Faerie-Touched

by Blind_Author

Summary

In a world of sorcerers and magic, Sherlock is a Faerie-born and John, lacking any kind of magical talent, often seems a bit out of place. But he has a gift all his own...
Faerie-Born

Fire, Water, Air and Earth

Daemon, Undine, Sylph and Fey

Dance the Elements to your decree

For none can tell you 'nay'

But beware the one you cannot Touch

Lest all your power Sink away

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John had known that Sherlock was part-Faerie the moment he saw him. Faerie-born always looked a bit...otherworldly (too pale, too perfect), so right from the start, John had suspected the bloke had some Faerie lineage somewhere in his family tree.

The fact that he'd summoned his notebook to his hand with a small gust of wind was also a bit of a give-away as well. It was true that sorcerers could cast similar spells, but only a Faerie-born would be so careless with the Elements like that.

Some people might be put off – Faerie-born tend to be relatively insular and distrustful of humans, sorcerers included – but John knew he had nothing to fear from the man. Sherlock seemed solidly on the unusual side, but every Faerie-born he'd ever met had their own set of foibles, usually dependent on the type of Faerie they were descended from.

Daemons were the Fire Faeries, Undine the Water, and the Fey came from Earth. John suspected Sherlock was part Sylph – the Faeries of Air – given his little display in the laboratory (his impulsiveness and general flightiness could be taken as a sign of Sylph blood, but John had never felt comfortable using personality traits to pin down heritages). And while Faerie blood could manifest down five or six generations, judging by the kind of power Sherlock's brother wielded, they couldn't be less than quarter-Faerie. Enough to lose the more physically obvious aspects of Faerie blood (green hair, blue skin, golden eyes, just to name a few), but for the sheer level of power to be essentially undiluted.

It was a shame he claimed to be married to his work, but John figured that was understandable; Faerie-born had to be careful who they invited into their beds. While full-blooded Faerie could rein themselves in enough to have sex with a human partner without risk, Faerie-born tended to become slightly uncontrollable in the grip of strong emotion, and orgasm tended to destroy their control. Which meant their partner had to be a sorcerer that was strong enough to be able to withstand that much magic being thrown around – John couldn't count the number of times a Faerie-born's partner had been wheeled into the emergency room because they overestimated their magical strength.

The doctors in the hospital called it being 'Faerie-Touched', because if you were a low rank sorcerer, then you had to be touched in the head to start rolling around with a Faerie-born.

Besides, John suspected it would take a tenth rank or above sorcerer to hold Sherlock's interest; someone with the power to meet him on equal terms and the intellect to keep up with his. And John was certainly no sorcerer, so he put that idea in the 'wishful thinking' pile, and did his best to abandon it.
An army surgeon returned from Afghanistan, where he'd clearly served in a prominent enough position to have got himself shot? Sherlock could admit he'd been expecting a fourth-rank sorcerer, at the very least. Maybe even a seventh or eighth.

But no; there was no residue of magic hovering around John Watson, no aura of power. He didn't even carry the talismans most humans used to protect themselves from those with magic. There were no wards to shield his mind from manipulation, no small bundle of spelled wood or earth that could shelter him from a magical attack.

In short, he was leaving himself surprisingly vulnerable for a seemingly-intelligent military man. Sherlock wondered briefly if something had happened during his service to make him distrust any protection that wasn't his own.

At least the limp wasn't magical in origin; only psychosomatic, and not very deeply entrenched, at that. He'd expected John to be limping on the walk home, not to keep up his sprightly gait even through the door.

Of course, as soon as Sherlock had stepped over the threshold he knew something was wrong. The wards that would lock out those that meant him ill were gone, and he could feel pooled magic radiating from the living room. When he and John entered, it was to find Lestrade and his detectives ripping the place apart; the ordinary humans with their hands, while the sorcerers were undoing every one of his banishment and concealment spells.

It was enough to make Sherlock want to summon a hurricane strong enough to suck every single one of them out the windows. Didn't they stop to think that, with a new flatmate to entice into something approaching a sense of security, there might have been a reason for the invisibility spell on the eyeballs?

Anderson's presence only made things worse. While his speciality were spells that enhanced his own senses (useful for a forensic analyst), he was also in the habit of constantly walking around with layers upon layers of deflection spells. Deflection spells were different from shields, in that they didn't stop the magic in its tracks, but more just made it...slide off.

It always set Sherlock's teeth on edge. As a Faerie-born, he had a keener magic sense than sorcerers, and when those senses slid around deflection spells it was like having a black spot in his vision. Not like John, who was just...blank, like an empty chair, but as though he knew the chair was there, but just couldn't see it.

Frankly, Sherlock didn't know how Lestrade could stand to work with the man.

Still, deflection spells also took far less concentration than actual shields, and Sherlock comforted himself with the fact that Anderson probably just wasn't capable of the mental faculties required to produce actual shields.

Considering that he'd been surrounded by only low-level magic all evening, Sherlock thought he could be forgiven for the way the cabbie had grabbed his attention. He hadn't exactly been on his guard, and the man had some of the strongest compulsion magic he'd ever seen.

But that was how it was in some people. They were technically low rank sorcerers, but displayed astonishing talent in just a few spells.

Really, in compulsion spells, the cabbie had been worthy of a twelfth rank. But his concentration had
faltered when that bullet had blasted through the window, puncturing his lung and likely nicking the subclavian artery.

For a human being without a particle of magic in him, John Watson was really quite extraordinary.

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“You're not magical, are you?” Sherlock asked over their very late meal of Chinese, magical residue still hovering about the room from the false 'drug bust'. “You didn't use a locating spell to find me.”

