In My Heart There Is Only You
by Thorntonsheart

Summary

"You can't." A deep breath. "You can't keep leaving me Sherlock, I barely survived the first time you 'died', I was the bloody walking dead for almost two years. Ironically Mary helped me through that; put me back together like some broken statue. Bits were still missing, but I was at least recognisable as vaguely John Watson shaped. When you came back you had those missing bits with you and I was whole again." Here John looks up and unapologetically holds Sherlock's gaze, his eyes shining wet. "Then that... that bitch tried to take you away from me again! And she almost bloody succeeded! You flatlined on that table, Sherlock, you were dead. You left me, broken and scattered."

Sherlock watches, amazed, as John allows a tear to trail down his face; his John strong enough to allow his emotions through.

Notes

I have watched TAB only a few times and on each viewing I've decided that it's trying to tell me something different! I have loads of story ideas, none of which I necessarily believe to be how the story is going, this is just one of them.

I've set the story halfway through His Last Vow, so as such it is, I suppose, an AU. I know very little about the effects of Morphine (except for what I personally experienced or saw...
my father display) so please take that element with a pinch of salt!

As always, my thanks go my amazing beta Lockedinjohnlock, as always her beta work is perfect!. She truly goes above and beyond and happily listens to my muddled musings! She is also an extremely talented Podficcer! Go and have a listen!
Sherlock leapt from the precipice, a smile gracing his face even as he fell, the water of the Reichenbach Falls feeling strangely comforting as it encased his body. Finally he knew what needed to be done, finally he had the strength to do it......

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The sound of beeping gradually permeates Sherlock's muddled mind, images of Watson.... John...... Drifting away like dust in the sunlight. With the return of sound comes the return of pain; pain so violent that it causes him to arch his back and clench his fists. One hand makes contact with a harsh, starched material that seems to cover his body. The other holds strong onto something hard, yet somehow soft; warm and yet strong. Sherlock forces himself to open his eyes, the bright white of the overhead light momentarily blinding him. With great difficulty he compels himself to look in the direction of his still clenched fist. John. There, his knuckles bleached white from the force of Sherlock's grip, is John's small, but strong and steady hand. Slowly, so as not to startle John, (or is that himself?) Sherlock allows his eyes to follow the rumpled cardigan sleeve up to John's broad shoulder, up over his neck, until his gaze finally rests on the face of the man himself. John Hamish Watson, doctor, ex soldier, best friend and husband to an assassin ..... Sherlock’s eyes flicker over John's dishevelled appearance. He deduces that John hasn't slept properly for five, no seven, days; that he has been surviving on hospital canteen food and coffee. A quick glimpse to the side shows that John has taken these items, or had someone bring them, and eaten at Sherlock's bedside. John's clothes are rumpled, adding to the sleep deprived look, but are not the clothes he had been wearing when Sherlock had collapsed in their.... his .... living room at 221B. Someone had been caring for John. Mary? He shakes his head slightly, even the small movement making him feel nauseated, fear starting to knot in his stomach.

"It's ok, Sherlock. She's not here." John's voice is gentle, designed not to startle but to reassure. How can John know that Sherlock is fearful of Mary? John is not usually so perceptive when it comes to Sherlock and emotions. Other people's, yes, without a doubt, but Sherlock's? No. He seems quite happy living in the bubble of his own devising that Sherlock is unfeeling, or perhaps just doesn't feel things 'that way'. How very wrong John is.

Sherlock opens his mouth to speak but his mouth is caked with a sticky residue and his lips parched, almost to the point of cracking. The only noise that emerges is more a croak, which then merges into a distinct sound of discontent when John wriggles his hand out of Sherlock's clutches and stands.

"I'm going to get some ice chips, which you are going to suck on, and then, when you feel able, you can ask me whatever you need to. But be aware, Sherlock Holmes, I won't let you overtire yourself or try any more re-enactments of the great escape. Understood?" John's dark blue eyes meet with Sherlock's, John standing broad and strong, sure in his faith that Sherlock will do as he is told this time.

Despite his nausea, Sherlock manages a quick nod and tries to quell his rising anxiety. He is in a secluded room, in what appears to be a private hospital; Mycroft's doing he supposes. John is only at the nurses' station (he can even hear John's reassuring tones drifting back into the room) and yet he can't shake the feeling that he is in danger, being watched, maybe.

Contrary to his urging at Baker Street that Mary was to be trusted, it wasn't something he felt in the slightest. He wants to run and hide, and take John with him, to protect John at all costs. Sherlock knows that he needs to persuade John to go back to Mary, to stay with her. It is the only way he can
see for John to be safe, keep your friends close, and your enemies closer; and John loves her. Doesn't he? They had got married, have a child on the way, a home together. She had been there for John when Sherlock hadn't been able, and has been there ever since Sherlock had returned.

Wearily, Sherlock closes his eyes and is immediately flooded with images of Mary in her wedding gown, Mary holding a gun whilst dressed in black, Mary dressed in a black mourning dress, strangely decorative and more in keeping with a wedding gown, Mary heavily pregnant and wearing the red coat that reminds him so much of blood and the Mary in his dreams - no pregnancy, no child in sight and intelligence that seems superior to even his own and a match, as much as he hates to admit, for Mycroft.

"Sherlock." His whispered name draws him back out of his increasingly frustrating musings, the sight of John's concerned and caring face going a long way to calming his thoughts, if not his fears. He reaches out a shaking hand towards the cup of ice chips, wincing at the pull of the drip in his hand. A blood pressure cuff on his other arm limits his movement from that side. "Nope. You're sitting still and I'm doing this. You're going to sit there and suck on this ice and be bloody quiet whilst I have my say." John puts the cup down on the small slide-out table on the hospital bed and uses the buttons to slowly raise Sherlock into a seated position. He leans over Sherlock to adjust the pillow and Sherlock catches a hint of John's deodorant and the delicious musk of John himself. His pulse speeds up a little as a result of John's proximity and he silently curses the increased beeping from the monitor, spilling his secrets to the world at large.

"There, that looks more comfortable." John's eyes flicker over to the monitor, studying the read out, before turning and running a cool hand over Sherlock's forehead. Just this simple touch is enough to raise goosebumps on Sherlock's bare chest and he shivers. "Cold?" Not waiting for an answer, John pulls up the thin hospital sheet and positions it over Sherlock, leaving it to settle just below the bandage stuck to Sherlock's almost equally pale chest. "Sitting up isn't too much strain for you is it?" At a shake of Sherlock's head, John sits on the edge of the bed and grabs the cup of ice. He holds a small chip momentarily in his fingers over the cup before gently smoothing the melting ice over Sherlock's sore lips, finally slipping it between them when Sherlock parts them. The cool water feels heavenly in his mouth but far too little and he eagerly parts his lips when the next piece of ice touches against them. This time some of the water actually slips down his sore throat and he groans at the sensation, the sound rough even to his own ears. He watches as John pauses in the act of offering the next chip, closing his eyes and taking a breath before opening them again. The ice touches his lips almost in a caress and he feels his face flood with colour when John's fingertips linger against his lips, both men seemingly reluctant to move.

Finally John moves his hand away and averts his gaze so that it is fixed on the ice in the cup he is idly rocking in his hand.

"So," Sherlock watches as John steels himself for what he obviously considers to be a difficult conversation. John's shoulders pull back, his grip tightens on the cup and Sherlock can see the muscles at his jaw working as he clenches, deciding on how best to start. Equally fascinated and horrified, Sherlock admires the way that John's cheekbones became more prominent in the way that he knows means John is about to speak.

