason he often utilises his computer) on his knees. His legs are crossed underneath him on the leather chair that's inevitably 'his' since that first evening with John in the flat, just as the more old-fashioned chair opposite of it is now just as inevitably John's. He's working his way through the comment section on his newly updated and redesigned website while John's doing some sort of weird and rather ineffective form of cleaning. He mostly seems to move things into piles and then move the piles around a bit, only to sort through them again. A recognisable sign that John's thinking about something, a decision, and is deep in his thoughts.

Suddenly, John raises his eyes from the pile of paperbacks on the floor in front of him, meets Sherlock's eyes and slowly smiles an odd little smile. It's more of a twitch of the left side of his mouth really, but it clearly registers as a smile in Sherlock's mind, where a very extensive catalog of John Watson's facial expressions and body language is stored and regularly updated. And; there it is. That sensation in his stomach, occurring right in the midst of all the frankly alarming domesticity currently in the 221B.

Running self-diagnostics might be tedious but the transport is - even though it ought to be well-trained from years of discipline - still something of a mystery to Sherlock Holmes. Right now, for example, there's no reason for palpitations. Yet, there they are. More fascination than annoying, if Sherlock is to be honest, and he attempts to be strictly honest with himself, since he sees through his own lies anyway. And there are few things that are as boring as a poor liar.

**Common causes for palpitations include (but is not limited to):**

- **stress** (seems unlikely, arguing with morons on one's website is more irritating than stressful, really)
- **caffeine, nicotine, pharmaceuticals or cocaine** (there's certainly a high intake of the first two, but there's thankfully a total lack of the third and annoyingly it's more or less impossible to use the forth and still maintain access to crime scenes)
- **anemia** (dull, unless you're bleeding out, in which case it's... at least not dull. Leads to medical attention from ex-army doctors)
- **heart-disease** (not very likely if you've been told that you don't have a heart, is it?)

Wait. Best not rule that last one; the one about the heart. At least not on the grounds of not having a heart. That would be a paradox, the heart not being the cause of sensations originated from said heart, because said heart being non-existent.

So. Heart-disease. Angina, endocarditis, myocarditis, heart failure, heart attacks, arrhythmia...

*...sentiment?*

Sherlock snorts with sudden disgust.

Where would such a preposterous thought originate from? And why? Is the current 'being alright' just an anomaly that appears just before some sort of fallacy occurs to make sure that he will drive
himself off the rails?

Suddenly, he doesn’t feel alright any more.

He's far from alright.

Chapter End Notes

Euthymia according to the all-knowing Wikipedia:

Euthymia is a normal non-depressed, reasonably positive mood. It is distinguished from hyperthymia, which refers to an extremely happy mood, and dysthymia, which refers to a depressed mood. It is a term used frequently in mental status exams.

The term is also sometimes used referring to the neutral mood (absence of a depressive or manic cycle) that some people with bipolar disorder experience with varying frequency.

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Euthymia in this chapter:

Well, it's pretty straight forward this one, which is why I chose to start out with euthymia. It's Sherlock in a rare case of euthymia; he's neither all obsessed about a case, hyperthymic about an experiment or a triple murder, nor depressed (well; in a 'black mood') afterwards, when the boredom hits him. He's neutral and seemingly satisfied at the moment, which might be rare for him. Unfortunately, it won't last this time either...
John isn’t Sherlock’s keeper in quite the same way that Mrs. Hudson isn’t their housekeeper.

Sherlock doesn’t need a keeper. He is - after all - a grown man. Sure, he behaves like a child on an almost daily basis, and sure, in many ways he does actually need John. But he doesn’t need a keeper, he needs a friend. A friend, colleague and a flatmate. One with an almost endless patience, one that's hard to shock. Sherlock had once called John his ‘conductor of light’, but John had slowly come to think of himself as more of a fender between Sherlock and the rest of the world; someone to lessen the blow from the people around them whenever Sherlock does or says something ‘a bit not good’. John can do that for Sherlock, so that Sherlock can be fantastic and genius and not get held back simply because he hasn’t bothered to learn how to be civil. Somehow, against his own intention, John’s begun to see Sherlock as someone who is so brilliant and has so much to give that his ‘bit not good’-sides should be overlooked, at least every now and then. And until everyone else realise and accept this fact... well, John supposes that he can be a fender. Just every now and then, just when it's really necessary. Which, as it turns out, is quite often.

There are other things that are also necessary for John keep an eye on. Like Sherlock’s ‘moods’, as John refers to them in his own thoughts. Right now, for example, there's a pretty sudden ‘mood’ incoming. It had begun just a few hours after John had taken the risk of asking Sherlock if he was alright. John now wonders if that had perhaps been an unwise move. The tense, snappish atmosphere that had occupied their flat for the last two days seemed to suggest that that might just be the case.

Two days ago, Sherlock had suddenly stopped typing in his impressive speed on John’s laptop, slammed it shut and then he turned completely still, staring out into nothing for a couple of minutes before suddenly throwing the laptop aside, walking right over the low table in front of him and out to the front door, grabbing his scarf and coat, then slamming the door behind him. Bewildered, John had wondered what on earth it could have been that Sherlock had seen on the internet that had ended the relative peace and quiet from the last couple of weeks. Then he’d simply continued to sort through his paperbacks, far too used to his arrogant, unpredictable and dramatic flatmate to even try to make sense of what had just happened. It was just how things were around 221B. And John took pride in being calm in almost every weather or war. So his paperbacks got sorted while his thoughts returned to where they had been before Sherlock’s histrionic display of frustration.

He hadn’t mentioned anything to Sherlock about what he was currently pondering over, not yet, it was too soon, the thought was too fragmentary yet. He wondered if Sherlock had deduced the cause of his musings. Probably not; Sherlock always enjoyed a good showing off, and even more, Sherlock always loved shocking John by declaring John’s own thoughts before John had even had a chance to finish them. No such declaration had taken place, so his thoughts are probably still just his own.

The thing is that John actually doesn’t want to hear Sherlock’s thoughts on this matter. Not now. Not
until he's made a decision. This is one of the few matters in his life that actually doesn’t revolve around Sherlock, the Work or their friendship. This is all John’s, a part of his life that doesn’t really interest Sherlock enough so that he would intervene or even pry. He’ll just mutter, sulk and then ignore it all.

The matter in question is John’s work. Not The Work, of course, but John’s own work at the clinic. Sherlock basically considers it a waste of time, a waste of John’s skills and a waste of breath. In the beginning John had appreciated the mundane; it had been a counterbalance to his nightmares, to the crime-solving and to the mad scientist doing experiments in the kitchen. Now, one and a half year later, he's slowly becoming aware that he is, as Sherlock would put it, ‘bored’. He knows he's doing important work even if it isn’t anything like the rush and risk of stopping an arterial bleeding close to a warzone. He knows that his patients likes him, that he makes them feel safe, that they need the way he can adopt different parts of his personality to reach out to each and every one of them. Joking pretty boldly (and, if he's honest; a bit tastelessly) with Joanna, the middle aged woman he often treats for her recurrent airway infections. Being silently strong, determined and soldierlike but still professionally kind with Mr Roberts, who's beginning to show early signs of Alzheimer's but refuses to listen to anyone except ‘that military doc’, who he considers to be the only ‘unfuzzy bloody do-gooder’ at the clinic. Nodding understandingly, playing out his ‘cardigan-and-short-older-person’ bit with the scared teenage boy who refuses to give his name, but in the end manages to explain that he might need to be tested for STD’s. John knows that those things are important and that he uses his skills, but still, it doesn’t quite seem to be enough for him anymore.

The problem is perhaps that he sees what he does at the clinic in contrast to his life with Sherlock. His life with Sherlock is difficult, demanding, annoying and at times it's a bit like being a dog walker for thirteen stray dogs that are all displaying clinical symptoms of ADHD. But it's also stimulating, it offers him a sense of belonging, keeps him from getting stuck in his own thoughts and keeps the PTSD (and its associated limp, thank you very much) in check somehow. His life outside of Sherlock; mainly a few old friends, the on-and-off relationship with his sister and his work is… they do none of those things for him. It's ordinary, sometimes disturbingly predictable and often just a passage of time to pass until he can run out to a crime scene, a morgue or a suspect with Sherlock, feeling alive, needed and in the eye of the storm once again. And that is the problem, right there. His life without Sherlock offers very little excitement, and he's gradually begun to reason that maybe that's why he's let Sherlock take over more and more of the other parts of his life. If he's to be able to keep some parts of his life uninvaded from the whirlwind that is his best friend, he has to actually want to keep the other parts of his life. Those parts need to have a value of their own. And not just that; they have to offer some allure. Right now, they simply seem… bleak.

And a big part of the allure of his life with Sherlock is the rush, the urgency and the chaos that somehow keeps his own troubling thoughts away and the matter at hand in focus. So maybe the solution is simply to try finding those factors in some of the other parts of his life. It had begun as an abstract thought, simply a theorising on his problems, but then he had once again run into Mike Stamford. Mike had mentioned that so many of his young medical students wanted to go straight to work at the A&E even if they were not in any way prepared to handle the stress, the chaos, the fast decisions and the sometimes ugly sides of society that were just too obvious at an A&E in London. He’d said that more than they needed young, energetic doctors that had watched way too much E.R., they needed people like John. They needed someone who had seen things much worse than what an A&E in a country far away from war could ever bring, someone who was competent enough to work with much less than what a modern hospital had in terms of equipment, personnel and resources.

John had not thought so much about it at the moment, he just took the underlying compliment with a ‘ta’ and kept talking for a few minutes before they had to part way. It was only later that evening that he had thought about the words Mike had used to describe the A&E; ‘stress, chaos and fast
decisions’. Maybe it was some kind of sign. Not that John believes in signs, but once again he had ran into Mike, and Mike had said something in passing, that seemed to fit right into the situation John was in at the time. The first time, it had led to Sherlock. This time perhaps it would lead to a place where John would be able to continue his life with Sherlock, but without losing himself in the process.

“Sherlock. Talk to me. What’s going on in that over-active brain of yours?”

Sherlock doesn’t stop tapping on his phone, but John thinks that perhaps the tapping is slowing down from ‘blurry speed’ to ‘break neck speed’. The crotchety mood has now been going on for three days, and usually John can handle it, but then usually he’d know what it was that caused it.

“Case,” the man simply replies in an obviously disinterested way, not looking up.

“Yes. I’m aware. But besides that, there’s something, isn’t it?” John insists, putting down his papers on the desk. He’s found that being in a position that means he doesn’t have to look Sherlock in the eyes during uncomfortable discussions is tremendously helpful.

“No.”

The answer comes rather abruptly, but still lacking any trace of engagement or interest.

“So… You’re just irritated over the common things, like everybody’s stupidity, the boredom of life and the appalling state of the criminal classes’ intelligence?”

Sherlock doesn’t dignify that with an answer.

John can’t hold back a sigh and decides to drop the subject. Sherlock isn’t likely to give him anything to work with in his current mood. If John pushes the issue it’s likely that the outcome will be a slammed door or hours and hours of demonstrative and passive-aggressive silence. No one can pull off passive-aggressive silences like Sherlock. His every cell becomes spiny, sulky and dismissive, yet he’s obviously very aware of just how much attention John pays him. If John ignores the sulking, the sulking is likely to develop into full blown destructiveness.

John returns to his random browsing on the internet and tries to gather his thoughts. It’s been three days of unusually adverse sulking. After he’d rushed out a few hours after the ‘alright conversation’ Sherlock had not returned to the flat for almost 24 hours. In the morning, when John found that Sherlock had not returned, he’d sent a text simply saying ‘Case?’, but he hadn’t received any reply. He left for his (increasingly boring but somehow comfortably ‘normal’) job where he had a full schedule and wasn’t able to pass Sherlock’s outburst more than a fleeting thought, which had been kind of a relief. Still, he found he checked his phone more frequently than he usually did, hoping for a sign of life from Sherlock. When he returned to the flat later that day he was relieved to be met by the sight of the Coat and the Scarf hanging at the hook he had come to think of as ‘Sherlock’s’. There was no sign of the man himself in either the sitting room nor the kitchen, and the flat had been uncharacteristically quiet, but the door to Sherlock’s room had been shut, which was a tell. The bedroom doors of 221B were never completely shut if the occupant didn’t specifically wished not to be disturbed. Not that that had ever stopped Sherlock from entering John’s room without more than a hasty knock as warning, but it was still an unspoken rule.

Sighing, John starts preparing a sandwich and puts the electric kettle on. If that’s how things
are going to be, then fine, he won’t make a fuss.

And it is, obviously, how things are going to be. Sherlock goes to the bathroom once, late in the evening, but otherwise he keeps to himself in his room. John once calls through the door, asking if he wants tea, he but gets no reply.

The next morning, Sherlock’s already up and out in the sitting room when John gets up. John's not greeted with so much as a nod, but it feels good just to see Sherlock, who seems to be in his mind palace. Before John's made up his mind on whether he should or should not ask Sherlock if there's anything on for the day once Sherlock's left his mind palace, the man in question snaps out of his catatonic-looking state and leaves for his room, dressing gown flapping behind him. The door slams shut, and then there's only silence. Again.

Two hours later, just as John's found an online forum about emergency care and is debating with himself on whether he ought sign up and check it out or not, Sherlock enters the room. John makes sure not to look up from his keyboard, which is fairly easy, since he can’t type without constantly eyeing the keyboard. A couple of minutes passes in silence. John keeps trying to find a username for the forum, finally settling for ‘Watson_UK’. Just as he's confirming his password (designed to be at least somewhat of a challenge for Sherlock, but he guesses that the date of his deployment, written backwards, will hardly keep Sherlock out for more than a minute or two) when Sherlock suddenly speaks.

“John. You will have to move out. I have tried to find other solutions, but I haven’t found any satisfying alternatives. I realize that this will cause you some logistic inconvenience, but I am sure that Mycroft could assist in finding a new living arrangement for you, if you would like.”

Oh. Shit.

After a second of initial panic, John does what he always does; he turns perfectly calm and alert when faced with a crisis. Maybe the calmness is authentic or maybe the panic's just put under a lid, but it really doesn’t matter; the end result's the same.

“Alright… And how have we reached this mutual agreement?”

“It is not a mutual agreement.”

“No. Obviously. So; would you care to tell me why I have not been asked to participate in this decision-making about my living arrangement?”

“The reason is irrelevant for you since the decision is already made and is also final. If you’re worried, as I am sure you are, being who you are, I can assure you that it has nothing to do with
anything you did.”

“Well, isn’t that a relief,” John says, with more bitterness than he intended, but he can’t keep it in. “So it has nothing to do with me, but I still have to live with the consequences of a decision made over my head without even an explanation? How comforting.”

“No need to be sarcastic, John, if that was what you were going for.”

“No need to be sarcastic? No, clearly not. Actually, let’s be polite instead. Lets see; Sherlock, would you be so kind as to explain to your idiot of a flatmate why you, without any warning, just decided that he has to move out?”

“Please, John, I have lived long enough with you to recognize that as even more sarcastic.”

“Oh, really? Well, since you have learned so much about social interaction from me, perhaps you could use that insight to acknowledge the need of offering your best friend an explanation as to why you’re throwing him out without even considering him entitled to a reason as to why?”

“And how would that help you?”

“How would that…? Sherlock. You are not stupid, usually, but now you’re just being a pigheaded meatball! That would help by letting me understand how I went from being your flatmate, colleague and best freakin’ friend to being thrown out on the street?”

“I am not throwing you out, John. I am fully prepared to ask Mycroft to help you find a satisfactory new arrangement and let you stay here until that’s been arranged, which should not take more than a day or two.”

“You know what, Sherlock; cut the crap. Now, tell me how on Earth this makes sense in your head?”

John’s anger is now evident from his tone of voice. He's glad Sherlock is not at an angle that allows him to deduce the tension in his body, the expression on his face and the look in his eyes (probably just as open and obvious as they always are to Sherlock).

“I’d rather not. It will not do either of us any good spelling it out.”

“Well, it won’t do any good not spelling it out either, so if I have any say in this, I would very much like to hear your reasoning.”

Sherlock falls silent, and John stares at his screen. He's unsure whether he's more pissed off or more terrified. He decides not to make any attempts to find that out.

“Your presence is disturbing my thought process as of lately, and I realize that this ‘friendship thing’ might not be a good match for a sociopath with a drug problem. I figured that it would be better to ensure my continued focus on important matters and that you wouldn’t have to keep getting disappointed by my behaviour and hoping, in vain, that that’s something that would ever change.”

“What? I’m disturbing your thought process? By what; breathing, thinking? Would you rather I stopped doing those things? And no, you’re not a sociopath, you said to ‘do your research’ to Anderson, and while he probably was too much of an ass to do so, I did. The conclusion was that you’re not a sociopath; sorry to bring that to you.”

“The label is hardly the issue here, John. I am, however you choose to label it, incapable of changing myself into someone who is in any sense of the word ‘sympathetic’ or even ‘kind’. And since that
causes you discomfort and you are not willing to accept it, you will continue to be in discomfort as long as our current arrangement continues. And, furthermore, I find all these emotions you keep leaving around the flat as some kind of fingerprints or breadcrumbs to be utterly and increasingly annoying, and it interferes with my thinking. Therefore the logical thing to do is to put an end to this.”

“Do you really think that I would still be here if I felt continuously uncomfortable with who you are?”

“You are a person who thrives in making sacrifices for others, probably because that’s been a part of your identity since early childhood when you had to take care of your sister and partly even your father, while your mother drank herself into stupor and harassed everyone around her. Of course you would stay. I am doing you a favour by pointing out exactly how idiotic that is.”

“Oh, you’re playing the ‘deduction card’, trying to shock me by revealing personal details that you hope will make me angry and run off. You know what; I am not shocked or angry. I figured that of course you knew all that; I figured that you deduced that the very day we met. No news there.”

“Of course I deduced it within minutes; it was all too obvious.”

“And still you asked me to move in. And now you want me to move out. What's changed, Sherlock? Couldn’t deduce that you would grow annoyed with me?”

“Honestly I thought you’d be smart enough to move out as soon as your limp was cured and you realised how it was to live with me.”

“So the amazing Sherlock Holmes’ got it all wrong? That’s a first. Now let me ask you again; what's changed?”

Sherlock doesn’t reply immediately. It takes almost three full minutes (John checks the clock at the bottom of his laptop screen while waiting for either a reply or more slamming of doors) before Sherlock clears his throat, hardly audible, and speaks.

“I did deduce that you might be stupid and dependent enough to stick around. And I thought that I could handle that. Turns out I can’t. There; there it is; I admit my failure. Enjoy it.”

Now it's John’s turn to hesitate before replying.

“Are you afraid that you’ve become… more human?”

Sherlock snorts in disgust.

“Hardly. It’s more of a chemical response in the brain to being in close proximity with a person over long periods of time and becoming accustomed to having them around. It’s as simple as that; a change in neurotransmitters due to a constant input of another person being nearby and somewhat not boring. That’s boring and predictable in itself, but I had thought that my brain and transport would not react so horribly ordinarily to these external stimulations. As I said; my estimate was incorrect.”

“So you’re basically saying that you grew what…? ...'fond' of me?”

“If you like to put it that way, then yes; I guess that would be one way of putting it. And don’t come with all your ‘that’s human, Sherlock’ or ‘that's healthy’, because it is not. At all. Now, make up your mind on whether you would like me to ask Mycroft to find you a new place or not.”
With that he stands up, puts his phone in the pocket of his dressing gown and returns, once more, to his room.

Chapter End Notes

Codependency is neither a diagnose (even if some researchers has proposed it become an own personality disorder in the DSM) or a symptom listed in the DSM. It's still a term that is used in many professions' and in many groups, especially concerning people living with someone with substance abuse or alcoholism.

Wikipedia defines Codependency as follows:

"Codependent relationships are a type of dysfunctional helping relationship where one person supports or enables another person’s addiction, poor mental health, immaturity, irresponsibility, or under-achievement. Among the core characteristics of codependency, the most common theme is an excessive reliance on other people for approval and identity."

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Codependency in this chapter:

I think that the beginning of this chapter where some of John's thoughts on Sherlock and their friendship are described are somewhat straight forward. John is careful not to think of Sherlock 'as a child', but he still advocates that Sherlock in many ways 'did need John'. John thinks of himself as the person who makes it possible for Sherlock to do what he does and still not get kicked in the balls for being rude, thoughtless and sometimes just nasty in his comments and actions. So instead of demanding that Sherlock should attempt to act differently in some situations John makes sure that he can go on as before, but without consequences. He also keeps an eye on Sherlock's 'moods' and tiptoes around in his own flat when Sherlock's being extra snappish. And this is just a few things that John does that enables Sherlock's refusal of acting a bit more mature, civil and perhaps attempt to work on his mental health/black moods. Both the series and (in particular) this fic are showing a few other examples.

What John also does is making himself needed (or at least considering himself needed). He lifts the personal qualities that he considers himself to have and their importance for someone who lives with Sherlock and cares for him. He does in part build his identity around being Sherlock's flatmate, friend and colleague and views himself as part of the solution when it comes to Sherlock.

Codependency could be viewed as a spectrum; there's many different degrees of it and not all of them are directly dysfunctional, but many could be. Love is often in part codependant, but just to a certain degree.
The door doesn’t slam this time. Sherlock just closed it behind him as if he had just announced that he was tired and was going to bed early (though the thought of that is absurd, so it’s really an appalling comparison). What he had in fact said was even more incomprehensible, though.

John shuts the lid on his laptop, puts it under his arm and goes slowly up to his room and closes the door in the same controlled manner as his (soon to be ex-) flatmate had just done.

Sitting on his bed with his laptop on the neatly made covers beside him he tries to understand what's happened. The hint of panic in the back of his head is kept in control by his habit of reacting to chaos and crisis in an almost automatic, unemotional way. Slowly, he begins to do what the doctor and soldier in him tells him is the only way to minimize the damage and control the situation; he looks at the facts, makes an assessment of the situation and then forms a course of action.

Two hours and fifteen minutes later he's in full soldier mode as he knocks on Sherlock’s door. He knows that the change is visible not only through his actions and his tone of voice, but also in his posture, just like the emotionally immature man on the other side of the door had told him that first day in the lab at Bart’s. The thought of that day, of what it had been the beginning of, helps John to relax a fraction, letting his posture be a little less army-like and his facial expression going from soldier on a important but probably deadly mission to a doctor who's facing a patient who needs John to make the decisions for him.

“Sherlock. I’m coming in now.”

There’s no response. John takes one last breath before he opens the door.

Sherlock is sitting by the small desk he had quite recently bought with the purpose of storing more of his case related papers. It had been a desperate action to prevent that his papers were disturbed by either Mrs. Hudson or John, who both seemed to think that things that were in the sitting room was supposed to be kept off the floor, no matter how important they were. Even if the case has been closed for a couple of weeks Sherlock might need his papers, but that is clearly not understandable to the mundane minds of those living with him. At least that's how John imagines Sherlock’s line of thought. Now the man sits with his own laptop, looking up with an annoyed expression.

“Have you made a decision? Should I text Mycroft?”

“Does Mycroft know about this?”

“If he didn’t before, he would surely now,” Sherlock says, unaffected. “But to answer your question; yes, he knows.”

“And what is his opinion on this latest one of your brilliant ideas?”

“He fully agrees with me. Normally, that in itself would cause me to second guess my decision, but in this case it won’t.”
“He agrees with you?” John finds that hard to believe.

“Yes. Therefore I expect that he will quite happily agree to help you with the logistics.”

“Alright, whatever. Now, let me try something, would you?”

“What would that be?”

“Deducing.”

“John…” Sherlock begins, his tone exasperated.

“No. Hear me out and tell me if I am totally and completely wrong on this one, and if I am, I will let you alone and make preparations for moving out.”

There’s no response from Sherlock but he keeps his eyes on John.

“Is the thing you were - to be frank - trying pretty hard not to tell me in fact that you have fallen in love and that that scares you shitless? And now you want to solve the situation by throwing me out, hoping that those feelings will evacuate your mind if you evacuate me from your life?”

Sherlock holds his gaze, but there’s something deeply complicated going on with his facial expression even though he hardly seems to move a single muscle. If it had been under any other circumstances, John would have been fascinated by this facial acrobacy. As for now he mostly holding his breath, trying to appear calm and return to the detached determination he’d built up before entering the room.

“Very amusing, but hardly accurate. The thing you miss to take into account is the fact that I am incapable of such emotions as you suggest that I would harbour. And if I were to possess the ability to feel those… sentiments, it still wouldn’t be relevant, so I suggest that you go prepare you departure.”

John tries to maintain eye contact, but his friend averts his eyes back to his laptop in a gesture of clear dismissal.

“Why would it be irrelevant?”

“That’s so obvious I should not grant that with an answer.”

“Oh, please, do enlighten me.”

“Very well,” Sherlock says, sounding even more exasperated. “I’m not interested in that kind of relationship since I lack the necessary emotions, interests and skills that would prove useful under such circumstances. You are not interested either since you are - as you are rather fond of exclaiming - ‘not gay’! Therefore, I would say that it’s highly irrelevant.”

“What if you got one or more of those parameters’ wrong in your assumption?”

"And what would that be, if you may? You are secretly gay and now wish to open the door to your metaphorical closet by engaging in sexual intercourse with a sociopath without any interest in such activities?"

“Here we go with the sociopath delusion again. I thought you hated repetition? Anyway, how about we test these assumptions? There can hardly be any more damage done to this friendship anyway, I would say.”
“Oh, there could definitely be more damage,” Sherlock says dryly. “I’m attempting damage-control, but you are clearly determined to throw that approach out of the window.”

“Yes, and you are attempting to throw your best friend out of your life; how appropriate.”

Silence.

“How would you attempt to test these assumptions?”

Sherlock finally turns back to face John from right across the room. His eyes seem to be stripped of emotion.

“By testing each and everyone one of those statements that you just made.”

“Why would you want to do that?” Sherlock says, actual curiosity in his voice.

“Because unlike you I am not ready to throw away the best friendship I have, even if is also the most frustrating and annoying friendship I ever had.”

“So you are saying that you are willing to attempt at some sort of romantic relationship with me, even though you are not attracted to me and I am not interested in a relationship, just as a last resort to save this friendship?”

“That doesn’t sound very clever, not when you put it that way. But, before you celebrate that little verbal victory of yours; my suggestion is that we examine if all those things you said are really true. If they are, this would be a lousy idea. If the aren’t, well, we’ll just have to take it from there.”

“And how would we examine the accuracy of those statements?”

The tone's doubtful but not totally dismissive, which is a far better outcome than John had dared to hope for. Now, though, came the problematic part.

“Well, I don’t know, that hypothesis and examination thing is your area more than mine, isn’t it? You should come up with some scientific approach. I don’t know; make a spreadsheet or something!”

John's frustrated, but he's also well aware that he's playing on Sherlock’s pride in those areas by announcing himself unable to come up with something. After all, showing off is one of Sherlock’s biggest interests in life.

To his surprise, John catches a half second of something resembling a smile twitch at the corner of Sherlock’s mouth. It's over so fast that he's not entirely certain that it had actually been there.

“A spreadsheet would probably not be the most effective approach in these highly unscientific matters. And besides, I asked you to move out because all your emotions and their effect on me is bothersome, and your suggestion is to try and add more of the problem?”

“I’m suggesting that those ‘effects’ you describe might not feel so bothersome if they were reciprocated.”

“If you reciprocate my feeling of annoyance?”

“Is it annoyance that you're experiencing, or are you annoyed by the feelings you’re experiencing?”

“That doesn’t even make grammatical sense!”
Sherlock suddenly stands up, his chair pushed back so forcefully that it almost tips over, and he takes three quick strides towards John, playing up the height difference in order to make John back out of the door while Sherlock looms over him, eyes dark with frustration.

“I am very sorry that I misused the English language.” John says calmly, piercing his eyes into Sherlock’s. ‘Now, could you just shut up and decide whether you dare to experiment with this or not?’

‘You still don’t have a suggestion as to how such an experiment would be accomplished and I am quite frankly tired of you trying to postpone the inevitable - that you are moving out - by offering to experiment with your heterosexuality and my ability to tolerate interfering emotions. I suggest you go pack now because when I get back here I wish to be alone.”

His voice is cold, detached and lacking every trace of the warmth John thought he’d seen a glimpse of in that ‘almost half smile’ just minutes ago. Sherlock push and tries to pass John in the doorway, but John has lost his patience and grabs a hold of Sherlock’s arm with a bruising grip, crowding him against the doorpost. He hesitates for just a second, then he gets up on his toes, pushes the other hand to Sherlock’s cheek, in part to caress and in part to hold his head still, as he leans up and closes almost all the distance between them.

He stops when there's only a few inches separating their lips, catching Sherlock’s eyes, which holds a surprising mix of astonishment, indifference and hesitance. It seems illogical that they would manage to express all these things at once, but as John looks into them he finds that they do. Sherlock's body language is tense and reluctant, but he's no longer actively trying to push John to the side.

“Now, could we get on to test my hypothesis?”

There’s no reply, and after a second John lets his lips brush against Sherlock’s. Warm air from Sherlock’s nose, unmoving lips under his, the smell of Sherlock so intense at this proximity and the tiny, almost unnoticeable twitch that he can feel in the two points of contact between their bodies; their lips and John’s grip on Sherlock’s forearm. Nothing more, nothing less. He backs away just an inch with his mouth before he once again brush his lips against his friend’s. His friend who’s still not moving away.

John backs off but kept his grip on Sherlock’s arm. He forces himself to seek his friend’s eyes, and is utterly unprepared to find that they are closed. Just as he notices, Sherlock’s eyes fly open and there's so many contradictions in that gaze that John himself begins to feel confused. Then Sherlock closes the distance between them, his lips meet John’s with a rather uncoordinated force and he keeps pressing their mouths together as he lets his free arm fumble to find the back of John’s head, using his hand to gain even more leverage into the thing he's doing, which is probably supposed to be some sort of kiss. He holds them together like that for almost a minute, moving his own mouth to nib at John’s lips, but they are pressed too tightly together by his grip on the back of John’s head, so the effect is probably not what Sherlock intended. It mostly feels like he's trying to push different parts of John’s lips between his own, unable to decide what to do next.

Then, as suddenly as his reciprocation of John’s kiss had begun, it stops. He releases John from his grip, but John's too shocked to remember to release his own grip on his friend, so they stay close, their breathing uneven and in tandem.

Finally, John clears his throat, his voice even more unrecognisable than it had been just a minute ago.

“So, I’ll take that as an agreement on the matter of giving this a try?”
And, shit, this has happened. Really happened. He’s kissed Sherlock, who’s kissed (if that's really the term for whatever that had been) him back. He’d already been convinced that this is a trainwreck of an idea, but now he's just too stunned to even care about his own doubts about this whole thing. This thing, that is sure to qualify itself as a whole new level of bat shit crazy in their already derailed way of life.

Shit.

Chapter End Notes

Intellectualization according to Wikipedia:

Intellectualization is a defense mechanism where reasoning is used to block confrontation with an unconscious conflict and its associated emotional stress where thinking is used to avoid feeling. It involves removing one’s self, emotionally, from a stressful event. Intellectualization may accompany, but is different from rationalization, the pseudo-rational justification of irrational acts.

Intellectualization is one of Freud’s original defense mechanisms. Freud believed that memories have both conscious and unconscious aspects, and that intellectualization allows for the conscious analysis of an event in a way that does not provoke anxiety.

* * *

Intellectualization in this chapter:

My thought was that John 'looks at the facts' and 'forms a course of action' in order to avoid emotions ('hint of panic') that he doesn't wish to confront in this chapter. The feelings are unpleasant, and he’s learned earlier to put them aside in order to think and plan, which is of great importance medical emergencies and on a battlefield, but may also be a way to avoid facing your emotions under other circumstances. It's also a way to avoid the unconscious conflict inside on this matter; his relationship with Sherlock. If he let himself think about what would happen if he lost this friendship, and what this friendship really meant to him, he would might have to face some things about himself that he rather not examine too close.
Repression

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"So, I'll take that as an agreement on the matter of giving this a try?"

John’s voice is hoarse. Why? Why would John’s voice turn husky from just two kisses? If what John had done really could count as a kiss, which is debatable. Sherlock had decided that it would be a gesture of enlightenment to give John a real kiss, not just some kind of hardly noticeable lip touching. Well; the lip touching had actually been noticeable. More than noticeable, actually. It had almost been painful, but then Sherlock had never been one for light touch. The distinction between the touch hardly being there at all and the uncomfortable tickling sensations had always made him rather stressed. Still, John’s lips had just felt a little like that. But most of all Sherlock had been aware of the warmth of John's breath. That had been… acceptable.

He's not in love; that thought is just preposterous. The thought that he might experience some... sentiment, had hit him that day in the sitting room, but after walking around in London for hours he'd come to the conclusion that yes; that feeling might be what other people defined as ‘in love’, but for him those same sensations meant something completely different. Other people’s feelings when they’re fascinated with another person seem to be decidedly more ‘noble’. Those feelings seem to be associated with things like longing, adoration, wanting to make the other person happy, give them everything and make the other person more complete (which isn't logical, if you think about it). What Sherlock feels, if he ever feels anything more intense for another person, is not noble. That much is clear. That's the one thing that he's truly learned after the business with... [ deleted ].

"Sherlock?"

Sherlock's kept his eyes on John’s, but his mind had gone astray. He directs it back.

"I don’t think that’s wise," Sherlock concludes.

"And why’s that?"

"I am Not Good, John. And I don’t mean that in some kind of ‘I’m not worthy of you’ way. I mean it literally. I am Not Good. And I am perfectly okay with that, but I don’t particularly want that for you, John. That’s why I think it’s best that you move out and move on. And besides, I do not posses those emotions you seem to think I harbour for you. Not the romantic kind. It’s simply a fondness that has grown because of our compatibility in work and the domesticity at the flat. And you don’t possess those feelings either, so I don’t really see the need for any 'agreements'."

John remains quiet, his eyes fixed on Sherlock’s. It takes a while before he speaks again.

"Well, I do see the need for this. So, if you value our companionship like you claim to do, then I
would like to at least give this a few days."

"A few days of what, John?"

Sherlock knows that his eyes has turned narrow and piercing, but can’t be arsed to really care. In this moment, there’s both relief and a sense of being cornered, and it’s a confusing mix.

"Of us. Just, you know, testing the waters. Nothing too fast, or too drastic. Just trying to let our guards down a little. See where that leaves us."

John must have seen some form of panic in Sherlock’s face, because he quickly continues.

"I’m saying we should letting everything out and parading our every vulnerability, just, well, being open to the possibility of us feeling… something. For eachother."

John’s cheeks seems a nuance pinker than usual, and Sherlock notices an odd warmth in his own face, feeling slightly appalled at his transport’s reactions to things his brain would never react to.

"Sherlock, I really, really need us to at least give it a try. You’re my best friend, you know and if you throw me out simply because you’re scared of feeling, well, anything, really, then I would at least know that I - that we - tried. Tried to see if your discomfort was lessened by giving your, eh, ‘reactions’ a little room, instead of keeping them in that giant brain of yours, going round and round like a washing machine."

"I hardly see the logic in that. My problem is that all those… reactions I seem to have when in some form of companionship are severely distracting and quite frankly not very pleasant. Your solution to this problem is to attempt to increase those unwanted reactions. Even if those things - human relationships - are far from my area, that does seem like a very odd solution even to me."

"Well, as you said; you’re hardly an expert in these matters. And you trust expertise. So trust me."

"I don’t think that you have thought this through," Sherlock says, silently.

"Well, this might just be one of those situations where thinking too much will not be helpful."

And with that, John surprises Sherlock yet again by leaning up, using his hand to angle Sherlock’s face down towards him and give Sherlock one more of the ‘not quite kisses’.

Since the ‘not quite kissing’ leaves him with more of a tickling sensation than a satisfactory one, Sherlock once again decides to put a little more pressure into it. The resulting kiss is more of an uncoordinated angling of heads and pressing of lips than he’d intended, but then it’s been a long time since he’d last done this, and that hadn’t been during any circumstances that resembles this. Nothing really resembles this. This is sheer madness. Still; it’s something. Something to do until the inevitable destruction of what had, until very recently, been the most important relationship in Sherlock’s life. John might think this utter stupid attempt at something else, something ‘more’ than friendship, will resolve the issue of the two of them coming to an end. It won’t. Sherlock can not live with all those… reactions that John has caused him to experience as of lately, and John probably won’t be safe if Sherlock lets those reactions turn into actions for more than a few days. And Sherlock doesn’t love. He simply destroys what he thinks is ‘his’. Destroys what he desires. So he’s stopped desiring. Stopped to… [deleted].

There’s lips, there’s John’s hesitant hands on Sherlock’s waist and there’s Sherlock’s blood flowing a little faster than usual. There’s John, trying to make the kiss softer, and Sherlock, trying to make it harder. There’s the two of them, breaking apart, breathing a little too fast, a known sign of arousal, but also of stress, panic and loss of air.
This is not going to end well. This is too much like…

[deleted]

[deleted]

[deleted]

John must have caught on to the fact that Sherlock's not only far gone in his thoughts, but also distressed. Well, ‘distressed’ is hardly the word Sherlock would have used, but it's the kind of word that John usually attributes to people looking the way Sherlock's most likely looking right now. His lips come crashing against Sherlock’s again, and this time, it's not the ‘not quite kissing’.

When Sherlock snaps back from those deleted files and the sensation that just thinking about them has brought on, and starts to reciprocate, John’s tongue is suddenly there, so inexplicably warm and foreign against Sherlock’s lower lip. He startles involuntarily, then accepts this new addition to the kiss and lets the tip of John’s tongue continue tracing the outline of his lower lip without further unwanted bodily reactions.

Kissing John is not boring. It's actually surprisingly unpredictable, and as John continues to feel the seam of Sherlock’s lips with that pointy tip of his tongue Sherlock finds that the sensation of kissing John is somewhat like being in lethal danger. His otherwise very scattered mind, buzzing with at least twelve different lines of thought at the same time, becomes crystal clear. There's only room for one thought at the time, only the essential thoughts that will ensure his survival. In this case, his mind is focused not so much on survival, but on sensation. He doesn’t have a clue as to what John will do next. That fact has such a momentum for him that his mind seems to get that sharp edge that is otherwise reserved for finding the last pieces of evidence in a complicated crime or struggling to find the only way to get out of an otherwise lethal situation. It is… unexpected.

"This okay?" John murmurs into his lips, breaking the kiss just a second, not moving away.

Sherlock gives the question all the answer it deserves - which is none at all - and crashes his lips back onto John’s, fierce with impatience. He's not sure what he's impatient for, but maybe it has something to do with the fact that this kiss has somehow stopped the constant buzzing in his head and given him a short respite. He's not impatient to take this further, physically speaking, not even sure if he would be able to do so, but he wants that clarity in his brain to go on for just a little longer. Later, he will try to figure out how that clarity is connected to what they did; with John kissing him. But not now.

John might be easy to deduce in their everyday life, but in this, he's unreadable to Sherlock, probably due to Sherlock's very limited knowledge of these matters. So even if John had had his tongue tracing Sherlock’s lips, it comes as a small shock to find that that tongue is now pushing into Sherlock’s mouth, parting his lips and just crowding in. That's… not as repulsive as he remembers it being. It's not quite comfortable either; it's sending some kind of electric impulse straight from his mouth to his belly. It feels like a cramp, mostly. Not painful, but not pleasant. Still, his body responds almost without consulting his brain, and he hesitantly lets the tip of his own tongue meet the invading tongue. It's slick with saliva. John’s or his own? It doesn’t taste anything in particular, so it might be his own, then. One more cramp in his belly. The warm, electric feeling moving down to his pelvis. Oh.

John makes a sound into Sherlock’s mouth. It's hard to analyze, since it's distorted by the acoustics of Sherlock’s own oral cavity. It feels interesting, though - the vibrations projecting into his mouth. Sherlock can't remember if this is something he's felt before. There had been quite a lot of chemicals
involved the previous times he had tried this, which has left his memory of those times partially blurry.

John’s tongue in his mouth, slowly exploring. John’s hands, now underneath his dressing gown but not underneath his t-shirt, firmly but absently massaging his lower back, keeping the distance between them as small as possible. His own tongue sometimes darting out to meet John’s, his own hands cupped around the base of John’s skull, forcing him to keep the kiss hard, as for it not to tickle. If he’s to feel this, he wants to really feel it.

Then, there’s a sound. A buzzing sound.

Sherlock ignores it, as does John.

The buzzing stops, then starts again.

Oh.

Phone.

Vibrations.

On his bedside table.

John seems to be reacting as well, breaking them apart just a few millimeters, and it's enough, Sherlock’s brain catches up and he takes a few (admittedly pretty clumsy) steps to fetch the phone.

His voice is just like John’s had been; a little bit off, a little bit hoarse, as he answers the call. Then he listens for half a minute before replying.

"We’ll be there in twenty."

He hangs up, throws the phone on his bed and begins shrugging off his dressing gown.

"Case, John. Call a cab, we need to get to the supermarket."

John just looks at him for a few seconds, then nods and seems to slip into professional mode. His back straightens and his facial expression becomes focused once again.

"Alright, let me get my phone."

He turns around, and is halfway out of the room before he turns around once more and sees Sherlock buttoning his shirt with efficient movements.