“Nope, just the phone's GPS,” John agreed. “Never had a drop of magic in my life.”

“Hmmm.”

“What?”

“It's just rather unusual to see a human serving on the front lines in a war,” Sherlock pointed out, the vaguest hint of scepticism in his tone.

John shrugged. “First of all, I was medical personnel, which hardly qualifies as 'front lines'. And I've got pretty good instincts – I know when to duck and run.”

“Evidently they're not infallible, though,” Sherlock said, nodding towards John's shoulder.

“This?” John jostled the limb in question. “This wasn't any kind of Faerie attack or spell – just a plain old bullet.”

Sherlock snorted, as if to convey his contempt for John being taken down by a mere bullet. But if John's hunches about Sherlock's strong Faerie blood were correct, it was likely he'd need a bullet made of cold iron before he was even mildly inconvenienced.

John's gun was full of cold iron bullets, mainly out of pragmatism. Ordinary bullets wouldn't harm a half- or quarter-Faerie, but cold iron bullets stopped humans just as easily as they did Faerie-born.

“And no one spelled the wound?” Sherlock asked.

John shrugged again. “Didn't take. It's not like we've got seventh rank sorcerers out there, you know.”

“Hmmm,” Sherlock said again, and that was the extent of his input on the subject.

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“What do you specialise in?” Donovan asked one day while they were gathered around a crime scene.

Donovan was a sorcerer with an affinity for tracking and locator spells, but most of the police force tended to be gifted in some way. Lestrade didn't show it, but John suspected he had an Undine ancestor seven or eight generations back.

“Medicine,” John quipped, and grinned at her.

Donovan seemed surprised. “You're not a sorcerer?”

John shook his head. “My sister's one, but I've never managed a spell in my life.”
Some people believed sorcerers were the result of Faerie blood resurfacing after many generations, but John wasn't sure about that. It was true that sorcery seemed to have a genetic basis, in that many families were known for it but it occurred only sporadically in others. The royal family had deliberately bred themselves for generations to produce powerful magic-users, and a few nobility had done the same. It was also true that many sorcerers displayed an affinity for one of the four Elements above the others, but in John's experience that usually had more to do with their nature than their family history.

Take Harry, for example. The Watsons used to be one of those families known for producing immensely powerful sorcerers, but a steady decline in fortune, standing and arranged marriages in the last two hundred years ensured that very few of them manifested any powerful magic nowadays. Harry was only a fourth rank sorcerer (as opposed to that great-great-grandmother who'd ascended all the way up to twelfth rank), and she had an affinity for the Earth, while their mother (a second rank) had an affinity for Fire.

Harry was stubborn and set in her ways, slow to admit to being wrong, while Amelia Watson was lively and passionate with a quick temper. John's father wasn't magical at all – like John, he couldn't cast a spell to save his life.

Most doctors were schooled in Water spells, as they were useful in slowing bleeding and the like, but John had been a skilled enough surgeon that they'd overlooked his lack of magic. It wasn't as though all spells were foolproof anyway – the more complex they were, the greater the likelihood of something going wrong, and sometimes spells just didn't take, even when they were cast perfectly.

All in all, magic was a rather fickle mistress, and John was often glad he didn't have anything to do with it.

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To Sherlock's frustration, the wards around Baker Street weren't taking well. Mrs Hudson kept banishing them every time she had friends over, saying it wasn't healthy not to socialise.

“If your friends don't mean us any harm, they should be able to walk straight through the wards,” he grumbled, trying to reinstall them for the third time that day.

“That may be, but you're a bit too strong with your wards, dear,” she chided. “They feel like a big 'keep out' sign to most of us – even normal people get nervous walking over them.”

“John's never complained.”

“Does he complain about much?”

Sherlock thought back, and grudgingly admitted he didn't.

For some reason, the idea that he might have made John uncomfortable walking through their door made guilt stir in the back of his mind. He shook it away – it wasn't his fault, how could he have known something was wrong if John didn't say anything? – but as soon as John got home from the shops, he asked him.

“Do the wards make you uncomfortable?”

“What?” John paused in the midst of setting out the groceries. “Are you saying you've got wards put up?”

“Yes – at the doorway. You've never noticed?”
John shook his head, and Sherlock smirked, reminding himself to bring this up the next time Mrs Hudson objected to the wards. John might not be a sorcerer, but that bit about them bothering normal people was clearly rubbish.

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“He tried to glamour you,” Sherlock said, apropos of nothing, as they left the bank and Sebastian Wilkes behind.

John blinked, glancing back at the offices. “Sebastian?”

Sherlock nodded tightly. “He's not very powerful – only a third rank – but his glamours are usually very good.”

“Isn't trying to glamour me into liking him a bit unethical?” John frowned, feeling irritated that Sebastian had tried to spell him into trusting the tosser.

“The government is trying to make it illegal,” Sherlock said, throwing out an arm for a taxi. “But it's difficult, because the idiots can never agree where the exceptions should be. Policemen trying to get a suspect to confess? Doctors treating a difficult patient? And if you have doctors glamouring their patients, why not have lawyers glamouring their clients into trusting them? And from that point on it gets very sticky and ridiculous and tied up in standards and precedents and all that legal nonsense...”

He looked back at John, pausing as he registered John's expression. Then, in a tone of sudden realisation, “You didn't even feel it.”

“What, the glamour?” John shook his head. “Nope, I didn't feel a thing.”

“Fascinating,” Sherlock mused, staring at John a little too intently for the doctor's comfort. “I mean, I knew it didn't take – I was ready to shield you, and I felt it try to grab you then it just dissipated – people usually feel something when they brush off a spell.”