"Don't ever do that to me again Sherlock. I don't care what crazy arse excuse you think you have, you are not to do that again." He pauses and Sherlock is sensible enough to realise that this is not a prompt for him to talk, rather a time for John to study Sherlock's reaction to his words so far. Sherlock realises how incredibly rare it is that they are looking directly at each other when talking about difficult things, namely emotions. Determined to show John that he is aware of the import of the moment, he holds John's steady gaze, the urge to look away or make some glib comment viciously suppressed. He owes John this.
"You can't keep running off, being dead, just to prove you're clever." John puts the cup of ice chips back on the table and slowly reaches out for Sherlock's hand. Sherlock finally looks away from John's face and watches in fascination as John twines his short, strong (utterly beautiful) fingers with his own paler, longer (nothing special) fingers.

The touch of John's hand in his causes Sherlock's breath to hitch. He has spent so many hours wondering what it would feel like to have John's hand in his own, with no handcuffs or running to interfere with the experience and it is now clear that his thoughts have come nowhere near close to the truth. John's innate strength seems to flow into him and he is unable to suppress the contented sigh that the touch teases from him. John speaks his next words to their joined hands, his shoulders tense, apparently worried at the reception his words will have.

"You can't." A deep breath. "You can't keep leaving me Sherlock, I barely survived the first time you 'died', I was the bloody walking dead for almost two years. Ironically Mary helped me through that; put me back together like some broken statue. Bits were still missing, but I was at least recognisable as vaguely John Watson shaped. When you came back you had those missing bits with you and I was whole again." Here John looks up and unapologetically holds Sherlock's gaze, his eyes shining wet. "Then that.... that bitch tried to take you away from me again! And she almost bloody succeeded! You flatlined on that table, Sherlock, you were dead. You left me, broken and scattered."

"And then, and I have no clue how you did it, you came back. I don't believe in miracles, but somehow you managed it." Sherlock watches, amazed, as John allows a tear to trail down his face; his John strong enough to allow his emotions through. "You started to get stronger, but you hid the truth from me, kept the fact that my wife tried to kill you, and damn well succeeded, and you somehow escaped out of a hospital when you could barely tie your shoelaces and decided to confront her. Do you know what an idiot you are? Having me there was no guarantee she wouldn't shoot you again. You put your life on the line for no reason! You tore your stitches and had to have your heart restarted, again, all because you felt you had something to prove. You're a bastard, Sherlock Holmes, and you're slowly killing me."

The silence that falls between them is only broken by the beep, buzz and whir of the various machines monitoring Sherlock's progress. Despite his hard words John is still carefully holding Sherlock's hand, his thumb gently caressing the palm. His face is an open book and he looks utterly crushed.

"John." Sherlock's voice is rusty from disuse and his throat aches with the effort, but he pushes on, determined to be as brave as John, to let his emotions out, finally. "I didn't do it to hurt you, or for no reason." He pauses, biting his lip, knowing that his next words will either break John further or finally start to mend them both. "I did it to protect you. I always do things to protect you." He stops when John squeezes his hand tightly before releasing it, only to retrieve the ice and feed a few more chips to Sherlock. He accepts them gratefully, his throat feeling less ragged and his lips more mobile. He allows his eyes to close briefly in relief when John takes his hand again, fingers linked once more. "I jumped because there were snipers aiming at you, snipers who would only stop if I were seen to die." A deep breath, a squeeze of hand. "With Mary, I needed you to find out in a controlled manner, so that you could see that she wasn't trying to kill me. So that you will forgive her and go back."

"No." The word is deadly calm and brooks no argument. "That's a lie. I was a doctor in the army Sherlock, I've seen enough wounds meant only to incapacitate and enough designed to kill. She wanted you to die, and she wanted you to do it slowly and painfully. It meant that I wouldn't leave you and catch her, which a shot in the leg would also have done, but mostly it meant that you would most likely bleed out before an ambulance got to you. You would be dead, and I would be
none the wiser. Magnussen wouldn't tell me, he'd be true to form and try and hold it against Mary, who would later eliminate him. I would be broken again and Mary would swoop in and try to put me back together again. Except this time I'm not even sure I would have been recognisable as John Watson.”

The truth of the fact hangs heavy in the room and it is many minutes before either man speaks.

"I'm leaving her Sherlock. How can I forgive a woman who tried to kill my best friend in cold blood? A woman who knew too well what your death would do to the man she supposedly loves but did it anyway? I don't care what it says on that bloody memory stick. I ceased to love her the moment I found out she shot you, and truth be told I never loved her as a man should love the woman he intends to spend his life with. I was too broken to see the truth behind it until you came back, and then too stubborn to admit the truth of it to myself. I should never have married her. That was cruel to the woman I thought she was. I wasn't free to give my heart to her."

The rapid bleeping of the heart monitor betrays the turmoil that Sherlock is experiencing, the way that his heart is clinging to the hope of what he thinks John is implying. But Sherlock needs the words to be spoken between them, needs for there to be no more misunderstandings between them.

"Why wasn't your heart free to be hers?" The words are whispered, the hope too fragile to be spoken too loudly.

John meets Sherlock's bright blue gaze with his own deeper blue one and raises his unoccupied hand to stroke tenderly over Sherlock's cheekbone before drifting along his jawline, his thumb briefly stroking over Sherlock's lower lip before his hand stills, palm embracing the side of Sherlock's face.

"How have you never deduced this? How is this a surprise to you?" The questions are clearly rhetorical and Sherlock makes no attempt to answer them, merely continues to try and read the truth of the situation from John's face. "My heart wasn't free to be hers, because it was already someone else's." A pause, a slow deep breath. "It was yours Sherlock, it will always be yours."

Sherlock feels like he can't breathe, too many thoughts and emotions are trying to break through at once, clawing at his chest and throat, desperately trying to escape. He takes great gulps of air and grips onto John's hand, he is conscious that he is blinking rapidly but seems unable to control his own bodily reactions to the situation. The touch of calming hands wiping away tears he hadn't realised he had shed helps to ground him.

"Breathe, Sherlock, deep breaths." John's voice is soothing and calm, a balm over Sherlock's roiling emotions. "I know you don't feel things like that, and I'm probably being unfair telling you, but I can't keep it to myself any longer. I will always be your friend, Sherlock, I don't need for it to be anything more, but I thought it was time that you knew that you are worthy of being loved."

"You're an idiot John." A brief laugh is startled from John and Sherlock uses the pause in his words to grip John's fingers fiercely. "As always you see, but you do not observe. You saw all the things I have done, but you didn't observe why I did them."

"Then, tell me." John asks quietly.

"Moriarty couldn't burn the heart out of me, because I don't have it. I gave it to you long ago." The words are simple but heartfelt. Sherlock knows he should be feeling embarrassed by spouting such romantic sentiment but it's the truth. He doesn't know precisely when he gave his heart over to John's safe-keeping; only that it now resides with him. He carefully brings John's left hand to his lips and bestows a lingering kiss on its palm. The resulting hitch he hears in John's breath is all the
encouragement he needs to treat the other hand in the same manner.

He smiles up into John's face when he feels the man stand to lean over him. John cups Sherlock's cheek, sweeping his thumb over that glorious cheekbone and Sherlock savours the sensation of John's clever fingers drifting over his skin, lighting up all his touch receptors, making his senses tingle.

"I really want to kiss you Sherlock, but your poor lips are too tender." John's gaze is fixed on Sherlock's mouth, a glimpse of his tongue enough to cause Sherlock to tremble in his hands. Slowly, John presses lingering kisses to his forehead, to the bridge of his nose, along each cheek bone and finally to the corners of Sherlock's full lips. They both sigh as their foreheads rest against each other and Sherlock feels more whole than he can ever recall feeling. "Now, you need to get better so that I can kiss you properly. I want to find out if that mouth of yours really does feel as good as it looks."

Sherlock draws back a little, a frown forming on the bridge of his previously kissed nose. "My mouth?"

John chuckles a little at Sherlock's evident confusion.

"Your mouth is a sinful distraction, Sherlock. How can you not have noticed how often I look at it, how often my conversation seems to be directed at your lips? I can't wait to trace the shape of them with my fingertips, with my lips, with my tongue."