"Just so you know, we don’t have to do that again, or at least not… take it further. There’s nothing saying that this needs to be physical. Just… so you know."

Sherlock looks up, then nods briefly before finishing the last button and beginning to search for his trousers in the piles on his floor.

When he next looks up, John’s gone from his line of sight and his mind is blissfully filled with the adrenaline from the short summary of the case Lestrade had given him.

The game is on and his mind is once again focused.

This is what he needs. This is where he excels. This is where he finds meaning.
This is not like the mess that had…

[deleted]

[deleted]

[deleted]

Chapter End Notes

A little help from Wikipedia:

Psychological repression, or simply repression, is the psychological attempt made by an individual to repel one’s own desires and impulses toward pleasurable instincts by excluding the desire from one’s consciousness and holding or subduing it in the unconscious. Repression plays a major role in many mental illnesses, and in the psyche of the average person.

Repression, ‘a key concept of psychoanalysis, is a defense mechanism, but it pre-exists the ego, e.g., 'Primal Repression’. It ensures that what is unacceptable to the conscious mind, and would, if recalled, arouse anxiety, is prevented from entering into it'; and is generally accepted as such by psychoanalytic psychologists.

However, regarding the distinct subject of repressed memory, there is debate as to whether (or how often) memory repression really happens and mainstream psychology holds that true memory repression occurs only very rarely.

* * * * *

Repression in this chapter:

The most obvious repression in this chapter is the [deleted] memories. But as Wikipedia points out, it's not that common to actually repress a whole memory completely, and I don't think that Sherlock's actually done that in this story, although he gives it a good try, and probably thinks that he can repress ('delete') it completely if he just tries hard enough. He does probably repress the notion of those memories, or disallow his thoughts from coming too close to things that reminds him of what's [deleted]. As we see in this chapter, he's well aware of what thoughts are 'too close' to what he's [deleted], and consciously avoids those thoughts. He's attempting complete repression; later chapters might show us how well those attempts will work...

Many other examples of repression, from both John and Sherlock, will follow in this story.
Two thoughts circles in John’s mind as he stares out of the window on the way to the latest crime scene in the oddly-smelling cab.

The first thought consists of only one word. One word that is, as of lately, rather well-used.

Shit.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

The second thought is of a more fragmented and abstract nature and seems to follow a somewhat circular pattern.

Kissing Sherlock Holmes and convincing him to try for a romantic relationship is the single most idiotic, pathetic, self-destructive, amoral and embarrassing thing I’ve ever done. And looking back at my history of life choices, that says a lot, thank you very much. How on earth could I think that that was a solution to him throwing me out? This is going to end with me being thrown out even more literally, as in manhandled out by a gangly, morbid baritsu expert right out of the door. Still. I am not thrown out yet, am I? So my theory was not entirely off. But at what cost? I mean, kissing Sherlock Holmes and convincing him…

The thought seems to be stuck in a loop, with just a few variations in word choice and phrasing. Sometimes the list of adjectives describing his own stupidity is even longer.

He shouldn’t be so scared of people disappearing out of his life. It’s just the course of life. And he’s lost friends before. It had always been he who held on the longest, but when they made it all too clear that they’d lost interest in their friendship he had reluctantly given it up. He doesn’t really
understand how people can do that. Letting friends go like it's easy just to go out and make new friends. Like the friendship meant nothing. Yet, this is worse. Because Sherlock is more than that. He is a partner in life, in work and in the flat. And Sherlock is ready to just give it all up because feelings bothers him. The thought makes John feel a sting of anger.

Sherlock sits silently beside him, tapping away at his phone. At this point John considers the phone to be more of an extension of his friend than an actual possession. They haven’t said a word since John left Sherlock’s room to get his phone and call the cab, and maybe that was for the best. Who knows what Sherlock is up to now? Planning advanced, uncoordinated sex? If his sexual preferences are anything like his kissing preferences, that would be uncomfortable in more ways than the obvious one. The obvious one being, in short, that John isn’t sexually attracted to people with penises and that Sherlock most definitely possesses a penis. Oh dear, what on earth has he been… No, focus. He has to focus. There’s absolutely nothing that says that it's going to have to come to that. Sherlock’s said himself that he has none of the feelings that John had suggested. Still, why would the man agree to John’s quite frankly lousy arguments on why they should give this a try if he's as uninterested as he claims? That makes absolutely no sense. And Sherlock is, despite all his whimsiness, nothing but sensible when it comes to logic and reasoning. The only thing that makes people regularly question that is the fact that Sherlock himself seldom bothers to explain all his reasons for his actions or statements. John suspects that it is part of Sherlock’s fondness for leaving people flabbergasted at his actions and words.

Focus. He has to focus.

He has in some miraculous way bought himself some time by the stupid, pathetic and utterly bizarre suggestion of the romantic relationship. He has not been thrown out tonight. Instead, he is where he most of all wants to be; in a London cab in the night time, going to a crime scene with his best friend to see said friend being fantastic, brilliant and as shiny as a newly polished car in a posh car dealership. Then they might run around London, risking their lives to prove that Sherlock is clever and that John is as loyal to the seemingly para-suicidal genius as guard dog would be. And that, all of that, is worth it. Their friendship, their life. This phase of uncertainty on Sherlock’s side will pass and they will go back to normal. No odd, eccentric sex and no throwing out bloggers on the street by emotionally immature detectives. No. Back to normal. As normal as life had ever been since that day in the lab of Bart’s. As normal as John wants life to be.

The cab arrives at its destination and Sherlock swirls off towards police tape and the pulsing lights and sirens. John pays the cabby, composes himself and follows.

Eight hours later, they are at Barts A&E at Bart’s.

The suspect ss currently being stitched together in a room now guarded by two policemen and Sherlock paces rapidly in the waiting room, eager to get last bits of information needed in order to close the case. Unfortunately, the suspect had thought it better to try to throw herself towards the door that led into the warehouse at the home supplement store they had chased her into. Even more unfortunately, she had missed the door while looking over her shoulder, and had ran right into a shelf full of turquoise and cerise vases and candle holders. There had been a lot of bleeding, but nothing too serious, which John had been able to conclude after a brief examination while they awaited the Met and an ambulance. The third unfortunate circumstance in this affair had been that the suspect suffered from some sort of blood phobia and had passed out after realising that she was, more or less, covered in blood. No wonder she had chosen to strangle the store clerk in the sports shop two floors
down instead of shooting or stabbing him. There is also a little private triumph in John over the fact that Sherlock had assumed that the strangulation was modus operandus just because it left less evidence in form of weapon and blood traces. He had not taken the hemophobia into consideration. Neither had anyone else, but that's beside the point.

The good thing about the past eight hours was that things had been just as usual between them. Sherlock being rude, insulting John’s intelligence. Then he'd been looking at John as if John were a true wonder or an especially gruesome locked room murder, all because John had asked about the lack of Oyster card in the victims pockets, which had led Sherlock to deduce that the victim must have had a parking ticket by now, which in turn had led to them finding the car. The car was not registered at the victim, but to his aunt. Knowing that, Sherlock had deduced that the murderer must be someone who worked close to the victim. Some of the logic in that might have passed right over John’s head, but he was a little too used to it to even bother to sigh when Sherlock snorted ‘Well, that’s obvious, isn’t it?’.

The waiting room in A&E is busy. There are at least ten patients waiting, some in obvious pain or discomfort, others quietly staring out of the windows or at the muted TV-screen that is showing a rerun of Emmerdale. In the reception, a nurse taps at a keyboard while talking to a colleague who is standing behind him. Another nurse is sitting beside an elderly man in the waiting room and trying to get some piece of medical history. Half an hour before, John had heard the sirens of two ambulances stopping outside, heard the rushing footsteps on the ground. Something in him had made itself known then. Some sort of decision, or at least a hint of a decision to be made. This could be a part of his daily life, instead of the clinic. The A&E with the calms and the storms, the rush and the chaos paired with the more silent hours. Not the constant and unhurried pace of his current job. Here he could have a rush, he could have adrenaline and it would be his, not only something that his companionship with Sherlock gave him access to. This would be just his work, his merits. And when Sherlock finally throws him out, he would still…

A bolt of something that is not unlike nausea hits him.

‘When Sherlock throws him out’. When. It's like the constant adrenaline flow that he's lived in since Sherlock had asked him to move out (was it really just twelve hours ago?) has kept him in a mist of rush, and now it begins to subside, and he is left with the facts, really seeing them for the first time.

The thought of his time as this man’s friend, colleague and flatmate slowly running out hits him like nausea, like when a kid loses sight of their parent in the midst of a big market in a town they’ve never been to before, all the people passing by, nobody seeing the panicked child, and the child not seeing anyone who looks anything like their parent. Is this the last time they do all this? John might have had his last case with Sherlock, and he hadn’t even reflected on it up until now.

John fights the urge to wrap his own arms around himself, knowing that he is in fact neither lost nor a child. He's an adult standing in an A&E with an arrogant arse of a friend with whom he has chased the person they are waiting for into a shelf of glassware. This is his life. Risks, medical emergencies, chases and unbelievable deductions of a mad man whose lips he had licked a couple of hours earlier, with the aim of saving a friendship.

Oh dear.

Oh fuckin’ dear.

He should not be feeling lost - he is used to the chaos. But he also knows that in the middle of every chaos that he's been involved in since he returned from Afghanistan (and that's a considerable amount of chaos), there's been one constant. One fixed point, however unstable that fixed point might seem. And now that fixed point is too freakin’ scared to be his fixed point. Scared of feeling
something, something he calls ‘fondness’. But John knows better, doesn’t he?

Sherlock’s always been able to feel fondness. Just look at how he will do almost anything for Mrs. Hudson (well, anything except actually behaving himself, obviously). He hugs her when she’s been away, fixes her telly when the channels have been mixed up for the third time that month and he does something (John really doesn’t want to know exactly what) to make the little group of youngsters that’s hung around Baker Street move several blocks away with all their hanging around and loud screaming, simply because they make Mrs. Hudson anxious when she is going out for her lottery tickets in the evenings. Sherlock isn’t afraid of fondness. He is afraid things that he can’t figure out by logic. Like… being in love? Feeling lust? Oh dear, does Sherlock even feel lust? Ever? John doesn’t know. Not even after living with the man for over a year.

The nausea is still there, but John feels the panic slowly evacuating his body. He has a battle plan. He isn’t sure what is scaring his best friend, but he will at least try to hold them together. If that means kissing the man, then fine. It hadn’t been as hard as he had thought it would be, considering that there’s absolutely no sexual attraction and well; Sherlock is a bloke. It shouldn’t matter, love is love, and John does love Sherlock. Just… in a very non-romantic, non-sexual way. Heck, he even finds the man attractive in an aesthetic kind of way. But doing more than kissing would be… challenging.

But then, aren’t challenges part of what he lives for? Even if the thing he challenges is his own sexuality. Not that his sexuality could change, but in order for Sherlock to feel that it’s ‘all fine’, John could do some kissing. Rather kissing than moving out. Preferably, Sherlock would find that he is just being confused by some sort of strong feelings of companionship and they could forget the whole kissing/throwing out spectacle and continue just as before. Because it simply isn’t a good idea to be in a relationship with the man John loves. Not just because of the sexuality issue. No, in fact, that could be managed. He could deal with that. It’s the other thing that makes it impossible. The thing they never talk about, but that has been the one thing that's made John remain some kind of distance in their friendship. The drugs. The fact that Sherlock is an addict.

John knows too much about addiction to take that lightly or dare to believe that Sherlock will never do drugs again. He’s lived with addicts more or less his entire life. His mother, his sister. He’d ended his last, serious relationship after Jenny’s need for opiates had made her steal his key card to the hospital he was doing his internship at, and then she’d attempted to break in and access the narcotics. And the faked drugs bust had revealed to John that he had once more gotten involved with an addict. He’d almost decided to move out then. But then he’d hesitated and decided to give it some time, since Sherlock was seemingly not using at the time, and he’d also made John want to live for the first time since he’d woken up with a hole through his shoulder. That must count for something. But even if he could be best friends with an (ex-?) addict, he couldn’t be a romantic relationship with one. After Jenny, and after his sister’s divorce, he’d promised himself that. To never again to be in a relationship with someone who was unable to put John in front of their need for the poison that ruled their life. Never. Ever.

Just as he finishes that thought, the door to the waiting room opens and a nurse with a very strong body odor walks up to them and explains that the suspect is now almost done being stitched up (although, he doesn’t use those exact words) and that she wants to see them, wanting to explain what had happened. Before the nurse has finished the sentence, Sherlock is halfway into the A&E, seemingly well aware of which room the suspect is currently in.

John just shrugs his shoulders at the nurse’s frown at the detective’s instant take off, smiles and follows Sherlock, smoothing over his lack of social polish the way he Always does. The nurse smiles back and followes John.
"John?"

Sherlock’s voice breaks the surface of John’s sleep. Feeling disoriented, John blinks his eyes and finally get them focused on Sherlock, who is standing a few feet away from John’s bed, clad in his usual uniform of pyjama bottoms, t-shirt and dressing gown. The man’s hair is oddly enough in perfect order, which is unusual in combination with his barefoot ‘nothing on that requires leaving the flat’ outfit. Why has he bothered with the hair routine when he hasn’t bothered to dress himself? Odd.

"Sh’lo? Wha’ you doin’ he’?" He manages to squeeze out from his still almost sleeping mouth.

"I agree."

"Wha’?"

"I agree to your suggestion."

What sugges… Oh. *That* suggestion.

"Rite..." John murmurs, trying to sound cheerful and actually feeling it, a bit.

Apparently, he will not be thrown out of his flat today. That is great news. If he could just sleep a bit longer, that’d be even greater news. They hadn’t gotten home for another five hours after the suspect’s confession in the A&E, and John had fallen asleep with his clothes still on, he now notices. At least he made it to bed and under the covers. Impressive, really.

"Right," says Sherlock, as if repeating John’s statement. "So, what do we do?"

"We let John sleep for at least five more hours, then we can think about that."

"You already slept five hours. No; will there be any plan on how we are to proceed?"

"A plan? Sherlock, as I said; we’ll just try letting our guards down just a tiny bit and see where that leads. We don’t need a plan."

"And what if what happens if we ‘let our guards down’ is ‘a bit not good’?"

Sherlock seems to be genuinely wondering.

"Then we know. And we'll take it from there."

Sherlock stares at him and seems to process that statement for a few seconds. Then he nods and leaves the room. Confused, John tries to figure out if Sherlock is just being Sherlockian and has accepted this new piece of information and is now in the process of adapting to it immediately, or if Sherlock is going to be Sherlock the Sulker for the rest of the day. Considering his facial expression and the lack of slammed doors and clomping feet, the first alternative seems more likely. Satisfied with this deduction, John goes back to sleep.
Next time John wakes up it's full daylight. He has gotten at least thirteen hours of much needed sleep and there's some sunlight behind the clouds outside his window. He hears the sound of Sherlock working with his bottles, microscope and microslides at the table downstairs. It's almost like normal. Almost like this could actually, maybe work.

Then he gets up, gets dressed and goes into the kitchen.

A few minutes after that, John is no longer as confident in his hopes that this might work out. In fact, he is rather panicked and fights the instinct to surrender and just letting Sherlock throw him out already. Being pressed up against the kitchen wall by a surprisingly eager best friend who is currently pressing his mouth too hard against your own has that effect on him, John concedes. He tries not to let his panic show while Sherlock makes his first attempt at involving tongue in what John guesses is supposed to be a heated snogging.

Well, Sherlock can’t be a natural talent in every area, he supposes.

Chapter End Notes

And with that, we're on to Wikipedia for a brief summary of how it defines Borderline Personality disorder:

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) (called emotionally unstable personality disorder, emotional intensity disorder, or borderline type in the ICD-10) is a cluster-B personality disorder, the essential feature of which is a pattern of marked impulsivity and instability of affects, interpersonal relationships and self image. The pattern is present by early adulthood and occurs across a variety of situations and contexts.

Other symptoms usually include intense fears of abandonment and intense anger and irritability, the reason for which others have difficulty understanding. People with BPD often engage in idealization and devaluation of others, alternating between high positive regard and great disappointment. Self-harm, suicidal behavior and substance intoxication are common.

* * * *

Borderline personality disorder criteria in this chapter:

The diagnostic criteria that was used as a theme in this chapter was the first criteria for Borderline Personality Disorder from the DSM IV - TR (a diagnostic manual for psychiatric disorders):

(1) frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment.
Note: Do not include suicidal or self-mutilating behavior covered in Criterion 5.

In this chapter, and a few of those before this, John is scared of having to leave Sherlock; eg. being abandoned. He's not all clear about his reasons for this, and probably never will be completely clear on them, but he's scared and would do most things to avoid this abandonment. He's clearly not comfortable in being sexually close to Sherlock in the beginning, but he tells himself that it's worth it, which is, frankly, not quite the best thing to do. I think it's not that clear, though, I think he might feel a lot more for Sherlock than he would admit to himself, due to previous experiences with
some of Sherlock's... habits. But he doesn't know this consciously, and that makes the kissing part a bit absurd in terms of avoiding abandonment. He's scared to go back to what his life was before Sherlock, but deep inside, he might also be afraid of life without Sherlock, but that's yet to know...

Last; Would also like to add that so many people with this diagnosis is extremely creative, driven and fight like few in effort to survive their own minds. I find many have the most awesome sense of beautiful dark, dark humor. I meet people with this diagnosis daily in a professional setting and I could not express how great my admiration is for how hard some of them struggle through traumas, prejudices and even against the mental health care system that is supposed to assist them. Research indicate that a majority of people with this diagnosis has been traumatized at an early age. This is not about attention-seeking teenage girls just wanting to be pitied or waste the hospitals time and resources. This is mainly about people who live in a constant state of internal alarm and fight the different impulses daily.

(Will make an honest effort to keep my A/N shorter in future. For now; not so much...)
With his lips firmly pressed against John’s, Sherlock almost panics and erupts from the inside, spilling all his nerves onto the kitchen floor (but that would more for John to clean and John doesn’t like body parts or bodily fluids on the floor; he says it’s slippery and unsanitary).

Sherlock tries to mimic the movements he’s seen others use in situations like these. Hand cupping the back of John’s head, pressing their bodies together, tilting his head and trying to find a way into John’s mouth with his tongue. It’s supposed to come naturally to you, he’s come to understand. It doesn’t. Perhaps it had when he had had 7% normalization solution in his veins. He’s deleted most of the times he’d tried to do this, so he wouldn’t know. It had probably been easier with chemical aid. Most things are.

This is supposed to help. This is supposed to bring clarity in the matter of the strange reactions that Sherlock suffered lately. This is suppose to differentiate between sexual attraction and something more like… affection, but more dangerous. The part that makes him panic almost instantly after he’s crowded John against the wall is that it isn’t instantly more clear. In fact, it’s even more of a mess than it was just minutes before.

He’s thought about John’s words, about letting guards down and that if things turns out being ‘bit not good’ that will at least be clarifying. And for once, John seems to have made a faster and more logical conclusion than Sherlock. And that fact in itself makes Sherlock’s thoughts even more complex. Because when John surprises him, that disturbing sensation under his sternum seems to intensify.

Earlier, after he’d left John’s bedroom with this new direction in his mind, he’d taken a long bath. He let the water fell over him from the shower head high up on the wall while he sat down in the tub, letting the distant rain of the water tap against his skin. Sitting curled up to a ball, his forehead rested against his knees and inhaling the microscopic waterdrops in the steam, he tried to figure out the next step.

He’s been given a new direction, one he’d until minutes ago had thought to be unacceptable. If John is okay with the fact that things might turn out a ‘bit not good’ and just thinks of that as a sign as to whether this will work out or not, that opens up several new solutions. Sherlock has never considered that he, acting as himself, and by that running a considerable risk of treating John as an object or a possession, is acceptable even as a means to an end in figuring this whole thing out. But it will certainly make things easier.

He needs to know if what he feels behind his sternum, the sensation that makes him unable to concentrate at the same level as he’s done up until recently, that makes him feel a constant unease and makes him hyper aware of himself in every second, is in fact sexual attraction. That would be unfortunate, but not unmanageable. It seems to be highly unlikely that such desires should affect him, considering his history. He isn’t sexually attracted to other people. There had been one or two times in his teen years, when his hormones had plagued him as worst, making him miserable with their
effect on his intellectual structure of thoughts and focus on important matters, and there had been that
time in his early… [deleted].

[deleted]

[deleted]

No. Not going there. The conclusion is still the same; he's seldom or never been bothered by sexual
desire towards others. Just the thought of it makes him squirm a bit, shifting in the tub to turn the heat
of the water up. He isn't unaffected by sexual needs, but his own mind and his own hands has
always been sufficient as to those needs. Except for a few rare times, Sherlock's only ever been
indifferent or slightly disturbed by the thought of engaging in sexual activities with a specific person.

And after the events which is almost entirely [deleted] he had found that his lack of need for others
when it comes to sexual stimulation is nothing to dwell on, but something to regard as a token of his
independence. The distance is necessary. He isn't good, and by lacking sexual interest in others, his
body has at least made it significantly easier for him to isolate himself from situations that could
prove to trigger certain reactions and chemical complications in his brain. If he's sexually attracted to
John, that's certainly problematic, but it won’t necessarily be the end of an otherwise valuable and
rather enjoyable association. A friendship. With the one person who doesn’t bore him to death or
considers him to be nothing but a brain in a jar, useful for intellectual problems, but distasteful in all
other aspects.

Sexual attraction might be a complication, but not a disaster on the level of unintentionally detonating
an atomic bomb.

If it isn't just sexual attraction, if it's more than that, on the other hand, then he'd rather deal with the
atomic bomb. At least atomic bombs are all-destructive, and would wipe all of this mess away. If this
is what for others might be considered to be ‘being in love’ that would, indeed, be worse than
detonating a bomb in the middle of Baker Street. Because Sherlock is not capable of those feelings,
yet turns into something else inside him. He knows that, no matter how much he’s worked on
deleting the occasions where… [deleted].

And he might not be able to experience most of the emotions that people feel, but he’s come to
realise that loyalty and companionship are concepts that he is not only able to identify within himself
when it comes to John, but that he's actually able to put these feelings into his actions every now and
then, often earning him those totally unreserved and amazed smiles from John. That correlation in
itself is incitement enough to accept those feelings and try to utilize the actions that come from
experiencing said feelings. And that loyalty and sense of companionship tell him, in no uncertain
terms, that subjecting John to the sides of himself that would surface if he was under the influence of
those hormones and change in neurotransmitters would be totally and utterly unacceptable. The
atomic bomb would be preferable.

The problem is, as stated, to differentiate between those two states. Sexual attraction and…
obsession? Yes, obsession is probably the most accurate term. He's not obsessed now. No. Then
he’d be in a chemically impaired state of destruction. But just the notion that that could be what
lingers under the surface is enough to make him take action and tell John to move out. That had been
the rational, loyal and moral thing to do. But John had refused him. Refused to leave without what he
considered a reasonable explanation. Which Sherlock would never give him. Which Sherlock can’t
give him without un-deleting some things that should stay [deleted] for the sake of sanity.

And now, John is prepared to face some ‘bit no good’ if that's what it takes to come to a conclusion
of their situation. And Sherlock's not prepared to show him any of that, he isn’t cruel just because he
isn’t as human as the rest of the people around him. He has clear and very structured concepts of
morality. It isn’t the same as that of most people, but it's certainly less flexible and possible to alter for
the sake of his own convenience than other people’s morality seems to be. He mostly finds their
shifts and flexibility in this area distasteful and inconsequential to a degree that makes him feel as
though they are the ones lacking conscience, not him. And in his rigid sense of right and wrong,
subjecting John to himself at his worst is a violation on a level that exceeded all other amoralities.

If this is just sexual attraction, the situation will be alright. Not good, but not disastrous, he tells
himself as he steps out of the tub, reaching for a towel and making his decision.

As soon as John wakes up, he will do an experiment. The outcome will determine if it's possible to
continue to live with John without the risk of a chemical reaction causing him to become…

[deleted]

When Sherlock returns from his thoughts, John is kissing him back.

It hits Sherlock that this is probably the first time that they actually actively kiss each other. The
earlier kisses had been more of a taking of turns. John had initiated while Sherlock had been too
stunned to act, and when he had made sure to make the kiss firmer, John had become more passive.

Now John is threading his fingers into the hair on the back of Sherlock’s neck and that… is very
acceptable. It sends a thrill of warmth from his follicles, through his spine, pooling out in his belly
and, oddly, his palms and the soles of his feet. His palms find their way from the back of John’s head
to cradle his face, feeling the slight stubble, the warmth of skin and the muscles in his face working
as John’s tongue reaches out to meet Sherlock’s. His own tongue had been tracing John’s lips,
hoping for them to open, and there’s a jolt through his body as the tip of John’s tongue met his. First,
he instinctively forces their mouths even closer, going from forceful to bruising. Then he realises that
this makes it almost impossible for their tongues to explore each other unless John finally lets him
into his mouth. He releases some of the pressure. There’s some form of vocal sound coming from
John at the release, and John’s tongue instantly begins to circle the tip of Sherlock’s, then following
the contours of his lips, before returning again. Sherlock decides that it must have been an approving
sound.

His body, his transport, feels odd. But it's a kind of odd he's familiar with. He's not unused to the
feeling of arousal. In fact, he has a somewhat regular habit of taking those matters in his own hands,
without significant enjoyment. But this is unusual. Being pressed to another person and feeling like this
without even being touched in the more critical areas. Areas that are now definitely somewhat
interested, but not enough so that John will notice. Relieved, Sherlock makes a little space between
the lower parts of their bodies as not to shock John in case said areas become even more interested.
He gathers that if there is one thing that might make John hesitate, it would be the feeling of an
erection against his hip. Not being gay, and all that.

For not being attracted to men, John makes an impressive effort. He finally opens his mouth more,
tilting his head further to the side, inviting Sherlock in. And as Sherlock accepts that invitation, a
sound escapes him. A sound that makes him scold his transport for its lack of self-restraint. John
doesn’t seem to mind, though. He makes an accompanying sound and lets one of his hands slip from
Sherlock’s hair (not good) to rest at the small of Sherlock’s back (very acceptable). Sherlock,
meanwhile, tries to find a rhythm in the sliding of tongues and movements of lips. He's not returned
to the bruising pressure of lips, even if the impulse to do so is strong. He finds that he wants to
invade that mouth as much as possible. The feeling that his movements in John’s mouth transfers to
his groin is… significant.

John’s mouth slips away from his for a few seconds. Sherlock had not expected that he’d feel as empty as he does when he loses contact with John’s mouth, but then John finds his lips again and resumes the kiss. Ah, breathing. He must have needed to breathe.

But after a few seconds John withdraws again, resting his head against the wall, breathing fast. Sherlock’s just about to reclaim his mouth again, when John speaks.

"We might..." he whispers with that voice, the voice that's significantly hoarser than it ought to be. "We might, hm, slow down a bit. You know, I don’t want us to rush anything… We have time."

Sherlock feels a slight sting of something that might be related to the term ‘regret’. But that's not a feeling he's especially familiar with, so he's not quite sure if that's the correct interpretation. Sherlock swallows discreetly to make sure that his own voice doesn't sound as odd as John’s. It doesn’t seem to help to any noticeable degree.

"You are right. In fact, there's no need for us to do this again."

"What do you mean?"

John looks a bit confused as he, seemingly embarrassed, straightens himself up so that he no longer leans against the wall to which Sherlock had pressed him. Sherlock, on the other hand, makes sure not to be too far away from John, since that would increase the risk of John looking at all of him and thereby notice how his trousers doesn’t quite fit as comfortably as they usually do.

"I am sexually attracted to you."

"Eh, yes, it would seem so, or at least you seemed to be eager."

"I was, since I assumed that it would lead to a conclusion, which it did."

John makes one of Sherlock’s absolute favorite facial expressions at this announcement. It's a complicated expression that communicates something along the line of ‘I am not entirely sure where you’re going with this, no, in fact, I have no idea at all, but I get a strong feeling that you expect me to catch on, so I’ll pretend you’re making a perfectly logical point and that I follow and now just expect you to go on talking’. It's an expression Sherlock has become increasingly acquainted with during their friendship, and has come to regard with certain fondness, since it's just one more tell of how much John has gotten to know him and how he's found his own little ways to avoid Sherlock’s ‘how can you be so stupid’ outbursts.

"John, I just told you my conclusion," he says as an answer to John’s ‘go on, then’ face.

"Your conclusion being that you are attracted to me?"

"What other conclusions have you heard me utter since we stopped kissing?"

"Alright. And the fact that you are attracted to me means…?"

"It means we’re done with the kissing."

"For now?"

Something in John’s face looks a bit hesitant. Sherlock, on the other hand, doesn’t hesitate before answering, tone now perfectly neutral.
"I’ve reached a conclusion. I would say that any reason for us to kiss is now obsolete, and therefore I don’t see why we would ever do it again."

With that, Sherlock makes his way out of the room.

Chapter End Notes

A brief summary of Schizoid personality disorder according to Wikipedia:

Schizoid personality disorder (SPD) is a personality disorder characterized by a lack of interest in social relationships, a tendency towards a solitary lifestyle, secretiveness, emotional coldness, and apathy. Affected individuals may simultaneously demonstrate a rich, elaborate and exclusively internal fantasy world. This could also be looked at as an overactive imagination that was developed in early childhood (even as early as age 1).

* * * * *

Schizoid personality disorder criteria in this chapter:

This chapter is based on the third criteria of Schizoid personality disorder according to DSM IV - TR (a diagnostic manual for psychiatric disorders):

(3) has little, if any, interest in having sexual experiences with another person

In this fic, Sherlock is written as demisexual, or perhaps gray-asexual, which is the reason for his rare interest in sexual activities involving others in this story. But it also serves as to illustrate a criterion of Schizoid PD in this chapter. This interests me, as this is just like in life; there will always be criteria and symptoms of psychiatric disorders that seems to fit people, but you need to fill many criterias of the same diagnose and have a significant suffering or loss of function to receive a diagnosis. And many of these “symptoms” are better explained by our personalities, or preferences or circumstances for most people.

As said, Sherlock clearly doesn't lack sex drive in this story, and neither does many of the people with Schizoid PD. it's just engaging with others to accomplish sexual satisfaction that's not appealing. For this gray-asexual Sherlock, it's not the thought of 'another person' that's troubelimg; it's just a majority of other persons. With someone he's attracted to (and probably not only sexually, but intellectually, emotionally and aesthetically as well), he's very interested. In this case, there's one more complicated factor; bad memories. Otherwise he might have been less hesitant. He's still troubled by some aspects of the sexual acts, like smells and some of the touch, but this is also a complicating factor and probably due to sensory issues rather than sexual ones. There'll probably be very few people that Sherlock would actually want to have sex with, but he's not against sex other than from the fact that he's troubled from memories.
Theory of Mind

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

One thing about his flatmate that never fails to frustrate John is that Sherlock often seems to think (or at least act like he honestly thinks) that the people around him will come to the same conclusions as he has as long as they've been given the same facts. This is problematic for two reasons. First, other people often don’t see the same facts as Sherlock do; they miss at least half of what Sherlock sees, deduces or gathers. Second, Sherlock’s conclusions might be logical when it comes to crimes or science, but his conclusions about personal matters often seems to make as much sense as you could expect from someone who thinks that drugging someone with PTSD and then locking him in a lab and scaring him shitless with illusions of great monster hounds is a perfectly reasonably thing to do if you need to test a hypothesis.

John sometimes considers this as ‘Sherlockian logic’, something which can be compared to a five year olds’ sense of reason when it comes to interpersonal relationships. Sherlock can deduce other people’s motives, actions and priorities, but outside of a crime scene, his deductions seems to be missing the obvious component that not everybody shares Sherlock’s views on the world and would like to know every little fact about everything they care about, no matter the consequences. What Sherlock said before he calmly left the kitchen was just a perfect illustration of Sherlockian logic.

"Actually, I would say that we’re all done with the kissing from now on."

And then the man had gone for the sitting room, melted into the couch and steepled his fingers, ready for a trip to the mind palace, while John stood there with the pulse still audible in his ears and lips tingling from the hard kisses. And John is sure that to Sherlock, it somehow makes perfect sense to agree to try to be more than friends, only to realise that he actually feels sexual attraction towards his ‘maybe more than friend’ and then call it all off, as if that's a deal breaker. Sexual attraction as a dealbreaker for a relationship? That's definitely a first. Sherlock knows that John is a sexual person, so it isn’t out of fear to impose something on John, but maybe…

Oh.

Suddenly, a whole new idea takes form. Why hadn’t he thought of that before? It should have been obvious. So... Sherlock knows John is a sexual person, but come to think of it, John has no idea about Sherlock’s sexuality. He hadn’t been sure he wasn’t asexual until just a few minutes ago. It's still possible that he is. And no matter how Sherlock thinks of himself, it's clear to John that Sherlock has limited (if any) experience with kissing. Whatever happened between them, it might have been overwhelming and perhaps contrary to how Sherlock perceived himself. No wonder his friend had rushed off to go to his mind palace. ‘Sex does not alarm me,’ Sherlock had said at Buckingham Palace. And maybe it doesn’t. But maybe the actual feeling of sexual attraction and the physical responses caused by the attraction do, in fact, alarm him. The man can not be arsed to see to any of his body’s other signals (he mostly seem to see perceive them as some kind of betrayal from his transport), so why would this be different?

It all makes sense. Sherlock hadn’t expected to have a reaction caused by physical intimacy. When he did, it must have shocked him. Now he doesn’t want any more physical stimulation, appalled by his body’s reaction. And John can deal with that. As long as that doesn’t mean that he's about to be thrown out of the flat once again for being distracting. Because sexual attraction is nothing but distracting. John should know. Attraction in general is distracting. And he is attracted to Sherlock, has been since they first shared that cab to the crime scene with the pink lady. But it's not sexual
attraction, it's more like he's drawn to the man, like the pull of a magnet, unavoidable due to the laws of physics. And while he isn't classically good looking, Sherlock has this pale and lanky composition that, paired with dark curls and sharp eyes, makes him hard not to look at. Perhaps it's all the contrasts that makes him so fascinating. Soft lips, sharp cheekbones. Sharp movements, soft fingering on the violin strings. Pale complexion, almost black curls. Rude manners, almost angelic appearance when relaxed. Intelligent in a scary sort of way when it comes to most things, naive like a child when it comes to others. All those things that makes him John’s best friend, but also sometimes makes John dizzy when trying to keep up with the man. He's all contrast, but no outlines.

John will simply have to do his best not to be distracting. And he could start by getting out of the flat. No matter how this all end, he has things to do, and if this ends, he would rather have those things done.

There are three hours left until John’s shift at the locum will start, and he decides to spend that time wisely. He gets dressed in relaxed yet presentable clothing, has a quick shave and then brushes his teeth for a longer time than is really necessary. He knows it's not very likely that he could still detect the taste of Sherlock’s tongue in his mouth, but just to be sure, he brushes for one more minute. It’s not that he actually minds the taste, it had been quite nice, mostly coffee and perhaps some lingering mint from toothpaste. It's just that he doesn’t want to be reminded of what happened after the kiss. Not now.

When he’d grabbed his phone, his keys and his lunch box he passes the sitting room, where Sherlock, as predicted, is still in his mind palace. John doesn’t bother to say goodbye, since he figures that it's highly unlikely that his flatmate would register his words. Instead, he gets his jacket on, winces a little when his bad shoulder gets stuck in the sleeve in a very uncomfortable way, and then leaves the flat, silently closing the door behind him. The stairs to the flat smells faintly of some sort of stew, Mrs. Hudson has probably been cooking.

The autumn air is high and clear as he leaves the building. He searches his pockets for a few seconds before finding his Oyster card then heads to the tube station, taking the train in the opposite direction of the locum. It's a bit symbolic, really.

"How can I help you?"

The nurse in the reception looks friendly, but stressed. John is utterly familiar with that expression; it's almost as if everyone working in health care has been trained in making that exact face. He always feels a bit guilty when he needs something from a stressed nurse, but he tries to rationalise that this particular errand won't cause this nurse too much trouble.

"I was wondering if there's someone I can see about applying for a job?"

"Oh, of course, what kind of job?"

"I’m a doctor."

"Oh, I see. In that case, I doubt you’ll leave this building empty handed. We need doctors like we
need painkillers at the moment," says the nurse, now genuinely smiling, giving a tired little laugh.

"That’s good news for me, then," John replies and smiles back.

The nurse looks past John, making a quick assessment of the patients in the waiting room before making her decision and rising from her chair, starting to close the window that separates her and the patients when needed.

"Come with me, I’ll make sure you get straight to Mrs. Leighton before you get a chance to change your mind."

Forty minutes later, John leaves St. Barts A&E feeling almost light-headed.

He’d not only gotten a job offer, he’d also been showed around at the E&A (which he's reluctant to say he’s already a bit too familiar with due to his working with Sherlock) and had been greeted by several of his potential colleagues-to-be. Everybody had seemed sincerely pleased at meeting him and there had been a lot of joking about the pace and the pressure in the A&E, but when Mrs Leighton had informed them about his previous work as an army doctor his colleagues-to-be had seemed to conclude that he was the doctor for the job. In the end, he’d shaken hand with Mrs. Leighton and promised that he’d get back to her before the end of the week.

It hits him that he hasn’t felt so... at home for a long time. Not the kind of 'at home' he feels in the flat, which is, in fact, his home, but at home in a way that only being needed, respected and having a certain role in a group can offer. Not that Sherlock doesn’t need him - Heaven knows he does - but this is different. This is a professional setting. It's not like at the locum, where Sarah had directly asked if he wouldn’t be bored, no; here they just saw a need, and a man capable of filling it. And it's just about him, just about his merits. No Sherlock, no intervening Mycroft. Just John, and John’s own knowledge and experience.

He slides the phone from his jacket pocket. No new messages or missed calls, but… Oh. He's in a hurry if he's going to make it to his shift in time. And he can forget about the lunch box he’d planned to eat before the start of his shift.

Well, it was worth it. It was so worth it.

John’s stomach growls as he waves goodbye to his third patient that shift. He looks longingly towards the plastic bag containing his lunch before buzzing in the next patient. He puts away his notes from the last patient and looks up just as the door to his room opens.

No.

No, this cannot be happening. Not today. Please…?

John silently wonders if his receptionist hadn’t been suspicious over letting this patient in. His clothes, his posture, well, everything about him, screams that he’s far too wealthy to visit a locum for any possible health problems. Still, here he is. Mycroft Holmes. The one person John feels the least inclined to meet today. Maybe Sherlock is right when he says that Mycroft can sense when someone
is happy and then directly go on a sacred mission to spoil that happiness?

"Sit down, Mycroft, I see you have some health issues for which you wish to consult me?"

Mycroft raises an amused eyebrow and looks suspiciously at the chair in front of John’s desk, before sitting down on the edge of the seat, probably afraid of catching anything ‘common’.

"Oh, Doctor Watson, I would say that it’s rather the other way around today. I wish to offer you some counseling on some of your recent issues, so to speak."

The umbrella for the day, navy blue with dark wooden details, taps the floor as he finishes his sentence.

"How very kind of you," John remarks dryly. "And what matters might that be, that require you to take time from my patients?"

"Well, they won’t be your patients for very long now, will they?"

"I haven’t decided yet, but probably not."

"I am glad to hear it. I think it’s about time you got use of that adrenaline addiction of yours in more ways than by assisting my brother."

"I’m so thankful for your approval, Mycroft. Now, what do you want?"

Mycroft takes his time, looks smugly (at least, John thinks it's smugness, even if more or less all of Mycroft’s expressions signals smugness to John) around John’s tiny room at the locum before once again focusing his gaze on John.

"I believe my little brother is a bit confused as of lately," he admits somewhat reluctantly.

"Is that so?"

"It is, indeed. And I also believe that he told you this, and asked you to leave, which you choose not to adhere to. May I ask why?"

"As usual, I hardly see how that is any of your business, Mycroft, even though he mentioned that he’d talked to you about this matter."

"So he did. And as I am sure that he also mentioned, I actually agreed with him in this particular matter. I think it would be wisest of you to move out of Baker Street, Doctor Watson. I would be more than pleased to help you find a new accommodation."

"That’s nice. Being kicked out of my home by one brother and then have new arrangements made by the other brother. Lovely, really.” The irony in John’s voice is perhaps a bit more noticeable than he’d been aiming for, but it can’t be helped.

"Oh, John, you take this the wrong way! I simply offer you my assistance as I know how hard it must be to find a decent place on your salary, and since it’s because of my brother’s… peculiarities that you need a new place. As you know, I have nothing but high thoughts on how good an influence you’ve been to my brother up until this day. However, all good things might come to an end, and this will probably be it. I must admit I am surprised over how long it took. I would have thought my dear brother would have been corrupted by his… emotions long before this."

"Is that so?"
"So it is."

They sit in silence for a while, before Mycroft once again speaks.