John was absurdly touched by the idea that Sherlock had been prepared to throw up a shield – barriers took a lot of concentration, and the idea that Sherlock was prepared to divert some of that important brainpower to protect him made him smile.

“The army guys used to call me 'Numbskull','” John pointed out. “A glamour hasn't worked on me yet.”

Then he laughed at his own private joke, and wondered why Sherlock didn't seem similarly amused.

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The idea that John had no defence against glamours but his own will didn't sit well with Sherlock. Granted, it seemed to have worked against Sebastian, but what happened if a more powerful sorcerer or Faerie-born tried it?

“I could make a talisman for you,” Sherlock offered on the taxi ride to Van Coon's apartment.

John blinked, then smiled. “Thanks for the offer, Sherlock, but really, don't worry – I'm fine without it.”

He knew John was taken aback – making a talisman for someone was extremely personal, and usually limited to family members. But from what Sherlock could infer of John's relationship with his family, they weren't likely to be sending John talismans in the post.
“I don't mind,” Sherlock insisted. “It doesn't even have to be noticeable – I could make your watch a talisman if you wanted-”

“No,” John said firmly. “Sherlock, you're...you're Faerie-born, right? The means for you to make a talisman, you have to use your blood, and I...I don't want you to do that. Really, it's not needed.”

Making talismans was a time-consuming process for anyone, but because a Faerie-born's true power was in their blood they had to be willing to give up anything from a few drops to half a litre, depending on how well protected they wanted their talisman-holder to be. And talismans created with blood could often be used as a direct conduit to their creator, which was why most Faerie-born refused to make them, refused to open up a possible weakness in their defences.

Sherlock wondered if he could draw blood and freeze it over a period of weeks, possibly make a talisman for John with two or even three litres? Surely three litres of a quarter-Faerie's blood would protect him against almost every kind of magical assault?

“I don't mind,” he repeated.

“I don't want you to!” John snapped. “All right? You don't need to bleed just to keep me safe, Sherlock, it's...it's not needed, okay?”

“And I keep telling you, I don't mind!”

“It's not a question of 'not minding',” John hissed, looking honestly furious. “I don’t want you hurting yourself just for something you 'don't mind'. And I don't need it anyway, so just leave it!”

The taxi pulled up in front of Van Coon's apartment complex and John leapt out. Sherlock could tell by the expression on John's face that this subject was closed for the foreseeable future, and if he brought it up again it would just make John more stubbornly resistant.

So he rang Van Coon's bell and swallowed back what he'd wanted to say.

'It's not that I just don't care if I'd bleed – I know the risks involved in making a talisman. But I'd rather be vulnerable and have you protected than the other way around.'

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John managed to give the police the slip – most of them relied on compelling spells to keep their suspects with them nowadays, rather than handcuffs, so as soon as they'd turned away John had made a run for it and lost himself within the crowd outside the art gallery.

Of course, the fact that he'd avoided the ASBO didn't make him any less furious at Sherlock. And he'd had a long time to stew on the bus ride home.

“But I cast a camouflage spell!” Sherlock protested. “They shouldn't have seen you!”

“They're police, Sherlock!” John bellowed. “They cast those blasted true sight spells on themselves every hour they're on duty – you know, the ones that let you see through illusions? They saw all of us, and only grabbed me because I was the poor sap who didn't start running at the sight of them!”

“My camouflage spells are good enough to fool anyone below a seventh rank,” Sherlock snapped, clearly indignant. “I can't expect you to understand, given how disgustingly normal you are-”

That hurt. Because okay, John would never be able to understand magic the way that sorcerers and Faerie-born did, but it wasn't like he was completely ignorant. He'd had a sister and mother who
were both low-rank sorcerers, and he'd served with Faerie-born – he knew more than a few things about magic.

And deep in John's heart, he might have been a little envious of Harry and Sherlock and everyone like them. The ones who could cast a spell to hide something they didn't want found, rather than just stuffing it under the bed. Who could cast spells to cook and clean rather than actually taking the time to do it. Who could make shields that would deflect bullets and even when they were hit, could heal themselves.

For all that he'd been on the outside of groups of his magical friends, no one had ever called his lack of magic 'disgusting' before. And that, above all, was what had cut into him like a jagged shard of glass.

Logically, John knew this was just Sherlock being ratty – they were dealing with someone who seemed to be able to sneak into buildings and through wards without magic, and it was confusing him – but it still hurt.

Even though Sherlock was quarter-Faerie and could probably tackle most criminals by himself, he'd never objected to John accompanying him. He was one of the few people who hadn't seemed to care about or even really register his lack of magic. To the extent that John had developed just a bit of a crush on him.

Though in his defence he thought it would be hard not to develop a crush on Sherlock, what with that face and that mad grin and that brilliant mind and gods help him, but even Sherlock's less agreeable quirks were starting to seem endearing to John.

Apparently Sherlock didn't feel the same way, though. If two people hadn't already died on this case, John swore he would have just up and left.

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Sherlock was almost convinced that this could work. Granted, given that he was Faerie-born and John non-magical, they probably couldn't have sex, but that could be worked around. Sherlock knew about the concept of open relationships, and felt fairly certain he could tolerate John having sex with someone else provided it meant he stayed with Sherlock.

It wasn't ideal – Sherlock would prefer John had sex with him and no one else for the rest of his life – but he wasn't prepared to risk John's safety. Sherlock was planning to take John on a fact-finding date to the circus where he would explain just what kind of relationship he thought they could have, but apparently John had made other plans.

Apparently, John preferred a female, non-magical doctor, over a male, Faerie-born consulting detective.