Sherlock swallows suddenly, the words are essentially innocent but the colour has flooded his cheeks, heating his skin; blood rushes between his legs and he shifts uneasily on the bed. Arousal is not a new sensation to him, but allowing it to wash over him whilst sitting in a hospital bed covered only by a thin sheet and pyjamas bottoms is. The look on John's face is sexy as hell and the words are out of Sherlock's mouth before his brain has fully kicked into gear.

"What else would you like to trace their shape with?" He allows some of the arousal he is feeling to bleed through into his voice and is rewarded by a flush staining John's cheeks and the sight of his pupils visibly dilating.

"You really want to know?" His words are husky, his own want for Sherlock now clear in his voice. He studies Sherlock's face closely; when it is evident that there is no guile he licks his lips and delights in the way that Sherlock tracks the movement of his tongue. "I want to trace the shape of your mouth with my cock. I want to leave the wet evidence of my desire glistening on your lips, to see it shining on your skin before you lick it off and sample a taste of me. I want to slide my cock inside that delectable mouth of yours and feel it embrace me. I want to feel your lips slide along my hard length and I want to feel your tongue work me, teasing the head of my cock, tasting me. I want to see your lips purse tight around me as you suck and I want to see some of my release dribble from your mouth when I come, the rest I want to see you swallow. I want to taste myself on your lips and in your mouth, and then, I want to do the same to you. Christ, how I want."

Sherlock groans deep and heavy and squeezes at John's hands. His body is still too weak to react fully, his erection half hearted at best but his mind is more than willing. His brain is flooded with image after image of the scene that John has so graphically set and it takes many long moments before he is able to catch his breath enough to speak. In the meantime his monitors are bleeping and whirring enough to wake the dead. A nurse pops her head round the door but 'Doctor' Watson waves her away with a simple 'I just gave him some interesting information, he'll calm down soon.'

When Sherlock can finally speak, it is little more than a croaked 'John!' but his facial expressions and flushed cheeks make it very clear to John that his impassioned speech was very well received,
if poorly timed. John once again feeds some ice to Sherlock; it's mostly ice water in the cup and he has to fish around a bit for some chips. This time he deliberately allows his fingers to linger on Sherlock's lips, his eyelids fluttering shut when Sherlock briefly sucks them into his mouth. John shifts in his chair and surreptitiously adjusts his straining erection, blushing when Sherlock eagerly follows his movements.

"Guess you weren't the only one affected." There is a chuckle hidden in his words and Sherlock smiles with him. "I said you could ask me questions and all I've done is talk. What did you want to ask me?"

Sherlock takes a moment to calm his swirling thoughts and allow the last of his, rather disappointing, erection to ebb away. There are so many questions he wants to ask, so many things he wants to say, but the image of Mary keeps floating around his head.

"What do we do about Mary?"
"Jesus, I've got a case of verbal diarhrea!" John laughs towards the ceiling.

"Is that your medical opinion, Doctor Watson?" Sherlock queries. He tries to keep his voice serious as befits their overall situation, but John's sudden humour is contagious and a chuckle escapes him.

"Oh yes. Caused by finally talking about things that should have been said years ago. Random feelings and ideas will continue to pour out of the infected until all possible connotations of thoughts and emotions have been shared." John's shoulders are shaking as he fights to hold his laughter back, tears threaten to spill down his cheeks. Sherlock says nothing but knows that not all of those tears are ones of mirth.

"Straight back to work is it then Sherlock?" Despite the flush still colouring his skin, John is now all seriousness. "We aren't going to do anything about Mary. She's my problem. I got myself into this mess; I will get myself out of it." John's voice is determined and there's a cold edge to his words. Such a difference to just fifteen minutes earlier, when his mobile lips had been shaping words of such heat that Sherlock can still feel their burn.

"No, together, 'There's always two of us', that's what you said." Sherlock's voice grows weaker as a wave of tiredness hits him. He can see that his morphine level is still quite high, enough to keep the pain relatively at bay but also enough to make him sleep for many more hours than he would like. At the back of his mind, he realises that John must be monitoring his levels and that he considers it important for Sherlock to sleep. Distantly he recalls that the body often does its best healing whilst asleep.

"When? There should always be the two of us, but that's not how it's gone, is it? You run off and face it all on your own and I sit around like some useless imbecile. I'm not stupid, Sherlock, and I'm not defenceless; army, remember?"

John is still sitting on the edge of Sherlock's bed but his back is now rigid, hands clenched against his thighs and Sherlock longs for their touch again. He fights the heaviness that is threatening to wash over him and drag him back into the depths of sleep. He ignores the pull of the drip in the back of his hand and stretches to cover one of John's hands with his own. Carefully, he loosens the fist John is making and clasps their hands together.

"Not stupid, John. Never stupid." Sherlock's words are starting to slur and he curses himself for being so reliant on the medication. "The two of us....." The gaps between blinking are getting fewer
and fewer and he is struggling to keep his eyes open. "Against the rest of the ......" Sherlock's words trail off as he finally succumbs to sleep. He does not feel John raise their clasped hands to his lips, or the way that strong lips brush carefully over his hand, each fingertip adorned with a kiss, nor does he hear John utter the last word of his sentence. He has drifted back into the world of dreams where his Watson awaits him.

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Watson had appeared shocked to see his wife in the crypt but covered his displeasure well. He is standing slightly away from her and Holmes, deciding to let Holmes take the lead in this one. Mrs Watson stands before Sherlock Holmes, confident in her elegant, yet daring, attire. No long skirts cover her legs; rather, they are encased in trousers - much more practical for the work Holmes has only now realised she is involved in. The feeling that she should be pregnant keeps plaguing his mind, but the Watson's have never had any children, and it is beginning to look unlikely they ever will, given Mary's advancing age. And yet, Holmes still can't quite clear the image of a red-swatched, heavily pregnant Mary from his mind. In the flare of the torchlight, she is looking at him with cold eyes and Holmes can't help feeling that he doesn't quite come up to her expectations, that he is somehow less than what she had expected. Holmes can't find it in himself to disagree with that supposition, Watson had always written about him in such a way as to make him seem above sentiment, above emotions and above feeling pain over failures. Mrs Watson had seen straight through that and had continuously tried to ensure that Watson had too, for her husband to see the weaknesses of the man he appears to idolise. Watson is no fool, he knows that it is a persona that he created for Holmes in his stories, and yet he never corrects his wife. He lets her continue to berate him and it is Watson's loyalty to Holmes that is gradually destroying his marriage. Holmes knows he should feel responsible for this and encourage Watson to repair his marriage but he will not interfere, the question of what happens within his marriage is one that only Watson can decide. Whatever the outcome may be, Holmes knows he will be there for his friend for as long as he is needed.

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Sherlock blinks blearily awake, the white light above him coming sharply into focus and causing him to flinch away. This time, only a background level of pain accompanies his awakening and he allows a sigh of relief to escape him. He has no idea how many hours he has been asleep; the room is windowless and there are no clues as to what the time may be. He swallows and is grateful to find that his throat feels vastly improved. Slowly, he allows his glance to glide around his room. Flowers sit on a table by the door: not as many as when he was in hospital the first time around, just three or four carefully selected bouquets. Somehow, they mean far more to him than the overflowing amount had previously. He can see a simple bouquet of yellow and white roses that he deduces are from Molly, a brightly coloured bunch of carnations that are most definitely from Mrs Hudson and a simple shop bought arrangement, presumably from Scotland Yard. Slightly away from the other flowers sits a lone plant, a cactus in full bloom, beautiful and unique. Sherlock ponders it whilst his eyes travel around the rest of the room, finally settling on a sleeping John. A camp bed has been set up alongside Sherlock's hospital bed; far enough away to cause no problems but close enough that John will awaken at the slightest sound. Sherlock knows that the cactus is from John but for the life of him he can't work out why John would buy him such an odd gift. Does he consider Sherlock to be prickly and unapproachable? No, their conversation earlier (yesterday?) disproves that line of thought. Deciding to think more deeply about John's gift, Sherlock tries to adopt his perpetual thinking position. The movement causes his drip line to snag and pull the cannula in the back of his hand and his resulting yelp of pain has John on his feet before Sherlock is even able to blink.