"As you may have gathered, my brother has never been a natural talent when it comes to understanding other peoples' motives and emotions. Now, I know that he bases his little career on these things now, but I am sure you would agree with me on that outside of his so-called ‘work’, he is hardly socially adept. And still, his social skills nowadays are practically beaming when compared to when he was younger. As a young child, it took him years of frustration before he even understood that he and the people around him didn’t have the same interests or motives for doing things. He was unusually bound to Mummy, who took this as a sign of him needing her constantly, and therefore almost never left him. I don’t think that, under his first years, he even realised that she was not an extension of himself. Then when he was four, our mother got rather ill, and had to spend two weeks in the hospital without visitors. It was perhaps then he realised that he was in fact alone in his thoughts, Mummy not being there to listen and reflect those thoughts. It was of course a frustrating realisation for him, and he was never quite the same after having made it. He became more quiet and introvert after realising that almost everyone else around him worked in a different way when it came to emotions. Even with his dog; he attributed all of his own desires and opinions towards old Redbeard. It was quite charming, if only it hadn’t also been a bit disturbing for a ten year old boy to consequently do so."

"And you’re telling me all his private childhood frustrations because…?"

"Because it will surely shed some light as to what I am about to tell you. I’m to understand that my brother holds certain… feelings towards you."

Mycroft’s voice is, as always, rather disdainful when talking about anything as human such as emotions. In this he is at least consequential. Still, it annoys John to bits to hear Mycroft spell out his younger brother’s life like this. Except, John's also intrigued. John choses not to comment on Mycroft’s statement, and the British Government continues.

"Of course, these tendencies to confuse his own motivations with this of others became less noticeable as he grew up. He still couldn’t understand why other people would see the world in any other way than he did, but he accepted the fact that they did. That was, until his emotions once again got the best of him."

John supposes that the silence is meant to be dramatic, but it only makes him annoyed. Soon his receptionist will surely knock on his door and ask if there’s a problem, since his patient is still in there.

"Sherlock made a friend in the first year of his university studies. He was only seventeen, and was naturally an outsider, but there was a boy in his chemistry group that seemed to be able to stand him. Soon, they did almost everything together. This boy, Samuel, was the son of a diplomat and was used to meeting new people all the time, moving around in the world. He had a lot of knowledge that interested my brother, but most of all, Samuel was not stupid. He was nowhere near my brother in regards to intelligence, clearly, but he had a quality about him that I think would be called ‘street smart’ in today’s slang. And he clearly enjoyed Sherlock’s odd temper, his total disregard for conventions and rules; it was the opposite of everything he’d grown up with. Unfortunately, as Sherlock’s first year went on, his friendship with Samuel became increasingly important to him, and in the end, I think he confused his feelings of dependence with what’s commonly known as ‘love’."

The repudiation in Mycroft’s voice is obvious, even if the man surely had been aiming for something more neutral.
"It ended badly. I will not go into the details with you, since you’ve made your opinions about me ‘spelling out the life of my little brother and his misfortunes’ quite clear, Doctor Watson. Let’s just say that my dear brother once again had some trouble with distinguishing between his own feelings and motives and the feelings and motives held by others. In this case, the feelings and motives of his dear friend Samuel. I had to step in quite literally to clean up his little mess that time. And that didn’t stop him from drowning his disappointment in intravenous aids. As you can imagine, I am not especially keen on going through those years that followed again any time soon. I would therefore advise you to listen to Sherlock on this instance. For once, he’s being rational and self-perserving. And, I must add, protective of you as well. It’s good to see your loyalty towards my brother, since you know how I worry about him, but in this case the most helpful thing to do would be to take his advice and leave Baker Street as soon as possible. In case you think I belittle my brother, rest assured that he’s well aware of the fact that he’s not capable of ‘love’. What he felt towards Samuel might have mimicked ‘love’ in the earlier stages, but it soon became clear that it was something more primal. Not sexually, mind you, but possessive. And unable to accept the fact that the object of these feelings didn’t return them in the way he assumed. As in regard to sex, I am sure you know as well as I know that that’s not something my brother would be capable of."

John is astonished. How can Mycroft expect him to listen to this nonsense? It doesn’t matter if the events described are correct, it’s the way Mycroft describes his brother that makes John just open and then close his mouth again, unable to find something to say.

"I can see that I’ve upset you, Doctor Watson. I can assure you, I am well aware that my brother in the last year and a half has made significant progress when it comes to interpersonal skills, especially when it comes to you. I must admit that before he met you, I was very reluctant to even hope that he would ever engage in friendship again, but I am thankful to be proved wrong. My brother is not as cold as he would like us all to believe, but his feelings are not the same as other peoples’, and should not be treated as such. I told him early on that caring is not an advantage, something I know you despise me for. No, John, don’t argue, I know very well that you consider me to be the reason that Sherlock thinks he’s not human in all aspects. It’s partially true, but that is because I would rather have him distancing himself from others than ending up in alleys with needles up his veins again. He can’t handle his own emotions, and is better off with all his brain capacity intact and his emotions well-kept inside. He’s happy, wouldn’t you agree? He’s clean, he’s doing amazing work and he’s even managed to connect to people around him to a certain degree. To force him to face his earlier mishaps by awakening those same reactions again could only be selfish, wouldn’t you agree?"

Mycroft’s cool and composed gaze meets John’s. John is not sure how his own gaze might be described, but ‘cool’ is most likely not an appropriate description.

"I understand," he says finally.

"I am glad," says Mycroft with something that might be described as an imitation of a smile.

Mycroft stands up, holds his hand out towards John, but soon realises that the doctor on the other side of the desk will not take it.

"Don’t be selfish, John. You don’t even want him, not in that way. So don’t subject him to a temptation that would jeopardize his more sane sides just because you’re afraid of ending up alone. He has so much more to lose than you, Doctor."

Mycroft nods, taps his umbrella to the floor, and leaves John’s room.

John just stares out in front of him, realising that this day has already taken too many sharp turns, and hoping that next patient won’t require him to use his brain, since he figures that his brain is currently overloaded and will only be useful again once he’s had a significant amount of time to sort through
all this data.

Suddenly, he thinks that he might understand how Sherlock must be feeling right now.

That thought is both oddly comforting and a bit alarming.

Chapter End Notes

Theory of mind according to my dear companion, Wikipedia:

Theory of mind (often abbreviated ToM) is the ability to attribute mental states — beliefs, intents, desires, pretending, knowledge, etc. — to oneself and others and to understand that others have beliefs, desires, intentions, and perspectives that are different from one's own. Deficits occur in people with autism spectrum disorders, schizophrenia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder as well as neurotoxicity due to alcohol abuse. Although there are philosophical approaches to this, the theory of mind as such is distinct from the philosophy of mind.

* * * * *

Theory of Mind in this chapter:

In this chapter, Mycroft tells John about a few things related to theory of mind that Sherlock's experienced difficulties with and John also reflects on some other things on his own. These things include such as separating himself as a person from other persons in early childhood (his mother in this chapter), putting himself in others shoes (figuratively speaking), understanding why people would want something else than he does, not understanding how other people don't see the same things as he does when looking, for example, at a crime scene, being aware of (but not always reflecting on) the fact that others can't read your mind (when expecting John to understand his moods, where he went etc). This is also some of the explanation for what happened between Sherlock and Samuel; Sherlock couldn't understand that someone he felt so close to didn't see him the same way he saw Samuel.

Theory of mind is an interesting concept, which is not well-known, but is very noticeable when it’s functioning different than usual, as it does for some people. Theory of mind should not be confused with the ability to feel empathy, as it has more to do with how a person experiences the world than how that person reacts to it. Theory of mind is an ability, but one that can be hard to gain if you’re not born with it. You can always learn it in theory and use this knowledge, but it will take more effort than if you had it from the start, which is part of why social interactions will always be more challenging for some of us that for others. Lacking theory of mind does not mean that you are narrow-minded or selfish, it only means that you’ll have a harder time differentiating between other’s point of view and your own. It can also mean that you’ll have to study people very thoroughly, which can result in you becoming very aware of other’s lack of consistency in regards to desires and intents, which can indeed well needed in many occupations.
PTSD Criteria, part I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Except for when his black moods of boredom hit him, which they do all too often, Sherlock is not one for self-pity. It's not constructive, rational nor does it in any way solve the problem, and therefore he sees no point in indulging in it, no matter how sweet it sometimes seems.

On this particular day though, he somewhat reluctantly wishes that he was a more sentimental man when it came to himself. It would have been easier if he could just feel the whole impact of the fact that he is sexually attracted to a man who has no capacity to reciprocate his attraction and that he had therefore acted accordingly, by throwing the man in question out and then hide to heal his wounded pride. Instead, his mind forces him to analyze, structure and sort through every little aspect of this humiliating ordeal. It also forces him to acknowledge that he isn’t thinking rationally at the moment, since his body has its own very persistent needs after that last kissing session. He is almost certain that he’d managed to hide it from John, but it makes it impossible to enter his mind palace to sort his thoughts. Instead of walking up the stairs towards the small, dusty and partially closed off storage room in his palace where he keeps information about his transport’s reactions to others, he finds himself just walking the stairs endlessly, seemingly unable to reach the cellar where the storage room is situated. The stairs won’t end, and after he hears the door close behind John, he realises that it’s no use. He cannot get any useful information from his mind palace in this state. Just the fact that he's actually aware of John leaving the flat, even though he’s been in his mind palace, is a certain indication of that.

With a sigh, Sherlock returns back up to the entrance of the palace and exits. Back on the sofa in his sitting room he realises that part of the problem might be the fact that he's currently still half-erect. Well, isn’t that a joy?

He's reluctant to handle the situation the usual way. Usually, he’d have no problem with just enjoying some masturbation in order to take care of his apparent needs. Lately, however, there's been some disturbances of his normally so solitary activities. It had began some weeks before That Day, when he’d realised his body reacted peculiarly when John was around. First, he’d thought it was natural yet annoying that images of John (and various parts of John’s body) would appear as he fantasized while masturbating. He quickly discarded those images, as he was less than thrilled to have his private moments of physical pleasure invaded by the (imaginary) presence of others. The problem was that this happened again two days later, when he was enjoying a boredom-relieving wank in the shower. Then again, three days later, and again after that. It was after That Day that his real problems had begun. He’d been alone in the flat, experimenting with a dildo which he’d acquired a few months ago. Suddenly, the usually faceless person fucking him in his fantasy had become his very own flatmate. Appalled by his own mind, he’d paused and tried to will that particular part of the fantasy away. But once he’d continued, John had been back in his fantasy. Frustrated, and perhaps even a bit anxious, he’d determined to give up the whole masturbation session. That had proven to be highly uncomfortable during the following two hours.

Since then, he’s only had one or two quick releases of pressure, which were in no way up to his usual standards. All because he's pretty certain that allowing himself to think of John while experiencing intense physical pleasure would result in increased tendencies to associate John with sex. It's also true that thinking of something, or someone, while under the influence of oxytocin- a neurotransmitter released during hugging, cuddling and orgasm- will inevitably lead to associating said person with the feelings that oxytocin was designed to cause; namely pair-bonding, trust and
intimacy. All the feelings that Sherlock under no circumstances wants to associate with his very not interested friend. Just the thought of associating any of those intense reactions caused by oxytocin with an actual person is undeniably dangerous. That means he’d might accidentally open up the floodgates to that part of himself that… [deleted].

His reluctance to involve any other human being in his masturbatory fantasies is thus rational and should be treated as such. Therefore, he's now less than enthusiastic about the current state of his penis. He could ignore it, of course, but it seems to be insistent these days. Perhaps he’s spoiled it by indulging regularly for many years. The last few weeks has been anything but regular in these regards. He knows he ought to tame his transport and stop spoiling it with such worldly amusements, but until now, it had seemed that this indulgence was far less interfering to his Work than food and sleep had proven to be. Quite the opposite; he seemed to relax and think more clearly when he’d given himself a pause in order to achieve orgasm. Now it seems like this little indulgence will have to join the Appalling Human Needs That Ought To Be Mastered category. But not right now. Right now, matters are a bit pressing, and he is in no state to make a decision of such importance. He’ll find a rational way to deal with such situations on a day where no such situations are currently making themselves known.

With yet another sigh, he stands up, shrugs off his dressing-gown and heads to his bedroom. If he's to do this without risking unwelcome images of certain best friends he'll have to do it properly.

It doesn’t work.

Or, the masturbation works splendidly. It's the ‘not thinking of John while wanking’ that went straight out of the window in no time. In the end, he’d capitulates. Embarrassed, he gives in to the urge to pretend that his fingers are instead John’s, entering him, stretching him, thrusting into him. He blushes, alone in his bedroom, when he thinks about what John would say to him, would call him, while John’s fingers are replaced by John’s cock (Sherlock’s black dildo) and a somewhat forceful rhythm is established. He comes, breathing out the most humiliating words. (They’d not seemed humiliating before, when he’d done this. They’d just been part of his sexual fantasies, not to be seen or heard or experienced by any other person. It's just now, as he’s imagining saying these things so that John can hear, that his face becomes even more heated than it already is.) Sated, but not satisfied, he’d dries his hands on the sheets and feels the impact of his failure.

"So, it has come to this," he mumbles hazily and with no small amount of self-loathing in his voice.

This problem has to be dealt with.

Soon.

Well, after he’s gathered his mental and physical resources back after the orgasm.

Soon.

When John returns, Sherlock has remade his bed (changing the sheets had seemed to be too much on an effort, since he’d surely soil them again any minute, he’d thought with disdain), had a shower, made three cups of tea, eaten two pieces of toast with John’s favorite jam and tried to work on the
John-problem. Working on John-related problems while eating John’s favorite snack had not been his best idea. Just as working with John-related problems while suffering the after-effects of a John-related orgasm had turned out to be a compellingly stupid idea.

He’s managed to come to one conclusion, though. That conclusion is that John leaving the flat would be counterproductive, as Sherlock would then have no need to tame his transport’s urges, but would probably find himself indulging in them with no reason to sustain himself. He would, in addition to this, find himself having no best friend, no flatmate, no colleague and no John. Most importantly, he would find himself hurting John. And this is by far the most appalling and morally disturbing thought of all. John is not a person who trusts easily, and he trusts Sherlock (even if that alone says something significant about his judgment in these matters).

John is also a person who’s steady but still fragile in some aspects. He’d been contemplating suicide when Sherlock met him, and being all alone again might push him in that direction once more, even if things had certainly changed for his friend since then. John still has nightmares and can still freeze up when reminded of certain traumatic events. Sherlock has found that even if John has no problem with using his gun, sounds that reminds him of gunshots and that come unexpectedly, like when he’s at home, using the vacuum cleaner, will sometimes cause him to freeze up. Sherlock had bought a new vacuum that same afternoon and made a promise to himself never to attempt to experiment or in other ways alter the vacuum again. In addition to sudden noises, Sherlock has found that John must have an unusual state of vigilance even in his sleep. Sounds that are unexpected will make him alert in no time, and he’ll have troubles getting back to sleep again. Sherlock had soon figured out that his own violin could be helpful in these situations, and had taken to playing some nights when he heard the sounds of John, restless in his bed, unable to sleep. John never says anything, for which Sherlock is grateful. That would mean they’d both have to acknowledge John’s issue, and also Sherlock’s awareness of it. Silence is far more comfortable.

In conclusion, John is not to be hurt and Sherlock knows better than anyone that John isn’t as unyielding as he seems. John had been in a bad place when he and Sherlock met and is now in much better condition; therefore, throwing John out is not as good an idea as it had seemed just a few days ago. Sherlock had thought it through, but he had done what he often accused others of; he’d seen, but not observed. He’d thought it would save John the risk of Sherlock becoming someone he’d rather not be, but maybe that risk is preferable to John going back to his pre-Sherlock state? It would certainly seem so. In addition to this, Sherlock should have resolved the matter of differentiating between infatuation (Not Good) and sexual attraction (just an annoyance) before taking drastic measures. He’d been acting out of fear and that is inexcusable. From now on rationality and reason will be the sole deciding factors in all decisions regarding John Watson, best friend, flatmate and colleague.

As John enters the flat, Sherlock notices instantly that John is… troubled? ...thoughtful? Both? It’s clear from the line between his brows that something is bothering him. The way he holds the arm of his bad shoulder a little bit closer to his body than usual tells Sherlock that he’s also anxious. The fact that he’s stopped on his way home to have crisps and mayo tells him that his friend had felt a strong urge to comfort himself with the familiar taste and smell.

"You’re bothered by something," Sherlock says as John winces a bit while hanging up his jacket.

"Stressful day, that’s all," John replies with an attempt at relaxed tone that wouldn’t even have fooled Anderson.

(Okay, it would probably have fooled Anderson. No need to insult John’s acting skills so deeply.)

"You are not to move away from this flat," Sherlock says matter-of-factly, in what he hopes is a
reassuringly unemotional tone.

"I’m not?"

"No. You are not. I realised that I ought to spell that out for you, even if it would seem to be quite obvious in light of recent conclusions."

"Oh, yes. Quite obvious. Of course. I got that the same second you said that there’d be no more… eh, kissing."

John’s little talk had begun with familiar irony, but towards the end it culminates into something more like hesitant embarrassment. It’s fascinating.

"Yes, exactly," Sherlock retorts, pretending not to have noticed John’s irony. It's an old game for them now, originated from the time when Sherlock had honestly not been all too certain as to when John was being ironic. People had seldom been ironic with Sherlock before. These days, Sherlock can hear the irony in John’s voice in the first syllables he speaks. It's just one of those ways in which they’ve in time grown accustomed to each other.

"So, just to be on the safe side, let me see if got this right?"

Sherlock makes a sanctioning nod to answer this.

"You’re sexually attracted to me..."

"Can you just let that one go? I understand that this amuses you, but I can ensure you..."

John interrupts him, shaking his head.

"I am not making fun of you, Sherlock. I would never do that, not about these things. I hope you trust me to respect you enough not to do that."

Sherlock simply nods, aiming for an uninterested expression.

"I simply need to get this settled. So, you experience certain… physical sensations toward..."

"John! You’re not funny."

Sherlock’s just a few steps away from entering into an epic sulk out of sheer embarrassment.

"Not aiming to be, just trying to find a way to say this without making you uncomfortable."

"Well, that’s not going to happen, just get on with it so we can attempt deletion of this conversation later on."

"Alright, at any rate, you’re attracted to me, therefore we’re done kissing and you’re not throwing me out?"

"That seems to cover it, yes."

"I know you’ll call me an idiot, but I am too tired to care, so I’ll say this anyway; I don’t understand."

"Of course you don’t, you are, as you just so helpfully said, an idiot."

"So I will not get an explanation for this?"
Sherlock steeples his fingers and looks thoughtful for just a few seconds before answering a determined ‘nope’ with emphasis on the ‘p’, then heading to the kitchen, putting on the electric kettle and finding two mugs.

John doesn’t follow him into the kitchen; judging by the sounds from the sitting room he’s busy with melting into his chair. Sherlock prepares the two mugs of tea and returns to the sitting room. John holds out his hand when he sees Sherlock approach and Sherlock hands him his mug.

"Ta."

Sherlock nods in acknowledgment before returning to the kitchen and resuming his latest experiment at the kitchen table. It's not a very interesting one, but it serves the purpose of keeping him occupied while not seeming to be anything out of the ordinary. Sherlock gathers that John needs some amount of ordinary right now. He dislikes John being tense. And threatening to take away almost everything that makes John feel safe is certain to make him tense. Sherlock scolds himself for having been so thoughtless earlier. The relief of finding that it was nothing more than sexual attraction that had made him feel odd in John’s presence is certainly making him think clearer. Now, everything can go back to normal.

Well, except for the inconvenience of dealing with his untamed transport’s physical manifestations of sexual attractions, of course. He's definitely not feeling a twitch in his cock at the thought of John’s hands, as they are splayed out around his mug at this moment. Absolutely not.

"Sherlock?"

Sherlock's interrupted by this meaningless mention of his name. He makes no attempt to hide his sigh.

"I was at the A&E today. At Barts."

Oh, that’s right. Sherlock had wondered how long it would take before John finally made a move towards the job he’d been thinking about these couple of weeks.

"I see."

"I was offered a job there."

"That doesn’t surprise me. They must have a hard time finding someone who likes being exposed to A&E patients for that ludicrous joke of a salary."

Sherlock is still not looking up from his microscope, trying not to smile to himself. He's in fact very pleased that John has finally taken this step. The locum work was a waste of someone of John’s talent and capability. At the A&E he would at least be challenged once in a while, and perhaps not be so appallingly domesticated and bored as he was at the locum. Besides, he might even stumble across one or two interesting cases while at the A&E. This is indeed good news.

"Yeah, thanks, now I feel truly special for getting the offer."

"But it’s true."

"I know," sighs John. "But I’m still excited."

"Good for you."

"So what do you think?"
Sherlock looks up from the eye piece and feels truly confused for a moment.

"What does it matter what I think? It’s your job. You’re still going to be away at inconvenient times when I could have use for you at The Work, you’ll still go out and be social with those boring people you work with and you’ll still worry about the rent since your pay check is a joke. The only difference to me is that you might not die of boredom quite as fast at the A&E."

John looks at him, as if searching for something in his face. Then he lights up.

"Well, that’s true. I had already made up my mind, but that little speech of approval would have been helpful if I hadn’t."

John is smiling, and Sherlock fights the urge to join him. When John truly smiles it’s hard for everyone not to beam with him. And John smiled like that now. Sure, it’s mostly because of a boring job, but part of it could also be attributed as Sherlock’s work. He’s made John sure of his decision and he’s settled John’s worries about having to leave the flat. Now, John is, just for a moment, happy. Sherlock had long ago found that he is fascinated by Happy John. It's emotional and dull, really, but Sherlock gathers that these kinds of disturbances comes with the whole friendship thing. He can take that in order to have John as a friend.

He can, however, not be quite be as accepting of his penis’ response to John’s smile.

He returns to his eyepiece, cursing inwardly.

That night, Sherlock’s so fed up with his own sappy emotions that when he hears John scream in his sleep, then pant, then going to the bathroom to drink water, Sherlock tries his best not to feel anything but curiosity.

What is John dreaming of now? John never talks about his dreams. It's clear, however, that they are about the war. Afghanistan. Most likely about the events leading up to John’s shoulder getting pierced by a bullet that shattered the scapula. The dreams has no significant pattern, but seems to increase their frequency when John is stressed or has been in situations that reminds him of the battlefield. Which happen to be quite a few situations, as he lives with Sherlock Holmes. Still, John doesn’t seem to avoid these situations, stoically facing things he surely must know will trigger his nightmares. He never mentions his dreams, but if Sherlock would ever miss a nightmare by being out of the flat, John’s temper the next morning will tell him in no uncertain terms what had occured during John’s sleep that night. John is not as evenly tempered as people like to assume. In fact, he's in some regards worse than his flatmate when it comes to having sudden outbursts. Mrs. Hudson learned this very early on, and has, as always, found a cheery way to deal with it. If John has had bad dreams during the night, he will seem like himself in the morning, until he suddenly has a fit and then quickly gets himself together again. He will not apologize, much to Sherlock’s relief, but he will make extra effort to be patient with Sherlock afterwards. Sometimes he will have three outbreaks in one morning, only to regain his calm again in a matter of seconds. Sherlock finds this, as so many other things about John, to be quite fascinating. He’d said so out loud once and had been given reason never to utter anything like it again.

Sherlock lies in his own bed and listens to John’s shuffling footsteps from the bathroom and back to his bedroom. John is unlikely to fall asleep again anytime soon. Neither will Sherlock. It seems like the thought of John, in his bedroom, in his bed, dressed only in tshirt and pants, is enough to remind Sherlock’s uncooperative body of the neglected half-erection from earlier that evening, when John
had smiled and talked about his job offer. And Sherlock had spent the following hour feeling somewhat uncomfortable while continuing his experiment.

He hasn’t reached a decision as to if he's going to stop masturbating in order to stop any unwelcome Pavlovian hormonal responses towards John caused by intense orgasms while thinking about John. So for now, he guesses that he's free to do as he likes.

With just a bit reluctance, he reaches into his bedside drawer and decides that a long and prostate-stimulating wank might be the just what he needs in order to forget any sappy emotions that he refuses to acknowledge and any memories of post-traumatic nightmares waking his friend up.

Chapter End Notes

This is the first chapter in this fic that is illustrating symptoms of a diagnosis that the author acknowledges that a character has. In this case, it’s the canon PTSD of John Watson.

A summary of PTSD, according to Wikipedia:

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may develop after a person is exposed to one or more traumatic events, such as sexual assault, warfare, serious injury, or threats of imminent death. The diagnosis may be given when a group of symptoms, such as disturbing recurring flashbacks, avoidance or numbing of memories of the event, and hyperarousal, continue for more than a month after the occurrence of a traumatic event. Most people having experienced a traumatizing event will not develop PTSD. People who experience assault-based trauma are more likely to develop PTSD, as opposed to people who experience non-assault based trauma such as witnessing trauma, accidents, and fire events. Children are less likely to experience PTSD after trauma than adults, especially if they are under ten years of age. War veterans are commonly at risk for PTSD.

* * * * *

PTSD criteria in this chapter:

This chapter is meant to illustrate one of the diagnostic criterias of PTSD, according to DSM - IV - TR:
D. Persistent symptoms of increased arousal (not present before the trauma), as indicated by two (or more) of the following:
(1) difficulty falling or staying asleep
(2) irritability or outbursts of anger
(3) difficulty concentrating
(4) hypervigilance
(5) exaggerated startle response

Not all of these symptoms were illustrated in this chapter, but since the requirement is two or more symptoms, I'd say that the criteria is somewhat illustrated. Well, as illustrated as something can be when illustrated by fictional characters...

Nightmares and trouble sleeping was illustrated in this chapter, as was, in some parts, the trouble of concentrating and some hypervigilance. John's also known to have a
temper at times, and is alert whenever there's danger around.
ADHD Criteria, part I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Kissing Sherlock is now apparently out of the question, no one is getting kicked out of 221B and John has resigned from his locum work and accepted the job offer at Barts A&E, starting in two days.

In other words, life is actually perking up. John has cleaned out his desk at the locum and is heading back to Baker Street, only feeling a passing hint of annoyance over the drizzle that’s going to soak him soon if he doesn’t get indoors within minutes. Sherlock might not quite be his usual unguarded self, not yet, but he is surely getting there. And John can deal with his own somewhat confused thoughts on the matter later, when things has settled between them again, once more going back to easy partnership, friendship and flatsharing.

For now, there are other things to focus on, while waiting for things to return to normal. His first shift at the A&E, for starters.

The first thing that happens at John’s first shift at the A&E is that an elderly woman, who seems to suffer from dementia, takes his hand with impressive firmness and holds on to it tight, then looks him into the eyes for several seconds before finally asking him where he’s parked her car.

After that, everything that follows seemed to make just as much sense.

His first shift is supposed to be one where he just follows a colleague and observes, perhaps helping with some minor things, but primarily just finding his way around the A&E, learning the routines, meeting the colleagues and adjusting to his new workplace.

None of that happens. Well, he does meet a lot of colleagues. But other than that, there is not much of his shift that corresponds with what Mrs. Leighton had promised him when he’d accepted the job and agreed to start slowly.

It turns out that the doctor he was scheduled to follow and observe is home with a sick kid, and the doctor that he is next assigned to is stuck doing an operation. After somewhat reluctantly presenting these facts to him, Mrs. Leighton had asked how he felt about maybe following and observing a nurse instead. He had found himself to be a bit confused, because although he had all the respect a doctor ought to have towards nurses (and that is not an insignificant amount of respect), their routines and line of work is in major parts totally different to that of his own as a doctor, but he willingly accepted. After all, a nurse might be way more capable of showing him around in a somewhat structured manner, something that’s not especially likely when following a fellow doctor. Mrs. Leighton had looked at him for a second, then tilted her head with a little smile.

"And how are you at handling chaos?"

"Very good," John replied without hesitation.

"I hope you mean it," Mrs. Leighton had said with a quick shrug and then lifted the phone on her desk.
Mrs. Leighton might have exaggerated just a bit when she said ‘chaos’, but John can clearly see her point. While he would never call his new colleague ‘chaotic’, since she obviously doesn't lack a certain form of structure and priorities, he would perhaps settle for ‘intense’.

When he is first introduced to the nurse Mrs. Leighton had called to her office, his first thought is that the person he's shaking hands with is possibly (a very young) nurse-in-training, since she couldn’t be more than 17 years old. It soon emerges that she’s been a nurse for three years, that she’s worked at the A&E for two of those years and that she must be at least 25 years old. Mrs. Leighton explains the situation to the nurse, who interrupts her halfway through her explanation and smilingly says that she gets the picture. After that, she turns to John and asks if he's ready.

Selma Ivanovski is 5’2” of impulses, words and fidgeting, and John is surprised by how relaxed that makes him feel. She is nothing like the efficient, well-spoken and discrete nurses that he’d worked with at the locum. She is clearly attempting some form of structure as she shows him around at the A&E, but she's constantly interrupting herself to comment on something they see or to greet other staff members and introduce them to John. It's obvious, even to John, that one or two of the other nurses and doctors seem just a little bit patronizing when they look at Selma. That fact alone almost makes John decide that he will grow to like this whirlwind of a colleague.

Following Selma through the different rooms and storages he soon learns where equipment is kept, why the building's construction is faulty, that Friday afternoon is everybody’s least favorite shift and which coffee machines are most frequently broken. He is asked questions about what he most enjoyed about working with health care. When he, amongst other things, answers something about never knowing what to expect he is instantly rewarded by another question as they enter into a stockroom, in the search of some paraphernalia needed at one of the emergency rooms.

"So, are you one of the adrenaline junkies?"

Her face shows nothing but curiosity as she gathers two boxes of syringes and places them in his arms as she continues to search for more.

When she notices his hesitation to answer, she turns around with an unapologetic smile.

"Oh, I didn’t mean it like it was a bad thing! Most of us here at the A&E are adrenaline junkies. I was just wondering."

Her messy, dark-brown hair falls into her face when she kneels down to search the lowest shelf for some more syringes. He silently wonders why she doesn’t keep her hair in a ponytail as the others with longer hair does in the A&E. He is pretty sure there are hygienic recommendations at the A&E as well as everywhere else. Then he lets out a laugh at the familiarity of it all, the feeling of not being the odd one out, as he’d in many ways been at the locum.

"Yeah, I am. Totally. After all, I invaded Afghanistan."

That earns him a quizzical look, than a surprised laugh.

"Oh, that’s a whole new level of adrenaline junkie, this can be interesting," she says merrily and grants him two more boxes of syringes before pointing at the door to indicate that they are done here.

When John leaves the A&E several hours later he is dizzy from all the new information. New buildings, people and structures have always made him a bit overwhelmed, and he leans against the
brick wall of a nearby shop before heading to the tube. The fresh air makes him feel almost like he is sobering up after a very indulgent night out.

As he reaches for his Oyster card he also retrieves his phone, which he usually keeps on him at all times (because of Sherlock and The Work) but had left in his jacket that night. He has one new message, but it isn’t from Sherlock. Without knowing why, it worries him. He reads the short message from Mike Stamford, asking him how his first day back at Barts has been. He smiles and types out a quick reply before putting his phone back into his jacket and taking the steps down to the platform, longing for a shower, something easy to eat and then bed. He’ll be back at the A&E following day, which is a Thursday. This time he will not be following anyone, but working as one of the team. Until then, he needs his rest.

Selma had said that Thursday is usually a pretty calm night, and he hopes that this will prove to be true tomorrow. Selma had also said that if he could handle bombs and gunfire, he could certainly handle annoying patients and odd objects inserted into odd parts of the body. At this, she started to rapidly name just some of the more odd things that had been taken out from different body-openings at the A&E. He knows that this is a common thing to laugh about at hospitals; he’s done his fair share of internships and then some. Still, it’s something about how Selma just blurts it out without hardly knowing him and looking utterly intrigued, like other people’s weirdness is the most exciting thing she knows, which had made him question if his new colleague had any social filters. She is without a doubt friendly, and polite (almost overly so), but she also seems to just speak whatever enters her mind, which is usually not things you’d normally bring up when introducing a new colleague to his new place of employment. Well, this is true, but not when she is with a patient. She is still intense then, and also a bit loud from time to time, but most of all she’s professional, and never cold in the way that some of the staff seem to be around certain categories of patients. She just seem to feel at home with almost any situation that requires her focus, but also to lose most of it as soon as the situation is over, going back to being fidgety, interrupting herself and going the wrong direction when aiming for a certain room or instrument. It’s not what he is used to in a professional setting, but he doesn’t mind, except for when he sometimes needs to think, but her voice doesn’t stop. Still, it doesn’t seem like she is ever bothered when he loses track of her conversation. For that, he is grateful.

He’d left the A&E feeling overwhelmed but content. He could probably find some sort of place for himself there. And he desperately needs a place for himself that is just his.

Something that is certainly not ‘just his’ is his laptop. When he returns to the flat, Sherlock lies sprawled across the sofa with John’s laptop on his stomach and some biscuits in a ripped-open package beside him on the floor. John can’t help his small smile, but Sherlock doesn’t look up, just continues to scroll through whatever email he’s currently reading before finally looking up as John enters the sitting room.

"You didn’t get that soft introduction that you were promised."

"Nope."

John puts the kettle on, noticing that it’s still warm from when Sherlock last made tea or instant coffee. He proceeds to the bathroom, just throwing off his trousers, picking up his pyjama bottoms and slipping them on with a content sigh before returning to the kitchen. There, he realises that the cord to the kettle isn’t plugged in. He plugs it in and tries to turn the kettle on again, this time rewarded with an almost instant sound from it.

"You still liked it. Your shoulder isn’t bothering you, and you are tired, but you lack the line between
your brows that appears when you’re troubled or hesitant.”

"Correct," John answers and opens the fridge, hoping to find some yoghurt. There is none.

"It felt good for you to be able to once again feed your adrenaline addiction through your line of employment,” Sherlock continues, now putting John’s laptop aside at the coffee table, and stretching before sitting up and brushing crumbs from his dressing gown, making John sigh over the amount of crumbs now nesting in the carpet in front of the sofa.

"You’re not the first one to point that out to me today."

John is always pleased to see Sherlock in any state of surprise, and he knows what that slight lifting of eyebrow, almost unnoticeable, means.

"A female."

"Yes."

"But not a potential romantic partner. Why… Older? Married?"

"Way too young. Looks like seventeen."

"A colleague, but probably not another doctor..."

"A nurse."

"Of course. A nurse who observed your addiction to danger."

"I would rather say that she figured that most of the people working in the A&E were adrenaline junkies, herself included."

Sherlock hums noncommittally and waves his hand to indicate that John should move aside, as he reaches to the cupboard for two clean mugs. There is only one, and Sherlock looks from the mug to John, and then back.

"Fine, I’ll wash one."

John isn’t even in the mood to nag about it, and Sherlock finds John’s favorite tea and puts it on the counter side by side with his own.

"So, how about you, anything on?" John asks as he lets the hot water rinse one of the mugs that has gathered by the sink.

"Molly had an interesting corpse today, I went there to look at it. Turned out it was not interesting at all."

John lets this piece of not-really-information pass, pours the boiled water into their mugs and leans against the counter as he lets the tea bags float for a few minutes.

"So we need to find you a new case, then?"

Sherlock chooses not to respond to this as he fidgets with his mug, lifting and sinking his teabag into it.

"Should we take a look at the blog, see if anything interesting has been submitted? I’ve read some of them on the subway, but I never know when I’ll find a missing rabbit that might interest you."
"Please, the rabbit didn’t interest me. It turned out that it should have, but I missed that at that point."

"I should really record all our conversations, so I can have things like that saved for eternity. Sherlock, admitting that he’d missed something. That’s something I won’t hear every day."

Instead of making a snide remark back, Sherlock seems to get lost in thought at that, leaving his teabag in the mug far longer than advisable. John settles down at the kitchen table, just moving a few vials and beakers aside to make room for his mug. It must have been a couple of days since they last attempted to eat in the kitchen, judging by the state of the table.

John lets his gaze fall on Sherlock for a few seconds, seeing that his friend is clearly still lost in his thoughts. For one second, John considers to go and take Sherlock’s teabag out of the mug in an attempt to save the tea, but then figures that if Sherlock is thinking, it is not very likely that he’ll remember to drink his tea anyway. Instead, John settles for browsing news sites on his phone while waiting for his tea to cool off.

"John?"

Sherlock is now back in 221B again, apparently. John looks up from his phone and meets his friend’s eyes, observing the slight wrinkle between his brows, noticing that Sherlock had commented on the lack of wrinkle between John’s own brows just a few minutes earlier. Apparently, worry is to be expected in this flat, since both men instantly checks each other for signs of it.

For just a moment, Sherlock looks a bit lost. Then he looks down at his mug, frowns at the beverage, and puts it aside.

"Yes?"

"Oh. Never mind."

And with that, the almost-conversation seems to be over. Sherlock pours out his now too strong tea and flips the teabag in the bin before putting the kettle on again.

John stares at his own tea, unsure of what just happened. Or, rather, what didn’t happen. It had not been quite as effortless as usual between them over the last week, but that was to be expected under the circumstances. John had been ready to attempt a relationship of a more sexual nature with a bloke, afraid to lose him, no matter his own sexuality. Sherlock had blurted out his attraction towards John and had then put a stop to all further touching. It ought to be tense.

It is tense.

As Sherlock gets a new tea bag out and waits for the kettle to re-boil, John thinks about how close they still are to losing all this. Things have been put out of balance; both of them have showed some of their cards, neither of them comfortable with the knowledge of how exposed they are. They are walking on thin ice now, metaphorically, and it's frail. If more things turn up between them to tip the balance, things might not be so easy to adjust back into balance once again. And that would be it.

"Sherlock?"

Sherlock turns back towards John, once again leaning against the counter.

"Are we… alright?"

John is ashamed over how pathetic his question sounds there in the space between them.
"Why wouldn’t we be?” Sherlock asks, A carefully neutral expression on his face.

"I was thinking about the, ehm, events of last week."

"Oh."

"Indeed."

"So, are we alright?"

"I have no idea how to answer that for the both of us, but as far as I am concerned, I see no problem."

"Good."

"Yes. And you?"

"I’m still a little confused, but it’ll settle."

"What is it that confuses you?"

"Well, the whole… kissing thing, I suppose."

"Yes, it must be very confusing, I just told you everything there was to know, how confusing."

Sherlock has a bitter tone under his sarcasm that John doesn’t miss.

"Except, you didn’t. You told me the conclusions, but not how you’d reached them."

"It’s hardly significant for you. You have the conclusions and you have my promise that I will not try to make you move out of this flat again. What more do you need?"

"Eh… Nothing, really. I guess I’m just still trying to figure this whole thing out."

"Don’t. It’s a waste of time. You’re better off concentrating on something more useful, and less out of date. The Work, for example. Or perhaps that blog of yours, you might want to learn how to type more eff…"

"Sherlock," John interrupts. "I get it. Fine, we’ll drop it."

Sherlock makes a distant nod and starts to walk towards his bedroom. John finds that he is desperately trying to stop himself from saying what he knows is soon going to blurt out of his mouth, but it's no use. It comes out fast, like there's no time to lose.

"Just, you know. If you ever need to… try that again…"

John had really tried to stop himself from saying that. He had. But the words come out anyway, and now they are hanging there in the air, perhaps waiting to fall and be what finally tips the scale and ruins everything that they’ve become to each other. Just because John couldn’t keep his mouth shut. Shit, he doesn’t even know why he’d said that. Except, that he, for some reason, really needed to. He needs to know why he’s been considering this on a semi-conscious level during these last days of not-kissing. And he needs to know if Sherlock has thought about it as well, or if he's just tried to delete the whole thing.

Sherlock looks at him, expressionless. Except, when it comes to Sherlock, that lack of expression is as expressive as any of his gestures. He's unsure. Still, his voice is steady and cold as he speaks.
"You are not gay."

John waits for him to continue.

"I fail to see why you’d subject yourself to that, when it’ll continue to fail to bring you any physical pleasure whatsoever. And I fail to see why I would want to inflict myself on someone who clearly lacks any interest as to the activity, based on my genitals and chromosomes. I might be selfish, as so often stated, but I am not inclined to engaging in physical contact with someone who finds those activities repulsive due to me not being a woman. That, at least, I am very well aware of being something that is, as you put it, Bit Not Good."

Sherlock’s tone is sharp and icy. John almost wishes that his friend would just scream at him, or run off as he sometimes does when upset by something John did. Instead, his friend just stands there, eye contact never failing.

"What if I didn’t find the kissing ‘repulsive’? What if I am just extremely confused by it all?"

It’s almost like a staring competition. Both of them refuse to be the one who breaks eye contact. John bites his lip. Sherlock frowns.

"I am not capable of any relationship of the romantic nature, neither am I interested in one. Anything I’d be interested in would be purely physical, and it’s not even guaranteed that I’d be interested in that for any length of time, or that I would like to engage in more sexual acts, would it come to that. I don’t see why you’d go to the trouble of contradicting your sexuality, and for what, exactly?"

"For knowing."

"Go to a bar, pick up a guy. Find out."

"You berk, it’s not about guys in general."

"Then why bother? I have nothing to offer you that you couldn’t get from a woman. A woman, for whom you might actually feel sexual attraction."

"I might feel that for you as well."

"’Might’ being the keyword in that sentence," Sherlock says sharply, still refusing to break eye contact.

"What’s it to you, then? You’re sure you’re not going to develop any feelings for me other than friendship. You claim to be attracted to me, so it ought to be just win, no risk for you."

"No risk?" Sherlock is now visibly upset. "Just the risk of feeling like a freak, trying to impose myself on someone who’s my friend. My until very, very recently extremely straight friend, who might think this is a good way of saving our friendship. I’d be using you, and you’d resent me for it, and I’d share that sentiment."