Sherlock knew John resented the way he'd barged in on the 'date', but really, he should be proud that Sherlock had controlled himself enough not to let loose with a gust of wind that knocked stupid Sarah over on her arse. And it wasn't like he hadn't been tempted.

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“All that over a hair pin,” John mused when they were back in the flat, Sebastian's cheque on the table before him.

“Not just any hair pin,” Sherlock pointed out. “It's pure jade, and was used as a power focus for the spell that created the Great Wall.”
John knew a power focus was much rarer than a talisman – it was an object many sorcerers or Faerie-born had imbued with their own magic, magic other people could then draw out of the object.

“If Amanda had been even a first rank sorcerer, she would have known what she had right away,” Sherlock continued. “Didn't you feel the power coming off it?”

John snorted, unable to keep the bitterness out of his tone. “Of course not. Disgustingly non-magical, remember?”

With that, he pushed his chair back from the table, fully prepared to leave his tea in his cup and indulge in the epic sulk that had been stirring ever since Sarah had told him she thought the conflicts involved in dating a colleague were too much for her to handle. But he was halted by something pulling on his sleeve.

When he glanced back, Sherlock was trying to look as if he hadn't moved, but John knew he'd felt that tug – just a quick pluck to arrest his movement.

“I didn't mean...” Sherlock's voice trailed off and his lips thinned. His eyes darted up to John's face once and then fixed on the kitchen table. “It's not disgusting. You...you could never be disgusting.”

And just like that, John's anger thawed, and he half-heartedly cursed himself for being so damn easy where this man was concerned.

“Don't worry about it,” he said, patting Sherlock on the shoulder as he sat back down.

Something in Sherlock seemed to relax. John grinned at him as he finished his tea and biscuit, thinking that this was a bizarrely domestic little scene, if you ignored the twenty-five thousand pound cheque on the table and the skull Sherlock had tucked behind the kettle.

“Mummy is half-Sylph,” Sherlock announced abruptly, not looking away from the television.

John, interrupted in his attempt to get out his latest blog entry, looked up. “I kind of guessed you were Faerie-born from the start, you know.”

“Sylphs are the air Faeries,” Sherlock stated.

Feeling a little perplexed, John nodded even though Sherlock couldn't actually see him. “I know – that old rhyme, right? Fire, Water, Air and Earth / Daemon, Undine, Sylph and Fey / Dance the Elements to your decree / For none can tell you 'nay' / But beware the one you cannot Touch / Lest all your power Sink away.”

“Oh god, that ridiculous thing,” Sherlock snorted. “As archaic as 'Ring a ring a roses'.”

“It's kind of scary that you know nursery rhymes,” John mused. “And hey, don't knock it – there's a lot of good lessons from that, after all.”

“Nothing more than a memory exercise to help children remember the Faerie attached to each Element. The first two lines are all that's needed, the rest is simplistic drivel tacked on to make it seem deeper than it actually is.”

“Anyway, was there a point to this?”

“I just thought you should know I'm quarter-Sylph. That's all. Are there any Faeries in your family
tree?"

“I'm told there were a few Feys on my Dad's side, but that was a long time ago, Sherlock. Long enough for just about every trace of it to vanish.”

“Just about every trace?” Sherlock asked sharply, suddenly seeming a whole lot more invested than the conversation warranted. “What do you mean by 'just about'?"

John shrugged, feeling suddenly uncomfortable. “Well, Harry's got a bit of an affinity for Earth, but Dad doesn't have any magic and it's supposedly from his side, so—”

“But your mother used magic,” Sherlock broke in, still strangely intense.

“Um, yeah, but she had an affinity for Fire and cooking spells, and there were only sorcerers in her family, as far as we know—”

“Did you know most geneticists hypothesise that all magical ability is the result of Faerie blood? That every sorcerer has a Faerie ancestor, but most of them are so far back in the family tree that no identifiable characteristic remains apart from the magic?”

“I'd heard of that,” John admitted. “I know that Mum often thought Harry's affinity for Earth came from Dad's side, even though Dad wasn't magical.”

“Exactly! Even if someone appears to be completely without magic, other traits can survive and be passed on. Take sex, for instance—”

“What?” John blurted, blinking at the sudden change in subject.

Sherlock didn't seem to have even heard the interruption. “There are records of supposedly low rank sorcerers surviving sex with half-Faerie, because that resistance was inherited, but not the extreme magical talent.”

“Okay...” John said slowly, not quite understanding why Sherlock was looking at him like that.

It was an intense, focused gaze that was doing shivery things to John's stomach, and he looked away as quickly as he could. He didn't need to be thinking about sex in the context of Sherlock looking...like that. He'd done a very nice job of avoiding overly lustful thoughts thus far, and that was how it was going to stay!

So he cast around for a joke to diffuse the tension. “You know me, Sherlock – I'm the exact opposite of magical, remember?”

“Yes. Yes...of course.”

Sherlock didn't speak again and John went back to his typing, wondering if he'd imagined the disappointed tone in Sherlock's voice.

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Sherlock had never seen spells like these before. Elaborate, circular fire wards, so complex they were dizzying, that exploded like a bomb if they were crossed. Drawn around hostages so they couldn't move, couldn't step outside the circle and trip the wards, could only stay where they were and follow the instructions they were given. Because one symbol, if erased, would neutralise the wards entirely, but the bomber never revealed it until Sherlock had solved the puzzle.
But that wasn't even the best part. No, the best part was that there were puzzles to begin with. The best part was that someone was taking the trouble to do all of this just for him. They had to be a master of fire and ward magic, ninth rank at least, though possibly all the way up to twelfth. If they weren't a full Daemon, that was.