"Sherlock? What do you need? What hurts?" The words are tumbling out of John's mouth and his
hands are trailing carefully over Sherlock's arms before Sherlock has even realised where the pain is coming from. Ever efficient John can see that the drip needle is misaligned and the tubing leading from the bag containing rehydration fluids snagged. "We're going to need to get this changed; it's going to leave a nasty a bruise I'm afraid." John finally looks Sherlock directly in the eyes and his care and concern is clear for anyone to read.

"You do it." It still hurts Sherlock a little to speak, but the words emerge more easily than before. Suddenly, Sherlock is concerned about the loss of time and what Mary may be plotting now that she knows he will pull through. Remembered words flood through him, bringing heat to his cheeks and a hitch to his breath, John saying that he wanted nothing more to do with Mary, that his heart belonged to Sherlock and then, in the most explicit of ways, describing how he wanted his body to belong to Sherlock too.

He calms when John runs a cool palm over his forehead and along his cheek before settling at the nape of his neck. A shy smile flutters at John's mouth and Sherlock can only look on in wonder as John leans closer to him. Sherlock's eyes slide closed at the first sensation of breath against his skin. He sighs when he feels the chaste touch of John's lips against his. He longs to deepen the kiss, to pull John more firmly against him but he lacks the strength and his arm movements are restricted by all the machines. John pulls away slightly before pressing another light, yet lingering, kiss against Sherlock's full lips.

"I can't change the drip for you Sherlock. I'll look after you at home, but let the good people here do their job. I will talk to them about getting the other stuff off you, though; give you a bit more freedom of movement. You've been coming in and out of consciousness for a few days now and they were able to remove the catheter before you woke earlier. You were lucky you were asleep; it's not always a pleasant experience for the patient. You're going to need some help either peeing into a bottle or using the loo." John gives a lopsided grin before kissing Sherlock's blazing hot cheek and leaves to go and talk to the nurses.

Sherlock flops back in his bed, his face burning with humiliation. Realistically he had known he would have had to have been catheterised, but having John speaking so matter of factly with him about his future toileting requirements whilst his kisses still tingled on Sherlock's lips is mortifying.

John returns to the room a few minutes later. Sherlock knows, without a doubt, that John has delayed coming back into the room too quickly to allow Sherlock some time to recover his usual, impeccable poise.

"Someone will be in shortly to reposition that drip and take away all the other stuff." John stops at the edge of the bed, taking one of Sherlock's long hands in his. "You're healing really well, better than they expected given the damage you inflicted on yourself." He holds up his free hand to halt Sherlock's inevitable protest. His voice lowers to become more intimate, encompassing only the two of them. "I know why you did it, why you met with her, and I thank you, but please, no more." A gruff clearing of his throat and John's voice returns to his usual warm tones. "Mycroft has somehow arranged it so that not only can I stay here with you, day and night, but so that I can also make any decisions about your care whilst you've been incapacitated. He seemed very adamant that I took care of you, not that I would have it any other way."

"Thank you, John. There is no-one else I would trust my life with so completely." Sherlock can see the effect his unexpected words have on John; a small smile pulling at his thin, but perfectly formed lips, his navy blue eyes alight with happiness.

"Really, you should be thanking your brother. He pulled all the right strings to get you here and enable me to stay here. He has also posted guards outside the building, and I suspect not all the
health care workers here are only that." John's face darkens when he realises how close to home that statement is. It's obvious that he is wondering how often Mary used her medical training as a way to infiltrate hospitals to complete one of her hits as an assassin.

The sound of a snort and the sight of Sherlock rolling his eyes is enough to pull John out of his musings. It's so very typically Sherlock that a flood of affection washes over John and he has to work hard to suppress an indulgent smile. A deep chuckle breaks through all of his efforts and soon he is laughing alongside Sherlock, the action washing away the last of the darkness that had threatened him. The laughter gradually dies off and a different sort of seriousness fills the room.

"John?" Sherlock reaches for John's other hand, inordinately pleased when John meets him half way. "Is there any reason to believe that Mary isn't pregnant?"

Sherlock flinches when John clenches his hands in reaction to the query but doesn't pull his own away. John ducks his head and Sherlock can see the pain his question has caused and his chest aches from more than just the bullet wound, but this is something that needs to be known, the answer will influence how they move forward from this. He watches as John sets his personal feelings aside and truly thinks over the issue. He alternates between chewing on his lower lip, sucking his cheeks in and huffing, it's such an expressive face and under other circumstances Sherlock could lose himself in observing and cataloguing every nuance and expression.

"It's possible; nothing is one hundred percent foolproof but we did always use birth control. Went over the top a bit, to be honest, she was on the pill but we also used condoms. Obviously, we'd discussed children but neither of us wanted them, at least, not yet......Possibly at all in my case."

John struggles to get the words out, guilt at not wanting to be a father competing with the hope that maybe he wasn't going to be. "We were both stunned she was pregnant, you saw that, but once the shock passed I thought 'Yeah, I can do this', and for a moment it felt amazing. But later I couldn't stop thinking about how it could be possible. We had been so very careful: no slip ups, no diving onto each other in a blind passion." John looks up and meets Sherlock's eye. He squeezes Sherlock's hands and mutters 'sorry', realising how much pain this discussion must be causing the man whose heart lies in his safe-keeping. "I want to say, it's unlikely there's a baby; she did a pregnancy test at work but I never saw the kit, just took her word for it. But she has a baby bump starting to emerge and is suffering terribly with morning sickness."

"I'm sorry John, but I have to ask this. Is there any chance that, if she is pregnant, the baby isn't yours?"

"Great! So, I married an assassin who not only has a damn good go at killing my best friend but fucks around too!" The words are loud in the small room and Sherlock's eyes dart to the corridor outside, it's empty but he can hear hushed voices coming from the nurses' station just down the hall. "Sorry, sorry." John apologises for his outburst, letting go of Sherlock's hands to cover his face with his palms. "God, I sound like a jealous husband. " He drags his hands down over his face and then rests them back on his thighs. Sherlock is surprised to see relief clearly displayed on John's face. "And I'm not, I'm really not. I'm praying that she has been unfaithful so that if there is a baby it's unlikely to be mine. What kind of man does that make me, Sherlock? Hmm? I'm newly married and all I want is for my wife to have been screwing around so that I can get out of the worst mistake of my life and into my flatmate's pants!" John colours at his final words but doesn't deny them.

Sherlock raises a single eyebrow and somehow that is enough to break the tense atmosphere, quiet chuckles drift in the air and John rubs a hand sheepishly over the nape of his neck before tilting his head back and exhaling loudly.
"Jesus, I've got a case of verbal diahorrea!" John laughs towards the ceiling.

"Is that your medical opinion, Doctor Watson?" Sherlock queries. He tries to keep his voice serious as befits their overall situation, but John's sudden humour is contagious and a chuckle escapes him.

"Oh yes. Caused by finally talking about things that should have been said years ago. Random feelings and ideas will continue to pour out of the infected until all possible connotations of thoughts and emotions have been shared." John's shoulders are shaking as he fights to hold his laughter back, tears threaten to spill down his cheeks. Sherlock says nothing but knows that not all of those tears are ones of mirth.

"It sounds very serious indeed, and rest assured John, I will take very good care of you whilst you suffer and during your recuperation." Although Sherlock's words are intended to be light-hearted they are no less sincere for that.

There's a moment of silence as both men savour the knowledge that they will finally be there for the other one, come what may. Sherlock reaches for John's hands again, unwilling to have even the smallest of distance between them.