"You are not imposing anything on anyone, Sherlock," John says with a determination he didn’t even knew he that felt, as he continues. "It’s me who’s asking. And maybe, we’ll find that it doesn’t work for me. Then we’ll drop it. You won’t be responsible for having caused anything, and I won’t ever feel resentment towards you. You risk nothing, Sherlock. I have no hopes or expectation on this being anything else than a possible physical thing, as you have made that clear, so you won’t be breaking any hope."

"Would you? Otherwise?" Sherlock’s tone is slightly curious, but still carefully neutral.
"What? Hope on a relationship?"

Sherlock nods, deeply focused.

"No. I don’t think I’d be ready for that. And that is not mainly because I’ve always thought of myself as straight. It’s because of other reasons. But I wouldn’t mind trying kissing again. Not promising that I will want to go any further, but..."

"That’s acceptable. I might not want to go any further either. This is, by the way, probably a ridiculously lousy idea."

"I agree. Shall we...?"

And John is not quite sure how it all happened, but here they are, again, facing each other, ready to possibly screw up the best friendship he’s ever had. And shit, he truly must be as badly addicted to adrenaline as has recently been stated by two different individuals. Because this makes no sense, and he is still going for it.

Chapter End Notes

First; Wikipedia:
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD, similar to hyperkinetic disorder in the ICD-10) is a developmental neuropsychiatric disorder in which there are significant problems with executive functions (e.g., attentional control and inhibitory control) that cause attention deficits, hyperactivity, or impulsiveness which is not appropriate for a person’s age. These symptoms must begin by age six to twelve and persist for more than six months for a diagnosis to be made. In school-aged individuals inattention symptoms often result in poor school performance.

* * * * *

ADHD criteria in this chapter:

This might have been one of the least "theme-focused" chapters of this fic so far, partly because I used a newly introduced OC for this illustration of a few criteria for ADHD. In this chapter, I chose to use a wide range of criteria, basically because it was more illustrative that way; having Selma only displaying some fidgeting might have been stretching the definition of a symptom a bit too much, without any other symptoms to add to it. ADHD is not a disease, it's a significant variation ('and', says the author: 'it's a variation, not a disability') of normal neurological function in some parts of the brain. As most neuropsychiatric diagnoses, it exists on a spectrum, and it's always complicated to draw a line between 'displaying some of the symptoms' and 'fills enough criteria and is suffering from these symptoms on a level that requires a diagnosis'.

Now, the criterias used in this chapter, all from DSM - IV - TR:
Following are from the Hyperactivity part of the criteria:
(a) often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat
(e) is often "on the go" or often acts as if "driven by a motor"
(f) often talks excessively
And these are from the Impulsiveness part:
(g) often blurts out answers before questions have been completed
A person with ADHD might, like Selma, might be seen as a bit 'unusual' or 'too much', but could just as well be directing all these symptoms inwards, which would make the condition harder to detect. Internal restlessness (often a sense of slight panic while not stimulated enough, often a whirlwind of thoughts but problems focusing on any of them) is often much more distressing than external (like fidgeting or being on the run). A person with ADHD might also have a high level of 'compensation', which is very common among above average intelligence persons with this variation. They will be able to 'hide' or 'make up for' some of the variations in behaviour and cognition that ADHD leads to; but it comes with a price; it's exhausting to control your movements and impulses for long, and suppressing your natural instincts. This can often lead to depression and anxiety. Selma, in this chapter, can control (or doesn't get as a affected by) some of her 'symptoms' when in stressful situations where there's a lot of adrenaline, or when she really goes in to a role as a nurse, or when she knows that she needs to. On other occasions she doesn't bother to, since it's not necessary in order to do her job well, which might be hard if fidgeting constantly when with a stressed or anxious patient, for example. Working at an A&E, or similar intense and adrenaline fueled professions, are common with ADHD, as is creative professions with lots of independence as to how you work. A person with ADHD has a hard time regulating their level of wakefulness, which leads to a lot of restlessness in order to keep the brain from slumbering, but in an environment with lots of adrenaline, that's often not a problem.
Sensory hypo- and hyper reactivity

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I agree. Shall we...?"

Sherlock is clear about the fact that they probably shouldn’t.

If John later on decides that this isn’t something he actually wants, the erection related problems might just get too prominent and distracting. And even though it seems like there’s no risk of any further developments of a more disturbing and emotional kind, it might not be wise to engage in these kind of activities with the only friend you have, and is ever likely to have. Most importantly, the risk might be slight, but there’s a (certainly almost insignificant) risk that John will develop some sort of… expectations. That would indeed be most unfortunate, since Sherlock has no inclination whatsoever to fulfill any kind of expectations.

John’s gaze doesn’t falter. Sherlock wonders if John is aware that he's absently biting his lip. Maybe it isn’t absentmindedly. Perhaps it's to trigger some kind of response in Sherlock. He wouldn’t know; he's never quite understood the mechanics of flirting. Or foreplay. Actually, he doesn't recall ever having experienced foreplay. Might prove to be future area of research. Sex and attraction are contributing or triggering an unproportional number of crime considering how little time people actually spend having sex, according to research. And John has stopped biting his lip and rises from the chair with a trace of hesitance in his movements. He moves towards Sherlock, and with just a few steps left between them, his posture changes, becoming more determined, looking almost as he does on those occasions when they are entering a building where they know the suspect is likely to be found. Ready. Alert. Uncompromising.

Sherlock finds himself shuddering slightly without any obvious cause. Embarrassing, but most likely unnoticeable. He should probably do something now. Not leave it all up to John. He should at least make a conscious decision about this.

John’s hands aren’t as hesitant or wary as they had been on previous occasions resembling this. They grip firmly on Sherlock’s upper arms while John presses himself as close as he can get without actually touching Sherlock anywhere but his arms.

"You are not imposing anything on me, are we clear on that?"

He looks at Sherlock as if willing him to accept this as a fact. Sherlock is unsure whether he can trust those words or not, but is not inclined to object at this point. He would never impose himself on another person with any kind of sexual or romantic aspirations, he can... [deleted]

[deleted]

"Sherlock?"

John’s voice, wondering. Sherlock must have blanked out for a few moments.

"Yes?"

"Is this okay?"

Sherlock nods, not quite sure if he really ought to do something else. But John stands there, very
close, very focused. Focused on him. His eyes' focus shifting between Sherlock’s eyes, mouth and…
his neck? Sherlock isn’t sure what to make of that. Instead, he makes some kind of decision, a
decision he thinks he might unconsciously have made a few days ago.

He leans in, lets his hands find their way to the back of John’s head and presses his lips hard against
John’s, not waiting for any sign of reciprocation before pressing himself against all of John. He can
feel the unfamiliar firmness and pressure from another person’s muscles, bones, skin and fat against
his own, a feeling that makes him feel like he’s had a instant release of oxytocin through out his
entire nervous system. His body both relaxes and tenses up, and he's surprised that his reaction is to
press even closer to John, his head in a firm grip as he keeps pressing their mouths together.

John’s hands seem to catch on. They find their way into Sherlock’s hair, first almost curiously, then
letting the fingers clasp the curls at the same time as John tilts his head, opens his mouth and makes
an unarticulated sound as his tongue presses into his friend’s mouth. Sherlock feels the same thrill
along his spine as he had done the last time, and the feeling causes him to press his own tongue
against John’s and it's all wet, warmth and textures. Lingual papillae on the tongue, the mucosa of
the oral cavity and the sharpness of teeth, all creating an astonishing mixture of sensory impressions.
The tastes are too faint to distinguish, but there's a slight hint of bitterness mixed with something
that's almost like sucrose. And John’s tongue slides against his own, and it's humid and hot and
almost too much.

He might have made one or two sounds for himself; Sherlock isn't quite sure from whom the distant
sound comes as he presses his pelvis against John’s lower belly. The sensation is almost consuming,
making him catch his breath, but his breath is in John’s mouth, and breathing beccomes complicated
and fantastic all at the same time. John deepens the kiss further while tugging just a little at
Sherlock’s hair, and the blend of sensations causes something inside Sherlock to come loose. Some
sort of correlation is suddenly formed between two different points of data, the first one being what’s
happening just now, feeling John’s oral cavity with his tongue, pressing against John and feeling
John’s pulse through all layers of clothing. The second one being the intense atmosphere and
immediate rawness of all the masterbatory fantasies Sherlock’s ever had. It's like a switch being
flipped almost without warning, and Sherlock's never experienced anything this quite like this. The
two points of data merge into one, and Sherlock finds that he's both in the uninhibited state of his
fantasies and in the very palpable reality of having another person’s body and breath and pulse
pressed against him at the very same time. It shouldn’t be possible, it's never happened before, but it's
happening now and it's saturating every nerve ending in his entire body.

Sherlock's distantly aware that he’s been making noises and he's very much aware of how the
movements of John’s tongue cause reactions in his genitals. His erection's gone from half-erect to
fully erect and he's not quite sure when that happened, but he really needs some pressure or friction
against it at this very minute. John is sucking on his lower lip, and it's odd and it's making the urge to
grind against John even more insistent. Without even having made a decision about it, one of
Sherlock’s hands finds its way down and in between them, fumbling and then palming John’s cock
through his trousers.

John jolts and exclaims something that sounds suspiciously like a curse, but the syllables get lost
between tongues and lips and Sherlock doesn’t really need to know. He can feel John’s cock twitch,
can feel blood filling it rapidly and he can feel the slight tremor in his own hand. John is hard, and it's
because of him. It might be an odd thing to feel proud of, but what Sherlock feels isn't unlike pride.
John’s body reacts with arousal in contact with Sherlock’s body, and John might be straight, but…

"John?"

He breaks away from the kiss, rapidly breathing and feeling his own palpitations ringing in his ears.
His voice comes out sounding like a fusion of insecurity and urgency.

"John? Is this... Is this repulsive?"

And John grunts, actually grunts, before shaking his head. Then, without warning, John bites him. He bites Sherlock’s neck, not hard, but there’s teeth, and then he nibs and licks and it causes Sherlock to make decidingly undignified noises.

"And you?"

It’s John’s voice against the damp spot on his neck, more rasp than Sherlock has ever heard it before. He decides not to even attempt a verbal response, ashamed over the incoherence in his own voice. He moans, actually moans, instead, tilting his head to expose more of his neck.

John nibs, finding his way to the skin under Sherlock’s ear. He gets curls in his mouth and has to use a hand to push them away before resuming to lick. Sherlock’s not sure whether it’s most urgent to press his cock or his neck closer to John. He tries for both, but it isn’t working with the angle John’s leaning against him, so he settles for the neck for the moment.

John’s teeth scrape his skin, then he sucks hard, and Sherlock’s once again making sounds he hasn’t agreed to make. His hand finds its way back to John’s cock and squeezes it through the fabric. It isn’t enough, and soon his other hand joins in to fumble with John’s belt and trouser button. John reacts by pulling off Sherlock’s neck for a few seconds, just panting, before gripping Sherlock’s buttocks firmly and letting his fingers dig in, pressing the lower parts of their bodies more firmly together, and Sherlock feels John’s cock, covered by his own hand, mash into his thigh. His own erection is now pressing against his friend’s iliac crest, the feeling of it intense and immediate in a way that doesn’t resemble what he feels during masturbation in the slightest. Had it felt like that when he did this before, over a decade ago? He can’t really tell. There had been cocaine in his blood those times and it had merged and mixed with his perception in a way that made it impossible to tell what sensations that had been the drug and what sensations had been the reactions of being pressed to another body. Now he’s sober, he’s present and the body pressed to his is John’s. Is it different if you know the other person? It ought to be. Oxytocin and endorphins and…

John’s belt comes undone and Sherlock easily maneuvers the button and zip before he stops himself. The impulse had been to slide his hand into John’s pants, touching skin against skin and find out what it felt like to have John’s cock underneath his fingers, but just as he begins to slide his hand under the waistband of John’s pants, Sherlock realises doing so will most likely lead to actual sex. Naked, panting, orgasming, ejaculative sex.

"What?" John gasps, pulling away just an inch from the breaking of subcutaneous blood vessels he’d been engaging in on Sherlock’s neck. His breath's humid and warm against distressed skin.

Sherlock realises that he must have paused all of his movements, and for a second, he considers just resuming the kissing and pressing together of body parts, ignoring his thoughts. It is, after all, just about the only thing he can think about at the moment. Which, in itself, is magnificent. Having a mind like a highway without clearly separated lanes, where his thoughts don’t give a shit about following directions, Sherlock certainly isn’t spoiled by a state of singular focus too often. It's still messy and chaotic, and all of the sensory input seem to compete for his attention by increasing the level of awareness from each and everyone of his senses simultaneously, but there are no actual thoughts, just perception. And that's something Sherlock knows to treasure. But he also knows that John can probably read the hesitation in his body, so perhaps it's best just to get it out with. With any luck, his choice of words might actually cause John to physically react in a way that will be more telling than any verbal response. He meets John’s eyes, careful to keep his voice low and firm, without a hint of hesitation or desperation.
"Are we going to fuck, John?"

And there it is. Yes. Instant physical reaction to Sherlock’s use of profanity. Flicker of eyes, flinching in extremities and sharp intake of breath. And the eyes. Something that’s unmistakably lust, but also something that’s almost a flicker of fear.

"I don’t mean any penetrative acts. I am just asking if you’d be opposed of this leading to orgasms induced by any form of continued..."

John interrupts him with a surprisingly steady voice.

"No. Not opposed."

John's now darkened eyes keep on his for a few more moments, a steady gaze, a soldiers gaze. Then he instantly begins illustrating his answer by starting to tug at Sherlock’s belt while returning to lick, this time dipping his tongue into the jugular notch. Sherlock's just about to resuming his aborted attempts at finally getting a hold of John’s cock when John looks up at him again.

"I’ve never done this, just so you know. There’s a risk I might be crap at it."

He licks his lips, a nervous reflex. Sherlock tries to determine if John's nervous about being inexperienced or about maybe about becoming disgusted once in close contact with another man's penis. He hopes it's the first, but he can’t be sure.

"I am not entirely sure that I would be able to tell if you actually were."

It's the truth, but the dry statement makes John smile slightly for a second.

"So you've never…?"

"I have, but it’s irrelevant. Bedroom?"

At that, John’s hand once again begins tugging at Sherlock’s belt, and lips meet messily and uncoordinatedly before John gets the angle right and slips his tongue into Sherlock’s mouth. Sherlock doesn’t think about what he does, just starts sucking on John’s tongue, which first leads to a moan, but seconds later it leads to a rather pained noise, as he probably has been a bit too enthusiastic on the suction. He lets go and instead just presses his tongue into John’s mouth, while finally slipping his hand inside John’s pants. It's damp, warm and the hairs on John’s abdomen tickles the back of his hand in a way that almost makes him retract the hand again. Instead, he pushes his hand more firmly against John’s abdomen, replacing the tickling sensation with comforting pressure. It's the light touches, the tickling. He can’t stand it. It's like pain, but more scurrying. The uncomfortable sensation soon becomes irrelevant, because now he has a determined hold on John’s cock, and it's most delightfully warm, a damp and very heavy and palpable in his hand. John’s whole body reacts, which is also an enjoyable sensation, and John has to pull of the kiss and make a sharp intake of breath, muttering something and pressing into Sherlock’s hand.

John’s hand is suddenly done with the zipper and pressed against Sherlock’s erection through the fine material of his black pants. He jerked, glad that they aren’t kissing at the moment, because he needs air. Shallow, fast breaths are all he can manage. And as a reaction to John’s hand, his own hand begins to pull and press at John’s cock, as if by that willing the hand on his own to do the same.

He must have done that too rough as well, judging by John’s cry. Sherlock lets go immediately and John straightens up from his now a bit cringed position before speaking with a slightly breathy voice.

"Not… Quite that hard, mind you?"
And Sherlock's too embarrassed to look at him, but John just resumes his previous activities, now tugging his friend's pants and trousers down just enough to get his hand to Sherlock's cock. The sensation of a trembling hand holding his erection is overwhelming enough to wipe out the previous, devastating moment from Sherlock's mind. As John hesitantly begins to stroke, his fingers closed around Sherlock's cock, his flatmate has to hold himself back in order not to instantly thrust into the hand. Instead, he stumbles two strides back, dragging John with him, until he can grab the counter behind him and regain balance. John leans up, kisses him, then continues to nib and lick down his jaw and neck. All of Sherlock's senses are concentrated on the pressure and movement of John's hand, and he feels a tightening as his testicles draw up closer to his cock. A calloused hand works up and down his shaft, retracting his foreskin and then letting it cover the head partly again with steady strokes. For one second, Sherlock thinks that he maybe should do this to John as well, simultaneously, but he's incapable of doing so as John's thumb sweeps over the head of his cock and…

It floods through him, makes him clench and thrust and it's suddenly wet and spilling and-- Oh.

He can hear himself, but he's not quite conscious of making the sounds that he hears. It's too much and too exquisite and should never stop but he can’t stand it…

Sherlock manages to catch his breath, then shudders. And he can’t quite open his eyes but he can see the light from the lamp above the table through his eyelids and it's so warm and red and he… Breath. He has to breath again.

He gets his eyes open, feeling his chest heave and seeing John's hand leave his now spent cock, the hand sticky with semen and John not quite sure what to do with it. Sherlock wants to see if he could do this, if he could make John break down this way, but his arms are too heavy and his head seems too light.

John settles for drying his hand on his trousers, breathing hard and watching Sherlock. He reaches for his own cock, making a sound of relief as he begins to stroke himself. It's impossible to look away. Sherlock stares at the hand stroking and then at John's face, eyes falling shut and mouth doing something complicated that looks like a combination of a half-smile and pain.

One more breath, then Sherlock gets himself together just enough to close the inches that separates them and reaches down until his hand is covering John's. He follows John's movements, just adds a little pressure, but after a few strokes he can't retain himself from grabbing John's wrist and dragging his hand away before getting down on his knees, not quite remembering how it had felt the last time he did this. He takes a hold of John's cock, feeling the surprise in his friend's whole body as Sherlock leans in to taste.

He might be post-orgasmic, hazy and still a bit out of breath, but his sense of smell seems to be heightened rather than dulled by these circumstances. It is the smell. The smell of genitals, of sweat and precome and something else, something he can not recall the name for. The smell that makes his stomach twist in a reaction to the intense (and to Sherlock quite unsavory) smell that now seems to fill his nostrils, not leaving any passage for air. He takes a deep breath through his mouth, willing his stomach to settle. Before he can feel the smell of anything else, he hastily takes the head of John's cock into his mouth and sucks.

He hears the intake of breath, feels the shudder in John's body, hears another rather unarticulated curse and tries to breath through his nose, but the smell is too much. He sucks and swirls his tongue a little before pushing himself back just a little, letting the head slip out. Instead of resuming, Sherlock begins to stroke with the hand that's still holding John's cock in front of his face. It's instantly better, his nose now a few inches away from John's groin, which seems to be the source of the
overwhelming smell, rather than the cock itself. Sherlock needs to research what that is. He has a slight memory of the smells being one thing that had been quite nauseating during his previous sexual encounters, but he’d forgotten just how intense it was.

John’s hand comes down to join his, increasing the pace of the strokes and increasing the pressure slightly. Together they work John’s now leaking erection, and after two minutes, John makes a movement with his other hand as if trying to move Sherlock aside, but Sherlock stays put and watches with fascination as the man in front of him tenses, holds up on stroking for just a second and then comes, loud and… wet. Very wet.

Sherlock should not have been shocked, but even if he’d understood what was about to happen, he is still surprised at the sudden spray of warm, sticky fluid on the bridge of his nose, on the side of his nose and on his cheek. More continues to come. He closes his eyes just before one of them is hit, and he feels the liquid run down his cheek. It’s… warm. Warm, and odd. Not unpleasant, just new sensory input. Unexpected. He’s fantasised about it, but reality is very, very wet and runny in a way he hadn’t imagined it to be.

He carefully wipes the semen from his orbit with the back of his hand before finally looking up at John, who’s staring down at him, wide-eyed and panting.

They stare at each other for a few seconds, their breaths heavy and uneven. The lamp over the table now seems too sharp to Sherlock’s eyes, but he won’t break eye contact as he clears his throat. He can’t come up with anything to say, he finds, desperate to break the silent tension.

Instead, he turns to look at the back of his hand where white, creamy, sticky liquid is smeared. Carefully, he brings the hand closer to his face, tries to smell it discretely. It isn’t bad. He looks up at John, who’s still staring at him, and then back at his left hand, before running the index finger of his right hand through the fluid, testing the texture, which is mostly like his own semen. After a moment of hesitance, Sherlock brings the finger to his mouth to taste. He hears John’s shocked sound, and feels the taste, also much like his own. A bit bitter, slightly salty. Not much different in comparison.

He looks up to meet John’s eyes again, but the eyes are now locked on Sherlock’s mouth. Suddenly, Sherlock can’t stop himself from smiling. He catches John’s eyes as he gets to his feet with some effort, regaining control over his facial expression once again. John is there, steadying him as he gets up on feet. The warmth of the hands holding him makes him feel grounded in a way he’s not sure if he likes. But he finds that he does like John’s ragged breathing, his steadiness and silence. They don’t lock eyes again, just stands there, John still holding him under his arm. It’s Sherlock who backs away first, breaking the silence.

"Not repulsed, then?"

Chapter End Notes

First; Wikipedia:

The term "sensory integration dysfunction" was coined by the occupational therapist and psychologist Dr Anna Jean Ayres based on her research with children with learning
disorders. It refers to difficulties in emotional and behavioral regulation, attention, perceptual-motor functions, and learning related to atypical processing and integration of sensory information, particularly from the proximal senses (vestibular, proprioceptive and tactile systems). Sensory integrative disorder is not recognized as a stand-alone medical diagnosis in the classifications DSM or ICD. However, the new DSM5 lists sensory hypo- and hyper-reactivity among the criteria of autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

* * * *

Hypo- and hyper reactivity in this chapter:

In this chapter, sensory hypo- and hyper reactivity was used as a way to describe Sherlock's perceptions during a rather awkward but intense sexual situation. It's illustrated by his repulsion of some sensory data (some smells, tickling sensations), and need for stimulation in other senses (the way he dislikes gentle or fleeting touches, which is quite common amongst persons in the autism spectrum and related neurodivergences, his need to be grounded and feel steady, need for new input). The common feeling of being overwhelmed by too much sensory input was also used, though very mildly compared to how intense it can manifest itself, sometimes it can lead to sensory overload, which will make an appearance in some future chapter.

When one has these sensory integration difficulties, it can lead to many different problems and positive situations in life. You can have the most extraordinary sense of smell, which can sometimes be extremely helpful, or you can have a hard time judging how much muscle tension or strenght you need to move an object, which can be a cause of 'clumsiness'. It can be too bright in the sun, or it can be too dark everywhere, and the only way to stimulate your optic senses is to look at bright lights. Seeing people moving towards you, like on markets, can be very stressful if you have a hard time judging how fast they are going and what direction you're heading.

Sherlock will probably not be so bother by these things when he's on a case or playing the violin; there's something called 'hyperfocus' which might occur in autism spectrum disorders and a few other conditions, which means that the persons full focus is on just one thing; which might be rather unusual for someone with very divided attention or problems in filtering sensory data. When doing something you really can dive into, you might enter hyperfocus, and all the other distractions will be less invasive.
The shower.

If there's one place where John usually manages to sort through his thoughts, that would be in the shower. The steam, the sensation of the shower spray drumming against his back and presence of a locked door seems to be just the thing for clearing one's head. Since moving into Baker Street, John finds that the part where he has a door to lock is the most integral part of it. And so far, even his best friend seems to respect that one, single boundary of personal integrity. Now, more than ever, John needs his integrity. Because now, John’s let Sherlock into yet another part of his life. And he knows that he can’t let his friend invade his life completely, no matter how much Sherlock might enjoy that. Sherlock's an addict, and an easily bored genius on top of that. He's a benevolent dark hole that might swallow all of John if given the chance, without even intending to do so. It's just what Sherlock does; he's a cloud of intensity that consumes almost everything that comes close. And John is someone that has often allowed himself to get sucked in to other peoples’ lives. Because John needs the chaos, the direction and the needs of another person. But he shouldn’t. Because frankly, it's never done him any good in the end.

Half an hour ago, John'd had his very first gay sex, or whatever that might be classified as. He's still not gay, or even the slighest bit bisexual. But he’s engaged in sex with someone of his very own gender, so it probably still counts as gay sex. And now he's in the shower, not panicking half as much as he’d expected to do after something like this, which still leaves a whole lot of panicking. But it’s not so much the fact that Sherlock's male that's causing him to panic. In fact, the sex in itself had been… well, if still somewhat awkward, it hadn't been entirely bad. It had been uncoordinated, the kisses had mostly still been too forceful, and both his tongue and his cock are a bit sore after Sherlock’s over-estimation of the need for firmness during sexual encounters.

John had been relieved to find that getting hard had not been much of an issue. That could’ve led to a whole other level of awkwardness, since John was the one starting all of this. He hadn’t contradicted Sherlock’s statements about him not being gay and therefore not sexually attracted to Sherlock, and he wonders if Sherlock simply thinks that John has a serious case of denial, or if he accepts the fact that John is straight and doesn’t find this to be a problem as long as John consents to sex for his own, nebulous reasons. Perhaps Sherlock simply doesn’t care and just sees an opportunity to get have sex. Somehow, that last alternative doesn’t seem very likely to John, since Sherlock gets visibly upset at the mere thought of “imposing” something on John. He’d been uncharacteristically emotional about it, John remembers thinking at the time. Perhaps it's the sexual tension. It's pretty clear that Sherlock's nothing but very responsive to touch and he'd certainly been very eager when it came to making out.

It must have been obvious to Sherlock that John had reacted to the snogging. And even more obvious that John had enjoyed Sherlock’s hand on him. John's somewhat embarrassed by his reaction to seeing Sherlock Holmes on his knees, in front of him, tasting his cock. Shit. Sherlock, using his usually brilliant but unfailably rude mouth to gently taste John’s cock. That had been… intense. But Sherlock had pulled off and John wonders if it had simply been because his friend had satisfied his curiosity in regards to fellatio and therefore didn’t see the need to continue, or if he had wanted to accomplish both oral and manual sex during the same encounter. Both seem like reasonable explanations when it comes to Sherlock.

John rinses his hair out, increases the pressure of the shower spray and tries to relax again.
He's not sure that he wants to think about the end of the hand job quite yet.

Letting the water wash over him for a while longer, John soon realises that the water is slowly growing cold. Sherlock had been in the shower before him and probably used up most of the hot water.

Reluctantly, John turns the shower off, steps out of the shower and onto the wet floor (Sherlock never bothers with such mundane things as wiping up the pools of water on the floor after he’s showered), shivering at the loss of the hot steam in that had built up in the shower. He realises that he's actually rather knackered, and is pleased at the thought of how late it already is, because that means it will not seem like he's attempting to avoid Sherlock if he goes straight to bed. He can’t face his flatmate right now.

John slides up the stairs and into his room, closes the door behind him before he finally lets out a breath that he hadn't realised that he'd been holding.

The man in front of John had probably not planned on spending his 41st birthday in quite this way, but some things don’t really go according to plan. Instead of being out on a pub round with his friends, the 41 year old man is currently sitting on a hospital bed in an exam room at the A&E, an impressive amount of napkins and toilet paper wrapped around his hand. It doesn’t stop the bleeding, though, and the man’s jeans and shoes are drenched in blood, the smell of iron laying heavy around him. John avoids the pool of blood that has formed on the floor as he steps closer to the man.

"Alright, Mr. Saunders, you had a bit of an encounter with a broken glass, I understand?"

Selma's already dragged a metal chair from its place by the wall and positioned it opposite to Mr. Saunders. Now, she's efficiently gathering plastic aprons, a sterile suture kit, antiseptics, compresses and dressings on a metal trolley besides the chair. Mr. Saunders doesn’t seem to notice her; he's in a pretty intoxicated state and mostly stares at the tissues and paper covering his hand.

"Yes, he… it. Broke."

"And was there anything in the glass?"

John finds a pair of gloves in his size and puts them on the trolley beside the other paraphernalia.

"No, I had already. Drunk. Drink it."

John busies himself with checking the supplies Selma's gathered, while Selma herself, now in plastic apron, sits down on the chair opposite Mr. Saunders and covers his lap with a plastic cover before beginning to unwrap the blood-soaked tissues and paper. As she realises that she doesn’t have any bin close by to put them in, she looks around quickly before estimating the state of the the already bloodily floor by her patient’s feet, apparently deciding to just drop the tissues there.

"Now, Mr. Saunders, I’ll have to take a look and clean this up before Doctor Watson here can do some stitching, which it looks like you will very much need. No… actually, look at this, Doctor Watson, I think this might be a bit too deep and close to the tendons for us here, I think we’ll have to get you a hand surgeon to look at this."
She turns to look at John, who nods. In the army, he’d done it by himself, being a surgeon and all, but in hospitals everyone’s specialized, and this is probably more appropriate for a hand surgeon than for an A&E doctor. The locum had been different in that perspective. There, his patients were simply his patients, no matter what they came in for. If he couldn’t treat them, he refer them to another specialist, but here, at the A&E, he will have to let patients that he could treat be treated by someone else, simply because of how the system works. He had been used to way of doing things when he was in training, but the years spent in the army had made him comfortable with handling almost everything by himself, regardless of specialty. It’s better to get your hand patched up by a non-specialist than not having it patched up at all, and that was it. Here, he’d probably get sued if he tried something like that.

"You can go on and see next patient, I’ll have to assist the hand surgeon," Selma says, not looking up from Mr. Saunders hand as she washes it with generous amounts of sterile water.

"Right, I’ll get on then. Good luck, Mr. Saunders."

As John leaves the room, he only manages to take a few steps before he hears someone call for him from the nursing station further down the corridor. He walks over there, and is instantly asked to see a patient who’s just arrived in an ambulance.

"Woman, 45 years old, pain in lower abdomen since three hours. Well-known at the A&E, we never find any somatic cause behind her pain. She’s a regular at the psychiatric clinic as well, and the pain is most commonly diagnosed as psychosomatic."

The nurse hands him a file with the paperwork from the ambulance.

"Does she have any psychiatric diagnoses that would explain the psychosomatic pain?" John asks as he receives the file and lookes at the post-it with the patient's room number scribbled on it.

The nurse shrugs and clicks a few times on her computer, reading the electronic chart.

"She’s diagnosed with bipolar disorder, type II, Borderline personality disorder, generalized anxiety disorder and eating disorder NOS," the nurse recites, sounding increasingly fascinated as she just keeps finding new diagnoses as she reads further in the chart. "She’s also diagnosed with IBS, fibromyalgia and asthma, if that's any help."

"I know it was years ago I worked at a London hospital, but do people really have that many diagnoses nowadays?" John can't help asking.

"Nah, not all of us. But some of the psych patients really do have quite a few. I wonder if the psychiatrists gets paid extra every time they diagnose something new?"

In lack of a good reply, but still thinking that he ought to defend his colleagues in the psychiatric field, John finally just shrugs, taking the file and heading to meet the patient in room 14, who seems to have a bit of problem with comorbidity.

After a while, the pain seems to be decreasing slightly, and John finds himself to be yet another one of the numerous doctors that is of the opinion that the patient, Jenny Summers, seems to suffer from a somatoform pain in her stomach. Before he leaves in order to see to his next patient, John asks if she's an appointment to see her psychiatrist anytime soon.
An hour later, John retreats to the lunch room. He hesitates over the choose between tea and coffee, but finally decides that it isn’t worth the risk of a bad night’s sleep and pours himself a cup of tea. He looks around at the dimly lit room that’s furnished with a few chairs, wooden tables and an old leather couch that currently holding a few of his colleagues. At one of the tables he spots George, one of the oldest of the doctors in the otherwise pretty youth-dominated A&E, sit and nurse a cup of coffee. John waves a hand and looks questioningly at the chair next to George, who smiles tiredly and nods.

"So, Watson, is it?" George asks, warming his hands on the white, institutional looking coffee cup that is identical to the one John himself is holding.

"Yeah. And you, George…?"

"Claiborne."

"Claiborne, that’s it. How would you grade this shift, is it more or less patients than usual?" John asks, sipping his tea and almost making a face at the tart taste.

"I’d say it’s a little below average, but the night’s young still. How’s the A&E treating you?"

"Just fine, thank you. You’re a friendly bunch, aren’t you?"

George smiles and nods absent-mindedly.

"Yeah, guess so. Have to be in these places, never know when you’ll be needing a whole lot of assistance from your fellows, do you? So, seen any interesting cases yet?"

"I just treated a woman who had a somatoform stomach pain and four different psychiatric diagnoses. And asthma."

"Ah, think I know that one, Summers, right?"

"Yes, that’s the one. I gather she’s a regular?"

"Mm, poor woman. She’s not having an easy time, and some colleagues won’t even treat her, says she’s only here to get some attention and waste our time."

"What do you say, then?" John asks, finding himself a bit curious.

"That if I was having a decent life, I wouldn’t waste my time and money on going to the A&E, get snarked at by healthcare professionals’ and then be sent home without even a painkiller."

"Yeah, I guess so," John says, thoughtfully. "So I asked the nurse if it was common to have this many psychiatric diagnoses, she said that Summers’ certainly wasn’t the only one."

"It’s a pretty new field yet, psychiatry, we tend to forget what it was like when surgery was new, or x-rays, or any other of the things we now see as essential and an integral part of medicine. The diagnoses are still being improved, the research hasn’t had as many years as many other fields, and significantly lower funds. I guess it’s hard to draw the line between many of those diseases, maybe a few of them are even different manifestations of the same underlying disease, they don’t really know yet, the same way we don’t know the cause of MS or cancer."

John nods and is just about to ask more when the door to the break room opens and he sees Selma’s tousled head in the opening, searching until she finds him.
Watson, we’re done stitching and needling now, and there’s someone waiting to see you to discuss the lack of pee he’s been experiencing, don’t let him wait, he might need to use the bathroom!

John sees the light in the windows of 221B as he walks across the street and heads towards the front door. He can’t see any signs of movement behind the curtains, but that's hardly any indication of whether or not Sherlock's home. John isn’t sure what to hope for; facing his friend after what they've done or not having to do so. That complicated feeling he's been trying to avoid even thinking about ever since they’d got each other off in the kitchen (the kitchen, of all places) is now welling up once more and John is letting it, knowing that he’ll probably face the cause of said feeling in a minute anyway.

It's disturbing, somehow, that the thing John remembers most clearly about the whole Kitchen Thing isn’t about himself or his own reactions, no; instead he keeps coming back to how something about the way Sherlock had reacted. John can’t quite put his finger on what it had been, but it seems to be stuck in his thoughts and it won’t leave him until he’s at least found a word to describe it. The way Sherlock had…

John reaches the seventeenth step and only hesitates for a second before opening the door. If Sherlock's at home, then he'll certainly notice every discrepancy from John's normal behaviour, and John does not want Sherlock to analyse the cause of his hesitation.

He sees Sherlock as soon as he enters the flat. Sherlock’s in his leather chair with two textbooks in his lap and (his own) laptop on the table in front of him. He looks up, gazing over John in a quick scan, then nods and returns to the heaviest of the two textbooks. John rids himself of his jacket and toes of his shoes, gets into the kitchen and leaves his empty lunch box in the sink before switching the kettle on. He goes out into the sitting room while he's waiting for it to boil. Sherlock keeps reading for a few minutes while John turns on the telly on a low volume and searches the channels for something to watch. The kettle clicks, and John returns to the kitchen and pours two mugs of tea.

When he gets back with the tea, Sherlock's put the textbooks and laptop on the floor and is sprawled over more than half of the sofa in his usual way, the one that usually means that he plans to join John in the watching of telly. There's something so entirely domestic and normal about that that it's causing John to feel a sense of relief. Their friendship might change a bit if it's going to involve some form of getting off together, but apparently, it hasn’t changed completely, not yet, at least. There's no awkward silence, just the silence between two flatmates that don’t need to fill the space between them with words in order not to feel lost in each others silences.

Sherlock accepts the mug John is holding in front of him, and John makes himself comfortable on the sofa, feeling the tension of the past twenty-four hours ease a bit. He flips through the channels, burning the tip of his tongue on the tea as he always does when he's too tired to wait for the tea to cool down. He turns the volume up and they watch a few minutes of a program where guests comment on the evening news, and John knows that Mythbusters will be on in a few minutes on another channel, but is determined not to accidentally flip to that channel, too exhausted for an hour of Sherlock getting worked up, screaming (more than usual) at the telly and finding his laptop to write comments dripping with resentment to the show’s website.

"So, good day at Barts?" Sherlock asks as the show is coming to an end. "Got some drinking done, or at least poured, I sense?"

"You smelled that?" John asks, suddenly feeling the need for a shower.
He hadn’t thought the beer he’d accidentally stepped in after a patient dropped a glass bottle in the
waiting room would still be smelling. Well, at least it isn’t any form of bodily fluid.

"John, I think Mrs. Hudson can smell that from her flat."

"Well, I guess it’s time to get myself a shower before bed then," John sighs, too comfortable to
consider moving at the moment.

They let the telly stay on while Sherlock tries to deduce the rest of John’s shift at the A&E with a
moderate success rate, since John’s new job offers a few new elements, and Sherlock is yet to get
acquainted with all the new smells and tells of the A&E.

Two hours later, John finds that he’s almost falling asleep on the sofa. He stretches a bit before
sighing, casting a glance at Sherlock and getting up from the couch with a tired groan, running his
hands over his face in an attempt to regain enough focus to get to the bathroom. Sherlock instantly
stretches out over the whole sofa as John gets to his feet and staggers into the bathroom.

Taking a shower seems to be too much to even think about, John will change his sheets tomorrow if
they smell of beer then. He brushes his teeth, uses the loo and grunts a ‘good night’ to Sherlock
before he heads upstairs to his bedroom.

When he reaches his bedroom, John hesitates before closing the door behind him, not entirely
comfortable with his own motives for hesitating. He’d been prepared for one of two possibilities
when he’d gotten home. The first possibility being that Sherlock would be out somewhere, not
returning until long after John had gone to bed, and then be out again before John woke up, all in an
effort to avoid him or possibly because a case was on. But if a case had been on and everything had
been normal, John would have gotten texts about the location of the crime scene before his shift was
even over, expecting him to turn up as soon as a taxi could get him there. The other possibility had
been that Sherlock would be asking (or, more likely, not asking) for some form of sexual encounter
which may or may not be even more uncoordinated and eager now that John had opened up the
possibility of sex for a man that had seemed either sexually repressed or virginal, even though his
friend claimed to have done it before, which in itself is a bit surprising considering what John had
seen (or rather hadn’t seen) of Sherlock’s sexual interest in the year and a half they’d lived together.

But, none of those two scenarios had been accurate. Instead, everything had been almost like before
these past weeks of odd tension. And perhaps that’s it, really. The Kitchen Thing might have
resolved some built up tension in Sherlock, and now he’s good for another decade or so without sex.
Or he’d found that he was not at all that sexually attracted to John now that he’d actually had sex
with him (oh, fuck, they’d really done it; they’d had sex, for fucks sake) and is now relieved to find
that any distraction in form of sexual desire towards his flatmate is resolved. Either way, John finds
the whole thing a bit confusing.

As he gets himself down to his pants and slides in under the covers, John allows himself to think a
moment about what it actually had been in Sherlock’s demeanor last night that had caught his
attention but that now seems almost impossible to pinpoint. It had been both in the words he’d said
before they’d started, during and also in the thing Sherlock had said, or rather asked, after he’d gotten
up from his knees and was heading towards the bathroom. And, oh dear, the whole thing in the
end... He, John Watson, had come on his friends face, for crying out loud. He cringes at the thought
of it, but finds that he is simultaneously shivering. It’d been the most intense thing about it all, how
Sherlock had refused to move or let John turn away even though John had made clear indications of
what was about to come. The look on Sherlock’s face as he looked up at John the second before John had come; without any hesitation, just a hint of curiosity paired with neutral determination. And that other thing, the one John is unable to find a word for.

John’s own reaction is easier to pinpoint, which is regrettable, really. As he had opened his eyes and seen Sherlock do the same after having wiped some of the come from his eye, John had had the very odd sensation of feeling both devastated (mostly from embarrassment, but not without a hint of guilt) and very uncomfortably empowered. That last realisation of what he’d felt is so disturbing that he’s tried to ignore it ever since, but now, in the dark of his bedroom with only the London traffic outside to keep him company, John knows that he can’t deny it. It feels wrong, uncharacteristic and very, very disturbing. He’d had Sherlock freakin’ Holmes on his knees in front of him, he had come on his face (not for lack of trying to avoid it, mind you) and it had been an undeniably empowering feeling. Unattainable, untouchable and ridiculously proud Sherlock. And that very man, his friend the mad, posh self-proclaimed sociopath of a genius had let John see him like that.

John is a modern man, who’s had a fair amount of different sexual experiences, and he’s aware that that type of... gesture isn’t the same thing as assuming any kind of... helpless role. No, it's rather the opposite. It's that form of active submission that takes strength and self-confidence to allow someone to see, it's the more challenging role of the two roles in those situations and it requires you to comfortable with yourself and your partner. It doesn’t make anyone powerful to be the one for whom someone displays that kind of… whatever it is. But still, it makes John feel involuntarily powerful to have seen Sherlock like that, most likely simply because it is Sherlock, the ‘married to my work-‘, ‘body’s just transport-‘, ‘you’re an idiot, everyone is-‘ Sherlock that John knows and admires (and sometimes wanted to strangle).