And they did a nice job of taking his mind off that botched conversation with John. It was a slim chance, but Sherlock had been holding out the hope that John might have some kind of enhanced degree of resistance to magic, at least enough for them to kiss without Sherlock's magic trying to grab onto John and move through him.

No one was quite sure why Faerie-born's magic acted that way. Most scientists thought that, given Faeries' strong connection to their base Element, the power was more cut off in their children, which resulted in the magic becoming bottled up. There was no particular danger of an explosive release, but it meant that the magic sought an outlet whenever the Faerie-born was in intimate contact with someone. It was only a hypothesis, but it was generally assumed that the individual energies (and 'magic' didn't really apply, given that it happened with ordinary humans as well) clashed and tried to merge, resulting in the fallout that injured the non-Faerie-born participant.

But John hadn't said anything encouraging – hadn't mentioned any spells that should have hurt him but didn't – so Sherlock had resigned himself.

At least now he had something to take his mind off it. It was just a bonus that said something was so wonderfully fascinating.

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John stood rigid inside the fire wards, willing to play the obedient hostage (no matter how much it rankled) as Sherlock and Moriarty hurtled towards the inevitable conclusion of the twisted dance they'd been doing.

As soon as Moriarty left, Sherlock dropped to his knees beside the wards, demanding to know which one of the symbols would nullify the spells. He sounded so distressed John automatically reached out to touch him, reassure him, but Sherlock literally screamed at him to stay still.

Moriarty's return put pay to any further discussion. The Daemon threatened to set off the fire ward, causing Sherlock to wave his gun around, threatening to shoot him if he considered doing any such thing. John was about to end the whole silly charade when a swarm of sniper sights began hovering over Moriarty. Mycroft sauntered into view from a changing room on the other side of the pool.

"Each of those rifles is loaded with cold iron bullets," Mycroft said, as placid as ever. "And as that fire ward turns inwards, and thus will nullify the spells. He sounded so distressed John automatically reached out to touch him, reassure him, but Sherlock literally screamed at him to stay still.

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"Each of those rifles is loaded with cold iron bullets," Mycroft said, as placid as ever. "And as that fire ward turns inwards, and thus will only kill Dr. Watson and not improve your situation in the slightest, I believe you can determine the intelligent course of action."

"Mycroft," Sherlock said, a lot less grudgingly than John had expected.

Mycroft raised his eyebrows, as though surprised. "Come now, Sherlock, surely you realise posting the time and place of your meeting on your website wasn't conducive to privacy. I took the liberty of arranging this intervention with that Detective Inspector you work so closely with, who should be making his entrance within the next forty seconds."

Lestrade appeared, right on cue. John found he was disappointed. Mycroft seemed to have perfectly benign intentions, but there was just something about his 'always right, always in control' attitude that rubbed John the wrong way.
With Lestrade came Donovan and two other detectives, all of them with shields so strong they were practically glowing.

“Down on your knees, hands on top of your head!” Lestrade barked.

Moriarty glanced at the policemen, at the glowing beads of red that were sniper sights hovering over his chest, at the way both Sherlock and Mycroft held their right hands away from their body, ready to throw an offensive spell hard and fast...and he started laughing.

He laughed as though he'd just heard the funniest joke in the world, and as he laughed runes around the pool began to glow, runes that glowed so brightly it almost hurt to look at them. And runes that, John realised as he squinted and shielded his eyes, were completely surrounding everyone in the room except Moriarty.

The policemen's shields flickered as their concentration wavered, and Mycroft sighed with the patience of a long-suffering saint, and made a complicated gesture with his hand...

Which did absolutely nothing. He frowned, and repeated the gesture, more slowly and precisely. Still nothing.

Moriarty was smiling, that same deranged smile he'd greeted Sherlock with.

“Oh no, that won't work,” he said. “I created these wards with the power focus that got Hannibal's army over the Alps – even if you all work together, I think it'll take at least twenty minutes to break them down. Which is about fifteen minutes more than you have.”

John wondered if the sudden temperature spike was his imagination. Given the Daemon's glee, he didn't think so.

The sniper lights on Moriarty's chest had vanished. John didn't really want to think about what that meant.

“I won't lie, Sherlock, this is disappointing,” Moriarty sighed, gazing at Sherlock like an infatuated teenager. “I'd only planned to kill your little puppy, but now that you've gone and brought these other people to our little tete-a-tete I really can't help you out.”

Sherlock didn't seem to be paying attention – he had joined his brother and Donovan in hurling spells at the wards and it seemed to be taking all his concentration, while Lestrade and the other policemen seemed to be debating something. In short, they were all acting like they were honestly threatened by this.

John blinked, bewildered, then it suddenly clicked, and he couldn't stop himself from bursting into laughter.

Everyone turned to look at him. Sherlock with the kind of concerned look that suggested he thought John had been drugged, while everyone else just looked as though they figured he'd snapped under the stress.

“Care to tell us what's so funny, Johnny-boy?” Moriarty sneered, clearly displeased with someone stealing the attention.

John managed to dial his amusement down to a broad grin. “Nothing, really, it's just...you really think this is going to work. I mean, when you brought me in with a gun rather than a spell I thought you'd realised, and I thought Sherlock had figured me out when he wouldn't let me in the flats when we were investigating those smugglers...”
John shook his head, and clamped down on the giggle trying to escape. But it really was hard to
credit – everyone in the room thought that the wards were actually a threat.

None of them knew what he was.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Never more shall the Faerie-born walk this court

Never more shall they see our fair shore

No humans taken as husbands and wives

And Sinks will be no more.

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When Amelia Watson looked back on it, she thought it started when she was about three months pregnant. Her magic started becoming erratic, at times working perfectly, at times somehow dim, and at other times it just wasn't there at all.