"In all seriousness, John, what is your instinct here?" Sherlock looks intently at John, gauging his reactions. Watches as he sucks his cheeks in, exaggerating his strong jawline.

"Honestly? I think she's most likely faking the pregnancy. I can't really identify why though. I've heard her being sick, but that's easy enough to make happen; a couple of fingers down the throat or even something as simple as throwing a cup of water down the loo and making the appropriate noises. She's never let me in the bathroom with her, and afterwards she smelled clean, as did the bathroom; no lingering smell of vomit. Her face never had that sheen that appears after throwing up, either. The belly is a bit harder to explain, padding perhaps?" John tilts his head in query, silently requesting Sherlock's thoughts.

"I suspect you're right. We already know that she's a liar and that she's willing to do anything to keep you and your love. A child would ensure that. You're an honourable man, she believed you would stay with her for the sake of a baby." Sherlock squeezes John's hands. "Padding seems the most likely option, but how would you have not noticed?"

John flushes and casts his glance around the room, his focus never settling. "God, this would be easier with a drink." Finally, his eyes fall on Sherlock's face and he allows his attention to settle there. "But we need to speak openly now, don't we? Without the aid of alcohol or adrenalin." It's the plain truth and Sherlock does nothing to deny it, too many lies have been told between them; it doesn't matter that they were to protect John, too many feelings have been hidden; it doesn't matter that it was to protect himself. If they are to go on together, and he truly hopes they will, now is the time for unadulterated truths. "Mary and I haven't been intimate since the first week of the honeymoon. And by intimate I don't just mean sex, I mean things like sharing a bath or a shower, sleeping naked together, massages, even just settling into each other's arms to watch the telly. At first, I tried to do all that with her, but I must admit that after a while of being constantly rejected I just stopped trying. I told myself that I was being a good husband, not pushing her when she said no; but I was so relieved Sherlock, I didn't want to be touching her."

"No going back then?" The hope in Sherlock's voice is clear, he wants John home, back in Baker Street, where he has always belonged.

"No going back." John's words are whispered but no less resolute for it.

Quiet wraps its tender arms around the two men as they allow their thoughts to drift over all that
may come.
Chapter Summary

"Doctor Watson ....... John..... Forgive me, but are you sure you never had any idea about Ms Morstan's true nature before my brother confronted her?" Mycroft's voice is uncharacteristically soft, the tones carefully modulated but not faked, and it is this, more than anything that has John raising his head from the bed.

His grip on Sherlock's hand loosens but he doesn't let go. Sherlock's hand in John's hair drifts down onto his shoulder, where he squeezes encouragingly before allowing his index finger to drift, almost absentmindedly, along the neckline of John's jumper. Warm skin meets his cool fingertips and he can feel John unconsciously leaning in to his touch.

Chapter Notes

As always the very deepest of thanks go to my wonderful beta - Lockedinjohnlock.
She's very busy working, parenting, living her own life and being a fabulous podficcer and yet she always finds time to beta for me. I know I can never find the words to tell her how much that truly means to me!

The arrival of a nurse stops John and Sherlock from getting too lost in their thoughts and the fact that he is there to remove some of the cumbersome machines goes a long way to making Sherlock less resentful about having his comfortable silence with John interrupted.

"Good afternoon Mr Holmes, Doctor Watson. I've been given the go ahead to remove the blood pressure cuff and the heart monitor from you." As the nurse chats away he efficiently removes the cuff and clip, tidying them away neatly before wheeling them into the hall. Sherlock stretches his arms out in relief, wincing when his morphine feed pulls at his hand again.

"Right, Mr Holmes, this needs to come out." His nurse now has on surgical gloves and is gently manipulating the skin around the cannula insertion site. Sherlock clenches his teeth against the dull burn of pain and the constant chatter but is thankful for the distraction the nurse's one sided conversation is providing. "And, here we go." The cannula is slid free in one smooth move and Sherlock feels the relief instantly. "We're going to start looking at lowering your morphine levels, try and keep the withdrawal symptoms as minimal as we can. I see from your records that you have some experience of opiates before, so I'm sure you understand this necessity." Sherlock nods slowly, eyes flicking over to John, gauging his reaction. John looks unhappy at the reminder of Sherlock's less than shining history, but there is no disgust on his face.

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Of all the emotions Sherlock can recognise easily, disgust and contempt are at the forefront. After all, these are what he saw directed at him for years by his peers, by his brother and by his parents. Yes, his family tried to keep it hidden from him, but it was as clear as day to him, only partially veiled by the look of extreme disappointment. Something of his thoughts must show on his face as
John moves closer to him, away from where the nurse is busy finding a place to settle the new feed for the morphine and rests a solid hand on Sherlock's shoulder, squeezing slightly when Sherlock winces at the sensation of the cannula needle being inserted. John looks steadily into Sherlock's eyes as the nurse checks the feed and settings, thanking him and asking some general questions, all without breaking their eye contact. The nurse leaves after giving Sherlock a quick but thorough visual once over, knowing that if more help is needed Doctor Watson will either provide it - as he has done throughout Mr Holmes' stay - or he will seek help.

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The arrival of Sherlock Holmes to their tiny private hospital on the outskirts of London had been the source of many a break time's gossip. The famous detective, back from the 'dead' for little more than a year, had arrived via helicopter in the middle of the night. He had been heavily sedated, accompanied only by his brother and his doctor; the equally infamous Doctor John Watson. A gunshot wound directly to the chest, complicated by Sherlock leaving his original hospital too early, had ensured his arrival there. Mr M Holmes had informed them, in no uncertain terms, that he expected his brother to be watched at all times. When they had said that it would take some time to hire another nurse all expression had been wiped clear from Mycroft's face and his voice had been cold when he told them that Doctor Watson would be staying with Mr Holmes and only some of the medical staff currently employed at the hospital would be allowed to treat his brother. His assistant had passed a file over specifying who would be granted access to Sherlock and what would happen, in very clear terms, if someone else was found to be near him.

A bed had been placed in Sherlock's room for Doctor Watson; John as they were urged to call him, and his meals were provided by the staff. He used the toilet area attached to Sherlock's room for showering and ablutions and read aloud for hours at a time, often stopping only when his voice became hoarse. The staff had lost count of the number of times they had walked past the room to see John sitting by the edge of Sherlock's bed either holding his hand or stroking his fingers gently through Sherlock's hair. No sign was seen of the good doctor's new wife and no-one queried it. It was obvious to anyone with eyes where his thoughts and heart currently laid. John only left Sherlock's room if someone else were there in his place; these trusted individuals were few and the staff got to know them well, even in such a short time. Molly Hooper came the most regularly, she appeared meek on the outside but had been heard telling John in no uncertain terms to shower as he smelled none too fresh and then to go for a walk to clear the thunderclouds from his brow. He had, rather surprisingly, quietly acquiesced. Mrs Hudson, a motherly older lady, had visited once, accompanied by DI Lestrade. She had fussed at Sherlock's bed sheets, patted John's hand and then sat quietly knitting whilst John and the DI, Greg, had discussed old cases, football games and some of Sherlock's more bizarre experiments. Greg had patted Sherlock's bicep as he left, but his intelligent eyes had seen more than just the man in the bed, a friend by his side. The final visitor, and in some ways the most alarming, was Mycroft Holmes. He always came in of an evening, precisely at 7 pm, briefcase and umbrella in hand. Sometimes he and John would read over the paperwork contained in that briefcase and if this were the case the staff knew to give the room a wide berth. Occasionally they would talk in muted tones, eyes glancing over to where Sherlock lay still in his bed and once they had sat in companionable silence, Mycroft reading the paper and John apparently lost in his own thoughts, fingertips idly tracing the back of Sherlock's hand.