He shouldn’t feel like that; powerful just because Sherlock had in that moment taken on a somewhat (and perhaps unintendedly) submissive position, but he does, and it's unsettling. Sherlock seems to rule their life most of the time, and even if John isn’t in any way unable to deny the man what he asks for, most of the time John doesn’t. And John has the most to lose if their friendship ends, and he's pretty sure that Sherlock is well aware of that fact, so the power dynamic in their friendship is usually the other way around. John had been in a miserable state when they’d met, and his life with Sherlock has changed that, has changed him, and John isn’t very good at being on his own for too long. Sherlock, on the other hand, seems to have gotten along somewhat better compared to John before they’d met. Sure, he'd hardly been eating or sleeping, but he hadn’t been sitting with a gun in his hand at night, just feeling the weight of it and thinking about what he could do to his own cranium, John's pretty sure. He’d been so damaged, so plagued by his nightmares, memories and flashbacks, he’d been entirely…

Oh.

There it is. The word. The word he hasn’t been able to pinpoint, the word for what he’d seen in Sherlock’s eyes, and perhaps also in his words last night.

_Vulnerability_.

There had been just a hint of vulnerability there.

Chapter End Notes

I wouldn't say that comorbidity plays a huge role in this chapter, but this is as it is,
chapters will be more or less illustrative to the chapter title, depending on what's happening in the plot and how much title and plot is in sync at the given chapter. I hope this doesn't make the fic to uneven for the reader, but it's hard to balance.

Now, comorbidity, an interesting aspect of psychiatry and psychiatric diagnoses, according to Wikipedia:

In psychiatry, psychology and mental health counseling, comorbidity refers to the presence of more than one diagnosis occurring in an individual at the same time. However, in psychiatric classification, comorbidity does not necessarily imply the presence of multiple diseases, but instead can reflect our current inability to supply a single diagnosis that accounts for all symptoms. On the DSM Axis I, Major Depressive Disorder is a very common comorbid disorder. The Axis II personality disorders are often criticized because their comorbidity rates are excessively high, approaching 60% in some cases, indicating to critics the possibility that these categories of mental illness are too imprecisely distinguished to be usefully valid for diagnostic purposes and, thus, for deciding how treatment resources should be allocated.

The term 'comorbidity' was introduced in medicine by Feinstein (1970) to denote those cases in which a 'distinct additional clinical entity' occurred during the clinical course of a patient having an index disease. Although the term has recently become very fashionable in psychiatry, its use to indicate the concomitance of two or more psychiatric diagnoses is said to be incorrect because in most cases it is unclear whether the concomitant diagnoses actually reflect the presence of distinct clinical entities or refer to multiple manifestations of a single clinical entity. It has been argued that because "the use of imprecise language may lead to correspondingly imprecise thinking", this usage of the term 'comorbidity' should probably be avoided.

* * * * *

Comorbidity in this chapter:

Since it's discussed and explained in the chapter (through the characters POV, so not all scientific), it's pretty straight forward. Comorbidity is very common amongst psychiatric patients, but as stated above, it can often be different manifestations of the same problem, and the diagnoses are pretty new and are still being developed.

One can also think about comorbidity in this whole fic; what diagnoses/symptoms can be seen in the characters, and to what extent are they comorbid or just different manifestations of the same cause?
Anxiety attacks

Chapter Notes

TW for graphic descriptions of panic attack, and for other - implied - mental health issues.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The sound of a door closing.

Breath.

Just breath.

It's a desperate attempt to keep his head empty of thoughts, but that has never really worked for him, so Sherlock gives it up in a matter of seconds.

Now: direct thoughts to a topic that's distracting enough to drown out the thoughts that he just about manages to keep from flooding his entire brain. Are there really any topics that are distracting enough? There are chemicals that are distracting enough and there's also the possibility of pain, but Sherlock knows that these are strategies he ought to retain from using. So, no; there's nothing that's distracting enough to allow him to avoid what's currently threatening to wash over him.

He turns the telly off, shuts the lid of his laptop and puts it on the floor, gets up from the couch and heads into the kitchen, trying hard not to feel nor think. In the cupboard that holds parts of his chemicals and the paraphernalia used for his experiments there's a wooden box containing vintage vials, flasks and pipettes, a gift from a professor at uni who thought the old objects might interest Sherlock. They had, but perhaps not always for the reasons his professor had intended. One of the flasks contains a few milliliters of clear liquid, and it's remained untouched for the better part of eight years now. Sherlock’s kept it as a measure of safety, or perhaps as a test of his self-restraint, but for the majority of the time since he’d moved into 221B, the flask and its content has been more or less forgotten.

Sherlock glances at the cupboard, but instead of opening it, he searches the drawer beside the sink until he finds a lighter that hasn’t been used to light the bunsen burner, and pockets it. Next, he goes into his bedroom, opens his wardrobe and from the pocket of the fifth suit jacket from the left he retrieves an almost-full pack of cigarettes.

As he climbs the fire escape to get to the roof, Sherlock can feel the first drops of rain on his hair. It doesn’t matter, perhaps it's even for the better. Rain is constant and calming. As is smoking. And the sight of London.

Sitting with his back against a funnel and his knees drawn up to his chest, Sherlock takes a deep drag on the cigarette he's just lit.

The cigarette's quite invigorating, and Sherlock will never understand why it makes John so upset. Perhaps it's because Lestrade has told John things that made him interlock Sherlock’s smoking habits with Sherlock’s drug habits. It's an absurd simplification, and Sherlock has been smoking without injecting for many years. Still, it makes John prickly to see him smoke or the smell smoke on him,
and it had led to a few arguments, and not the kind of interesting arguments that just blow some steam off for both of them and sometimes end with one of them starting to laugh. No, it's the ‘I am worried about you’ kind of argument that Sherlock intensely despises. So he's done what he claims never to do; he's adjusted his habits for the benefit of someone else. And perhaps for his own benefit as well, as he loathes those kinds of fights. They bring up memories of his childhood and adolescence and that's rarely a good thing.

Inhaling and exhaling smoke, Sherlock finds that the nicotine soon floods his blood, keeping the feelings that threaten to overflow company. He knows there are no feelings in his blood, but the metaphor is one he’s always found apt, despite his general dislike of things scientifically incorrect, since the metaphor describes what it actually feels like. He doesn’t sense any feelings in his head, never has, no; he’s always felt feelings as if they linger just underneath his skin, and as a child he’d always imagined the feelings flowing through his veins, making the blood cheerful or angry or focused.

Feeling a little bit more himself, and while he's not exactly feeling more composed, he's feeling somewhat more distanced, so he allows himself to examine the thoughts in his head; the thoughts that he’s tried to repress until this moment. They can’t just be let out, so he’s going to have to arrange them in order to be able to examine them. Realising that he’s not able to distinguish between all the thoughts, Sherlock feels his frustration rising.

John had insisted on the whole catastrophic direction their relationship has taken and Sherlock hadn’t thought he’d ever be sexually attracted to anyone again and it’s a shame to be proven wrong on such a delightful assumption and John had looked at Sherlock after coming all over his face and Sherlock hadn't been able to interpret what he’d seen in John’s face, and there had been hands on his body and it had been shockingly pleasant, the increase in his dopamine and endorphin levels had made his head feel clouded and made his skin feel comfortable and very sensitive and now he'll never feel that again because John obviously isn't even going to mention this ever again and they’ll pretend like the whole thing’s never happened and Sherlock will never get an answer as to why that is so it must have been that John had in fact found either the fact that Sherlock was Sherlock or that Sherlock had a penis to be repulsive but is too polite to say so, he's a soldier so he will soldier on and be a good friend and never bring this up again and after a while, when he thinks Sherlock's gotten over this, he’ll leave, he’ll make some believable excuse and Sherlock will try really hard to believe in it, but he won’t and he’ll be proven right once again, but it won’t be triumphant and it was only ever about sex hormones, really, but this all has too much resemblance to [deleted]

[deleted]

He lights another cigarette, holds it in front of himself and just watches the glow slowly working its way, leaving ash that will fall to the ground in approximately 40 seconds if he doesn’t take a drag on the cigarette. The glow is hot enough to melt the skin if pressed hard against it. The burn would probably produce pus but if kept clean it isn’t likely to get infected.

Sherlock takes a drag, inhales and feels the slight burn in his pharynx. He takes another one. And another.

He shouldn’t think about these things, that’s one of the reasons that he’d objected to John’s proposal of ‘trying things out’, but John had insisted and look where that's gotten him. John's may be the good one out of the two of them, but Sherlock's the destructive one, and he should be kept on a safe distance from anything that could shatter if he himself shatters.

He puts the cigarette out, considers lighting another one, but his hands are already shaky from the nicotine and if he has any more he’ll get tachycardia and that would really not be a good idea right
now, since that's a sensation that can trigger his breathing and further stress his body, mimicking the symptoms of the beginning of a panic attack, and that could result in a positive feedback loop ending in an actual panic attack. They are rare these days, but he won’t risk it, he knows the vulnerability factors too well, and they have accumulated lately.

He hates breathing, but here it is; inhale, exhale. Slowly. Emptying his lungs as much as possible to get the carbon dioxide out and then inhaling in order to refill his lungs with oxygen. Inhale, exhale. Tedious; necessary. Inhale. Exhale.

The slight dizziness disperses gradually, and Sherlock rests his forehead on his knees. This is miserable and he feels like his body is revolting against him and his mind is clearly its willing accomplice. It's all a mutiny against his brain, and it's all unsavory and perfidy. One should evidently not yield for the body’s demands quite as much as living with John has made him do, because that has clearly been a mistake. And once again, it all comes back to John. John, who makes him sleep and eat and who spoils his usually so well-disciplined transport and then causes said transport to get hormone-fueled ideas and react in very disturbing and pubertal ways. And then John insists that Sherlock should indulge in actualising those hormone-fueled ideas, and afterwards John had found him to be repulsive and male and not at all to his liking and that's really it, isn’t it? Because fascinating but ordinary straight men don’t want angular, disturbed men with uncertain sexual identities in that way, no matter how smart, amazing and dangerous and unique those disturbed men are. That's only to be expected. All this just confirms earlier data that clearly states that he's not someone that any person that's sober or has a functioning brain would take to bed more than once. He knows that he's generally considered to be attractive by people that doesn't know him, it's a fact he frequently uses to get what he needs in order to solve cases. He also knows that people tend to regard him as markedly less attractive once he stops shaming normal and goes back to being himself. It's not so much his body as his person that's distasteful to others: his data has made that much very clear.

To add to the complications, his preferences in regard to possible sexual interests seems to be persons of the male gender, and solely straight. He only has two data points, but those two data points are conclusive. Before John, there's only been one [deleted] data point, which can not lead to any sense of pattern, but now that there are two, there's at least a beginning of a pattern. Those two data points seems to indicate that he prefers men over women sexually speaking. His masturbatory fantasies further supports that hypothesis.

In conclusion, his sexuality is of that kind that doesn’t require another person to be satisfying. That fact alone should be an indication that he shouldn’t get involved with other people. Every time he has, it's been either tedious or disastrous.

Sherlock dries his now damp face with the sleeve of his coat and feels how the rain's caused his curls to spiral down from the weight of the water, falling in his eyes and obscuring his vision. He dries his hands on the part of the coat that covers his thighs, reaches for another cigarette and lights it. The first inhale is toxic and wonderful and just right, chemicals and toxins swirling in and sticking to the mucous in his oral cavity, the pharynx and the tracheas, finally reaching his bronchi and ending up in the alveoli where they diffuse through the thin epithelium and into his bloodstream, causing a almost instant chemical reaction in his body and planting toxins that could kill him.

It's undeniably beautiful.

He continues to ponder all the things that now seem to whirl through his usually so organized mind palace like an autumn storm.

Inhale. Exhale.
He’d been on his knees in front of John, John who’d insisted they’d try this and John who’d kissed him with more intensity than previously, John who was compact energy and somewhat sharp intellect and knew right from wrong and who cleared Sherlock’s way when other people disturbed him with their demands for certain behaviours and certain words that Sherlock didn’t see the need for and John was seldom appalled by Sherlock’s behavior or seemed to mind proximity to Sherlock but then Sherlock had gone down on his knees and that had been a mistake but it had felt so enticing and he wanted John to know that he could have Sherlock like that, and it wasn’t out of pity or generosity, it was out of need and John had looked at him and something had been there, in his eyes, and his breathing had become even more distorted and he’d made a polite attempt to warn Sherlock and to turn away, but Sherlock hadn’t let him, he’d stayed and John had spilled on him and it had been odder and better and more devastating than he’d imagined it to be and to John it must have seemed embarrassing and weird and repulsive and like he was willingly humiliating himself and oh god he was weird even in that regard of his sexuality, but he’d thought he’d seen something when John had opened his eyes, and that something had made him confident for a second and he’d followed an impulse and tasted the come, and to John that must have been what sealed the whole thing because Sherlock was a freak and he had never wanted him in the first place but seeing him act like that had been what finally tipped the scale and made John want to clean his brain with chlorine and now he’ll…

Inhale exhale inhale.

Exhale inhale.

Tachycardia, almost painful. It feels like his heart is smashing against his ribs but that’s anatomically impossible and therefore it can’t...

Between almost-breaths Sherlock perceives that he’s rocking, but he can’t quite feel it in his vestibular system, it’s the wavelike motions in front of his eyes that’s telling him about the rocking, not the sensory data from his own limbs.

And John must have looked at him just like [deleted]

[deleted]

[delet…]

He can’t get oxygen into his alveoli anymore, or perhaps he just can’t get the carbon dioxide out. Either way, it feels like choking and dying, and the sweat breaks out and suddenly the wavelike motions he sees is more like swirls and he’s nauseous but can’t be sick right now, because he has no air and can’t cough up anything from his ventricle.

Inha… Inhal… No. It’s not working.

The tachycardia is increasing and it pulsates in his ears with alarming volume and he closes his eyes because it’s all getting blurry and dark in the edges and this is how it ends, and…

The daylight is nauseating.

The concrete behind his parietal bone has somehow leaked onto his zygomatic bone, which should not be possible considering the angle his head rests at.
The distant sounds that he hears must be the shower. Oh. John’s awake. Why is John awake when Sherlock just woke up? That’s unusual, but so is concrete inside his cranium, so perhaps he shouldn’t be surprised.

He finally opens his eyes, just tiny slots, and if the daylight was nauseating before, it’s ventricle wrenching now.

He closes his eyes again.

Then he remembers. The roof, the cigarettes, the rain. Then the palpations turning into tachycardia and he really thought he was done with those somatoform reactions, but clearly he had been wrong about this too.

He decides that some humiliations are best to endure without visual input, and lets his eyes remain closed.

It must be John’s day off, since John doesn’t display any signs of planning to leave the flat. Sherlock can tell even if he only got audible tells to go by. John’s feet are barefoot on the floor, John eats his breakfast absurdly slow and John taps a little absent-mindedly on his laptop between bites of toasts and spoons of yogurt.

Normally, that’d be a good thing, because John would be available for cases or to keep Sherlock’s brain from electrocuting itself by pure boredom, but today is not normal and Sherlock wishes John had a fourteen hour shift at the A&E.

After having been awake for more than an hour, Sherlock must once again face the betrayal of his body and head for the bathroom to micturate. Tedious business, and even more so since it requires that Sherlock exposes himself to the risk of being seen and talked to.

Grunting, he gets up from the bed, his head still has some anatomically incorrect filling, but the concrete has been replaced by styrofoam.

"Sherlock?"

John’s voice sounds hesitant, and Sherlock has made it almost back to his bedroom after using the bathroom before John calls out his name. Sherlock realises that returning to his room would be suspicious, and reluctantly heads for the couch, flinging himself to it and fumbling for his laptop on the floor besides it.

John walks into the sitting room, his own laptop half open in his hand, eyes searching Sherlock as if looking for a response.

"You alright?" John asks, his tone not really worried, but inquiring.

Sherlock grunts something that he hopes signals disinterest and finally gets his laptop up on his stomach and opens it.
"Alright, it’s one of those days, then," John says without as much as a sigh as he puts his laptop away on the desk before walking towards the couch.

Sherlock flinches as he suddenly feels John’s index finger tracing along his thigh, which is at an angle to support the laptop. Now, his laptop almost slips of his lap due to the flinch. He looks up, startled.

"I almost thought you’d gone out, it’s unusual for you to stay in bed until 10 am, you know."

"If you bothered to look for my coat you’d known I was in the flat," Sherlock says, attempting to be rude but sounding more cold.

John keeps running his finger towards Sherlock’s hip, then retracing his path back towards Sherlock’s knee. Sherlock holds his laptop steady. His breathing is not affected. He is just breathing, breathing just a little more rapidly than usual, but not by much. He should snap at John, say something nasty and make him go away.

"Is this still a ridiculously lousy idea?" John asks, looking at Sherlock’s thigh rather than at his face.

"You wouldn’t ask if you didn’t already know it was," says Sherlock, finally getting some snapping done.

"So you’re opposed? Because if you’re not, I’d like to keep doing this."

John is mirroring Sherlock’s words from two nights ago, words that had led up to the whole catastrophe. His eyes follow his hand as he lets the whole hand rest on Sherlock’s thigh, slowly kneading the rectus femoris through threadbare pyjama bottoms and Sherlock is not having tachycardia again. This would be an utterly embarrassing situation to have another panic attack, but his body is clearly not taking any orders anymore, so he might as well prepare himself for it.

Inhale. Exhale.

Inhale. Ex... exhale.

John should stop this, because this is cruel and John isn’t cruel.

And somehow John must have taken Sherlock’s fluttering eyelids and deep breaths as consent, because suddenly his laptop is lifted away and put on the coffee table, and Sherlock reaches for it as John lifts it, but his wrist is caught by John’s hand and John is holding it with a determined grip and there’s no longer any hand kneading his leg.

"Am I imposing something on you, Sherlock?"

Inhale.

Exhale.


Inhale...

He manages to meet John’s eyes, defiant as John’s leaning down, his other hand carding through Sherlock’s hair. And he manages to look defiant, and he is, but the words that ought to come out, hurtful and sharp, don’t come. It’s something about his vocal cords, and about the grip on his wrist, and that shouldn’t make any logical sense, but somehow it does.
John’s face changes and he looks incredulously on Sherlock.

"Have you been smoking?"

"If that bothers you, you can stop that," Sherlock says frostily and nods towards John’s hand, the hand that’s still massaging various muscles of Sherlock’s thigh.

"Of course it bothers me, you arrogant arse," John says with matching coldness, but his hand is still in Sherlock’s curls, now almost tugging.

It's increasing the tachycardia. Sherlock once again hears his own pulse in his ears.

"What made you do that?"

"Do I have to have a reason?"

"You always have a reason. And whatever that reason might be, you need to stop it."

"I hardly think it’s your place to pretend that it matters."

"It does matter, Sherlock, and you know it."

The grip on his wrist tightens. It's causing a paradoxical reaction in his groin. John’s hand is uncomfortably close to that reaction. Sherlock draws his knees closer to his stomach in an attempt to hide it.

"It does not, and certainly not to you."

"You think so, Sherlock? You think it doesn’t matter to me? That’s what you really think, isn’t it?"

Sherlock isn’t entirely sure if they are still on the subject of smoking.

"You’re wrong. And I don’t feel like licking ashtray, but it’ll do for now."

And now Sherlock’s breathing is in fact obstructed, because lips are crushed onto his and John’s chest is half way on top of his chest, compressing it and making inhaling almost impossible.

And John is licking. His tongue forcing itself into Sherlock’s mouth, licking his palate, his gums and pressing against Sherlock’s tongue. And if John doesn’t like the taste of cigarettes, he has a paradoxical way of showing it.

His hand are pinned to the couch next to his face, and one of John's hands is fist in his hair, holding him in place as John places himself on top of Sherlock, Sherlock’s legs separated by John’s and John’s iliac crest curiously close to Sherlock’s cock.

Sherlock is fighting John’s tongue, which seems to intrigue his friend, because John groanes into Sherlock’s mouth, and the vibrations can be felt through mucous and mandible. It almost tickles, and it's painful until Sherlock choses to focus on the feeling in his cock instead; his hips jerking up without any kind of consent from his brain.

John’s lips are biting down on his neck, and the sounds Sherlock hears can't possibly have been his own, but they don't sound like John's either.

He feels the pressure as John’s hips make a similar movement as his own, and it's pulsing and aching in his cock. There are teeth digging into the skin of his clavicle, not breaking skin, but with enough force to make him cry out. He tries half-heartedly to free his left hand, but John’s grip just becomes
Sherlock's trying to get inside John's trousers to feel his buttocks, but he can't get his hand underneath the waistband, so he settles for grabbing John's arse through his trousers, squeezing hard. This time, it's most definitely John who's making urgent sounds.

John's left hand leaves Sherlock's hair and finds its way down between their bodies, and John arches a little as he undoes his button and zips down, trying to get his trousers and pants down without letting go of Sherlock's wrist. Without thinking, Sherlock's hand assists, his thumb under waistbands as they pull down together until John's cock and arse are bare, his trousers and pants pushed down to under his buttocks. John pulls at the drawstring of Sherlock's pyjama bottoms, and Sherlock lifts his hips to enable John to pull them down. John's hand is touching everywhere, stomach, iliac crest, upper thigh...

And then it halts, and John arches to be able to look down on Sherlock's cock, or... no; he's looking at Sherlock's thighs, and oh, that's decidedly not a good thing.

This isn't how it was supposed to go. John shouldn't see that. Not like this. Not now, when Sherlock needs--

Sherlock tries to pull John down on top of him again, but John doesn't give in, his fingers touching the hardened tissue just below Sherlock's gluteus maximus.

"Sherlock, what the fuck is..."

"If you find that to be as repulsive as licking ashtrays, I'd suggest you stop being such a masochist now," Sherlock says, voice hoarse and harsh.

"How old are they?"

And John seems more angry than repulsed, and more worried than pitiful, so Sherlock looks down as well, seeing John's fingers trace the scar tissue on his upper thigh.

"Older than your bullet wound."

John's hand retreats and comes up to Sherlock's face, stroking his cheek for a moment, John's eyes searching his and finding them. The look on John's face is impossible to interpret, but their pelvises are once again pressed together, and John is kissing him once more. The hand leaves Sherlock's face and is placed on his iliac crest, holding tightly as they grind against each other. With their mouths an inch apart in order to allow them to breathe, they continue to move against each other, a hint of precome making the friction feel different.

John separates their mouths further as he lifts his upper body, supporting himself on the arm while holding Sherlock's arm pinned by his head again, and the change of angle makes John groan in a totally unexpected way, and suddenly, it all goes white, and it feels like all of Sherlock's pelvis is liquid and spilling out between them, and it's wet and it makes it even more devastating and unbelievable to rock against John as he lets the last shivers out, only to realise that John's gone all tense. Somewhere in the haze of his mind, Sherlock registers that John is now shakily rutting a few more times before collapsing fully on top of him, and everything is even more sticky and warm.

John's heavy upon him, making it hard to breathe, and Sherlock needs air, but he can't quite make the words come out. John's grip on his wrist loosens, and Sherlock pumps his fist a few times to regain circulation.

As John shifts to lay on his side beside Sherlock, Sherlock tries to meet his gaze, but John's eyes are
half closed and his fingers are clasping his friend’s t-shirt as if holding him there.

Sherlock stares up at the ceiling, the same stains and miscolorations that's been there for decades, and no one will bother to change the inner ceiling, because it's still functional, just a bit damaged, and somehow, that makes it easier to breathe.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Chapter End Notes

Our old friend; Wikipedia:

Panic attacks, also known as anxiety attacks, are periods of intense fear or apprehension of sudden onset accompanied by at least four or more bodily or cognitive symptoms (i.e. heart palpitations, dizziness, shortness of breath, or feelings of unreality) and of variable duration from minutes to hours. Panic attacks usually begin abruptly, may reach a peak within 10 to 20 minutes, but may continue for hours in some cases. Panic attacks are not dangerous and should not cause any physical harm.

The effects of a panic attack vary. Some, notably first-time sufferers, may call for emergency services. Many who experience a panic attack, mostly for the first time, fear they are having a heart attack or a nervous breakdown. Common psychological themes associated with panic attacks include the fears of impending death or loss of sanity; depersonalisation is relatively common.

Panic attacks are of acute onset, although acute debilitation (generally severe) may be followed by a period of residually impaired psychological functioning. Repeated panic attacks are considered a symptom of panic disorder. Screening tools such as the Panic Disorder Severity Scale can be used to detect possible cases of disorder, and suggest the need for a formal diagnostic assessment.

* * * * *

Panic attacks in this chapter:

Well, it's pretty straight forward in this chapter; it's a panic attack that's illustrated. But the interesting thing might be why this attack comes now; out seems like it was a while ago since Sherlock last had an attack. It's not hos first and he knows how to work through them with breathing and rational thinking about what's happening in his body. He's not paralyzed with fear that he's he's going to die; which is common the first times it happens.

I mostly wonder why he had an attack now, since it seems that it's been a while. What are the triggers for this return of panic attacks for Sherlock in this case, and how does he interpretype it?
Self-Harm, part I

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings apply for discussions of self-harm. No graphic descriptions.

It had been a conscious choice both to sleep with Sherlock again. It had also been a conscious decision to take the lead in that situation. He can’t blame it on either impulses or the physical stimulation that kissing had led to. No, this is all on him and his conscious mind, and it's just one in a series of very uncharacteristic and self-destructive choices he’s made in the last few weeks. And perhaps it doesn’t matter why he’d done it, because the result is the same either way.

He'd had Sherlock shivering and desperate underneath him and he’d been in a similar state himself even if part of him had stood beside it all and had been ready to run for it in case it all would become too much or too strange. He wasn’t proud of that, wasn’t proud of doing this even if he wasn't attracted to the other person involved in a sexual way. But this time it had been easier and there was no point in denying the rush of arousal that had run through him when he held Sherlock firmly in place and saw those normally piercing eyes becoming heavy-lidded and dark, seeing the almost reluctant desperation in his face and knowing that Sherlock wanted to be held there, wanted John to do that to him.

John isn’t like Sherlock, but he’s picked up a few things, like some of the tells and signs revealing what someone really wants, and that's part of what had started this whole mess, isn’t it? He’d observed more than Sherlock had thought he could, and had turned the table on him when asked to move out. Admittedly he’d done it in a state of pure panic, but he had used his observations to guide him through it. What he’d suspected he’d seen had seemed too absurd to be correct, but had turned out to be even more absurd than he originally could have guessed.

Sherlock is not only an undeniably sexual person, but also a person who seems to be unable to initiate the things he wants, and John can't help but wonder why. Usually Sherlock makes sure to get what he wants without making any excuses for wanting it. He’ll literally walk over dead bodies to get what he wants, but he won’t initiate a kiss. He's dominant and pushy in all aspects of his life, but he allows John to pin him down on the sofa, and it isn’t just some kind of game designed to keep John’s interest; no, Sherlock wants it, wants it very much. Most of the time, Sherlock will point out anything inelegant John might do, but being that close to him, Sherlock says nothing, makes no snide remarks, doesn’t turn it all into some form of challenge.

Afterwards, Sherlock's almost still, his breathing slowing down as he rearranges himself a bit as not to support too much of John’s weight on top of him, and John moves a little to the side, giving Sherlock’s chest more room to expand and contract. Sherlock pulls up his pants and pyjama bottoms, but doesn’t bother tying the drawstring. John considers doing the same, but is too hazy to bother. His now flaccid cock is pressed against Sherlock’s cotton clad thigh and therefore it isn’t visible anyway. Not that he ought to be modest or ashamed, but since Sherlock’s covered himself up, perhaps John should do the same. After a few seconds he determines that he's too post-orgasmic to care.

There's an odd stillness in the room. They’ve orgasmed together before, but they haven’t lain together like this. John finds that it feels more intimate and terrifying than the sex itself had done. It's
almost hard to breathe and it has very little to do with the loss of breath that usually occurs after sex. John can feel Sherlock’s breath through the layers of fabric between them, still a bit ragged, still uneven.

"You have questions," Sherlock suddenly says into the silence, his voice thinner than usual, like his vocal cords aren’t cooperating so soon after orgasm.

"Eh, what… Ah, yeah, you’re right, I will probably ask you things, but not right now," John says, at first not sure what on earth Sherlock’s talking about, then he remembers the damaged skin on his friend’s thighs and feels his stomach drop.

"Let’s just cut right to the part where I tell you that I have no intention to answer any questions on the matter," Sherlock says, and John suddenly wishes that they he could see Sherlock’s face, but his own head is resting against the side of Sherlock’s shoulder and his face is turned up towards the ceiling, eyes only half open.

"Alright, thanks for saving me the trouble, I guess," John manages.

They lie in silence for a while, neither of them moving more than necessary. The air had been filled with smells of sex and come and sweat a few moments ago, but John's senses have adjusted to the smell and he's no longer able to sense it. Seven minutes, he recalls. After seven minutes it's hard to sense a constant smell. He's read it somewhere, and doesn’t know if it's even true, but it seems likely. Seven minutes. Have they been lying here for more than seven minutes? It's hard to tell at this point.

The silence is not entirely comfortable, but John can’t find anything to say, really, and any words he usually says just to fill the silence seems absurd in the current situation. Finally, he makes up his mind and speaks.

"I should probably, you know, clean up a bit."

"Mm."

It's a noncommittal humming, and Sherlock seems to be far away in his thoughts. Has he gone to his mind palace? Now, with come drying on his shirt and on his stomach? John suddenly wishes that he too had a mind palace to retire to. Instead, he gets up, almost punching Sherlock in the ribs with his elbow as he tries to climb over his friend, out of the sofa, but he manages to put his weight on his his foot on the floor before he almost caused a vivid bruise on Sherlock’s torso, which would have been both painful and awkward. Then again, there's nothing about this that isn’t awkward, so perhaps it wouldn’t have mattered.

The awkwardness reaches new levels two hours later. John is in the sitting room, folding sheets and towels from the laundry he’s just retrieved from the basement, when Sherlock speaks to him from behind a tower of textbooks on the desk.

"How do you feel about fellatio?"

The question sounds completely normal until John considered the actual words. John first fails to react, then almost starts coughing in surprise. He manages to get his vocal cords and airways under control before he answers.

"From the giving or the receiving end?"
Astonished, he realises that his answering question sounds just as normal as the initial question, at least if he disregarded the actual meaning of the words.

"The receiving, obviously, since you have no experience of the giving," Sherlock answers with an almost bored note to his voice, as if he's had to explain this at least twice a day to John and is growing increasingly tired of it.

"Well, in that case I guess I have positive feelings about it," John says after a few seconds consideration.

"I see."

And with that, the conversation is apparently over. At least, Sherlock doesn’t seem like he's got anything more to add to it, and John is never going to pursue this topic again, given the choice. He continues to fold, and stacks the still warm sheets in a neat pile, military in precision, wondering silently if he by any chance might have missed half of the actual conversation and should have gotten more information out of this than he actually did. What could he have… Oh. Right.

"And what about you?"

At this question, Sherlock looks up at John, then returns his gaze instantly to the textbook in front of him.

"Previous data seems insufficient for a well-founded conclusion in the matter empirically. Theoretically, I am positive towards it."

And there it is, the answer that could win awards for ‘most clinical statement concerning blow jobs.’

"Alright, then," John says, at a loss for how to reply to Sherlock’s opinions (or lack thereof) on blow jobs. Instead, he grabs the first pile of sheets and walks out to the hallway and puts the sheets in the linen cupboard, spending an unusual amount of time organising the different types of linen into extremely neat stacks.

When he returns to the sitting room, Sherlock seems lost to the world, sitting by his laptop, eyes focused on the words he's reading as if they hold the answer to a coded message he’s finally found the key to and he's now deciphering it.

John realises that this is one of those times when he's grateful that Sherlock’s attention span is sometimes shorter than that of a cognitively impaired goldfish.

"So, Landon, you used to work in psychiatry, you said?" John asks the extremely tall colleague that he’s been working with from time to time during the first hours of his shift that morning. It had seemed natural to take a seat next to the calm and efficient nurse when he’d seen him sitting on his own at one of the tables in the break room during lunch hour.

"Yeah, did three years there before doing a few months at the post op, then I ended up here," Landon says, opening the lid of a large container of strawberry yoghurt.

"Did you like psychiatry?"

"Oh yes, it's really interesting stuff. Actually, I’d probably still be there if they hadn’t changed the
scheduling. In the end, they demanded that everyone worked rotations, and that just doesn’t work for me, with the kids and all."

"But you don’t have to here at the A&E? Do rotations, I mean?" says John, who isn’t sure if the nurses have the same type of schedule as the doctors.

"Nah."

John gets up to get his lunch box (yesterday’s Indian take away leftovers) out of the microwave before sitting down again.

"Can I ask you something about psychiatry?"

"Go ahead," Landon says good-naturedly and finishes off his yoghurt before starting on a very meaty looking sandwich.

"It’s just, well, I was thinking about self-harm, I figure you see some of that in the A&E?"

"Yes, not as much as two years ago, but still a few times a week, I’d say."

"Would you mind telling me a bit about it? I was thinking about the fact that I’ll probably come across it here sooner or later, after what I’ve read in the papers, and I know basically nothing about it. I understand that people do it because they’re not feeling that great, generally speaking, but other than that, I seem to know very little about it, I have to admit.

John feels a bit guilty over lying about the reason that he wants to know more about the subject, but the thought won’t leave his mind. He desperately wants to ask Sherlock about it, but his friend has made it very clear that he won't appreciate any questions on the subject, and John isn’t sure of how to ask him about it anyway. He just needs to know… well; more.

The sight of the damaged skin had made his stomach turn as soon as he had realised what it was. The thought of Sherlock, who regards sentiment as something to be transcended, having done something that permanently marks his body due to some form of emotional distress just doesn’t fit into any of his mental images of his friend. Oh, there are of course the drugs, but this is something else. The drugs are something that Sherlock had once, on one of the rare occasions when he’d actually acknowledged the subject at all, brushed off with the words ‘I was bored’. John had taken it for what it was: a reluctance to admit to any deviations from his strict discipline over his emotional and physical urges or needs.

To John, it seems highly unlikely that Sherlock would have tried drugs at a party due to peer pressure, since the ‘party’ and ‘peer pressure’ are not words one associates with Sherlock Holmes. It seems more likely that he’d actually been curious as to the effects of drugs on his brain, whether it had been for some kind of case or ‘for science’, since Sherlock treats his body like it's some kind of video game character, something that takes damage and then gradually heals and can then be damaged again when the meter is once again full. Still, John finds that he’s regarding Sherlock’s former drug habit as an attempt of self-medication. He has no idea who Sherlock had been then, or even exactly when ‘then’ had been, but just seeing the man bored or overwhelmed now give a clear indication as to how intense his moods must have been when he was younger and less practiced in the art of emotional self-regulation, something he now excels in. Well, excels in with a few exceptions. The dark moods, the sulking, the recklessness he displays when he's bored and the mood swings are clearly still not under his friend's control. Actually, when John thinks about it, he realises that the only emotions that Sherlock seems to be able to regulate - or rather repress almost completely - are emotions that relates to others or to his own body.
"I think there are many and varied reasons for doing it, really. And the term is very wide, self-harm can mean different things depending on who you’re talking to, but I guess you’re talking about the wounds we see here at the A&E."

John nods, takes a bite of his chicken and almost burns his tongue.

"I think the reason I’ve been given by most of my patients is that it’s easier to handle physical pain then emotional, so sometimes they cause themselves physical pain in order to divert the emotional pain. It works temporarily, but sometimes it seems to be a bit like drugs; you have to increase the dosage in order to get the same effect as you did in the beginning. It’s something about the endorphins that’s released when you’re in pain, some say. And then there are the patients that do it to punish themselves, either because they experience such self-hate or because they’re so used to be punished by someone else that they’ve started to do it to themselves when no one on the outside punish them anymore. It might sound weird, but it’s a bit like conditioning, you know; when you’re used to one stimuli following another, they can’t be separated without some deprogramming. Some patients self-harm in order to communicate their pain, but I don’t think they’re quite as many as the media makes them out to be, and really, it’s still about suffering and about the lack of other forms of communication for it."

Landon takes another bite of the giant meat sandwich, chews a bit while looking like he's completely lost in his thoughts, and then continues before he's even done swallowing.

"And then..." - chew, swallow - "there’s the ones that sometimes harm themselves in order to stop dissociating. Are you familiar with dissociation?"

"Yeah. I was an army doctor, so, well, I’ve seen it."

"Then you probably know how some people would do anything to break that state of detachment, I guess."

John nods, remembering the man who’d been held captive for months, and who refused to sleep once he’d gotten to the hospital facilities back on the base. He’d dissociated with random intervals, his eyes drained of emotion and his movements becoming increasingly jagged. The man would still carry on the conversation he’d been part of, but he only said what was expected and there was no longer any feeling to his words. Once, John had found him holding his hand against the scorching light-bulb hanging between two of the bunks, not even blinking as the heat must have caused considerable pain to his palm. When he’d turned to John, there’d once again been presence in his eyes. John had not asked, and the man hadn’t mentioned it as John put balm on the slightly burned skin.

"Well, then you know," Landon says, finishing another bite before continuing, obviously engaged in the subject, but still just as calm and thoughtful as he’d been with the patients earlier.

"And well, there’s the compulsive ones, it’s pretty rare, but they are recurrent here. They do it as a compulsion, just like any other compulsion you can see when someone has OCD, but this looks worse than most, since it’s so visible and damaging. And then there’s the autistic, or those on the spectrum. Sometimes they do it almost like a compulsion, and sometimes it’s part of what’s called ‘stimming’, which is some sort of self-soothing, but those injuries are mostly concussions, bruises and sometimes broken bones in the hand. Now, stimming is usually not that self-destructive, but it occurs. The difference is that the patient doesn’t really mean to harm themselves consciously, they say."

John has hardly begun eating, and looking at the clock he realises that lunch is almost over, so he begin shoving in his food.
"So basically, there’s no way of saying why someone did that to themselves, without them telling you?"

"Oh, one learns, the clinical eye and all. But most of the time, no. You get to know the patient, and then you can sometimes figure it out, but sometimes it’s really hard to know. Some will tell you, others don’t even know for themselves."

"Isn’t it hard, seeing someone do it again and again, coming in here with wounds?" John dares to ask, afraid of sounding judgmental.

"Of course, it’s hard. But it’s harder on them, one has to remember. How terrible mustn’t you feel in order to do that to yourself, I often ask myself. It makes it a bit easier to deal with it. Because of course, you sometimes want to shake them and tell them to stop, to tell them that they’re risking their lives and their health, but if in the end, no one chooses that for themselves if they have a functioning alternative."

John isn’t sure that he understands, or that he’s grasped the essence of what Landon’s told him. As he scoops the last forks of rice, John thinks about the times when he's been under considerable emotional stress; when the flashbacks from Afghanistan won’t leave him, or when nightmares of the war or a few events of his childhood wakes him up repeatedly during the night. Or when Sherlock had been below the water surface for what seemed like forever that day in September, when he’d fallen into the Thames while still wrestling with a murderer. How John had run down to the water, the panic increasing as the seconds became minutes and his-- No. He shrugs the thought off. He can’t think about that now. He has patients to see and a lunch box to clean.

"I think I am even more confused on the subject now, but I think that might be in a good way," John says as he gets up from his chair to go to the sink.

"It isn’t easy to understand. I know I don’t. But one can only theorise a bit, try to see it in context. That’s the best I can do, at least."

Context.

John thinks about context, about what context Sherlock might have been in. He knows very little about his friend’s life before they met and Sherlock seems content to let it stay that way. John has always been curious, and has generously distributed details of his own previous experiences and circumstances when Sherlock had wanted to know if he had deduced things correctly or when he’d simply been snooping around John’s stuff.

What was Sherlock’s life like before? John knows where he himself had been; in the bedsit, with the flashbacks, the gun and the inability to connect with anyone else. The war does that to you, they say. He’d just never thought it would do that to him. People that he used to enjoy spending time with now seemed two-dimensional and empty, caring about cars and sports and stock market, while John’s mind had been clouded by dying soldiers and civilians, with gun threats and the stench of blood in boiling heat on the windless battlefield. In his memories and dreams, the sun was always high and there was never any wind, the air static and the stench constant. Seven minutes didn’t numb his senses to the smell of blood, it had seemed.

He's glad that he's facing the sink, since his face might have done all sort of expressions as he thought about these things, things he tries very hard not to think about. And he’s been there, in that state that is both chaos and emptiness, but where’d Sherlock been just before they’d met? He doesn’t know, he just knows that Sherlock had been working cases and been clean for a while. That he’d been looking for a flatmate, but John still isn’t sure why, as Sherlock never seems to lack funds. It seems like Sherlock hadn’t had anyone to acknowledge his brilliance, at least no one
besides Sherlock himself, and as Sherlock had said, he only has one friend. Had he had friends before? Had someone bothered enough to notice that Sherlock likes his tea sweeter in the evenings than in the mornings, and that he’ll stop in the middle of a rambling speech about something gruesome just to observe an insect if he sees one while he's outdoors? Had someone else seen Sherlock, seen him when he thought no one watched and he adjusted his hair, squeezing curls in order to keep them from frizz, something he's very careful not to show that he cares about.