It was rather frightening, but the doctor had assured her that it was normal for pregnancy to interfere with magic (never mind that she hadn't had a single problem when she was carrying Harriet), so Amelia had gone home and tried not to worry about it. By the fifth month, when she was incapable of casting spells altogether, she went back, and was told the same thing.

Even after John was born, her spells were still erratic, sometimes taking and then vanishing, sometimes just never getting started in the first place. It was only when she'd set a batch of biscuits to cool with a little spell, then gone to bring two month old John in for his lunch and found the spell had died, that she realised what was going on.

Those times her spells just didn't take? That was when she'd tried to cast a spell with John in the room with her. When the spell started and then vanished? That was because she'd brought John into the room.

When John was around, magic simply...didn't work.

Amelia wanted to go to the doctor, but some gut instinct warned her against it. Instead, she and her husband began researching into Faerie and sorcerer lore.

It took them two weeks before they even found a reference. A tale from hundreds of years ago, as fanciful as Little Red Riding Hood, told back when having offspring with humans was considered taboo.

A legend that if a Faerie had a child with a human, it was not always powerful in the ways of magic – it didn't always have that slender connection to the Elements, through which their power was drawn.

Instead, it had a direct link to the Elements, a conduit so wide and vast that all magic vanished along it back to the natural Elements. This child would be a hole in the magic of the world, a drain through which power was poured and lost.

A Sink.

A Sink couldn't work magic, but no magic could ever be worked on them. Any spell that came into
contact dissipated back into the Elements that had birthed it.

Except it wasn't just any spell that touched John – it was any spell around him as well. By the time he was three, John had to be out of the house entirely if Amelia wanted to teach Harriet some spells. And it was around that time that Amelia and Roy realised that John needed to learn how to limit himself – he couldn't go around disrupting people's spells every time he walked down the street.

Something in Amelia's gut told her to keep this a secret, so that was exactly what they did.

--

It took John two years before he could control himself enough not to drain any magic he came into contact with. It was like whatever made him a Sink – that hole in the magic of the world – was spread around him like a net, and he needed to pull it in, to hold it under his skin instead of all around him.

It was difficult at first, and he kept slipping up when he slept, but by the time he was eleven, John had come to think of it like learning to control your bowels. You had no control when you were baby, but as you matured you acquired enough autonomy to control yourself all the time, even when you were asleep.

But he could never stop himself from being a Sink, or from preventing magic that actually touched him dispersing like it had never existed in the first place.

He had a vague concept of what he was – Mum and Dad told him it was called a Sink – but it was only when he was fifteen, in a History lesson, that he finally absorbed just how a Sink was viewed in the magical community.

They'd been discussing the decline in Faerie-born that had taken place from about the tenth century until the sixteenth. Reasons for the decline were hotly debated, but it was generally held that the Faerie Lord had forbidden sexual congress with humans specifically to decrease the number of Faerie-born. Why he'd want to do that was still a mystery, the only reference some kind of legend about a Faerie-born that had no magic, but instead nullified it, and brought the Faerie court to its knees.

Which, of course, had prompted the Lord's decree.

*Never more shall the Faerie-born walk this court*

*Never more shall they see our fair shore*

*No humans taken as husbands and wives*

*And Sinks will be no more.*

Though it was generally held that this 'Sink' was a myth, a bogeyman used to frighten creatures that weren't scared of magic or monsters.

That hadn't really sat well with John – the idea that you were essentially the embodiment of a fairy tale monster didn't do wonders for your self-esteem. But in time, he'd come to think of it as the advantage it was – sure, it meant he could never be magically healed or protected, but it also meant that no offensive magic could hurt him either. Glamours never worked, compulsion never took...it was like having an invisible shield between him and the rest of the world.

And, like any shield, sometimes that was good, and sometimes it was just alienating.
In the army they called him Numbskull. And Rubber, because nothing stuck, and just plain Lucky, because magic never seemed to touch him.

John had never told them what he was. Not so much because he was actively hiding it, but because it was hard to break such an ingrained habit, hard to get rid of the image of his mother's face telling him he mustn't tell anyone what he was, what he could do.

He'd assumed Sherlock had figured it out about the same time he'd stopped harping on about the talisman. After all, Sherlock knew he'd been completely unaware of the wards placed around their flat, knew that glamours and compulsions just slid off him – surely he'd realised?

Apparently not, if the confused, half-panicked (okay, maybe completely panicked) look on Sherlock's face was anything to go by. Mycroft, John had half-expected to just know – the man specialised in omniscience, after all – but it had never gone on any kind of record, which meant he was just as bewildered as his little brother.

Lestrade and the rest of the police had frozen, obviously recognising when someone was about to reveal a game-changer, and Moriarty...

Well, he was still gloating and triumphant, but John didn't think he was imagining the hint of unease in the man's expression.

“If anyone has expensive talismans on them, I'm very sorry,” John offered.

And then he opened up his net, his hole in the world's magic, and flung it wide.

Every single spell vanished. The wards dissolved, the police shields disappeared – there wasn't even any sound, no hiss of pressure releasing or pop of magic dispelled. The spells were simply there one moment, and gone the next.

John ignored the gasps and murmurs of incredulity to lock eyes with Moriarty.

“Impossible,” the Daemon breathed, panic starting to edge into his voice.

John thought Moriarty was the sort of person used to having contingency plans on top of contingency plans – there was no situation or scenario he hadn't thought up and already mapped out an escape route for.

Except this.

And in the face of the unknown and the unplanned for, the mask of 'perfect consulting criminal' was cracking at the edges.

“If you have any kind of plan that doesn't rely on magic, now would be the time to use it,” John offered.