Since Sherlock had regained consciousness all the visits had stopped. Mycroft's involvement was obvious, and the nurses were grateful that John and Sherlock had time to be together before having to deal with the rest of the world. They had seen the gentle kisses John had pressed to Sherlock's face and had heard about the way the machines had reacted to some intimately spoken words. They didn't need to be the genius that Sherlock was said to be to know that these two men needed space and each other. Nothing more was deemed necessary unless Doctor Watson requested it.
The afternoon ticks by slowly, John and Sherlock both dozing, off and on. Sherlock's hand is tightly held in John's or vice versa, John leaning awkwardly on the bed or Sherlock leaning slightly over to touch John as he sleeps in the chair that is pulled up close to the bed. The feeling of tranquillity is broken when Sherlock realises that his bladder feels full. He had been successfully ignoring the call of his body for the last hour but it seems that desperate measures are now called for. He fidgets on his bed whilst deciding on whether to wake John and let him assist or to ring for a nurse. A nurse would be less personal, so potentially less embarrassing, but the idea of another person touching his flesh causes Sherlock's jaw to clamp shut and a violent tremor to shake his body. The resulting judder of the bed frame is enough to rouse John from his light sleep and the decision is effectively removed from Sherlock.

"What's the matter, Sherlock?" Immediately the doctor in John is apparent, concern shown as a frown on his face as he sweeps an analytical gaze over Sherlock's body. Sherlock tries to lock his discomfort away but the involuntary twitching and clenching of his thighs (and backside) betray him. Relief replaces worry instantly and Sherlock is supremely relieved to see that John doesn't even break into a smile, doctorly or otherwise. "What would you like, Sherlock? A bottle or help to the loo?"

Sherlock studies John's face, grateful once more for the stalwartness of his friend. His embarrassment fades a little at the situation, even as he inwardly chides himself for his awkwardness.

"Could... Could you help me into the bathroom please?" Sherlock glances at his hands rather than at John, hearing rather than seeing when John stands up, moving his chair to make a clear access to the small room that adjoins Sherlock's. He tenses when he feels a firm hand at his shoulder, alerting him to John's supportive presence. The hand remains just long enough for him to relax a little before John moves further along the bed, carefully untucking the sheets that encase Sherlock's long legs. Using the buttons on the bed, John raises Sherlock into a sitting position, before carefully easing his legs off the bed, one strong arm around Sherlock's back as he turns him until he is fully seated on the edge of the bed. John then positions Sherlock's arm over his shoulder whilst simultaneously ensuring that the morphine feed is gripped in Sherlock's other hand.

"Ok. You're going to be unsteady on your feet, and your legs will probably feel very weak. Don't worry, it's temporary, we just need to feed you up and get you moving around a little." John's words are iconic Doctor Watson, but the warmth in his voice and the gentle squeeze of his arm around Sherlock's waist is classic John. Sherlock feels strengthened just by his proximity and taking a deep breath, he slides off the bed, trusting John to take his weight where needed. He stands for a moment, letting the gentle swirl of the room slow and some strength to return to his legs. He flexes his hand where it is gripping John's bicep, indicating that he is ready to move. John understands Sherlock's unspoken directive and together they slowly shuffle forward. They pause when they are close to the edge of the toilet, both men looking down at the innocuous item with matching expressions of awkward discomfort. Taking a steadying breath, John breaks the moment by asking the question that is parading across Sherlock's mind.

"How are we going to do this?" John awaits Sherlock's answer and when none is forthcoming offers a few suggestions of his own. "If you need to sit, you'll obviously need to lower your pyjama bottoms but then I'll be able to sit you down and leave the room until you're done. That gives you some degree of stability whilst you're doing what your body needs to do. If you wish to remain standing I'll turn away but switch my grip from around your back to around your abdomen. That way I'll be able to support you but you'll have some, if limited, privacy. That option requires less energy from you but I won't be able to leave the room."
"I'd like to stand. Even the small amount of effort to get from the bed to here has taken more out of me than I had deduced." Sherlock's answer comes quickly with no hesitation, and he is already shuffling closer to the loo and fiddling with the ties to his pyjama bottoms. John switches arms quickly and efficiently and only just manages to avert his eyes as Sherlock is reaching into his pyjama bottoms. The sound of liquid hitting porcelain is accompanied by a heartfelt sigh and John can't help but grin, it seems Sherlock was a lot more desperate than even his bed wriggling had indicated. He waits until Sherlock has stopped fidgeting, presumably sorting his pyjama bottoms out again, before adjusting his grip and turning once more. He surreptitiously glances in the toilet bowl, the doctor in him scanning for any obvious signs of blood in Sherlock's urine, before flushing the loo and guiding them both over to the sink. He runs the tap until the water is the perfect temperature and eases Sherlock's elegant hands beneath the stream along with his own. He dispenses the soap with his elbow straight onto their joined hands and proceeds to wash them both thoroughly, being aware of Sherlock's cannula throughout. Then, he dries his hands on the disposable paper towels before gently drying Sherlock's. Glancing up, he sees the quizzical look on Sherlock's face and John becomes aware of the fact that he is supporting Sherlock's weight as he leans heavily into him and that he has just washed both of their hands.

"You probably could have done that bit on your own, couldn't you?" John's cheeks flush a deep pink as self-consciousness about his actions takes over. He notices that he is still holding Sherlock's hands in his own and carefully releases them before sliding his arm back around Sherlock.

"Probably." Sherlock grins crookedly at John, his head ducked down so that he looks at John through his overly long fringe. "But I'm not sure I would have enjoyed it quite so much."

His grin broadens into a smile when he sees John smiling sheepishly back. Together they ease back into the main room, working together perfectly as they always do. John slowly helps Sherlock to sit back on the bed before carefully swinging his legs up onto the mattress. Sherlock leans back against the pillows with an audible groan of relief; even the short walk to the bathroom and back seems to have drained his remaining reserve of strength. He gazes through heavy eyes as John tucks the sheet back over his legs and is drifting into an easy sleep even as John lowers the head of the bed. He feels the light touch of lips against his forehead, the tender drift of fingertips through his hair and he falls into a dreamless slumber.

He wakes hours later to the sound of hushed voices in his room. He remains still, eyes closed, listening to the dulcet tones of John and the more ringing sound of his brother. They appear to be discussing his progress since he regained consciousness and he is debating whether to go back to sleep when Mycroft's voice is raised above the subdued sounds of the conversation.

"I know you're awake, Sherlock. You never were that good at faking sleep." Mycroft's voice is distinctly unamused but Sherlock can hear a touch of something underneath, definite strands of relief and concern.

He opens his eyes and is startled to see a flash of something very similar to genuine sentiment skitter across his brother's face before it is once again wiped clear. Glancing over, he watches as John smothers an indulgent smile at the two men's interactions, averting his gaze until he has his reactions under control.

"I won't bore you with tedious questions as to how you are doing Sherlock. Doctor Watson has kept me well briefed on your daily progress, and how you've been doing since you awoke. He assures me that your mental faculty appears to be back up to its full potential, such as it is, and I think it's
now time to decide what we do about the woman you both know as Mrs Mary Watson."

Sherlock clenches his fists in the sheets in frustration but is interrupted before he lets forth the diatribe he can feel battling to be released.

"Morstan." John's voice is monotone, impossible to read. Sherlock analyses John's posture and facial expression, finding them almost devoid of his usual tells. He is able to read disappointment and anger, but unable to tell at whom this is directed.

"I'm sorry?" Mycroft appears all politeness but Sherlock knows that he is shamming his confusion in an attempt to draw John out. A quickly suppressed surge of gratitude threatens to engulf Sherlock when he realises what Mycroft is doing. He is allowing John to, at least, feel nominally in charge of what will happen to Mary and how it may affect the rest of his life.

"Her name isn't Watson. In fact, I have no clue what her damn name may be; although I'm sure you do. If we have to refer to her in some recognisable format I would prefer it if we used the name Morstan."