John doubts someone had really seen Sherlock. John sees Sherlock, but at times he isn’t quite sure what it is that he’s seeing. What is theatrics, what is repression, what is manipulation and what is really Sherlock? Perhaps all of it is Sherlock, but in different forms. John likes that thought but isn’t about to accept it as the truth.

He dries his newly washed lunch box, puts it away at the counter and regroups his thoughts before accompanying Landon back to the patients.

When John gets home that evening, his feet aches from all the static standing and the constant walking, something he isn’t used to from the locum. After lunch, the A&E had been crowded, and he’d hardly had time to use the bathroom, not to mention having a cup of tea. The first thing he does as he enters the flat is to toe of his shoes, feeling his feet almost floating out now that they are no longer restricted by the leather of his shoes. He groans a bit as he stretches his back, and almost gasps when he opens his eyes to find Sherlock standing right in front of him, where he certainly hadn’t been a few seconds before.

Sherlock looks at him, scanning, then gives him a half smile as he speaks.

"You’re not used to the constant standing, and someone threw up in the examination room."

"Correct on both," John says tiredly, then stretches his toes before taking off his jacket.

"Hardly a challenge," Sherlock notes and turns to walk back into the sitting room.

John’s grip on his arm stops him in the middle of turning. As Sherlock turns his eyes back to him, John sees that the callous expression doesn’t quite make it to his eyes in time. There's something there, something that tells John that this affects Sherlock on some level, whatever level that might be. In just another second, the blankness in his eyes reappears, a blankness that John has learned is more telling than any sign of emotion has ever been.

He steps into Sherlock’s personal space, lets the grip on his arm remain solid, but allows the movement of his hand be tentative as he lets it slide into his friends hair at the nape, feeling the softness of curls and expensive product against his fingers. He meets Sherlock’s gaze again, and this time, there’s no blankness, just caution and observation.

He still doesn’t feel prepared to press up against Sherlock, to feel the very slight stubble, the hands that are bigger than his own and the erection pressed against his belly. He still doesn’t fantasize about this, but as his lips brush against Sherlock’s, and Sherlock immediately increases the pressure (and a sudden and intense smell of peppermint suddenly hits him) John finds that he's not quite as terrified as he'd been the previous times. It might be about a lot of things, and it isn’t about being in love, but there are probably some very complicated affections behind that ease of previous disturbance over the physical situation. And when he opens his mouth and Sherlock parts his lips, when his tongue invades Sherlock’s mouth and he feels his friend, the plague of his life and his flatmate shiver
slightly, it's all fine for the moment.

It's not all fine, not all good, and this is still a terrible idea, but John finds that he's so used to terrible ideas turning out to be at least 'not boring' that he feels that he might not really care whether the idea is terrible or not. He isn't in love with Sherlock Holmes, and that's all that matters.

The rest of it, John can handle for now.

Chapter End Notes

Now, self-harm according to Wikipedia:

Self-harm (SH) or deliberate self-harm (DSH) includes self-injury (SI) and self-poisoning and is defined as the intentional, direct injuring of body tissue most often done without suicidal intentions. These terms are used in the more recent literature in an attempt to reach a more neutral terminology. The older literature, especially that which predates the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR), almost exclusively refers to self-mutilation. The term self-harm is synonymous with the term self-injury.

The most common form of self-harm is skin-cutting but self-harm also covers a wide range of behaviors including, but not limited to, burning, scratching, banging or hitting body parts, interfering with wound healing (dermatillomania), hair-pulling (trichotillomania) and the ingestion of toxic substances or objects. Behaviours associated with substance abuse and eating disorders are usually not considered self-harm because the resulting tissue damage is ordinarily an unintentional side effect. However, the boundaries are not always clearly defined and in some cases behaviours that usually fall outside the boundaries of self-harm may indeed represent self-harm if performed with explicit intent to cause tissue damage. Although suicide is not the intention of self-harm, the relationship between self-harm and suicide is complex, as self-harming behaviour may be potentially life-threatening. There is also an increased risk of suicide in individuals who self-harm to the extent that self-harm is found in 40–60% of suicides. However, generalising self-harmers to be suicidal is, in the majority of cases, inaccurate.

* * * * *

Self-harm in this chapter:

Actually, in this chapter I'd say the illustration is pretty straight forward; it's a discussion of reasons people might self-harm. I chose to write it this way for many reasons; the reasons Sherlock did at one point self-harm is not yet to be disclosed, I wanted to avoid too much triggers (but they'll probably come in a later chapter, I'm afraid) and I also wanted to write about 'why' rather than 'how'.
Sherlock's down on his knees again.

"John, I don't expect or need you to reciprocate this," he says, voice deeper than usual as he fumbles with the belt and the buttons.

"I could… probably..." John’s voice is breathy and ragged.

"No," Sherlock simply cuts him off, following as John leans against the front door to remain their balance.

There are no more protests or attempts to address the issue of reciprocation, and Sherlock is relieved as he takes a deep breath through his nose, feeling the slight burn of tiger balm inside his nostrils.

John’s hands are flat against the door and Sherlock drags his trousers and pants down, feeling oddly empty, like his body is abandoned and hasn’t felt human contact in ages. It shouldn’t feel like that, not when he’s spent the last minutes making out with the man in front of him, has had John’s hands on his face, his neck, his back, his arse, his hair. It feels like these places are now experiencing some kind of abandonment issue, which is highly unsettling. Trying to ignore it, he lets his thumbs trace iliac crests, his breath adding warmth to the half-erect cock in front of him, watching it twitch a little, slowly filling. It's hypnotizing, and Sherlock forgets his body’s feeling of abandonment, relishing the sight of John’s cock growing harder with Sherlock’s breath as sole stimulation. It's fascinating, and he almost stills altogether when he watches the foreskin retract from the head, slowly displaying more and more of the flushed glans and gradually changing the appearance of the penis in front of him. One of the most curious aspects of it all is how strong the urge to once again take the bloodfilled and growing organ into his mouth is, to taste, to feel the heaviness and the almost suffocating feeling of it in his mouth and to sense every reaction of his friend as he does so. Slowly, he looks up at John’s face, but John’s eyes are closed, his face turned slightly upwards, as if he needs to keep his airways as open as possible. John seems to feel Sherlock’s gaze on him and slowly opens his eyes and looks down on him. Their eyes meet, and Sherlock can’t understand what he sees, it's something he doesn’t think he’s ever seen in another person’s eyes before. It's hazy focus, determined abandon and silent fascination, or maybe it's something else entirely - he lacks the data needed in order to tell for sure. Is this how someone looks when they're about to receive fellatio? It isn’t quite the same expression as last time Sherlock had been on his knees in front of John; that had held more desperation and hesitation, and maybe also a trace of fear. This is more like abandonment, like John isn’t hesitating anymore, like the path is chosen and no further internal debating is necessary. And John’s eyes don’t leave his, don’t flicker away, just make a brief detour to his mouth and then returns.

The tiger balm works. None of the previous overloads of smell from humid genitals or groin disturbs Sherlock this time. He finds that without that persistent smell, he's just curious, the need to struggle to override his impulse to pull away from the smell now nonexistent.

He drags his lips along the length, well aware that John is still looking. He feels the response as he holds his hands on his friend’s hips, hears the sudden intake of breath and in that moment, Sherlock feels capable of doing this without panicking. One of his hands leaves John’s hip and slowly closes around the base of John’s cock to adjust the angle as he lets his tongue swirl at the head without touching it with his lips. Another interesting reaction from John, and Sherlock feels...
a shift and hears a thump, realising that John probably has returned his previous position with his head resting against the door.

It had been a tedious business, watching all those hours of porn.

Judging by John’s reactions as Sherlock drags his lips along the length once again before taking the head into his mouth, it had been hours well-spent.

It's different from last time. This time he's prepared. This time there's less of an internal conflict regarding the risk versus reward. The risk is obvious, the reward is a bit less welldefined. If he gives his body this - sexual acts with this specific person, something which his body has (in no uncertain terms) made its requests for - then he's more likely to get this out of his system and be able to go back to his previous state of self-achieved sexual satisfaction. A state that provides less risk for complications. He's not opposed to his own sexuality, only the complications that involving someone else will inevitably cause. Complications and risks. And he likes danger, but this is not the kind of danger that gets your adrenaline pumping, this is the kind of danger that could result in… [deleted]

He feels his pulse increase but chooses to ignore it, taking more cock into his mouth instead. As he swirld his tongue, he notices that the taste in his mouth changes. Interesting. It's not quite like he remembers it, it's saltier and more tart. For some reason, this finding makes something in him relax a fraction. He uses that measure of relaxation to see how deep he can take John.

John gasps as more than half his cock disappears into his friend’s mouth. A thrill goes through Sherlock, a realisation of the fact that this might actually work. Perhaps he can have this. Actual sex with an actual other person. It isn't that he hasn't been satisfied by his solitary sex life, which is indeed both very stimulating and uncomplicated, but this is something else entirely. Not necessarily better, but far more intriguing as far as surprises and neurotransmitters goes. It's not the first time he’s had sex with another person, but it's the first time he’s had sex with another person that he's actually attracted to, as opposed to just wanting to have sex. He's just experienced attraction towards a few people before, a few people of which he’s only felt the desire to actually have sex with one. And that hadn’t… [deleted]

[deleted]

It isn’t working. The deletion is glitching and with a shiver Sherlock feels how cold sweat breaks out on his palms, making him nauseous. And John’s cock is filling his mouth and he keeps sucking and John keeps responding, but this is what he’d wanted that one time and that had… [deleted], no, it isn’t all [deleted], no, because he can feel how wrong this is, how sick he is for doing this to John, and how can he really expect a different outcome this time, when last time he actually wanted this...

No. Focus. These things have been [deleted] for a reason. There's nothing to add to that now. Focus. Back to this reality; the hallway, John, airflow partially obstructed by cock, knees hard against wooden floors, hands...

There's nothing holding him there. He could float away because nothing except his mouth and his hands are grounding to another person. The rest of him is empty and lacking in contour. He would disperse and diffuse into the air, a slight smell of strong mint left behind. Nothing keeps him here.

Nothing stops him from dissolving and John wouldn’t care, if John actually wanted him there he’d hold on to him, this is just John trying not to flinch out of disgust as Sherlock sucks his cock, because John is not like [deleted], but he could almost be, because he doesn’t want Sherlock like this either, he won’t hold on to him, wouldn’t still be here if Sherlock didn’t hold on to his hips and his cock and any second now, John will back away and Sherlock will still be on his knees and he’d finally have it confirmed that he's sick for wanting this, he's sick to take this from someone who clearly doesn’t
want another man, who doesn’t want him, and he ought to know better, because he can feel how empty his own body is, because no one wants him to stay, to do this and no one could want him like this if they know him and John knows him and that....

It's hard to hyperventilate with someone’s penis in your mouth and it's hard not to panic when you realise just how pathetic you are. And Sherlock’s body is hollow and nothing except his own hands and his mouth is keeping him here.

Inhale. Exhale.

Breathing through his nose, he tries to stay where he is, in reality, tries to avoid the looming panic.

Inhale. Exhale. 

And then his hands do something on their own account. They leave John’s cock and John’s iliac crest and find John’s hands, still pressed against the door. He keeps breathing way too fast and can hardly keep continue what he's doing, but he has John’s hands in his and places them on top of his head. John’s fingers instantly find their way into tangled curls, fingers almost scratching his scalp. Every follicle is vibrating with the touch and the weight of John’s hands on his head is suddenly keeping him from dissolving; there's contact and there's reality and there's pulse.

Inhale. Exhale. Inhale.

"Is this okay?"

John’s voice is breathy and sounds like it's coming from far away. The words are hoarse and the fingers are tightening their grip in Sherlock’s hair. And in the middle of inhaling and exhaling, he must have moaned, because he hears a moan that sounds like it's coming from somewhere much closer than John is.

John is asking if this is okay, and it is, isn’t it? There's still panic and he can still feel his own pulse in his ears, but John’s fingers are tugging harder on his hair for every movement of his mouth and… Oh.

The pressure on the back of his head increases and John’s hand tilts his head a bit upwards. Chest still heaving, hands slightly trembling, Sherlock reluctantly opened his eyes.

His eyes meet John’s.

He almost draws in a breath through his mouth, but his mouth is otherwise occupied. Instead, he almost chokes. In a very discrete way.

There's nothing but want in John’s gaze. Nothing. No hesitation, no disgust.

Just want.

And he has no idea what his own eyes communicate, but it must be something convincing, because there's a moan that's most definitely not coming from himself, and suddenly the pressure on his head changes and he's almost choked again, this time not by his own saliva, but on John’s cock. All at once it's almost all the way down his throat, and he tries desperately not to gag or push himself away as John’s hands hold him there for a few seconds while Sherlock’s thought-induced panic is replaced by gag-induced panic. His body has stopped dissolving and his thoughts goes instantly quiet as he struggles to relax his throat.
It doesn’t end there. As he finally gets his breath to calm enough so that he isn’t on the verge of
starting to see black spots, slow, careful thrusts begin. John’s hands on the back of his head hold him
in place while his face is kept from moving by the thrusts down his throat. There are no thoughts in
his head anymore, just the wet sounds, the gasping above him and the presence brought on by the
hands that are holding him.

He’s had this done to him before, and he’d lived through it and hadn’t regretted it, but this is
different. This is need and this is grounding him and this is John and…

The pounding into his mouth becomes more forcefull, his throat hurts a bit and he fights his gag
reflex desperately.

His hand leaves John’s thigh, where it had placed itself after John had made it superfluous to steady
his cock, and begins wandering down his own body. He finds the zipper and begins staggered
attempts at stroking himself while his whole body is rhythmically shaken with every thrust. It merely
takes a few seconds before he wants to stop, already too close, and he isn’t sure if he wants John to
see him like this, desperate and turned on by this, but his eyes are wet, saline is running down
his cheeks and he feels his own saliva trailing down from the corner of his mouth and perhaps
bringing himself off won’t matter in the midst of all that.

The thrusts becomes more erratic with every moment that passes. Sherlock’s hand is unconsciously
mimicking the rhythm and he feels how his nose is beginning to clog up in the same second he can
feel a warm weakness in his legs, now hardly able to hold himself up, but John’s hands are there, and
he’s alright, he’s coming and it’s so very, very hard to breathe, but so very easy to let go.

The orgasm leaves him feeling almost liquid and the thrusting leaves him thrashing and it isn’t
dignified, and it's exactly what he'd wanted, only it's even more.

There's a certain warmness in the back of his throat, but it isn’t until he registers the groaning above
him that he understand that his John has also climaxed. And he's reluctant to admit to himself that
he’d hardly felt John’s come at all, but he is (almost) always honest with himself, so he does.
Besides, it's such a relief to sag down from his kneeling position, leaning on his unsteady arms to
support himself as he hears John slide down the door until he too is sitting on the floor, panting, and
Sherlock opens his eyes.

John’s eyes are still closed, his head still leaning against the door, and Sherlock has come on his
clothes and they are both half undressed. It's delicious and there's no panic, just struggling to breathe
normally and sinking back onto his elbows, his arms now too weak and too shaky to support him
properly.

Inhale. Exhale. It's easy for now.

John opens his eyes, finding Sherlock’s. They are saturated and hazy, concerned and half-lided.

Concerned?

"Sherlock, shit, did I…? I’m sorry, I shouldn’t…"

And that it is.

That's what he should have been expected.
Nothing that he desires is ever ‘good’ or ‘decent’ and this is proving to be yet another of those things.

"First; yes, you did. Fuck my throat, that is. And you were the one doing the fucking, so I don’t see why you should also be allowed to be the one doing the regretting. Second; No, perhaps you shouldn’t have done it, because I do prefer being fucked by someone who’s not sorry afterwards."

His voice is altered by the harsh treatment his throat has gotten, but his tone is just as sharp and cool as he aimed for.

In front of him, John’s face does another complicated expression, and right then and there, Sherlock wishes more than ever that he had more of a natural talent at reading those emotional tells in people’s faces. But he’s never had that talent, he’s always been lacking in those aspects, he’s always been lacking in so many aspects, and this is just another one. Just another one. Nothing to waste his breath over. Breathing is boring and sex is boring and John is boring and…

"Sherlock?"

Inhale. Exhale.

He ought to leave this room, but leaving with one’s penis hanging out of one’s trousers is never dignified. And right now, he desperately needs to be just a bit dignified. From now on, he'll make sure that he always is.

"Sherlock, I’m only sorry that I might have hurt you, and that I… I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I shouldn’t just have done that. Not like that."

"No, that was clearly not what you wanted," Sherlock snarls, attempting to sit up in order not to be in such an exposed position.

John is clearly struggling with words and meanings, and his eyes flicker about and Sherlock’s stomach is doing very unpleasant things.

"What I want isn’t relevant in case this was something that wasn’t consensual, in which case I will regret this however much I like, ta."

John’s voice is just as complicated as his face had just been. It's anger and softness and frustration in a fusion that makes Sherlock blink in confusion.

"How would it not be consensual? Don’t overestimate yourself, John. No matter what your military training is, I doubt you could hold me there if I had seriously objected."

And then John’s face isn’t complicated at all, it's all relief and astonishment and a bit of laughter. Sherlock fails to see the fun, but then, he often does.

"Come here, you," John says and reaches out a hand towards Sherlock, still something like a faint smile on his lips.

Sherlock doesn’t move, doesn’t understand what John wants from him and isn’t all that eager to find out.

"Just… Are you okay?" John asks when Sherlock ignores his outreached hand.

"Please. Now you’re being boring."

And he actually manages to get up, and just like he’d thought, there’s nothing dignified about leaving
the room in a dramatic fashion with your flaccid cock hanging out and come on your clothes and spit
still on your chin, but there's a certain satisfaction to it. A satisfaction in not allowing John this, not
allowing him to pity him and care for him, a satisfaction in denying John the chance for making
amends for what he so obviously feels repulsed by having done. And if he's repulsed by this, there's
no compatibility and nothing to be sorry for, and Sherlock can leave the room without dignity but
with some form of reluctant satisfaction. So he does.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter contains a lot of different conflicts, but the conflict it aimed to illustrate was
the approach-avoidance conflict, which I think we all know, but not by name.

This is what Wikipedia has to say on the conflict at hand:

Approach-avoidance conflicts as elements of stress were first introduced by psychologist
Kurt Lewin, one of the founders of modern social psychology.

Approach-avoidance conflicts occur when there is one goal or event that has both
positive and negative effects or characteristics that make the goal appealing and
unappealing simultaneously. For example, the popular American cultural construction of
marriage is a momentous decision/goal/event that has both positive and negative aspects.
The positive aspects, or approach portion, of marriage are togetherness, sharing
memories, and companionship; however, there are negative aspects, or avoidance
portions, including money issues, arguments, and mortgages. The negative effects
influence the decision maker to avoid the goal or event, while the positive effects
influence the decision maker to want to approach or proceed with the goal or event. The
influence of the negative and positive aspects create a conflict because the decision
maker either has to proceed with the goal or event or not partake in the goal or event at
all.

The approach side of this type of conflict is easy to start toward the goal, but as the goal
is approached the negative factors increase in strength which causes indecision. If there
are competing feelings to a goal, the stronger of the two will triumph.

* * * * *

Approach-avoidance conflict in this chapter:

I think I wanted to write Sherlock in a way that was showing that he’d many reasons to
avoid, but few to approach. It made it more interesting for me to write, because it would
be hard for him to justify still doing it; the reason to do it would have to be strong in
order to weigh more than all the reasons to avoid.

Avoid;
- Fear of sexual rejection
- Unpleasant associations (memories)
- Unpleasant sensory input (smell)
- Conflicts with his desire to only engage in sexual activity alone (independence)
- Risk of problems in the relationship with John

Approach:
Yeah, that's the question. Why does he approach, even though he had many reasons not to? The reason he acknowledge is 'to get it out of his system' and perhaps also sexual desire. Are those reasons strong enough to counterweigh the reasons to avoid, or are there more reasons to approach that might be subconscious?
Minimization - Cognitive distortion

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Sherlock Holmes is a child, and John is not going to indulge him in behaving like one.

John is not going to indulge him in his sulking, not in his pretending that nothing is wrong and not in his martyr-like expressions.

It’s just not on.

Therefore, John is not spending the rest of the evening after the whole incident in the hallway glaring at Sherlock’s closed bedroom door. He’s not clenching his fists from time to time out of pure frustration and he doesn’t secretly want to scream because of the mess he’s turned this into. Instead, he’s calm and collected, cleans the flat up a bit, reads up on some of the documents on routines for the A&E that he got the first day and then he goes to bed at a reasonable hour.

John is a responsible adult and he’s not driven by anger. He’s not the kind of man who usually engages in oral sex with other men, especially not with men behaving as children and running off afterwards. He does not shove his cock down someone’s throat without verbal consent, and hardly even with verbal consent. He does not take any form of sexual gratification from such situations. He does this only to save their friendship. He is, however, aware of how twisted that last part is. He is aware that he’s got some issues with letting people go and with taking care of broken people. Then again, he’s a doctor. It’s only natural.

On the whole, John Watson is a very stable and normal bloke who just happens to end up in very unusual situations; in homes where no one except a nine year old acts like a grown up, in battlefields and sand-covered military hospitals, chasing through London after suspects and living with a crime solving genius without any self-preservation. Since a few weeks he’s also in a peculiar form of friends-with-benefits arrangement with the same genius, who claims to be incapable of anything emotional but gets upset, sulks and runs away with a surprising frequency for someone who’s not being emotional about it. John, on the other hand, is very practical about it all. This is all just a way to keep himself from getting thrown out of his flat and his best friend’s life, and whatever emotions that stirs up, it’s bound to be about their friendship and the fact that Sherlock’s behaving like a child. So John does what he always does; he keeps his head cool and acts practical and reasonable.

That means that when Sherlock leaves him half naked, sitting in the hallway after just having fucked his best friend’s face, John doesn’t panic. He sighs, because that’s what you do, isn’t it? When everyone that’s close to you keeps acting irrational and makes both their own and your life a mess, you just sigh and bide your time until you inevitably have to pick up all the pieces again. Soldier on and move forward. That’s what sane people in insane situations do.

John doesn’t panic, but he might feel somewhat unsettled about the whole thing. Not so much about Sherlock running out and having a fit again; no, that’s part of his everyday life. It’s the thing that happened before that that’s making him unsettled and anxious.

There’s a disturbing discrepancy in the whole situation.

John Watson is a straight man. He’s a considerate lover; inventive and thorough, but he’s pretty normal about what he likes in bed, at least so he’s always thought. He’s playful and enjoys every part of a woman, but he’s not one to ever push someone into a situation they’re not comfortable with and
he would never be forceful. He considers himself to be a nice bloke and his exes seem to agree to that. He might not be the right one for them, but it never ends in resentment and he’s never ever forced himself on anyone in any way. Therefore, it’s highly unsettling to consider what happened before Sherlock took off to sulk over John’s choice of words. The fact that he’s in a sexual situation with another man is unsettling enough, as he’s not attracted to men, but it’s the way he acted in that sexual situation that really bothers him. It doesn’t really matter that Sherlock moaned in approval or said afterwards that John would never be able to force him into something that he didn’t want to do. It doesn’t matter how Sherlock had looked as he had been kneeling on the floor: desperate, hungry and fully present, awaiting every movement John made. No, the only thing that matters is the fact that John isn’t the kind of person who initiates that kind of rough and dominant sex, and certainly not the kind of person who gets so turned on by the whole thing that he can’t think straight. Because it had been so extremely intense, and he’d felt so oddly present in the moment. He’d done that to Sherlock, who’d not just taken it, no; he’d been desperate enough to get himself off, clumsily and uncoordinated, while being fucked like that, his gaze hungry and his pupils unnaturally dilated. He’d been surprisingly pliant and wanting the previous times, but this was something else. Sherlock had wanted this, and John isn’t sure if that’s something his friend would admit even to himself, except in those very moments. But again, that doesn’t matter. It’s the fact that John had done it, and had been so intensely turned on by doing so that matters. That’s the discrepancy; what he considers himself to be and what he had actually been in that situation. It doesn’t fit, and it makes him feel like something is slowly coming undone, like a statue that’s weathered and slowly begins to crack. He needs to mend that crack.

John is a responsible man, so instead of lying awake all night, tormenting himself about what he’s done, he takes one of those sleeping pills that he’d been prescribed when he’d gotten back to England after the war and then he turns off the light. The sleepiness feels more chemical than he recalls it doing, but eventually, he drifts off and doesn’t wake up until one of his nightmares makes him jerk awake five hours later.

And after that, there is no hope for any more sleep that night.

Sherlock is still as merry as the half decomposed fingers in the fridge the next day, ignoring John’s presence and making sure everything he does is done louder than necessarily. It’s such a tense atmosphere that John decides to go do some errands or perhaps eat some lunch in a pub, all just to escape the flat for a few hours.

"Sherlock? I’m going out to do some errands, do you need anything?"

There’s suddenly no loud walking to the bathroom or forceful opening of drawers, just silence.

Well, that’s an answer, isn’t it?

He leaves the flat with a barely contained sigh and feels a latent headache building as he’s met with the white daylight outside. He’s on his first of two days off from his new job, and suddenly he gets an urge to call the A&E to ask if they need him to come in. He’s really not of any use outside of work right now, so he might as well be there. The thought of how desperate it might seem to call and ask for extra shifts after only a few days of his new employment keeps him from reaching for the phone. The idea is very tempting, but he’s not a desperate man, He can find something useful to do outside of work.

He sends a text to Lestrade and asks him if he’d care for some lunch, but gets no reply. Lestrade is
most likely working anyway. As John reach the tube, he sends a similar text to Stamford, and is now rewarded with a enthusiastic ‘yes’ on his lunch inquiry.

"So how’s things at the flat, then?" Mike inquires as soon as they’ve covered the subject of Mike’s family.

John takes another forkful of noodles before answering, trying to decide whether to tell a polite lie or something resembling the truth.

"Well, it’s intense, that much is sure," John settles on.

Mike looks thoughtful, and John is reminded of why he and Mike had gotten on so well in med school. It’s simply something deeply intuitive about Mike, as well as a surprisingly sharp mind. Most of the time, even John forgets how brilliant Mike really is, since he does such a good job covering it up by being jovial, easy going and making awfully bad jokes. In some ways, he is the mirror opposite of Sherlock when it comes to handling his own brilliance.

"Alright, more than intense, then. I’m basically living with a child most of the time, it feels like. Actually, right now, he’s probably at home, sulking so loud Mrs Hudson will start to worry about the state of the furniture again."

He's surprised to find how easy it is to say these words out loud to someone. They are words he hardly speaks, since he’s usually the only one, with exception of Mrs Hudson, and sometimes Molly or Lestrade, who is on Sherlock’s ‘side’. So John rarely speaks about his frustrations, since Sherlock has enough people talking about how frustrating he is already. With Mike, it's different. Mike knows Sherlock, he introduced them and he actually gets along pretty well with him, ever since that day when Mike had filled in on one of Molly’s shifts at the morgue when she was suffering from bad case of food poisoning, and Mike had surprised Sherlock with his knowledge about rare neurotoxins. Mike is not one of the people who thinks Sherlock a freak, and John really needs to let just a few thoughts out. Not much, perhaps just one or two sentences more.

Mike laughs his resounding laugh at John’s description of Sherlock’s current sulk, looking mischievously at John before speaking.

"So I gather I’m in for a bashing for introducing the two of you then?"

John can’t help but smile a bit at this, because that's it, really, isn’t it? John isn’t angry that Mike introduced them. John isn’t angry that he lives with Sherlock. He is frustrated and perhaps even a bit angry over a lot of things, but not over their friendship.

"I’m probably mad as a hatter for saying this, but no, no bashing today. Even though I might regret that as soon as I get home to find what he’s done this time. Be warned, the next time I ask you to lunch I might have changed my mind."

"I’ll take that risk, I think. The quality of these noodles makes it worth it."

They order coffee before the topic surfaces again.

"So, it’s bad right now? At the flat, I mean?"

"Well, I guess we’ve had better times," John says hesitantly. "And I just don’t know how to feel
about it, I mean, I know what he’s like, I shouldn’t be surprised when he keeps acting like a child, and still I get… frustrated at times. And I don’t know how I feel about that."

"So what you’re saying is basically that since you know about his more frustrating sides and still stay with him, you’re not allowed to be ‘frustrated’ about it all?"

"Eh, yeah, pretty much. It seems pointless to be frustrated about something that you have accepted."

"But do you? Accept it, I mean?"

John looks up at Mike, surprised.

"Of course I do, I stay, don’t I? Why would I be allowed to complain when I chose this?"

"Well, you might have chosen this, but that doesn’t really mean you have to like all of it, does it? You could actually hate parts of it and still chose it, just because the better parts outweigh the lousy parts, I’d say. At least, that’s how it works for me."

"It’s true, I know that, it’s just… I don’t feel like I should complain, I guess. He’s not a bad person, he’s just… Sherlock."

Mike gets an odd look on his face for a few moments, then he looks at John again, now careful with his words.

"What would happen if you got really angry at Sherlock?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why is it so important to you not to be mad at him? I’m only asking because I’ve known you for over a decade, John. I’ve never seen you angry at anyone close to you, and some of the people close to you really deserved some anger, I’d say."

Suddenly, the companionable atmosphere isn’t doesn’t feel that companionable anymore. At least not to John. He considers joking it all away, but he knows that the question will stick with him anyway.

"I guess I’d be an angry person."

Mike continues to finish up his plate of noodles, not commenting.

"And I don’t want to be an angry or bitter person. I guess I just don’t want the conflicts either."

"So what do you want then?" Mike says, not looking at John, but at the waiter that brings them their coffee, putting the cups in front of them hastily.

"I don’t know. Not much, really. Sort of a normal life, I guess, and I know that might sound a bit peculiar when I’m living with Sherlock, but it’s not that sort of normal I’m talking about. I think I just want some sort of order in my personal relationships and to feel that I am in charge of my own circumstances. I don’t mind risking my life to chase criminals or treat patients close to a battlefield. I just want… some sort of control, I guess. Control over my life and how others treat me. I work hard to be a decent bloke, and I guess I’d just want people to be decent to me as well, so I can have a decent life."

Mike knows John, and Mike isn’t stupid. In fact, he is far from stupid. He is brilliant, and some of that brilliance is about other areas than Sherlock’s brilliance. Sherlock can see patterns of behavior and deduce them, but John is pretty sure that Sherlock hasn’t figured this pattern out. John himself
isn’t exactly clear on this pattern, but he assumes that Mike thinks that he’ll pick up on it. In truth, he
avoids thinking about it most of the time, just so he can keep on living a decent life. The past is the
past and should not affect the future. He isn’t one to dwell, he isn’t someone who will hide behind
things that happened decades ago in an attempt to justify things that is not working out here and now.
He understands why people do that, and there’s no shame to it, really, but he just isn’t that sort of
person. He’s always been practical about himself and his circumstances.

"So what you’re saying is that you think that anger will cause you to lose the control you have over
your life?"

John gives that question a few seconds of thought. It isn’t the question he’d anticipated.

"In some ways, yeah. Anger makes me into someone I’m not, and that’s a form of loss of control,
isn’t it? I know who I am, Mike. I am not an angry person."

"Is there such a thing as an angry person? Or is there just persons that sometimes get angry?"

John’s first impulse is to roll his eyes or to smile at that. Then he decides to answer it instead.

"Alright, persons that get angry and allow the situation to affect them in a way that make them lose
some of their control, is that more clear?"

He sounds more hesitant than he’d aimed for. Mike doesn’t seem to notice, he sips his coffee with a
content look on his face.

"Right, then it’s more clear," Mike agrees. "If you get angry, that means that the situation has
affected you."

"It would seem so, yes."

"But is it a lack of control to be affected every now and then?"

"No. I’d say it depends on what affected you, and whether you wish to let it affect you or not."

"So you only want to be positively affected?"

"No, I don’t mind being negatively affected in general. I was affected by the war, and the
manifestations of that was not in any way pleasant, but I can handle those, I am allowed to get angry
over my damned psychosomatic leg or my shattered scapula, or my nightmares. I just don’t think that
other people’s bad decisions and habits should affect my entire life, just because they’re not ready to
deal with their own problems in a mature way, is that too much to ask?"

John knows that Mike knows what they are really talking about. Mike is probably thinking about the
fellow med student he’d befriended during their first days of med school, the one who was lying
about why he skipped classes and why he couldn’t come to parties some evenings. The student
whose mother had shown up in the dormitory one night and had hardly been able to stand up
straight, waking the others in the dorm with the loud bangs on her son’s door. John wants Mike to
think about anything but that student, because that student had been pitied until he’d joked it all
away, held a party, made out with one of the most desired girls in that year of med school and
everyone had forgotten about that night at the dorm.

"No, it isn’t. But can a person really choose what affects him?"

"I guess not, but they always say that one can choose how you let it affect you."
"I don’t think ‘not at all’ is one of the ways you can choose, do you?"

John has no desire to answer that, so he doesn’t. He sips on his coffee, looks out through the rain-streaked window and hopes that that’s the end of the conversation.

It obviously isn’t.

"So some things are okay to be affected by, then? But Sherlock isn’t one of those things, or people that it’s okay to be affected by?"

"I… Well, I don’t mind being affected by him per se. It’s just that I don’t want him to make me into someone I’m not."

"An angry person?"

That’s not what John meant and he’s pretty sure that Mike knows that as well.

He hasn’t thought about it specifically before, but when he does, it’s pretty clear to him. He doesn’t want to become affected by Sherlock in a way that makes him into that boy in the dormitory again. He doesn’t want to be someone who cleans up someone else’s mess and covered up for someone who’s too caught up in their own shit to care about the mess they make of John’s life.

John can handle being called away from dates for a case or being called away from work because Sherlock’s chasing down a suspect alone. It’s his and Sherlock’s work, it’s for the greater good and it doesn’t make John a caregiver to someone who should have been an adult and responsible for their own life. It doesn’t make John a victim of someone else’s inability to cope with life and illness. It doesn’t make him into someone people pity because he’s stuck with someone who chooses their addiction or illness over him. John chooses to work with Sherlock. He isn’t bound to it, there’s always a choice.

If he becomes closer to Sherlock and his friend turns back to his addiction, John knows he wouldn’t walk out on Sherlock, but he refuses to live like that again. And even without the addiction, Sherlock isn’t exactly an example of good mental health and the prospect of being dragged even further down in Sherlock’s dark moods than he already has makes John feel almost nauseous. People would expect John to take care of him if he had some sort of mental breakdown, which - judging by the way his friend can react during periods without a case - seemed like a very likely prospect.

John is aware that he’s being harsh, people doesn’t chose addiction or mental illness, but he’s lived with the consequences of both for most of his life and it’s always made him feel like he isn’t important enough to make the person in question try to master their problems. He’s never been enough, and he’s bloody tired of not being enough. And if John allows himself to be angry about it, that makes it real. It means it got to him. It means acknowledging that he cares but that it still isn’t enough for the other person.

"Something like that, yeah. Someone I don’t care to be, either way," he finally manages to answer.

"I respect that."

Mike finishes his coffee and they rise from the table and gather their jackets in silence, but it isn’t tense, it seems more like Mike’s lost in thoughts. As they leave the diner and walk towards Barts, Mike speaks again.

"I think you’re right. About being affected, I mean. You know better than most what you don’t want in your life, and that’s something I respect. You want to break patterns, and you do. That’s hard, really hard, but you’ve managed. Every situation is unique, but some situations remind you of
situations where you didn’t get a chance to chose. Situations are very different when you have a choice. Not necessarily better, but different. Sometimes we are so determined not to repeat past unpleasant experiences that we avoid anything that resembles those experiences, but that’s not always by choice either, it’s a consequence. For you, I think it’s a choice, though. A choice I can understand."

There’s nothing to say to that, really, but John feels like he has to say something.

"Yeah, I guess so. Ta, Mike. Thanks. For listening, and all. Sorry about all the bitterness."

"Well, I didn’t notice any bitterness, but even if I had, I wouldn’t have minded, you know. You’re a great guy, John, and it was good catching up with you. Let’s make sure we do this again soon, right?"

"Definitely," John agrees, and reciprocates the shoulder patting hug Mike initiates.

As they go their separate ways outside of Barts, John’s thoughts are so preoccupied that he manages to walk a several blocks before he realises that he has no idea where he’s going.

Well, that's just about right, isn’t it?

He really has no idea where he's going.

No idea whatsoever.

When he reaches 221B he actually has an idea. It isn’t exactly an idea well thought through, but then none of his recent ideas has been. It's an idea that's less based on emotions than the other recent ideas though, and if it works it might prove to make some things a bit clearer. And clarity is something that the past couple of weeks have been severely lacking.

He's not in the least surprised to be met by a still sulking Sherlock once he enters the flat. Sherlock is doing his best impression of being totally indifferent; a nod of acknowledgement, then the giant child John considers to be his best friend resumes typing on his laptop, just slightly harder than usual. The only thing giving him away is the obvious fact that John knows how Sherlock usually behaves when there's nothing in particular bothering him, and this is not it.

John gets his jacket and shoes off and then heads straight to the armchair Sherlock occupies. He takes the laptop right out of Sherlock’s hands, closes the lid and places it on the table by the side of the armchair before he straddles Sherlock’s lap without further ado.

Sherlock’s face changes from snappy irritation to condescending amusement in a matter of seconds. The beginning of a very rude protest over having his laptop snatched away dies on his lips as John takes his face firmly between his hands and presses his body a little closer to Sherlock’s, looking him straight in the eye.

"You and I are going to talk. No, correction; I’m going to talk and then I’m going to ask you a question, and after that I’d like to shag if you’re up for it."

John hardly recognises himself in these words; they are outright and unapologetic in a way that he seldom is outside of his professions. It's clear that Sherlock is also rather taken aback by John’s behaviour since the man doesn’t have any snappish reply instantly ready. In fact, Sherlock looks like
he’s fighting the urge to stare at John in surprise.

"Alright. Let’s get some things clear then. I was sorry that I did that to you last night, but not because I didn’t enjoy it - I’d think it was embarrassingly obvious that I did - but because it wasn’t something we’d talked about beforehand and I don’t give a shit about how boring you find that; for me that’s just not how I do it. If you’re still up for it I’d gladly do it again now that you’ve given me consent put in such charming words. That being said, I am not entirely comfortable with how I acted, and I’ve never acted like this before with anyone. I am also still very heterosexual, but I guess that isn’t an issue since neither of us wants a relationship and I find myself rather…” He searches for a somewhat neutral word. "- interested in doing this again."

At this point Sherlock's actually staring at him, doing a poor attempt to disguise this fact by looking uninterested. The effect of those two expressions combined is not entirely dignified.

"And that," John says, using his voice to emphasise his words, "isn’t something that’s being imposed on me, as you’ve so neatly called it before. That’s me wanting to shag you. Again. And we’ll get to that part in a minute, if you want to. But first; answer one question for me."

Their eyes are still locked and John still holds his hands firmly on either side of Sherlock’s face, making sure that he's really listening, really taking this in while holding John’s gaze.

"Sherlock, who is Samuel, and what on earth happened between the two of you?"

Chapter End Notes

Minimization by cognitive distortion (a form of defense mechanism) according to Wikipedia:

Minimisation is a type of deception involving denial coupled with rationalisation in situations where complete denial is implausible. It is the opposite of exaggeration.

Minimization – downplaying the significance of an event or emotion - is a common strategy in dealing with feelings of guilt.

Minimization may also take the form of cognitive distortion:

- that avoids acknowledging and dealing with negative emotions by reducing the importance and impact of events that give rise to those emotions.
- that avoids conscious confrontation with the negative impacts of one’s behavior on others by reducing the perception of such impacts.
- that avoids interpersonal confrontation by reducing the perception of the impact of others’ behavior on oneself.

It is frequently observed in victims of a trauma who use it to downplay that trauma so as to avoid worry and stress in themselves and others.
Minimization by cognitive distortion is this chapter:

What I wanted John to show was how he tries to downplay the importance of things that happened to him before. He'd do this in order not to get into a conflict with people he loves, but might not always like the behavior of. It would also be a way to feel less like a victim of something he can't control; if it doesn't affect him emotionally, then maybe he is not controlled by the circumstances? Last; I think that attempting to reduce the importance of things that have happened to him, or that he had to be part of, is a way to avoid dealing with emotions of hurt and/or anger.

11/4 2015 - MoiraColleen mentioned another reason for minimization in their comment, and it was so interesting I asked if I could add it, thank you! Here it is:

"People also minimize out of fear that someone else will tell them that the pain they're experiencing is exaggerated and they should just "get over it." It seems to me that John is a likely candidate for this motive as well, having likely heard his mother, for example, tell him he's making a big deal out of nothing if he protested her behavior."
Asperger's syndrome criteria part I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

First it's all silent in Sherlock’s head.

Then some sort of link between the words coming from John and the memories that's been carefully stored away in the disposal room of his Mind Palace is created.

And then comes the disruption.

Who is Samuel?

There’s a tightness around his chest, but it doesn’t feel like a panic attack, it feels much more sinister. And John is there, is sitting on his lap, is cradling his face and looking right at him. Sherlock wants to throw him off and Sherlock wants him to stay just this close. It’s a contradiction but that seems to be all his mind is capable of at the moment.