He didn't think so though. He suspected Moriarty's plans had been to hold them with the wards and get out with a teleport spell – something only a full-blooded Daemon, Fey, Undine or Sylph could do.

At least, as long as they had access to magic, which wasn't happening with a Sink in the room.

“Sinks don't exist!” Moriarty screamed.
“And yet here I am,” John said mildly. “Existing.”

He was half-expecting Moriarty to regain his composure and produce a gun or snipers or something. But he turned and ran for the door.

The police surged forward, but John was closer. Moriarty didn't even make it four feet.

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They'd given Sherlock a ridiculous orange blanket again. But this time, he thought he might keep it.

He was listening to Lestrade and Donovan questioning John, Mycroft talking to his assistant about taking custody of Moriarty, and every single one of them was carefully and obviously trying not to appear shocked. Except for John, of course.

“I'm the exact opposite of magical.” And John had been speaking literally – the exact opposite of a positive wasn't zero, but a negative. That was why it was a bullet that had wounded him, rather than a spell and why no one had been able to magically heal the wound. That was the reason Sherlock's wards had never bothered him, why Sebastian's glamour hadn't touched him, why Sherlock's camouflage spell hadn't worked on him, why he'd been so opposed to Sherlock making him a talisman – he didn't need one.

John was a Sink.

Of course, he knew that story, concocted to explain why numbers of Faerie-born had dropped off in the Middle Ages, but no one took that seriously.

Except now Sherlock would have to.

And, given what he'd said before he made every spell within fifty metres vanish into the ether, he'd assumed Sherlock had known about it. Ridiculous, of course – what did he think that conversation about inherited resistances had been about, if not Sherlock trying to determine whether he could get close to John in a sexual way without hurting him?

But since John was a Sink, that wasn't an issue any more. Sherlock would never have to worry about losing control, because John neutralised any magic that came into contact with him.

At that thought, Sherlock stood up and made his way briskly over to John.

“And you've never told anyone?” Donovan was asking – apparently they'd moved on from the formal interrogation to satisfying her prurient curiosity.

John shook his head. “My parents kept it a secret when I was a kid, and the habit kind of stuck. I mean, you see how tough a time Faerie-born can have – picked on at school, offers from shady people if they've got especially unusual talents – and I guess they thought it would be much worse for me if word got around I was a Sink.”

Lestrade chuckled, shaking his head. “And here I was actually worried about you running around with Sherlock – I kept expecting him to drag you into some kind of magical fire-fight you couldn't handle.”

“Yeah, well, I'm usually pretty good against sorcerers,” John said, his tone bland even as he grinned.

Lestrade smiled as well, a companionable sort of smile. “Bring them down to your level then kick their arse, right?”
John simply nodded. “It's saved my life more than a few times. Most moderately powerful sorcerers rely completely on magic, and once it's taken away...”

He shrugged, but his words had sent a chill through Sherlock. There were innumerable powerful people who would be vulnerable without magic, who never suspected it could be taken away. He remembered what John had said about his parents' concern, that people with interests to protect might seek to use him as a weapon or an insurance policy.

He raised his eyes to Mycroft's, to find exactly what he'd feared. His brother might have been talking with his assistant, but his gaze was locked onto John, and his expression was intrigued, speculative...almost hungry.

Sherlock deliberately intruded into Mycroft's line of sight, and held the stare his brother levelled on him. If Mycroft wanted to use John to do his dirty work, he'd have to go through Sherlock first.

Mycroft inclined his head, indicating the message had been received, but Sherlock didn't trust that placid smile and stalked closer.

“I mean it, Mycroft,” he hissed, keeping his voice low – it wouldn't do to alarm John, after all. “Leave him alone. He is not your toy, or your weapon, and he won't be your lackey.”

“He won't,” Mycroft said, with an emphasis Sherlock found peculiar. “But come now, Sherlock – faced with such irrefutable proof that Sinks exist, surely you don't think John can be the only one?”

Sherlock hadn't even considered that – it just made sense for John to be as unique in this way as he was in so many others. But he was almost immediately relieved; even if the statistical likelihood of a Sink being born was something as infinitesimal as one in a billion, with a world population of close to seven billion and growing, there just had to be others.

And with John so adherent to his own moral code and so resistant to manipulation, Mycroft knew he had a better chance in finding one of the other Sinks than of convincing John to work with him. Perhaps it made Sherlock the sociopath he'd always claimed to be, but he couldn't feel any sympathy for those unknown, hidden Sinks Mycroft would be seeking.

As he turned away, a disquieting thought occurred to him – what if there weren't any more? Until now, the only reference or record of a Sink had been in that laughable story about the Faerie Lord's decree. But assuming that was true, and it certainly seemed likely, then that meant the last record of a Sink was over a thousand years ago. And nothing had been recorded since.

Even assuming Sinks were incredibly rare, that seemed unlikely. Someone, somewhere, had to have been noticed or revealed, the way John had revealed himself tonight. Either the occurrence had been dismissed, or it had been actively kept secret, or...

Was it possible John was only the second Sink to have ever existed?

Careful to ensure none of this thoughts showed on his face, Sherlock finally, finally, turned to John.

John looked up at him, and actually seemed nervous, which was ridiculous – what did John have to be nervous about? He'd clearly been unperturbed by Moriarty's fire wards from the beginning, but he supposed a Sink wouldn't feel threatened by a Daemon, unless...

Unless something else had happened. John had mentioned a gun in the beginning, and from what Sherlock understood, a Sink was just as vulnerable to a gun or knife or fists as an ordinary human. Had he done something to John before he put him in those wards? Something John wasn't telling anyone about?
He was actually running through the horrifying long list of things Moriarty could have done to John while still leaving him mobile and without serious injury when he realised that John was watching him a little too closely. He was snatching quick glances at Sherlock's face and shifting his weight, almost as though he believed Sherlock was angry at him for something.