"Understood, Doctor Watson." Mycroft gives a curt nod before removing a thick file from his briefcase. "Her given name is Angela Georgia Ruth Allen, A.G.R.A, exactly what is written on the memory stick she gave you. She grew up in Mid-West America, came from a loving family - mother, father, twin brother. Joined the CIA at 18 years of age, severed all ties with her family at 20. Shortly after, her twin brother was killed in a house fire; by all accounts, she did not contact the family or attend the funeral. Her parents are living still, but are under the impression that their daughter is serving with some sort of secret military outfit and is either missing in action or working deep undercover."

"Is that a possibility?" Sherlock already knows the answer but feels that it needs to be laid clearly on the table. John deserves the whole truth before he makes any lasting decisions.

Mycroft quirks an incredulous eyebrow, viciously repressing a sigh, before continuing on in his methodical manner.

"None at all. She left the employ of the CIA aged 24. The records of her actions since are spotty to say the least, but we have been able to ascertain that she went 'freelance', for want of a more appropriate term, working for the highest bidder; unscrupulous in what work she performed."

"By unscrupulous I'm guessing you don't mean that she was like some sort of Batman? You know, punishing the wrongdoer, righting the wrongs?" John's ill-timed sense of humour raises a smile from Sherlock and confusion from Mycroft.

"I'm afraid not. The kills that we are able to conclusively assign to her were not bad people, at least, no more than most. They were individuals of power or influence who had upset the wrong people or institutions. They had become a problem and as such had to be eliminated. There also seem to have been a couple of kidnappings of younger people where she was involved in the, shall we say, disposal of the subject."

John blanches and grabs for Sherlock's hand, heedless of Mycroft's presence. Sherlock runs the fingers of his free hand through John's hair where his head is now pressing against the mattress. He can feel the tension running through John's body and ignores the pain in his hand where John is gripping so tight. Sherlock wishes he could wrap John up in his arms and remove them both from this situation, take them somewhere where there is no gunshot wound, no Mary Morstan, no nameless dead victims for John to mourn; somewhere where it is just the two of them against the rest of the world, as it should always have been.
"Doctor Watson ....... John..... Forgive me, but are you sure you never had any idea about Ms Morstan's true nature before my brother confronted her?" Mycroft's voice is uncharacteristically soft, the tones carefully modulated but not faked, and it is this, more than anything that has John raising his head from the bed.

His grip on Sherlock's hand loosens but he doesn't let go. Sherlock's hand in John's hair drifts down onto his shoulder, where he squeezes encouragingly before allowing his index finger to drift, almost absentmindedly, along the neckline of John's jumper. Warm skin meets his cool fingertips and he can feel John unconsciously leaning in to his touch.

"No. I honestly had no clue. I met her at the clinic about 9 months before Sherlock returned; one of our nurses had left and Mary was hired to replace her. She was efficient and friendly, the patients and staff adored her and, over time, we built up a friendship that turned into more. I know Sherlock believes I chose her because on some level I knew what she was really like, but I just can't see that. If I had known her for what she truly was I never would have allowed her to be employed at the clinic, let alone go on to have a relationship with her."

Sherlock tenses at John's words, he never should have said that John chose her because he knew what she was like; that was cruel and hurtful even by his standards. One day soon he will make amends to John for saying that, he knows now he was jealous of Mary having what he had always wanted.

"Understood. And am I to understand that you want nothing more to do with the woman we are referring to?" Sherlock stills at Mycroft's question. This is the crux of the matter. John's warm hand tenderly squeezes his own once more and John briefly bends his neck so he can rest his cheek against Sherlock's hand on his shoulder before straightening up, the soldier's bearing apparent.

"I loved the woman that I knew as Mary Morstan; maybe not enough, but I did love her. But that woman never existed, so my answer is easy." A cleansing breath and John continues. "I want nothing more to do with her. I want a divorce. I want my belongings removed from the house and I want her gone. Let the punishment fit the crime, I say."

"Some of that is very easily done. We can annul the wedding immediately if you wish; it will be as if it never existed. She married you under a false name without your knowledge. Unfortunately, we need to be playing the rather longer game here. I need you to act as if you forgive her; we need to draw out her contacts and colleagues. She has still been active during your relationship and I'm afraid I find the timing of her relationship with you to be highly suspicious."

"No!" Twin voices ring out, but John hushes Sherlock before continuing to speak. "No, Mycroft. I cannot go back to her after what she did to Sherlock. I won't."

Mycroft leans back in his chair, hands loose in his lap as he studies John, long moments pass before he finally blinks.

"Very well." Mycroft bows his head in acknowledgement, a brief look of approval flickering over his otherwise stern features. "I'm glad to see you have finally got your priorities straight, Doctor Watson. My brother needs you and England needs my brother."
Chapter Summary

"'She'? So you know who it is? And you're only now telling me?" Greg moves so that he is sitting up straight in his chair, arms folded defensively across his chest.

"Yes." John's voice rings clear. "My fucking wife." Cold fury manifest in each word.

"Mary? Seriously?" An incredulous grin sits on Greg's face as he waits for the punch line of the joke. He focuses on each man in turn but sees no deceit. "John's Mary shot Sherlock? And you knew, and did nothing?"

Standing suddenly, Greg makes to leave but Mycroft is beside him, a firm hand holding his upper arm at the bicep before John has even risen from his seat. Mycroft gentles his hold but does not release Greg.

Chapter Notes

Posting this chapter early as on my usual posting day I will be busy being a tourist in London. Won't be doing any Sherlock related things, as such, (my kids would not be impressed!) but I am staying in Leinster Garden!

I really hope you continue enjoying the story, the feedback has been lovely and I must admit I check on kudos, etc, rather too often!

Huge thanks to Lockedinjohnlock for the wonderful beta work and not laughing too loudly when I get severe cases of commaritis.

Sherlock studies his brother in shock. Had he really just implied that he had been disappointed that John didn't choose him rather than Mary? A soft snort to his side stoppers the flow of vitriol he is preparing to spill.

"Don't pretend like you don't care, Mycroft." John is looking directly at Mycroft, meeting cold eyes and a pugnacious chin straight on. "England may benefit from Sherlock and me working together again, but don't think you can hide your true reason."

Mycroft's hands are clasped loosely together in his lap. To the casual observer he looks calm and mildly disinterested but John's years in the army and work with Sherlock have given him the skills to identify false bravado when he encounters it.

"Oh, and what may that be?" A note of disinterest is clear in Mycroft's voice but the quick flick of concern he directs towards Sherlock betrays him.

"Sentiment." John allows the word to hang in the air for a moment. "You care deeply for your brother, Mycroft. You try to hide it, to dress it up as the country needing him, or the government,
or the police. But we both know the truth of the matter."

For a moment Mycroft is struck dumb, his mouth opening and closing as he searches for words, eyes blinking rapidly as he processes. "John...."

Any denials are quickly interrupted.

"Sentiment isn't a bad thing, Mycroft. It gives us the strength to do what we must, even when we're afraid. The courage to remain strong when we're needed." John squeezes Sherlock's hand, smiling softly at him before turning his attention back to Mycroft. "And the desire to do all that we can to avert little brothers' destructive impulses. And the dedication to picking up the pieces when those impulses shatter the person we care about."

John switches his gaze between the two men, both so similar in their posture, both upright and tense, neither wanting to admit the truth of John's words.

"If you didn't care, you wouldn't have known about danger nights, let alone called me. You wouldn't have helped Sherlock fake his death and you certainly wouldn't have gone to get him; and you wouldn't be here night after night, reading his notes and checking his machines." John draws a deep breath. "And you would have arrested Mary the moment you knew she had shot Sherlock but you didn't. I'm presuming you didn't because of the pain you thought it would cause me and how that pain would, in turn, hurt Sherlock."

The room remains silent, but the atmosphere is less charged. Sherlock studies his brother's face, looking for the truth of John's allegations. Mycroft's face is impassive, but Sherlock can see the evidence of long nights in his features; darkening beneath his eyes, his skin dull and in need of even the limited sunlight that Mycroft's fair skin can tolerate. Mycroft's intelligent eyes hold Sherlock's gaze, allowing him to deduce whatever he needs to. The truth of John's words is clear to see, Mycroft has always been there for him, will always be there for him.