Inhale.

Emptiness. Tightness around lungs.

Exhale.

And it begins to come back to him, and he’s not feeling anything about it really; he’s too busy looking at all the images he’s been trying to delete for years.

[file restoring...]

And it’s not panic inducing, it’s just hollow and shattering. And perhaps even a bit comical. He looks at the images, all the moments he's been wanting to delete, all the sensations.

Really, is this what he’s been trying so hard to delete? Just this? It wasn’t anything worse, it wasn’t devastating?

Samuel, his feet on the chair opposite his own, chewing on a pencil while focusing on what Sherlock’s explaining to him. Samuel waving to him when they pass each other in the corridors. Sherlock himself, at the university, sitting at a table while eating lunch with a few others, people who aren’t turning their eyes away or avoiding him. Samuel making them laugh, telling them to listen to what Sherlock has deduced about some of the professors.

And it’s not that bad. It’s not causing his body to react with any physical signs of anxiety. It doesn’t cause anything.

John is staring at him, but Sherlock allows his mental examination of the images to continue. John wanted an answer; perhaps he’ll get one.

Sherlock arranges the images in a timeline so get a better oversight.

First there’s university, Sherlock age 17, he’s younger than the rest but it doesn’t matter, it’s just one more thing that will alienate him from the others, but he doesn’t need the others, never have, he wants access to the lab and the freedom of leaving home. Then there’s the classes and a fellow student that ignores Sherlock’s dismissive behavior and keeps talking to him every now and then.
There’s hours in the lab, Samuel taking notes and Sherlock working with experiments that he’ll never be able to get credit for, since he has no right to perform them, has no approval from anyone at the Chemistry department to do these experiments, but it doesn’t matter; he’s occupied and it’s calm in his brain and his family is far away. Samuel is acceptable in terms of company, even if Sherlock usually prefers solitude.

No, this won’t work. He hasn’t got the time to go through the images this thoroughly right now.

And then there’s a misunderstanding, a misinterpretation of social norms and expectations, because Sherlock’s never been good at understanding human behavior, the therapist at rehab had said. And right then and there, at rehab, Sherlock had decided to take those words and prove them wrong, because he was Sherlock Holmes and he was more intelligent than all those people who claimed to understand social behaviors. So Sherlock spent most of the time in rehab cataloging and examining the people around him, building mental structures and creating connections between expressions, body language, choice of words and other data to build a mental database of people’s social behavior. It’s dull, but useful, and perhaps that’s what gets him out of rehab, because he learns what the doctors and therapists wants him to say, and says it. It works disturbingly well, and Sherlock’s frustrated by how something so simple can be regarded as something so important to master.

It had taken him a few months to refine this new skill, but then he does read people’s behavior better than most these. It’s still not automatic or congenital and it still requires more effort and attention than the other observations; the ones about material things and the connection between them. The deductions quickly became a defense against all the quiet accusations he’d faced daily about not understanding people, about not being able to read in others what others thought they could read in him. Deductions are a great way to show that you understand people better than they understand themselves. It will also provide the conception that it’s not lack of knowledge that makes him disregard social norms; it’s the simple fact that he sees the norms, sees right through people and their motives, and that what he sees is so dull and below him that he chooses not to participate.

His views on social norms not changed after he’d learned how to read behaviors and expressions, but others views on him had changed; where he used to be patronized for not observing social conventions he is now intimidating and sharp while still ignoring the same norms. This fact says more about other people than it says about him, he concludes.

So, yes, there had been a misunderstanding, a misinterpreting and a misery. And people had not been friendly before, but they’d let him in for the first time in his life, and one misunderstanding was all it took to change it back to how it’d always been. No, it hadn’t returned to how things had been before, it’d gotten worse. And he could live with solitude, with ‘freak’, with ‘you’re mental’ and with the silence that surrounded him once more, but he couldn’t quite live with himself. So he escaped himself with the assistance of intravenous chemicals, a habit he’d picked up before… [deleted]. (Oh, that’s still deleted, there’s still parts of this he hasn’t access to? He knows what it is, but the images won’t show yet. Peculiar.) So drugs had been a helpful solution to problems before the misunderstanding, they’d helped him become less himself, and that was very helpful if he wanted others to accept him. And for the first time in his life, he had wanted that. Not for his own sake, no, he hadn’t gone that far, no, it was for Samuel’s. And with cocaine in his blood he’d been ‘more easy going’ and ‘more likable’, and it was worth having to turn to chemical aids to achieve that. At least, he’d thought that at the time. It had been relatively low doses and a moderate intake, very controlled, as he would hate for anyone to find out that his ‘more amenable’ persona was a result of self-medication rather than of natural social skills. After the misinterpretation the doses had advanced. And an overactive brain with too much IQ and too few breaks was perhaps not ideal for cocaine, it’d seem, because then came a period of time that were quite hazy and…

“Sherlock? Hello, I’m still here, are you?”
He is.

He is in his chair while being pinned down by John, who sits on his lap, still holding his face. And John’s hands are warm and feel like solid hot water against his jaw and cheeks and his mind returns to the present and suddenly there’s something wrong with his ribcage, it’s too tight and his lungs doesn’t really fit anymore. It’s a stupid thought, because his ribs haven’t undergone any recent trauma and his lungs are just fine, it's just a physical manifestation of a mental state, he knows that, he knows all these things.

“No.”

His voice is not as it should be and his answer lacks the edge such a fatuous question deserves. But John is staring at him and he's staring at John, and it isn’t polite to stare, his father had always insisted, but then his father hadn’t had any better things to occupy himself with than such inane troubles. John doesn’t mind. John is one of the few that doesn’t seem to mind Sherlock being Sherlock, at least not some of the time, and that is more than he's used to. And John isn’t Samuel, John is very close and isn’t disgusted, at least not for the moment.

“Have you gone into your Mind Palace or are you just trying to avoid answering?”

John’s face has a half-smile and his tone holds some concern. That doesn’t add up in Sherlock’s brain, but then Sherlock’s brain is not made for such proximity to another person. Perhaps the lack of distance is affecting his ability to think, or perhaps it’s the fact that thousands of deleted images and connections and files are suddenly being restored and all his mind is occupied in the process.

“No.”

“I am speaking.”

“But you’re not answering.”

“No.”

“Are you attempting to?”

Is he? Is he attempting to tell John about Samuel?

*It’s just something about misunderstandings and about being sick for being him, about needing chemical aid for others to be able to stand him, about sex with strangers just to prove that he wasn’t repulsive, at least not if you didn’t know him too well, but he’d not liked it and so it all was almost ironic, and perhaps for the better, really, because sometimes you stop doing drugs and they start doing you and then you lose control, and control is really the one thing he can’t lose, because without control there’s just him, like he is, and that’s not good, and he’d never subject John to that, but he’d lost control and there’d been police reports that Mycroft had made disappear and there’d been restraining orders that Mycroft hadn’t made disappear because Mycroft agreed that Sherlock was losing his mind and if you lose your mind then you need to find it so he’d been divided, no, sectioned, and there’s nothing that you…*

“No not panicking, fuck, are you panicking?”

Inhale.

*No not panicking, it’s worse than that because Sherlock’s head is hitting the back of the chair*
repeatedly and it's sensation and it's rhythm and he's not a child anymore and you outgrow these things but his mind is almost blank and he hears his own humming and he can’t see John now because his eyes are closed and the light outside is too much and he doesn’t feel anything about John seeing this, because he’s not quite aware that John does.

“Sherlock, talk to me, Sherlock?”


His lungs are very empty. There’s nothing more to exhale.

“Get out!”

He’s screaming, and he had no idea that he was going to scream. He hears it at the same time as John does, but it feels far away.

“Sherlock, I won’t leave you when you’re…”

“Get. Out.”

Sherlock says it through his teeth and there’s an urgency to it that not even John could miss.

“Sherlock, I don’t want you to be alone when you are clearly…”


John’s heavy on Sherlock’s legs and the pressure hurts and John’s hands are gone from his face, because his head is dizzy from hitting the backrest of the chair. Then the weight on his legs is redistributing itself and then there’s pressure and the pressure’s gone and the warmth of John’s body is gone. It’s the most relieving sensation he’s ever felt; his body is now just his own and he hears John back off towards the kitchen.

Sherlock gathers up his legs in the chair, wraps his arms around them and makes himself into a very bony ball of limbs and tucks his head in as good as he can. The pressure of his own arms is heavy and grounding and his head is not hitting the backrest anymore. John’s in the kitchen but Sherlock’s not observing at the moment, he’s simply managing, and that’s enough for the moment.

Inhale.

There's a cup of tea on the table by the chair.

It's dark in the sitting room, and as quiet as a London night gets. Sherlock feels cold, but it isn’t intrusive, he doesn’t have to do anything about it just yet.

John’s on the sofa, sipping tea and looking at Sherlock, cautious and neutral. Sherlock’s not sure whether he finds it condescending or respectful.

He reaches out for the mug, movements not as smooth as usual, but there’s no tremor. The tea is lukewarm, and for some reason he finds that soothing. It’s not so sharp, it’s rounder like this.

“Sherlock?”
John’s voice is both steady and hesitant, which is absurd. The whole situation is, now that he’s returned to it. How long has John watched him? How long did it take for him to notice his tea? He could calculate that from the temperature of the tea, but it’s too much effort for now.

He decides not to answer, since he doesn’t really have an answer, because someone saying ones name isn’t really a question, is it?

“You don’t have to tell me, Sherlock. I shouldn’t have brought it up.”

No. He shouldn’t have.

“No.”

Sherlock sees John’s posture change. He’s relieved that Sherlock’s talking to him, it seems. Perhaps he’s right to be relieved. Sherlock’s not one for sentiment, but if there’s something he feels as he manages to break his own silence, it’s relief.

“Can I get you anything? Do you want me to leave you alone?”

“No.”

It’s no use now, the damage is already done. John might as well stay. Sherlock feels naked and exposed, but there’s nothing to do about it. He’d rather not feel alone as well.

And that’s perhaps the most terrifying thought he’s had this evening.

There’s silence as they both drink their tea, Sherlock’s still shaped like a ball, but not wrapped quite so tightly around himself anymore, and John’s resting his elbows on his knees, slumping forward. Eventually Sherlock sets down his mug on the table again and tucks himself in a bit around himself again, even though it’s childish. He usually doesn’t care if John thinks of him as childish, but in the current situation it’s somehow a bit unsettling. Not unsettling enough for him to actually reposition himself, though.

He doesn’t really want sex right now. Perhaps that’s out of the question now anyway.

“So, want to talk about it?”

“I thought you said you weren’t expecting me to tell you anymore.”

Sherlock’s pleasantly surprised to find that his voice works reasonably well. It sometimes doesn’t, after something like this.

“No, I didn’t mean about that.”

Oh.

“No. I do not want to talk about it.”

“I should have known.”

Sherlock has no idea what John’s referring to, which is quite frustrating, but he doesn’t want to inquire about it.

“Can we just go to bed, then?”

“Feel free.”
John hesitates, and Sherlock’s looking at him again.

“Would you come with me?”

“I don’t really feel like being fucked right now.”

“What, Sherlock… No. No, I didn’t mean it like that.”

John sounds regretful and apologetic and Sherlock’s trying to understand the width of what John must have been asking him, but it’s too late and the moment’s gone. John’s uncomfortable and is now up on his feet, picking up their mugs and walking slowly to the kitchen, putting them in the sink, then returning.

“I wasn’t… Not now.” John sounds like he’s trying to reassure him, and that’s really disturbing.

And Sherlock’s up on his feet, just a bit unsteadily, walking past John into the bathroom. There’s a relief and an emptiness simultaneously as he locks the door behind him and there’s a buzz in his head that won’t go away.

*Not now* John had said. Did he mean that it’d be a possibility later?

Sherlock doesn’t want to think about sex right now, but the possibility that John would still be interested isn’t unpleasant under the circumstances. He’s not sure where the fact that he just dismissed John and left the room without a word leaves them, and all the things he’s done should eventually tell John that this is a terrible idea, but he’s not sure how much it’ll take for John to accept that conclusion. Sherlock will take what’s offered in the mean time.

It’s impossible to sleep.

It’s always hard to fall asleep if he isn’t severely sleep deprived, but this is worse. There’s all these images from the (not so) deleted files to be sorted before his Mind Palace is in order again, and Sherlock can’t sleep while his Mind Palace is disorganised. He’s not even sure why he’s in bed when he knew that he wouldn’t be able to sleep, but it had something to do with avoiding John and John’s emotions and concerns. Hateful.

Sherlock turns in bed, running his fingers over the smooth cotton of the sheets but finding no relief in the sensation. He sits up, searching for something to occupy himself with, restlessness growing like a rash under his skin. His phone is boring, his laptop pointless (and still in the sitting room) and he don’t feel like doing anything, doesn’t feel like being with himself at all. He could perhaps focus on something so interesting that it makes everything else fade away, it’s what he usually does when it gets like this, but there’s nothing on and he’s out of ideas. There’s a panic in the restlessness and there’s liquid solution in the wooden box in one of the kitchen cupboards which he hasn’t used in eight years. He shouldn’t even consider it, John’s here and Sherlock knows what happened last time, but there’s been a panic building for too many weeks now, and this fragile balance between them is almost lost anyway. Cocaine in low doses could actually help, for a while. Sherlock’s more likable and boring in all the right, normal ways when he’s on low doses.

It’s quiet outside his bedroom. He can’t hear John, but he hasn’t heard him leave the sitting room, so he must still be there. Sherlock could go to the kitchen and rumble about in the cupboards, it’s nothing unusual, it’s nothing that would make John suspicious.
He’s fidgeting with his curls and he knows that’s not a good sign. It’s been taught to him that it’s an immature thing to do and his mother corrected him about it until he learned to control it until he was alone. Then he managed to almost stop doing it while being alone as well. He’s still fidgeting all the time, but he’s incorporated it into the patterns of his movements and the tingling energy he’s got around him so that no one thinks about it like fidgeting anymore, it’s just impatience from a man with a brain that works too fast for this world. He smooths the fabric of his suits, flips his phone constantly, his fingers are doing their own little rhythmical dances when he talks and no one sees that’s it’s something he’s compulsed to do, and it’s brilliant, really. Rehab taught him that too, indirectly. Rehab was horrid but had proven to be helpful. Sectioning wasn’t. Not in the least. Rehab was focused on the drugs as the problem, psychiatric care was focused on him as a problem. It was the same techniques and the same involuntary admission, but focusing on the drugs felt less threatening. He was so used to being the problem that he hadn’t seen any solution to that. The drugs was a solvable problem, at least.

He gets up from bed, too vibrating with need for stimulation, for distraction, to be able to contain himself in one place.

Pacing his bedroom floor isn’t working, and in the end he throws his dressing gown over his t-shirt and pyjama bottoms and paces out to the kitchen without even a look towards the sitting room. He sees the flicker of light from the telly and he senses John’s eyes on him as he’s visible in the doorway when he’s passing, but it’s just distraction, but not enough.

The cupboard is closed and he’s staring at it for a few seconds. He could just as well do it, it doesn’t matter, as long as the tingling and vibration stops and his brain stops to file all those deleted images again.

“Sherlock?”

He doesn’t answer; it’s still not a real question.

“I’ve talked to Mycroft. He came to the locum a few weeks ago. That’s how I knew.”

And it hits Sherlock that his mind must have been more affected by all of those stupid reactions and John’s stupid emotions and all these undisciplined urges of his transport than he’d even dared to see, because he hadn’t even thought about how John knew about Samuel.

“I see. Then why did you need to ask me?”

“Mycroft wasn’t really saying…”

Sherlock interrupts him, the most important question is still not being asked.

“And why on earth are you still here if Mycroft told you? I know you’re an idiot, a codependent idiot, but this is a whole new level of recklessness even for you.”

His voice is cold and he’s still staring at the cupboard and John's still in the sitting room.

“Mycroft really didn’t say that much. And whatever it was I wanted to hear it from you. I didn’t even pay it that much attention, Mycroft has no right to spell out things about your life and whatever happened it was over a decade ago.”

“It doesn’t change who I am and what I am capable of.”

“I think it does. And I still don’t know what happened, did you kill someone?”
John’s voice is disturbingly cheerful at that last question.

“No.”

“Good then.”

“John, I’d appreciate it if you would just leave. Leave and move out.”

“Not this again” John’s voice holds quite a bit of exasperation. “We’ve been through this. Not leaving. If we are to repeat this whole thing again, can we please skip the parts where you’re slamming doors and disappearing for days and go straight to the part where we make out?”

And that’s it, really. That is what’s kept Sherlock from the cupboard and its contents so far. The fact that Sherlock’s as fucked up as you get, but John Watson isn’t far behind. And it isn’t that John doesn’t know what he's doing at this point. No, he knows. Not all of it, but he knows enough to make any sane person leave and not look back. John, on the other hand, stays and makes black jokes about it.

“You should really find yourself a therapist. A good one, this time.”

Sherlock can’t bring himself to put any real effort into making his tone sharp.

“Probably, but then I’d just lie, because you’re the only person who really calls me on my lies and doesn’t let me get away with it.”

It's true, but not quite, Sherlock does let John get away with a whole lot of lies, because Sherlock isn’t caring or kind, but he doesn’t feel like it's a moral thing to do to out every lie that John says to protect himself from things he doesn’t want to think about. Sherlock wouldn’t give it a second thought with others, but John puts up with a lot and is dooming himself by living with Sherlock, so really, Sherlock ought to give the man a break every now and then.

“I don’t call you on all of your lies. I let you get away with the ones about wanting to fuck with me.”

“Those are not lies, they’re just complicated statements.”

“Where’s the difference?”

“Oh, there’s a difference.”

It's interesting to talk to John while neither of them can see the other and neither of them attempt to move in order to do so. It helps.

“What I want and what I should are seldom the same things, but that doesn’t stop me from wanting them.”

“So you do admit that you shouldn’t?”

“There’s no question to that. It’s one of the more messed up things I’ve done. Sleeping with you to save our friendship, you said it yourself, it’s so backwards it’s going in circles.”

“Is it working?”

“I’m still here, you’re still talking to me and I get to shag with you. Yeah, it’s working wonders.”

And with that, there's nothing to do about the hint of a smile that is creeping up in Sherlock’s face. It's stupid and irrational, but John can’t see him, so he only has to be embarrassed in front of himself.
There's the loud silence of a telly being turned off; it rings in Sherlock’s ears, louder than the sound of footsteps coming to the kitchen. And Sherlock is absolutely still as John approaches him, he doesn’t flinch as the warmth of John’s body hits his before John’s actual body does. John is behind him, pressed against him and holding him still by pressing his hands against Sherlock’s pectorals. It isn’t a comforting embrace, because John is pressed too close to Sherlock and John’s lips are dragged along Sherlock’s neck. There are shivers and the tingling of Sherlock’s restlessness is somehow decreasing. The careful drag of lips on his neck is distracting, though, it's feather light and tickled and it's uncomfortable.

“Just to be clear, you’ll ask me to stop if you dislike anything I do, right?”

John’s voice is partially obstructed by Sherlock’s skin.

“Then stop that thing you’re doing right now, it’s annoying.”

John withdrews his mouth, movements hesitant.

“What part of it?”

“It’s too light. I can’t really feel it, but I still feel it. It’s frustrating.”

Sherlock wishes he hadn’t said it the same second he hears himself saying it. It's such a specific and odd thing to say when you want to be fucked, and that's his problem, isn’t it? As long as he keeps being himself in these situations things get awkward. Or terrible. He remembers. His Mind Palace is still filing away the images, but the picture's still clear. He's terrible when it comes to things involving others. And he has no right to ask this of anyone. It's too close to disruption.

“Like this?”

And John’s mouth is back, but it's lower this time, on his trapezius muscle and sucking hard. Sherlock might have answered, because John keeps sucking and Sherlock tilts his head to grant John more skin to suck on, because this is better, so much better. Feeling subcutaneous blood vessels break is somehow connected to blood flow being redirected and erectile tissue being filled with said blood. It's almost painfully hard and that makes it all clear and direct, no tingling or vibrating.

And hands are moving down his body and he’s only a few paces away from the cupboard with the wooden box and the liquid solution, but his mind is no longer on those chemicals, it's on other chemicals that are flooding his blood.

Oxytocin, testosterone, endorphins…

“Now, this time, I’d like us to actually reach the bed,” John says while he slips his hands inside Sherlock’s pyjama bottoms.

And that's acceptable.

He can do that. They can do that.

It isn’t much about him that's acceptable, but John doesn’t seem to mind so much at the moment, so Sherlock decides not to mind so much either.
I chose to use the term ‘Asperger’s syndrome’ here, since it’s still the term mainly used, even if the diagnose now has been changed and incorporated in the bigger diagnose ‘Autism spectrum disorder’. I also find Asperger’s to be a more accurate term, since it doesn’t involve the word ‘disorder’.

Wikipedia on Asperger’s syndrome:

Asperger syndrome (AS), also known as Asperger's syndrome, Asperger disorder (AD) or simply Asperger's, is an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) that is characterized by significant difficulties in social interaction and nonverbal communication, alongside restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior and interests. It differs from other autism spectrum disorders by its relative preservation of linguistic and cognitive development. Although not required for diagnosis, physical clumsiness and atypical (peculiar or odd) use of language are frequently reported. The diagnosis of Asperger's was eliminated in the 2013 fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) and replaced by a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder on a severity scale.

* * * * *

Asperger’s syndrome criteria in this chapter:

I attempted to illustrate the following criteria for Asperger’s in this chapter:

(2) failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level

and

(3) stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms (e.g., hand or finger flapping or twisting, or complex whole-body movements)

I’d say that the first one is the most prominent. It’s clear in his history that mutual relationships isn’t something he’s accustomed to, and it’s perhaps not always to be regarded as ‘a failure’, it could also be by choice, but in the back story from Sherlock’s uni days he’s actually trying, and it’s working better than before, but in the end he uses drugs in an attempt to make himself less ‘himself’, which he thinks is the key to being more likable. When it comes to ‘appropriate’ I find that this is perhaps not the term I’d use to describe any of Sherlock’s social interactions or relationships. That doesn’t mean they’re necessarily ‘wrong’, but by society’s norms they’re not appropriate.

The motor mannerism from criteria 3 is something I based on the show. He’s fidgeting, flapping and does almost everything with his whole body. It’s sometimes called ‘stimming’ or ‘self-stimulation’ and is sometimes a part of under-/over function of the sensory integration, which can be seen in Sensory Processing Disorder and is often seen in individuals on the autism spectrum. The use of senses as a way to calm yourself or stimulate yourself is present in all individuals, but some of the ways to do it is more specific than others. When Sherlock’s overwhelmed in his chair, he uses some of the automatical stims that’s sometimes seen in someone with a stimming behaviour; he bangs his head against something. It’s not a decision and it’s not meant as self-harm, it’s just the body’s (sometimes dysfunctional, but in most cases very effective) ways to calm
down.
The feeling of humid skin, coarse hair and an erect cock against the back of his hand is vertiginous. It would be easy to distance himself from this, to just float away just a bit, and John knows how to do that. Sometimes he can induce the feeling of distance, making it work to his favor. This could be one of those times. Because he’s uncomfortable about doing this, and a little distance would make it easier. And with a little distance he wouldn’t risk his face or his hesitance giving him away, causing Sherlock to once again think that he is… not wanted.

His lips are still on Sherlock’s neck, leaving bruises only in places that shirts will cover. The skin tastes faintly of salt, otherwise it’s just a smell of that herbal soap Sherlock’s used as long as John’s known him. Sherlock seldom changes those kinds of habits, while John often experiments with products, not really caring. Sherlock cares about those things, the small things in his daily routines. Running out of ‘his’ tea will result in an instant sulk if John doesn’t go right out and get it, and if John happens to by a new brand of the bread they use for toast Sherlock will refuse to eat it. And it makes sense now, how Sherlock needs certainty about some things in his life. Things like how the flat smells, his favorite tea, the outdated but still functional bunsen burner he refuses to replace with a new one and his need to have John by his side whenever he wishes. He lives in an intense way, but some things are constant and that makes for some sort of balance, John supposes.

John lets his left hand tease Sherlock’s cock, stroking it only with two fingers, while his right hand finds it way under his friend’s t-shirt and locates a nipple. The sound Sherlock makes is one that John will never grow accustomed to associating with him; surprised, pleased and desperate. John pinches the nipple, twisting gently and feels how Sherlock’s head falls back towards John's shoulder, but Sherlock’s too tall, and there’s no possible way that he can lean his head on John’s shoulder, so Sherlock regains the control over his neck and supports his own head again. It’s just a little detail, but it shows that while being groped Sherlock isn’t quite as focused as he usually is, and it’s fascinating to be able to short-circuit just a tiny bit of that huge brain. Sherlock during kissing and sex could almost be considered pliant, and Sherlock is never pliant.

No, John can’t drift away, can’t distance himself, not now. He needs to focus and be present and he needs to show Sherlock that he wants him, even if he isn’t entirely sure that he actually does. He loves Sherlock, but he isn’t in love, and he’s attracted to Sherlock (just look at the man), but it isn’t sexual. This is a mess, but he needs to stay focused, he needs not to hesitate. Sherlock reads hesitation and even kindness as a dismissal, and John is beginning to see a pattern; a pattern he ought to have picked up on long ago.

He never considered the possibility that Sherlock might actually believe that John would find him repulsive; he’d thought it an odd thing to say and had assumed that it was because of the whole ‘not gay’ thing. Then he’d talked to Mike, and something Mike said about things from before affecting John’s own behaviour had made him think. Mostly he’d thought about himself, but he’d also begun thinking about Sherlock. And then he’d remembered what Mycroft had implied about Sherlock and that Samuel fellow, and he’d seen something that might be a pattern evolving. He doesn’t know what he’d expected Sherlock to answer to his question about Samuel, but he hadn’t expected… well, whatever it was that happened. It did clarify a few things, though.

He lets his hand slip out of Sherlock’s pyjama bottoms and turns his friend around, grabbing his hair to tilt his head down for a kiss. There are more sounds, now coming both from himself and from
Sherlock, and this time the kiss actually has a somewhat normal amount of pressure, which isn’t a bad thing. Sherlock’s tongue explores his mouth thoroughly and the pressure of Sherlock’s lanky body against his own is oddly solid and comforting. There are no doubts about there being an erection pressed against John’s belly, an erection that he’d held in his hand just a few seconds ago, and even that fact feels manageable.

Sherlock actually groans as John tugs his curls with the fist he’d used to tilt Sherlock's mouth down to his own. Sherlock’s hands are on John’s back, pressing the two of them together and scratching John's skin through the fabric of his shirt and John tugs at the curls again, harder this time, making Sherlock breathe harder through his nose.

“So, your bedroom or mine?” John manages to ask as he breaks away from the kiss.

Sherlock doesn’t seem to be listening; he just keeps searching for John’s mouth again, forcing John to bend his head away in order to be able to continue speaking.

“Alright, yours, then,” John manages before Sherlock's mouth is on John’s again.

John kisses back, once again overwhelmed by the taste of mint from the toothpaste, and something he can’t place. His tongue is in Sherlock’s mouth, and Sherlock’s become pretty good at kissing, he's pushing back just hard enough and it makes John wonder for a second where Sherlock has managed to learn that since they last kissed. John finds that parts of him are now beginning to show interest, which makes him relax a bit, knowing that there won’t be any issues with that this time either. John can seem confident all that he wants, but if his body chooses to tell a different story then Sherlock would doubtlessly attribute that to himself not being desirable. And he is desirable, it's just John who isn’t... used to the whole thing.

He begins to turn them around so he can steer Sherlock backwards in order to get them to Sherlock’s bedroom. He’d been relieved that Sherlock hadn’t suggested John’s room, because John might be more comfortable in his own room but the thought of another man on his sheets, in his bed, is just a little too strange to stomach right now. Oh dear, sperm. Why did he have to think about other people’s sperm right now?

John attempts to direct Sherlock with his hands while his friend is too busy trying to grind against John’s stomach to take any notice of how they bump into the kitchen table; he just takes it as an excuse to lean back against it and draw John with him. John, on the other hand, has no intention of making out on a kitchen table filled with dishes and microscopes, and urges Sherlock towards his bedroom. It's almost comical; John trying to get Sherlock to bed, not for his usual reasons (to get the stubborn child of a man to sleep every once in a while) but in order to shag him, while said Sherlock seems determined to make that as difficult as possible, just as he always does.

After having had to stop at two doorposts because Sherlock was trying to get inside all of John’s clothes at once they finally reach Sherlock’s bed. John is relieved to find that the sheets seem reasonably clear of any pathogens or unknown substances as he falls on top of Sherlock on the bed. Under him, Sherlock loses his breath for a second; he clearly hadn’t been prepared for the weight of John falling on top of him. It makes John giggle a little, which in turn makes Sherlock stiffen. John resumes the kissing, and Sherlock only manages to keep up the reflexive sulk for a few seconds before he is once again groping and tugging on John’s clothes.

There's an eagerness and desperation in Sherlock’s body that's more intense than it had been the previous times. It feels like Sherlock is holding on to John like he would hold on to the prospect of a case after two weeks without, like this is something he needs, like his brain would erupt by the pressure of being understimulated if he doesn’t get this. And it shouldn’t be a turn on to feel like he’s someone’s fix, but it seems like it is, because John finds that he likes the way Sherlock has lost the
ability to hold back his sounds and his impulses, leaving himself more easily read than before. Sherlock's hand are everywhere at once. John has to fight another smile as Sherlock begins to tug at the hem of John's shirt only to be distracted and reach down to palm John through his jeans. And John’s need for distance has faded; he's too far gone in the physical sensation of limbs and pressure and hard kissing to think much about the fact that Sherlock's still a bloke and that this still is a bit unsettling. Physical stimulation is still physical stimulation, no matter under which circumstances, and his body and mind respond accordingly. He finds himself reaching for the hem of Sherlock’s t-shirt, but since Sherlock’s arms are still in his dressing gown, John can’t get Sherlock free from the t-shirt. After a few seconds of fumbling and tugging John rolls off of Sherlock and answers his friend's complaining sounds by dragging the man up until he's sitting upright. Sherlock’s curls are disheveled, his cheeks flushed, his breath fast and he has an expression of equal part eagerness and sulking. This time John manages to stop himself from laughing, and instead he starts to pull the dressing gown off.

It only takes a few uncoordinated and clumsy seconds for them to get both the dressing gown and the t-shirt off. Sherlock then reaches for John’s shirt buttons, efficiently undoing each one before pulling off the shirt, which is proving to be a bit complicated with the cuffs still buttoned. When John gets himself out of the shirt he pushes Sherlock until he's once again on his back with John draped half on top of him, exploring the pale torso with his left hand and balancing himself with the right.

Sherlock’s hands are exploring as well, and John wonders how much self-restraint Sherlock is using in order not to go straight to the bullet wound, having seen the curious eyes Sherlock have been giving it the few times John's left the bathroom in only a towel. It doesn’t matter, but it's surprising that Sherlock's actually considering John’s possible dislike of having his scar examined.

The skin under John’s fingers is smooth and almost completely in lack of hair. He knows how his friend’s body feels, but feeling it without any clothes between their skin is different, Sherlock’s body feels warmer and more alive like this. John lets his fingers feel prominent ribs, the sharp iliac crest, the dip of a navel with some scattered hairs around it and then the nipple, rubbing it until Sherlock whimpers. Sherlock begins kissing down John’s neck, wet and seemingly without any direction, but it's warm and intense.

It takes a few seconds for John to realise that he's in fact grinding against Sherlock’s thigh. Sherlock, on the other hand, seems too occupied with tilting his hips up to rub himself against John’s hip and fumble and grope every inch of John’s body that he can reach to notice that John's now humping his leg. And John’s body doesn’t want to stop, because the friction's wonderful and he could come like this, but his original intent, the one he’d decided on before he’d even gotten home earlier that evening and had asked Sherlock about Samuel, had been to do this more properly. Properly; in a bed, close, tangled and without the ability to hide behind layers of clothes. Like it matters, but still not affectionate in a way that would make Sherlock bolt from the bed and escape. He figured that would be what Sherlock needed: to feel like this isn’t just something John endures or takes from him, but that John really wants him. And John, well... John wants Sherlock to have that.

He withdraws a few inches, just enough so that he can breathe, and so that he can hook his fingers inside of the drawstring of Sherlock’s pyjama bottoms, and begins to push them down. Sherlock assists by lifting his hips even more, meeting John’s gaze for just half a second. Sherlock’s eyes are half closed, but the pupils are enormous and his breathing is heavy. John steals a few seconds just looking at his friend as Sherlock holds his eyes closed, fumbling with his hands over John’s chest.

It's always so different to see someone without their clothes on for the first time, the lack of protective shell and external polish so evident. And Sherlock's no exception; where his usual guise is almost flawless under certain circumstances, his naked body's incredibly human.

The pale skin is scattered with a surprising amount of naevi and there are no tan lines visible where
one could expect to find them. John’s eyes sweep over the hickies on Sherlock’s clavicles and trapezius muscle that are already darkening and now looked almost painful against the otherwise pallid skin. The forearms hold a few patches of what John assumes to be traces of chemical burns or the like, he knows that the similar patches on Sherlock’s right hand are from experiments where Sherlock had miscalculated the effects on certain chemicals on other potent chemicals in his youth. The left forearm tells another story, one that John knows, but that he's rarely glimpsed. Sherlock is meticulous about covering himself with clothing, with the exception of his feet, which are usually bare around the flat. Even in his pyjama Sherlock keeps his arms covered up by using his dressing gown. The thought that it could be contributed to the faint track marks on his upper forearm has never really occurred to John, even if he’s seen glimpses of the marks when he's needed to check his friend for wounds or damage after some reckless maneuver during a case. And then there are the marks of cases as well; he particularly remembers the four stitches he’d given Sherlock when he’d gotten a shallow knife wound on his back a few months back. There's no doubt that Sherlock’s bare skin tells a completely different story than Sherlock’s posh exterior usually does, especially since there's a blush creeping down his pectorals, one that can only originate from arousal.

Sherlock’s hands have wandered down to John’s jeans and are efficiently making the necessary precautions before taking them off. John rolls off of Sherlock once more, gets out of his jeans and pants without any form of grace before he returns to the pyjama bottoms that he’s left half way down Sherlock’s thighs, and pulls them off as well. He tries not to look at the damaged skin at the top of his friend’s thighs, he doesn’t want to wonder about what caused Sherlock to do that to himself, not right now. He catches a glimpse of a hard cock rising from auburn pubic hair, and for a second he wants to distance himself, wants to pull back and cover himself up, make up any excuse and just leave, because when lying naked in bed this seems so much more real than it had done before, and the thought of it all makes John’s head light. But the second after John’s eyes catch on Sherlock’s face; flushed cheeks, half-lid eyes and slightly chapped lips, and he sees the look on his friend’s face, the look of someone who doesn’t want to look expectant but can’t quite conceal it. And it's enough to bring John back, because yes; it's still difficult to deal with male parts where he's been used to female parts, and no; he isn’t as natural and unbothered by the whole same sex thing as he wishes that he was, but this is Sherlock. His best friend, the plague of his life, the man who would and has risked his life to save John during cases and the person who makes John dare to hope for something more than a life spent surviving after Afghanistan. And he's selfish, rude, eccentric, lazy, inappropriate and emotionally immature, but he's very much alive and he’s made John feel alive after John had decided that he’d might as well be dead. Sherlock's unpredictable and home at the same time, he's a paradox and a trial, a genius and someone who used to be very lonely. And he's there, and they'll make a mess of their friendship and it's probably John’s fault, and it's also Sherlock’s fault, but it'll be okay, because no matter how fucked up this thing is, they’ve gotten to know each other even better through it.

He takes a breath and lets most of his thoughts go, and lets himself back down on top of Sherlock. It’s all warm angles and instant groping as their skin come into contact again. There's a hard cock leaking, there's another person’s sperm being smeared against his thigh, but there's also a tongue once again exploring his mouth in detail. His own cock finds friction against a prominent hip bone and this time it's skin against skin, no fabric, just someone else’s living cells against his own. John’s hands find curls to tangle in and Sherlock’s once again all over, never settling for anything. It's like having an meaty windmill under him, Sherlock’s hands fumbling and groping everywhere they can reach, and John looks up to meet his eyes and sees that…

Oh.

Yeah… If that's... that would explain it.

As he looks closer, John finds that Sherlock’s eyes are a mix of over-excitement and confusion, like
a child on a wild sugar high. It's like he lacks direction and has no idea where to focus or how to get forward, even if he desperately wants it to move forward. Sherlock might have done this before, but he’s also said that it had been tedious. Now it seems like he doesn’t find it tedious at all. No, he wants this, and when Sherlock wants something he's all-consumed by it in a rather hypomanic way.

And, John knows, Sherlock doesn’t want to want this so much. He doesn’t want to be the one who wants someone else, for whatever reason. He wants to be wanted, and John can see how that, and a lack of practical knowledge, could be what's making Sherlock almost shatter in confusion and energy.

Without hesitation, John grabs one of Sherlock’s hands - the one that's currently trying to decide if it wants to grope John’s arse or trace his spine - in a firm grip around the wrist and bends it up in order to pin it to the mattress next to Sherlock’s face. He meets his friend’s eyes, and is triumphant to see that they are now wide and wondering, but no longer confused.

“Stop flippin’,” John demands with a firm voice, and Sherlock stills, his other hand dropping from where it had been busy with exploring John’s forearm.

And now Sherlock’s eyes are even wider, but there's also a poorly hidden excitement in his face, and well, John should have figured, shouldn’t he? He should have seen this. It should perhaps have been obvious after the previous encounters, but John’s been too occupied with his own guilt to focus on Sherlock’s reactions, and what they could tell him. Looking back, he should have seen it.

Sherlock likes to be in control and he respects competence. Ideally, he's the one who has both the control and the competence, but Sherlock isn’t blind to the areas in which he has less knowledge and competence. He would rather ask an expert about a detail on a crime scene than make an uneducated guess, both because of the fact that he respects and admired competence and because of the fact that Sherlock hates doing anything in which he doesn’t excel. Come to think about it, that's probably one of the reasons why Sherlock never does any shopping or the errands; it's something John has begun to understand that Sherlock actually isn’t good at. He can’t make decisions at Tesco’s; he gets stuck staring at all the different types of pasta, and he can’t handle the input from the crowd at the pharmacy if he isn’t there on a mission; a case. So Sherlock pretends that he's too spoiled or too lazy rather than to admit that he can’t handle it. When put in relation to sex, some of those realisations can be applied.

Sherlock has very little experience regarding relationships and sex. Not only that; it seems like he’s actually been told that he's useless in these areas. And Sherlock's a show-off and a proud man, and he hates doing something that's less than astonishing, or at least extraordinarily odd. John, on the other hand, even has a (somewhat excessive) reputation about his abilities regarding sexual performance. To Sherlock, it must have been the obvious conclusion that John should take the lead.

But there's more to this, John realises as he the thoughts race through his head. Sherlock had been shown or told that he's not desired in a sexual context, that much is clear even to John. And if John takes the initiative Sherlock won’t be responsible, won’t ‘impose’ something on John and won’t have to show off some set of skills that he doesn’t possess. He won’t have to make the decisions and he won’t have to choose between all the hundreds of possibilities there is in a sexual situation, something John knows is a more common problem than Sherlock lets on. And perhaps, just perhaps, Sherlock’s glad to give up the control in just one area of his life, an area he doesn’t fully understand and doesn’t have enough data on to make educated decisions in. It'll leave his brain free to just experience, take in data and study methodology. Last, but not least in this context; Sherlock obviously gets off on it. And John's nothing but a considerate lover; he can give this to Sherlock, now that he’s realised what it is his friend needs.

John puts even more pressure on the wrist he holda pinned as he lets his other hand find its way into
dark hair, tugging hard. Sherlock’s head follows John’s hand and John leans down, kisses him more forcefully than he’s ever done before, and the sound Sherlock makes is confirmation enough that John’s interpreted the tells correctly. John has never had his tongue this deep inside someone else’s mouth before, neither has he had someone else’s tongue so deep inside his own mouth. It's messy and a bit suffocating, a bit like life with Sherlock ought to be.

Without giving it much thought he lets go of his grip on Sherlock’s hair and hunches his back a bit as he fumbles between them. He manages to get his hand almost around both their cocks, then has to reposition himself a bit on top of Sherlock in order to get the right angle before finally wrapping his hand around as much of them that he can hold.

He’s never imagined doing this and he has no idea where the idea comes from, but the sensation is unexpectedly intense. Their cocks press against each other, circled by his hand that can’t quite reach around them both, but it's still enough to make him shiver slightly as he begins to move his hand slowly up and down their lengths. He doesn’t break the kiss and he feels Sherlock’s attempts at gasps right inside their mouths, feels the vibrations of a moan and feels Sherlock’s chest rise and fall even faster under him. He picks up his pace and feels how one of them, or both, is leaking, which makes the slide significantly more pleasant. His stomach tightens and it can’t have been more than three minutes of joint thrusting before he feels his orgasm build up, and he doesn’t care to slow down, just gets his mouth free from Sherlock’s and cries out as he comes, feeling the hot liquid smear between them as they both continue to move through it. He continues, although somewhat less coordinated and energetic, to wank Sherlock as he lets his own over-sensitized cock out of his grip. Once he only holds one cock it's easier to reach and envelope but his arm still aches a bit from the movements. Sherlock comes with a sound John hasn’t heard before, and as soon as he’s sure that Sherlock has finished, John slumps off of him, managing to get himself into a position that's more fitted for breathing as he rests just half on top of Sherlock.