Oh. But it couldn't be that, could it?

“You are aware,” Sherlock began slowly, watching John's reaction. “That you being a Sink changes nothing about our arrangement? Well, a few things perhaps, but little of real importance.”

The way John relaxed told Sherlock that yes, he'd been worried about exactly that. “But you said it would change a few things – what's it going to change?”

“When we get home, John.”

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John could admit he was nervous. He'd essentially outed himself as a Faerie tale monster to Sherlock, his brother, and several members of the MET, and some part of him had been nervous that as soon as he turned to them they'd shrink away.

No one embraced the bogeyman, after all.

But Lestrade and Donovan had joked with him, had actually seemed relieved that he had a way to protect himself. Mycroft had only paid him the bare minimum of attention, like normal really, and in truth he'd only really been worried about Sherlock. Lestrade and Donovan being uneasy around him he could...well, not like, but certainly learn to tolerate, but Sherlock?

John didn't think he could bear it if Sherlock had been afraid of him. If he'd told him that he didn't think their living arrangements could continue, that he couldn't live with someone who could disrupt his magical experiments just by touching them.

Sherlock had said that nothing would change, then amended it to say that some things would change, which had left John nervously fiddling with the cuffs of his jacket the whole way home. But really, how was he supposed to take that if not badly?

Sherlock seemed strangely tense as well, and said nothing on the journey, barely even looked at him.

Back in their living room, John steeled himself for the inevitable conversation.

“Turn it on,” Sherlock ordered, that strange tension John had noticed before their conversation about Moriarty back in full-force.

“What?”

“Whatever you did at the pool, do it again.”

John was wary, wondering if one of the things that would change would be Sherlock treating him like a research subject. But he had never been able to refuse Sherlock something he truly wanted, and he couldn't start now, not when Sherlock looked so...desperate for it.

He took a deep breath, and expanded his net a small way, just enough to cover the room – he didn't want to ruin any spells in the kitchen or Sherlock's room. “Done.”

“That was quick,” Sherlock muttered, looking around the room as though he expected something to
have changed.

“It's not like a spell, Sherlock,” John sighed. “It's who I am. I'm a constant conduit to the Elements – it's just an act of will to open that conduit wider.”

Sherlock extended his hand, and looked pleased when there was no answering stir of air. “No magic. I can't even feel it – it's like it's just...gone.”

“That's what a Sink does,” John said grumpily, feeling more and more that this was going to turn into an experiment.

“Brilliant,” Sherlock breathed.

Then he crossed the room in two strides, seized John by the shoulder and kissed him.

It was hot and deep and desperate and John was just starting to collect the scrambled remnants of his brain together enough to respond when Sherlock pulled back.

“Do you know how long I've wanted to do that?” he demanded, as if the fact that he hadn't done it was a personal failure on John's part.

He leaned in again, but John's brain was back on line and he put his hands on Sherlock's chest to stop him. “You wanted this?”

“It's present tense, not past, and of course I want this – pay attention!”

John knew that when something you'd wanted for close to two months practically threw itself into your arms you should take it and not ask questions...but he was too deeply involved to be casual about this. And some part of John was wondering why Sherlock had made a move now – had he noticed John's attraction weeks ago, but now it was only the novelty of sleeping with a Sink that appealed to him?

“Why now?” he asked quietly.

“Because now I know I won't hurt you.”

Strangely, that was what convinced John. The expression on Sherlock's face was too intense, too raw, too honest to be a lie, and the idea that Sherlock might have wanted this but not enough to risk his safety explained...well, it explained a lot of things, actually.

So he stopped asking questions and dragged Sherlock into another kiss.

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Lestrade knew he had to make the call – follow-up on witness statements and all, maybe ask Sherlock about why a government agent had showed up to take Moriarty off their hands – but he thought it could wait. At least until tomorrow morning.

He wasn't blind, after all – he'd seen the way Sherlock looked at John. Sherlock used to just turn up at the crime scene, give out information like machine-gun fire, and then disappear with some disparaging remarks about the intelligence of everyone in the room thrown in. But with John, he actually explained himself – when John asked how Sherlock knew something, Sherlock answered. And where before he'd never seemed to need anyone's approval but his own, now every explanation seemed almost like a calculated attempt to impress John. Sherlock actually listened to the man – not often, true, and not all the time, but it was still a lot more than most people managed.
Sherlock had looked so smitten at the end of that first day, when he’d been supposedly going to talk about the rent, that Lestrade wouldn’t have been the least bit surprised if their next drugs bust found the two of them shagging on the kitchen table.

But then Donovan had told him that John wasn’t in the least bit magical, and Lestrade had actually felt sorry for Sherlock. The man was Faerie-born, after all, which meant he couldn’t roll around in the sack with ordinary human beings without serious risk to their health – people were trying to combat it, of course, with both magical and scientific devices, but as yet there was nothing they could do about it.

It was sad, but it happened; a Faerie-born fell in love with a human or a low-rank sorcerer, but couldn’t ever consummate the relationship without putting the person they loved in danger. Many a famous song or story had been written about that particular agony.

But John being a Sink put a whole new spin on things.

So yes, he’d seen the way Sherlock looked at John. And now that he finally had permission to touch without consequence, without the risk of harming the doctor...

Well, he was going to wait until tomorrow to call them.

Tomorrow afternoon.

End.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to my marvellous beta ginbitch, who helped me out a lot with this story.

Works inspired by this one:  [Podfic] Faerie-Touched by themusecalliope

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