Breathing is the only sound in the room as John lets his head fall back and he rolls a bit further off of Sherlock in order to get some air on his sweat-damp body. Opening his eyes is not an option; the lids are heavier than he’s felt them being in a long time and all he can do is breathe.

Inhale. Exhale.

And Sherlock’s beside him, breathing just as fast and uneven, and John isn’t repulsed or even confused right then. There’s a dawning realisation building up somewhere inside of him, but his thoughts are too scattered for him to grip that realisation just yet. He has a fair idea of what that realisation could be, and he finds that he's too tired and too spent to even feel worried right then, and when Sherlock begins to move with heavy movements and gets up a few minutes later, leaving the room without a word while John listens to his steps going towards the bathroom, John isn’t bothered. He knows Sherlock has to get out, that he won’t stay beside John for the night or even speak to him right now. Neither of them knows what they really want out of this and it's complicated and messy, but John is okay with that for now.

It's even okay that he isn’t that terrified right now.

Chapter End Notes

Rationalization according to Wikipedia:
In psychology and logic, rationalization or rationalisation (also known as making excuses) is a defense mechanism in which controversial behaviors or feelings are justified and explained in a seemingly rational or logical manner to avoid the true explanation, and are made consciously tolerable – or even admirable and superior – by plausible means. It is also an informal fallacy of reasoning.

Rationalization encourages irrational or unacceptable behavior, motives, or feelings and often involves ad hoc hypothesizing. This process ranges from fully conscious (e.g. to present an external defense against ridicule from others) to mostly unconscious (e.g. to create a block against internal feelings of guilt). People rationalize for various reasons — sometimes when we think we know ourselves better than we do. Rationalization may differentiate the original deterministic explanation of the behavior or feeling in question.

According to the DSM-IV, rationalization occurs "when the individual deals with emotional conflict or internal or external stressors by concealing the true motivations for his or her own thoughts, actions, or feelings through the elaboration of reassuring or self serving but incorrect explanations.

* * *

Rationalization in this chapter:

Most of what occurs in John’s thought during this chapter could be considered to be rationalizations, depending on what you think his real motive (subconscious motive) is. My angle was (and has been through this entire fic) that John is in love, but his history and in some part his self-image causes a cognitive dissonance when confronted with that sensation, leaving John with emotions he can’t really understand. He acts on some of them, but in order not to have too much cognitive dissonance he has to rationalize those actions, attributing them to wanting to stay with Sherlock, making Sherlock happy and natural bodily responses to touch. The last part, though, is also (for me) multifaceted, since John’s actually not been attracted to people of the same sex before, and still has a hard time with the pure physical sides of the attraction.

A few times in this chapter when one could argue that John’s using rationalization:

- When considering if ‘distancing himself’ (dissociate) would help him make this more believable to Sherlock. (Not just because it scares John…)
- When he decides not to ‘distance himself’ for Sherlock’s sake. (Not because he realises that he actually wants to be present)
- When he defends his emotions by thinking that he ‘loves Sherlock, but isn’t in love with him’, in order to explain to himself why he feels and reacts so much.
- When he’s relieved that he’s getting aroused, thinking it’s only because he doesn’t want Sherlock to think that John doesn’t find him attractive, not because he himself would find it embarrassing not getting aroused.
- When he relaxes and finds that he no longer even feel the need to ‘distance himself” it’s just because rubbing some parts and feeling some things automatically does that, no matter under what circumstances; it’s just biology.
- When he thinks about wanting to do this ‘properly’ it’s just because he wants Sherlock to have this ‘properly’, not because he might also want to feel all the skin against his own or explore Sherlock’s body.

Of course, one could argue for different reasons for all of those things, but in my mind, as I wrote this, this was how John managed not to cause a cognitive dissonance inside
himself by acknowledging that he’s not just doing this for Sherlock or for their friendship (like that was ever a rational idea…) but because he’s in love, or is beginning to fall in love, with Sherlock.
“You and your doctor have something in common, I see.”

Sherlock’s eyes flick open.

Mycroft.

Sitting room. Sofa. Daylight.

It takes a second to gather all the data needed to interpret the situation, but then it becomes disturbingly clear that Sherlock hasn’t just fallen asleep on the sofa despite his intention to spend the night doing rearrangements in his Mind Palace, but that Mycroft has also managed to sneak into 221B without waking Sherlock up. Now he’s standing by the sofa, looking down on Sherlock with a displeased smirk. Sherlock can only imagine how Mycroft enjoys this; catching his little brother “unguarded” and then physically looking down on him from his own superior position. Usually Sherlock would make a point about not caring how disadvantaged he seemed to be in relation to Mycroft; he refuses to participate in Mycroft’s suppression techniques by being disturbed by Mycroft standing when Sherlock’s sitting, by being in pyjamas when Mycroft is in a three-piece or being intoxicated and unshowered when Mycroft breaks into his old flat. This morning, though, he can’t help actually feeling exposed. He refuses to acknowledge this in front of his brother by getting up from the sofa, but the sensation is burning in him.

“What have I done this time to deserve a visit from the Queen?”

Mycroft ignores Sherlock’s hoarse, snarky and frankly childish remark in favor of continuing his own monologue, which is doubtlessly prepared in beforehand.

“I’d never pictured the good doctor as a man that needs to mark his toys so that everyone can see, but I guess that even goldfish can be unpredictable.”

Oh.

The marks. On his neck. Sherlock fights an impulse to cover them, but it would be irrational; Mycroft’s already seen them. There’s no point in admitting to any embarrassment. Mycroft will always see him as the irresponsible one that is nonsensical and refuses to adhere to logic, there isn’t any use in fighting it. Instead, Sherlock has learned to use it as a weapon, because nothing makes his brother more uncomfortable than displays of childishness and unpredictable behaviour.

“I hope, brother mine, that you haven’t pictured John in any such situation at all. But then I guess that picturing such things is the closest you will come to actual contact with another human being.”

“Oh, you are attempting to change the subject, aren’t you? Please allow me to bring us back to the issue at hand. You and doctor Watson seem to have some traits in common, don’t you think? You both disregard your personal safety regularly and you are both selfish to a fault.”

Sherlock just shuts his eyes for a second, attempting to appear bored while awaiting the rest of Mycroft’s little talk.
“I still would have thought that you both valued this… companionship more than you obviously do. Seriously, why do you compulsory sabotage every little thing that you manage to get going? You know how Mummy feels about…”

“Oh, please, don’t drag Mummy in to this, it just goes to prove that you haven’t got enough momentum in what you’re trying to say without dragging someone else into the equation.”

“Oh, but you’re wrong there, Sherlock, so wrong. This needs no more momentum. The fact that you and doctor Watson obviously have decided that disregarding the effects a few moments of… proximity will have on your so-called work and on each others' well-being speaks for itself, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Get. To. Your. Point.”

“My point being that you are selfish, brother mine. So very, very selfish.”

Face neutral, awaiting the rest. Sherlock tries not to let his face show any disturbance.

“Making police reports disappear this time would be a bit harder, Sherlock, don’t you think? The police knows the two of you and a majority of the police would be delighted to file a report on you stalking doctor Watson. They wouldn’t be as tactful as they were during the last incident, I think. And I think that those reports would hang in frames in their corridors, which would make it significantly harder to make them vanish. And the restraining order….”

“Oh, please, bring that up some more, will you? All your proudest moments as a brother, why don’t you just frame it yourself? And it’s not like that. I am…”

“You are what?” Mycroft interrupts. “Just dealing with some… physical needs? It must be tedious, such needs, but if they do master you so, why don’t you just do the responsible thing and go out and find yourself some release, preferably with someone who shares your… inclination. Any stranger would do, and if you do have such… needs, I can arrange something discrete.”

“Don’t be disgusting, Mycroft,” Sherlock spits out before he has time to regain his indifference.

“Oh, that disgusts you, does it? Then tell me, what makes your doctor different? Did I miss… No, it couldn’t be about sentiment, could it?”

“Sarcasm doesn’t suit you, Mycroft. But then, few things do. You know very well that I don’t do sentiment.”

“Well, then I think you will have to explain this to me, Sherlock. What would make you risk your ‘colleague’ and only friend by engaging in those kinds of relations, if it isn’t physical need nor sentiment? Please, do fill me in, because for once, I don’t get the picture. Let this be a first where you get to explain something for me, brother. Physical acts with someone else disgusts you, but then, what makes the doctor so special, if not sentiment?”

“I am not discussing this with you, Mycroft. Now, why don’t you just go and…”

“Oh, but you are, aren’t you? You are discussing this with me, and you know why? It’s because I am the one who will have to deal with the consequences of this little game of yours. And although getting you to rehab was a tedious affair, don’t you doubt that I will do it again, and faster this time. And the other things? Oh, I will do them too. But I would rather see that you for once in your life would choose not to be so shortsighted, impulsive and selfish, brother dear. But that goes for your doctor as well. Why do you think he agrees to those… activities? He’s not inclined to your gender, and so there must be another reason. Love? Fear of loss? What lovely things to use against him,
brother. When are you going to use his other big fear?"

“What?”

“Please, don’t tell me that you aren’t aware of how you could hurt him the most. Emotions might
never have been your strength, but you deduced it the first time you met doctor Watson, have you
forgot?”

The realisation hits Sherlock hard, knowing what he’d almost done just last night.

“Addiction,” he says with a sudden hollow feeling behind his ribs.

“See, you do know. Now, as your brother, you will always be my first priority, and therefore I ask
you this one thing; why do you think that doctor Watson agrees to this little agreement of yours?”

Silence falls, because Sherlock knows. He’s chosen to ignore it, but of course he knows. It isn’t
attraction; that much had been clear from the start. It's abandonment issues, it's a desperate measure to
keep Sherlock in his life. And Sherlock had let him do that, let him cross that line even though it
shouldn’t take a genius to realise why John would do that.

“Get. Out.”

Sherlock’s voice is fierce, and he gets up into sitting position in one hasty movement.

“Good, you see my point, then.”

“I. Said. Get out!”

Sherlock realises that he's shouting, but it's just too much, he needs Mycroft to go, now, he needs to
be alone, he needs to think, he needs to ground himself, he needs to feel something else, just not this
panic and that other feeling, that disgusting, hateful feeling that he despises with all that he is.
Mycroft has to go. Sherlock cannot be held responsible if Mycroft doesn’t just get out of…

“Don’t do the drugs, Sherlock, it would be too predictable,” Mycroft says, then leaves the flat while
Sherlock clenches his fist, pumping them, trying to keep himself under control, but failing.

The second the front door shuts behind Mycroft, Sherlock gets to his feet. His first instinct is to get
himself into his room, but half way there he realises that John might still be there. Why? Who had
said that John was allowed to stay in Sherlock’s bed? Is that something people do? Why would
John…?

He locks himself into the bathroom instead, and leaning over the sink, breathing heavily. There's bile
in his throat, and he feels sick, but he won't manage to throw up now, he's breathing too quickly and
the panic is too loud. Instinctively, he slumps to the tiled floor, curling up all his limbs, but it doesn’t
help, there's too much pressure inside and he needs, needs…

His head hits the wall behind him. It's rhythmic and it's pounding.

One. Two.

*And he shouldn’t be doing this, this childish tantrum...*
Three. Four.

...John could hear and he doesn’t want to...

Five. Six. Seven.

...make John more troubled, but it doesn’t matter, does it? It's all over anyway...

Eight.

...and he’s done it, again, again he’s imposed his own needs on someone else, and he's sick, but not only that, he’s...


...aware of what he's doing, and how John is likely reluctant to leave, and therefore would stay even though he has no desire to...


...do those things at all and why hadn’t he forced John to leave, why had he let his friend come up with that moronic suggestion that makes no sense at all, why had he let him...

Nineteen. Twenty. Twenty-one.

...offer up his body like that, how can someone be so scared of being without someone else that they’ll offer up their own body like that and how desperate had John been, why hadn’t he seen that his friend was that scared of being without...

Twenty-two. Twenty-three...

“Sherlock? Sherlock! What's going on in there?!!” John's voice, muffled by the door.

Twenty-four. Twenty-five. Twenty-six.

...all the things that had made him not take his life, as he had intended to do before they met, and oh, it makes sense and it's devastating, but it does make sense...

“Sherlock, what the hell did Mycroft say to you? Sherlock, open up!”


...that John would do it, but why would he himself do it, it wasn’t the sex, because he could handle that for himself, attraction or not, no, and it couldn’t be...

“If you don’t open up within 15 seconds I will break this lock and come in anyway, Sherlock, so open the fuck up, now!”

Thirty-one. Thirty-two.

...that same fixation that had led to all the disasters surrounding the memories of Samuel...


“5 seconds, Sherlock.”

...because he would never do that to John, he wants him, but he doesn’t want to want him and he
doesn’t want to follow him if he left, or, no, he would want that, but he would never do that, because a ‘no’ from John is something that he’ll always respect, at least when it comes to those things, no, he would never want to make John feel cornered, that's against all morality, and Sherlock has very strict morals, and John is not to be put through something like that, but still Sherlock has done something even worse, something unforgivable, and now…

Thirty-seven. Thirty-eight…

There's a loud crash that seems to break his eardrums, and his eyes are closed and his head is still hitting the tiled wall, but he understands what must have happened.

“You fuckin’ bloody idiot!”


As his head hits against the wall the forty-second time, there's no ‘bang’. His head hits something uneven, something both hard and soft. Instinctively, he keeps banging his head, but it keeps hitting…

...a hand. John’s hand. It's behind his head and it takes all the impact.

“Sherlock, do you hear me?”

John’s voice isn’t angry now, it’s… doctorly. Determined, but not demanding.

Forty-four. Forty-five.

John is here and he's in the way of the wall, and Sherlock still can’t stop, the pressure is too high, he's melting and he's still thinking, and the thoughts are so…

“Sherlock? Breathe, Sherlock.”

Forty-six. Forty-seven.

At forty-seven, the hand is gone, and his head hits the tiled wall again.


And then, it goes dark outside his eyelids.

Fifty-one.

And the hand is back. The banging sound is replaced by the softer ‘thump’ every time Sherlock’s head pounds the wall.

Fifty-two. Fifty-three. Fifty-four.

“Sherlock, I’m gonna touch you now, just so you know.”

Fifty-five. Fifty-six.

Sherlock’s curled up body is suddenly draped with John’s body. John’s hand is still behind Sherlock’s head, but now his chest is against Sherlock’s left side, and there's an arm wrapped around his knees.

And he's a bit panicked, because he doesn't want John here, doesn't want John to see him like this, doesn't want to be touched, but there's a pressure against him, and it grounds him just a bit, and he doesn't attempt to push John away. Not that he'd even had the coordination for that at the moment.


...and he's done it again, hasn't he?

John's still there.

Sherlock's still on the floor.

It's still pitch-black in the bathroom, it still smells like laundry detergent and cheap shampoo and they are still touching. Sherlock’s head is tilted upwards, resting against the tiles. John's hand is not behind it anymore - Sherlock can’t remember when the hand had slipped away. It doesn’t matter, because he’s messed up for the last time now. Not this, no, this is just the icing on the cake of selfish, moronic, illogical and repulsive behaviour. No, it's all that had happened before. Every single thing that had happened since that day in the living room, when he’d felt that uncomfortable sensation and the tachycardia. No, that's not it; he’d been logical then. He’d asked John to leave. No, it was after that. It was everything from the moment Sherlock hadn’t protested against ‘trying’ something else, and ‘see where it got them’. Everything after that had been… Not Good. And it ends here, whatever it was that they’d shared. Because after Sherlock allowed that first kiss, he’d been using John. And that is not acceptable. That is what a freak does.

What had been too much and induced this whole meltdown is now hollow. There aren’t any sensations or emotions as he sits still with John partly wrapped around him. It's all hollow and there's nothing to feel.

He can’t estimate how long they’ve been on the bathroom floor. Time is irregular when this happens. He despises it when things aren’t measurable or exact, and he’s always despised this; this almost complete lack of control.

John’s arm is still draped over his knees, stroking the side of his thigh. The other hand, the one that had taken the pounding instead of the wall, is now on the shoulder closest to John. It's hateful. John holds him like Sherlock supposes that John would hold a child after something like this. And Sherlock isn’t a child. He can control this.

No. He used to be able to control this.

He should get up, brush John’s hands off and leave. There's no logic in John attempting to ‘comfort’ him, not after what he’s…

“Sherlock?”

John’s voice, silent, but not hesitant or filled with pathos. Just a word. His name. Which still isn’t a question.

“Are you there?”

He chooses to nod, even though it's an irrational question, and apparently John can feel the movement, because he continues.
“I have no idea what that idiot of a brother you have said to you, and I guess we’ll not talk about that right now, so… Well, could we perhaps just reposition ourselves slightly, just so my bum doesn’t get so numb?”

Since Sherlock doesn’t answer, John adjusts himself a bit, partly letting go of Sherlock in order to position himself beside him, back against the wall and knees drawn up, mirroring Sherlock’s position. A few sounds of discomfort escapes him as he moves.

“So, forget what I just said, let’s talk about this while you’re still too… ‘blunt head force trauma’ to just shove me aside and make a sulky run for it.”

“Get out.”

Sherlock’s voice is attempting cold, but it comes out hoarse and uneven.

“Nope.”

John’s voice is unconcerned.

“Leave. Me. Alone.”

“No, not letting you get away with that one this time. I’m quite comfortable now, I could sit here for hours.”

After that, it takes fifteen minutes before Sherlock breaks the silence.

“You lied.”

The dark makes it easier, somehow. And John stays silent, so Sherlock continues after a minute.

“You said I didn’t impose anything on you.”

“That wasn’t a lie.”

“You didn’t give that idiotic suggestion because you wanted what you suggested. You did it because you wanted to avoid something else.”

“Yeah, I did.”

Sherlock tries to understand what that admission means. His brain feels like resin, sticky and slow, and there’s a dull ache in the back of his head.

“Do you have any idea what that makes me?”

There’s a harshness in Sherlock’s voice now, the hollow feeling is suddenly accompanied by a slight anger.

“What?”

“A freak.”

Sherlock feels the body beside him stiffening as John registers what his friend has just called himself.

“How does that…”

“You really can’t see that, can you? You really can’t see how touching you when I should be aware
that you are only allowing me to do so because you’re so fucking scared of being without your adrenaline, without sharing a living space with someone and being needed, makes me sick? You think that’s acceptable, reasonable? You don’t even like men, you’re not gay and all that, and yet, you insisted that you wanted to try this, that this was something you wanted. Why on Earth would you do that, are you really that pathetic? You let me impose myself on you, and I must have known why you let me. And I still did it. You try to convince me that I’m not a sociopath, but I think you’ve just proved yourself wrong."

His whole body's tense, and the words come out less well-spoken than he usually lets them, but it doesn’t matter anymore. He just wants to know why, so he can numb himself off without having to wonder about it. So he will know just how pathetic John is, and just how sick he is himself. That would make this easier.

“I think you’re right,” John begins, his voice now unstable. “I think that you are right about my motivation to suggest… this. At least the ‘fear of loss’ part. I panicked. And I think I might have had a lot of reasons for suggesting what I did, but yeah, fear was the biggest one. And I think that I was aware of that from the start. How messed up this is. And we’ve even talked about it, how messed up this is, and you didn’t… react like this then. Those times where you accused me of being in need of therapy and I agreed, but I also said that it was working out fine. And ‘fine’ might not be the best term for this, but it’s still… it’s working. Until now.”

“That’s a new low, even for you,” Sherlock says without any attempt to hide his own self-loathing.

“I don’t care, Sherlock. I don’t give a damn. I might be fucked up, but that’s what happens, right? You go to war to be a hero and you end up getting shot without any noble circumstances, and then you get back to England, and you’re not a hero; you’re an invalid with psychiatric disorders. And then you are alone, and no one needs you and your only conversations are those with your therapist. You’re having nightmares that make you weep like a baby and you’re having troubles with consciousness and it’s ‘normal’ and ‘understandable’ but it still means that you’re not saving lives or fighting for your country, no; you’re just sitting in a bedsit and fidgeting with your gun, because that’s what life became. And if that made me a bit fucked up, then, yeah, sorry for the inconvenience.”

Sherlock finds it hard to breathe for a second; it's probably the position he's crouching in that makes it hard, but then he manages a breath and takes it all in. John has never talked about it, not like this, and Sherlock finds that the image he's presented with is not at all tolerable.

“So you’re damaged from the war, from something real, and then you end up here, with someone who you have sex with even though it repulses you, just because you’ve been to war?”

And he doesn’t mean for it to come out like that, not really, but it does.

“No,” John says, not sounding as upset as he ought to. “No, that’s not it. I’m just saying that I might not be the schoolbook example for ‘great mental health’. Which, in turn, means that my motives and my rationale for doing things might not be all that clear to me all the time. And we’re not even touching the part about how I grew up, which my therapist would have a blast with. No, we’re here, and right now, I don’t give a shit about why this whole thing started. It’s done and it was a mess, yeah, fine; it was. And this is too. But let’s just soldier on and get on with this mess, alright?”

“You are not serious.”

“I’m serious.”

“No.”
“Alright.”

“What?”

Sherlock’s surprise isn’t well-enough concealed, and John catches on.

“You said ‘no’, so that’s it, then.”

“You didn’t take a ‘no’ when I said ‘no’ to all this in the beginning.”

“No, but if everything’s supposed to be healthy and make sense from now on I guess I have to.”

Sherlock has a feeling that John’s playing him. He doesn’t, however, know if he ought to just leave, so he postpones that decision a few minutes.

“Why are you even trying to play me, why does this matter to you? And don’t come with that crap about ‘fear of loss’, because it’s already lost, isn’t it? The moment I… did those things, knowing why you let me, that’s when it was lost.”

“Really, then why are we still here?”

John is calmer now, and it makes Sherlock uneasy.

“No, wait, let me answer that myself,” John says before Sherlock gets the chance to interject something. “We’re still here because neither of us has left.”

That’s one of the worst arguments in this whole crappy mess, Sherlock acknowledges, but perhaps it’s also one of the most truthful, which is indeed bad.

“And,” John continues. “We still haven’t talked about why you agreed to this, when you knew that ‘attempting a relationship’ to save a friendship was bullshit? And don’t even try with the ‘sex’ thing, because that’s not it. You don’t have to answer, just think about it, since we’re both too messed up to even discuss these things out loud.”

Sherlock tries very hard not to think about it. It’s only a partial success.

“Also; let’s just add to the record that I’m not doing this to save our friendship anymore. You’re right, that went right out of the window pretty quick. You can interpret that how you want, I’m not going to say anything more about it, let’s just leave it at that. And, just… just know that I might not be gay, or even bi, or whatever, but I… I was never repulsed. I was terrified, I was troubled and I am still not even half comfortable at the thought of doing… some of the things you’ve done for me. And yeah, perhaps that’s terrible of me. Or for you. I can see that, I really can. But between being a bit scared and a bit embarrassed over how I want you, but still can’t magically make myself all comfortable with it, I want… what we do. I see how pathetic that sounds. And I might be closeted or in denial, I don’t really care. It is what it is, and it comes down to… well, that I still want to… do that. Again. And don’t tell me that your own reasons are so much clearer. Because your reasons didn’t even make sense the first time you said them, I’ve just kept my mouth shut about it so you wouldn’t run off again and sulk over not being rational.”

If he’s honest with himself, as he tends to be, Sherlock has no idea what John’s words are supposed to make him feel. What they do make him feel is a mix of sensations, but ‘confusion’ might be the most prominent. One of the reasons for this might be because of the fact that he's not once heard John talk so much about anything remotely personal.

And in the end, John’s point about how they both are messed up and that neither of them have left
yet makes some form of backwards sense. There are some things that are highly disturbing that had surfaced during Mycroft’s idiotic talk and the... meltdown that followed. Still, they aren’t as disturbing as the things he might have been capable of once, but is in no way capable of now. He won’t do those things again. He won’t be rejected and called ‘sick’, he won’t come running after someone whom has... meant something to him - or at least he’d thought so at the time - just to attempt to explain and get some answers. He won’t, not anymore. Not to John. And that's it, really. Things could get bad, but not that bad. And he's repulsed by the fact that he ought to have seen why John started this, really seen and understood the impact of it, but he hadn’t thought it’d go that far, and when it had... then he might have hoped that John... No. Not consciously. He hadn’t hoped consciously. Perhaps not at all.

Still, it comes down to this. And it's his turn to break the silence in the still pitch-dark bathroom, so he manages a few words that seem to communicate most of what he wants to say:

“Put on the kettle, I need to check a few things about chlorine.”

Chapter End Notes

Wikipedia on 'stimming':

Self-stimulatory behavior, also known as stimming and self-stimulation, is the repetition of physical movements, sounds, or repetitive movement of objects common in individuals with developmental disabilities, but most prevalent in people with autistic spectrum disorders. It is considered a way in which people with autism calm and stimulate themselves. Therapists view this behavior as a protective response to being overly sensitive to stimuli, with which the individual blocks less predictable environmental stimuli. Sensory processing disorder is also given as a reason by some therapists for the condition. Another theory is that stimming is a way to relieve anxiety, and other emotions.

Common stimming behaviors (sometimes called stims) include: hand flapping, rocking, head banging, repeating noises or words, snapping fingers, spinning objects, etc. Stimming is almost always a symptom of autism, but it is also regarded as part of some non-autistic individuals' behavioral patterns. The biggest difference between autistic and non-autistic stimming is the type of stim and the quantity of stimming.

Stimming can, in some cases, be a self-injurious behavior. Common forms of these behaviors include: head-banging, hand-biting, and excessive self-rubbing and scratching.

* * * * *

Stimming in this chapter:

In the chapter of Asperger's syndrome criteria, the same stim, head-banging was used. Oddly enough, that chapter also included a few more mentions of stimming than this actually does, but it's hard to plan these things sometimes...
As mentioned above (Wikipedia), stimming can sometimes be self-harming. The difference between other forms of self-harm and stimming is sometimes distinguished between according to the intention; if it's planned or the intention is to hurt oneself, it's more frequently described as self-harm in many countries, while stimming is more often unplanned and the goal is seldom to harm oneself, but is a way to calm one's body/thoughts, and is often done through repetitious movements such as head-banging or biting, because when stimming, one often doesn't have the focus or the planning to use anything else than one's body. Head-bangning could be both self-harm or stimming, and it often is. The distinction between the two of them when it comes to biting and head-baning, other than intention, could be the person's other conditions; in autism spectrum and ADHD/ADD or other neuropsychiatric condition it's often stimming. Sometimes a difference could be seen in clinics; when stimming, it's unlikely that the person stops if you put a pillow between them and the wall; with self-harm that will often make the person angry and/or make them move or remove the pillow.

As said earlier, the Asperger's syndrom chapter includes more stims, such as fidgeting. In this story, Sherlock has learned that stimming is an immature behaviour, a view still held by many, but that's slowly changing. Stimming is a very effective technique for calming oneself down, and recent research suggests that stimming should only be replaced and avoided in those cases where it's harmful or disturbs the person or their surrounding to a large degree. To teach someone who stims not to do it is often done by a 'technique' called 'quiet hands', which is often very uncomfortable and disturbing for the person. The explanation for using this technique is often that one will have a easier time to 'pass as normal' if one doesn't stim, but stimming is often a very effective and natural way to handle one's moods and sensations and very useful.
Addiction

Chapter Summary

We've come to the end, and there's rooftops to attend to.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Pretending that everything's alright has always been a talent of John’s. He’s done it all through his childhood, where he’d never let one single friend visit his house, out of fear that his mother might be drunk, through his depression in med school, whenever someone was severely damaged and the field hospital was out of antibiotics and most recently after he’d begun to notice cracks in Sherlock’s emotional detached facade. So it's really not much of an effort to pretend that it's no cause for concern when your best friend - and now lover? - keeps banging his head against things and panicking, slamming doors and running off. What is an effort, though, is trying not to panic when Sherlock is suddenly not inside the flat anymore as John gets out of the shower. It's only a few hours after John had found Sherlock in the bathroom, and they've spent the last hours pretending that it hasn't happened; John reading thrillers and Sherlock doing something unsanitary involving chlorine.

As he reaches the sofa there's a faint smell, and it's been a while since John had last sensed that inside the sitting room, so it takes him a second to put the pieces together. When he does, he follows the trail one of the window’s and gets confirmation; yes, it's slightly open, and the pile of books that has been resident on the floor in front of it is shoved a bit to the side. He pushes the window open further and leans out to look up the fire escape. He can’t see anything, but then the angle won’t really let him, so he's once again guided by the smell, the smell of someone smoking a cigarette on their rooftop.

With a sigh John opens the window even further and reaches for the fire escape. He manages to close the window almost fully after he climbs out, in order to avoid getting the smell inside the flat in as large extent as possible. When he reaches the top of the ladder, he can see his friend sitting there, supporting his back against the chimney and resting his elbows on his knees. Sherlock looks at him as he gets up on the roof, but doesn’t say a word, so John just sits down beside him, assuming a similar position.

They sit in silence as Sherlock continues to stare out into blank space and taking drag after drag on the cigarette in an unhurried manner. John isn’t sure what’s supposed to happen now, but he knows that this is a place Sherlock seldom retreats to, and when he does, it's often at times when he needs to think, but not the Mind Palace thinking, no, it's the introspective thinking that drives him up here. The kind of thinking that will leave his friend quiet and thoughtful for hours afterwards. John wonders if that will be the case this time too. If they’ll just sit here in silence for hours as London moves in front of them. It's possible, but John decides that he’ll at least make an attempt to talk to Sherlock. But as he opens his mouth, before he has a chance to form any words, Sherlock interrupts him.

“You’re afraid that I'll start using again.”
It's a statement, and it's not at all a statement John had expected. In some ways, it's only logical that Sherlock would have picked up on John’s experiences with addicts, but at the same time it had seemed unreasonable that Sherlock would relate those experiences to John’s relationship with him. They are not bound together, they are free men and John could walk away any day, so why would John be afraid of Sherlock’s possible relapses? But he is. He is very much afraid of that possibility, because unlike Sherlock, John had soon realised that he wouldn’t walk away. Perhaps Sherlock has now realised the same thing. That would explain the statement in part.

John settles for a nod. That's as far he can go in his attempts to answer right now.

“Why?”

Alright, perhaps Sherlock hasn’t figured it all out, then.

“What do you think?”

It's a reflective question, but John can’t find it in himself to answer in any other way. Sherlock seems to have forgotten his cigarette and is now just observing the London streets below them.

“It would be a repeat of previous circumstances which you wish not to have to endure again, but you don’t know if you could manage to disengage yourself from it. From this life.”

And there it is. It's now been said out loud for the first time, but not by John himself, but by his friend or lover or whatever it is that Sherlock is to him. And it doesn’t feel half as vertiginous as it ought to, which in itself is something to ponder about.

“Yeah, well, yeah; I guess so. And yeah, that makes me the idiot, the one with the chemical defect and the irrational one, so go ahead, pick me apart.”

“Why would I do that?”

The question in Sherlock’s voice seems sincere. John tries to find the words for an answer, but what comes out is not something he’d wanted to say.

“Because that’s what you do, isn’t it? You sit there with all your bloody brain and your reason and your logic, so far above the rest of us. And then you point out how illogical we all are, you mock our weaknesses and then you’re off to the next mystery, deducing everyone until they fall apart. It’s what you do.”

He hadn’t meant for it to come out like that, he really hadn’t. In his thoughts there’d been a bickering tone and a glimpse of humor in the words, but when it was spoken out loud, it held no humor or familiar warmth. It's bitterness, or perhaps it's resignation.

“I don’t see how that’s any different than what everyone else does.”

“What do you mean? It’s not like everybody’s running around deducing everyone else’s weaknesses and shouting them out in the middle of a crowd.”

“It isn’t?” Sherlock’s voice is sharp, and John suddenly feels like he might have gone too far. “In my experience, that’s exactly what most people are doing. But for some reason it’s seems to be fine when they do it, and Not Good when I do, but that perception might be coloured by my lack of understanding to ‘social norms’, some would say. As would you. And I get called on that almost every day; being the freak and the one without a heart, the one who will end up killing people just because he’s fascinated with solving murders. People can deduce me - more or less accurately - and tell the whole street about their little ‘observations’, but I’m not supposed to do the same thing, since
I’m actually good at observing?”

Sherlock has resumed his smoking, the cigarette in his hand is now no longer ignored, and as soon as the glow approaches the filter, he lights another one. John watches the proceedings from the corner of his eye, still attempting to appear preoccupied with the London traffic. The implications of what Sherlock’s just said begin to settle as John breaks the silence.

“So you are what? Doing it first, so they will have a reason to call you on all the things you do, just so that they don’t call you on anything you are?”

Sherlock doesn’t attempt to answer, which is answer enough. John feels a chill, a feeling like he’s hit too close to something he has no business touching. He’s begun to sense that there’d been some sort of pattern in the behaviors he’s seen recently, and earlier, in the bathroom, he’d connected the dots.

When he’d worked at the clinic he’d often treated a young girl who had recurrent otitis. Once, when she was having a fever and was at the clinic to get antibiotics, something had happened - he still wasn’t sure what - and she’d panicked. Suddenly, there’d been a twelve year old curled up to a ball, rocking back and forth in the visitors chair in front of his desk while her father had tried to talk to her in a calm and neutral voice. The girl had hit her fists to her own head repeatedly, but the father hadn’t tried to stop her, had just sat there, talking calmly and then asked John if he would mind to turn off the lights. It was this part of the memory that had caused him to do the same when he sat with Sherlock on the bathroom floor. John isn’t Sherlock Holmes, but he can see a pattern and he can draw conclusions. John had known from the start what issues other than otitis that the girl had, he’d read her chart before he met her the very first time, and the sometimes deviant contact the girl gave was hard to miss. It wasn’t an obvious connection to make, because besides the meltdowns, the girl and Sherlock seemed to have nothing at all in common, but once John had touched on the idea, he had found it hard to let go. And it doesn’t matter, not really, because it doesn’t change anything, it’s just words and explanations, but nothing could really explain someone like Sherlock.

“Will you?” John finally manages to ask.

“Will I what?” Sherlock replies, indifferent as ever, but fingers a little trembling from the unexpected nicotine rush of chain smoking. And there it is again, another pattern; a pattern of addictions. From the outside Sherlock seems to be as unpredictable as the weather forecast, but John has lived with him long enough to manage to see the faint patterns of that unusual and sometimes downright self-destructive mind.

“Start using again.”

Sherlock stubs out the cigarette, this time without instantly reaching for the next one.

“I have no intention to do so, but then, in these matters intentions are hardly what you’ll want to rely on.”

John doesn’t know what kind of answer he’d been hoping for, but it's highly probable that no answer he wants to hear could be uttered with certainty. Sherlock's right about this; intentions are good, but hardly something to build your life on. Not when it comes to matters like this.

“No, I guess you’re right.”

Below them, cabs and pedestrians share the streets in an uneven struggle for traction, and it's the kind of struggle that will start early in the mornings and go on the entire day, only to be resumed the next morning. And Sherlock isn’t in such strict control of his transport and his urges as he wants to be, but then John has discovered that he himself isn’t as conscious about his own motives and limits as he
previously had thought, so perhaps they make a fitting pair, sitting on a roof and watching the citizens struggle for a passage through the clutter.

“That’s what it is, isn’t it? Addiction. It’s degrading, being so subjected to weakness of the transport, and of the mind.”

Sherlock’s voice is low at the end of his sentence, like he wishes that John wouldn’t hear the last part, the part where Sherlock admits to any kind of weakness of his mind.

“It is. But it’s human, which I guess isn’t something that’ll comfort you, but it’s still true. You deduced my biggest addiction when we’d just met, and you used it to make me come to a crime scene and watch you be brilliant. It’s only fair that I get to know that I’m not the only one subjected to addictions that I can’t seem to master.”

At this, Sherlock snorts, and John isn’t sure what to make of it, but it seems to be a snort directed inwardly rather than towards John, so he lets it pass.

“I mean, we are not an exception to these things,” John begins. “The positive and negative reinforcements will rule us too, it’s not like there’s a shortcut you can take to avoid how the mind works, even if I assume that you have tried every possible path in the search for that kind of shortcut.”

In the corner of his eye, John can see something that looks like an aborted smile on Sherlock’s face, the deepening of his dimple often gives his friend away before he can control his features.

“I don’t attempt at taking shortcuts,” Sherlock says dismissively, but the disapproval doesn’t quite reach his face, John notices. “I’m simply attempting to take the most logical way, but biology is disapprovingly human and won’t work logically. Therefore, I won’t give you anything else besides my intentions when it comes to this matter.”

“The intentions of Sherlock Holmes must be worth more than the promise of the common man,” John says, trying to keep the mirth out of his voice.

“What are you smiling at? I can hear you smiling, John.”

Sherlock turns to him, and there’s no point in trying to hide the grin that’s widening as Sherlock calls him on his teasing. At first, Sherlock looks frustrated at John’s glee, but after a few seconds, a hesitant smile forms at the corner of his mouth, before his face grows serious.

“John. There’s a wooden box in the cupboard where I keep my flasks and my slides.”

John measures Sherlock with his eyes and tries to figure out what his friends aiming at.

“Alright…”

“It wouldn’t do if Lestrade found it in one of his pathetic excuses for searching our flat.”

What does Sherlock mean, is there something embarass.... Oh.

“Oh,” John says, an echo of his own thoughts.

“Yes. It’s been in my possession since long before you moved in, and in periods of time I’ve actually forgotten about it. I recalled it recently, and I think it would be best if you would help me dispose of this… box.”
Sherlock’s voice is steady, and he's once again looking at London, not at John, but John reads him well enough to know that this isn’t something that he should ever trespass on, this is Sherlock giving him something, and in John’s mind it sounds like something more than a box containing one or another form of illegal substances.

“Alright, I can do that. Just, have you…?”

“No. I didn’t. Not since… Long ago. But it’s inconvenient having it around when doing our line of work and associating with the Met, even if they probably couldn’t find anything even if I put a label on it.”

Somehow, talking about drugs and addictions led them to other forms of rewarding behavior, because before John has made any conscious decision about it, he finds that his hand has reached those ridiculous curls of his best friend, and as his fingers slides through the bouncy, slippery hair, Sherlock takes a slow, deep breath and shuts his eyes. John knows that this is out of their usual pattern; because no one is challenging the other, no one is offering up themselves for some obscure unconscious reason and no one is hinting at sex. Still, it doesn’t mean that things will change, and part of John still wants to back off from kissing the man who has just confessed to keeping drugs in their flat. Really, he ought to be furious and yell at Sherlock, and he probably will, but for some reason he chooses to taste him first. And there it is, the fierceness of it, the way his hand grips around Sherlock’s wrist, but it's not just that. It's relief that they are still here, that they can still do this; this madness, this utterly unhealthy form of relationship… that isn’t a relationship, that is something else, and…

And it's not how he’d thought he’d end up; on a rooftop in central London, kissing a man of genius, addictions and contradictions, but he figures that once you get used to a certain level of insanity in your life your mind will never settle for less. Settling for less would be a bit like killing his own mind, and John has passed that stage where he thought that to be the only solution. He's back on a battlefield again, but the battle isn’t quite as black and white as the ones he's used to. This is a battle where he isn’t sure who's the enemy or if there even is one. People still get hurt - he got hurt - but it's unclear who is responsible for the damage. If he doesn’t want to risk damage, he shouldn’t be on the battlefield. No one has ordered him to be there, he's gone there himself and he has stayed as the chaos broke around out him.

It's what has become of life, really. It's chaos and codependency, running through London and kissing someone who has a wooden box that needs to be taken care of. John will take care of it, because that’s what he’s always done. The difference is that this time, he's been asked to do it. And he doesn’t know what caused Sherlock to do that, but he has a faint idea of what it might have been, and the thought of that idea makes him close the kiss and slowly withdraw from the man beside him. He doesn’t know if he wants to, but at this moment, it doesn’t really matter what he wants, this is about what they both need.

As for now, he has a box that needs to be destroyed.
So, with my thanks written in the start of this chapter, that just leaves the end and the continuation.

See next "chapter" for the link to next sequence; it's now on the road and rolling.

Thank you, once more, and now I'm off to write... no, sleep. I'm going to sleep.

/Hejdå!/
Next Sequence - Chaos and Codependency

Chapter Summary

So, I said there might be more Floodgates.

Now there is.

Since I noticed that people still subscribes to Floodgates, I thought I might as well post a link to the next sequence of the Floodgates.

I said that there might be more of this story, and that I would finish some other stuff before attempting a sequel, but well; the two nutters from this story wouldn't really leave me alone, so I surrendered to continue writing this lovely mess. The result is a direct continuation of Floodgates and takes up just a few days after the events of the last chapter of Floodgates. Some changes in format might occur, and the denial of being in love is perhaps not believable even to themselves anymore, but otherwise the idea is the same, and the level of mess might even increase.

So, yes, here it is; Chaos and Codependency - A Case Study:

http://archiveofourown.org/works/3918760

Thanks for all encouragment and people saying they wished for more of this story; it means more than you think.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!