For a moment Sherlock closes his eyes and lets the memory of his dreams wash over him. He is on a plane, has nearly overdosed but Mycroft is there, asking for the list of what he has taken so they can help him. Mycroft is disappointed, yes, but he's there for him, no matter what. Even if he has to rely on second-hand information via John, Mycroft has always been there.

The realisation causes him to suck in a sudden breath and grip at John's hand. He ignores John's quiet query and opens his eyes to meet Mycroft's concerned look.

"Thank you." There's a wobble to his voice and heat in his cheeks, but he knows the words need to be said. As much of an interfering prat as his brother has been, he can see now that it comes from the heart.

Mycroft gives a brief nod in acknowledgment of Sherlock's words before shuffling through the papers contained in the file, a subtle indicator that he considers all that needs to be said, said.

Mycroft clears his throat before changing the subject, eyes flicking between John and Sherlock, taking in their joined hands and the way they unconsciously lean in to one another.

"I've asked Detective Inspector Lestrade to join us so we can have a united front against any threat that Ms Morstan and her associates may pose."

"Why the hell does he need to be involved?" John chuckles in relief at the return of Sherlock's imperiousness, even whilst tugging at his hand in a gentle reprimand.

"Because, brother dear, it wasn't that long ago that you considered DI Lestrade one of the few
people worthy of risking your own life to protect." Mycroft meets Sherlock's even glare. "And, more relevantly here, his team are investigating who shot you. It will be easier to, shall we say, sidetrack the investigation if we have him on our side."

"You're going to ask him to break the law, Mycroft? To lose his job? To dirty his reputation?" John is scandalised by the mere suggestion, but Sherlock is listening intently, head tilted to one side.

"More precisely, I'm going to ask him to ensure that the manpower currently in use investigating your shooting, Sherlock, is directed elsewhere, for the time being."

"What makes you think Lestrade will do it?" Sherlock asks, genuinely confused as to what the answer may be.

"What makes Mycroft think I will do what?" Lestrade's cheerful voice echoes around the room. He looks slightly dishevelled, indicating a long day at work, but his face displays genuine happiness at seeing Sherlock awake and talking. His intelligent gaze quickly takes in Sherlock and John's posture and joined hands. His grin grows wider. "So, what am I needed for?"

"Sit down, Inspector ..... Gregory ......... I have some highly classified information to share with you concerning my brother's would-be murderer. What you do with that information is up to you but I hope that you will see the situation as we do, and join our efforts." Mycroft gestures towards the only other empty chair in the room and Greg sits warily down, taking in the serious faces of his friends.

"Ok. I'm listening." Greg sits forward in his chair, forearms resting on his knees, hands loosely linked.

"The person who shot my brother is an assassin by profession but we believe that she was not acting on orders when she pulled the trigger." To all intents and purposes, it appears as if Mycroft is totally focused on the papers in front of him but from the subtle tension in his legs and shoulders, Sherlock can see that Mycroft is very aware of Greg's presence.

" 'She'? So you know who it is? And you're only now telling me?" Greg moves so that he is sitting up straight in his chair, arms folded defensively across his chest.

"Yes." John's voice rings clear. "My fucking wife." Cold fury manifest in each word.

"Mary? Seriously?" An incredulous grin sits on Greg's face as he waits for the punch line of the joke. He focuses on each man in turn but sees no deceit. "John's Mary shot Sherlock? And you knew, and did nothing?"

Standing suddenly, Greg makes to leave but Mycroft is beside him, a firm hand holding his upper arm at the bicep before John has even risen from his seat. Mycroft gentles his hold but does not release Greg.

"Inspector, I need you to suppress your instinct to arrest Mary and sit down and listen. Mary will be dealt with in the appropriate manner when the time is right, trust me, Gregory." Mycroft slowly guides Greg back to his seat, remaining close by as he settles himself. When he sits back down, Mycroft angles his chair to subtly face Greg, using his body language to make Greg feel more at ease, included.

As the evening progresses, Mycroft explains about Mary and her assassin background; how he believes that John may have been deliberately targeted by her when rumours of Sherlock's possible return began to be circulated. John leaves the room a couple of times, always returning with a tray
full of drinks and a bag full of snacks. He explains it away as needing to stretch his legs but Sherlock knows it's because he needs to distance himself from what is being discussed.

Greg asks lots of pertinent questions, surprising Sherlock with his depth of understanding and his suggestions of how to move the investigation forward. Sherlock observes that Mycroft remains seated close to Lestrade throughout, his body language mirroring that of Greg's, and squirrels the information away for later use. Eventually, the topic moves around to what they are going to do next. Greg sides with John and Sherlock that John should not return to Mary, but supports Mycroft's assertion that John should be perceived to be making efforts towards a reconciliation with his wife. It is agreed that John will move back to Baker Street whilst Sherlock recuperates but will gradually start to send generalised texts before eventually asking more specifically about Mary's pregnancy. The concept of John being in touch with Mary at all makes Sherlock nauseous, but he understands all too clearly why it needs to be done. Mary needs to believe that John has forgiven her and continue with her old lifestyle. Mycroft is confident that his team, along with the support of Lestrade's, will be able to track her movements and associates, taking apart the last fluttering remnants of Moriarty's web.

Mycroft and Greg leave together with the arrival of John and Sherlock's meal, opting to continue their discussion elsewhere. Mycroft narrows his eyes at the smirk that Sherlock sends his way when he observes Mycroft's hand hovering proprietarily near the small of Lestrade's back but does not move his hand away, merely guides him out of the door, a brief nod goodbye directed at John.

Sherlock and John eat in silence, Sherlock barely picking at his meal. He shoves the potatoes around his plate a bit more before finally putting his fork down and pushing away the sliding table.

"John?" He keeps his face directed down to where he is picking at his covers, long fingers removing invisible lint.

"Hmmm." John prods distractedly at the last piece of broccoli on his plate, his mind obviously playing over the evening's discussions.

"John." Peripherally he can see when John looks up, food finally abandoned, plate next to his on the tray. "Previously, you seemed to indicate that you were attracted to me, that I had your heart." He senses, rather than sees, John nodding. "I ...." He hesitates, clearing his throat. "I..... Understand, completely, if you feel that after today's revelations it is too soon to embark on a romantic or sexual relationship with me, or indeed if you want to do that at all now." He finally looks over at John, bracing himself for the worst and is surprised when he sees an amused half-smile lingering on John's lips.

John stands from his chair and comes to sit on the edge of Sherlock's bed, carefully removing Sherlock's hands from where they are still picking at his cover, taking them both in his, before bringing them up to his chest and pressing them over his heart.

"I meant everything I said, and the idea of embarking on a relationship with you thrills me to the core. There's only one problem." John's voice is soft and reassuring. "I want a romantic and a sexual relationship with you. Is that something we can do?"

Sherlock doesn't trust his voice to be steady, instead pressing his hands more firmly over John's heart and nodding vigorously. Long minutes pass as they sit on Sherlock's bed, breathing the same air, hearts beating to the same rhythm.

"John, I have no personal experience in this area; I never needed or wanted it, but now find I both
need and want you. I want to explore all types of relationships with you." Sherlock looks directly into John's eyes. "And if I had the damn strength I'd be starting now." Sherlock watches as John's jaw drops slightly in shock, eyes widening with the first indications of desire.

"Why so surprised, John? I'm untouched, not untouchable. Well, I say untouched, but that's not completely true." Sherlock pauses, letting his words wash over John. "I've touched myself, of course." He tilts his head and holds John's avid stare unapologetically. He removes one long hand from John chest and allows it to trail over his own neck, along his collarbone before drifting it over the undamaged part of his torso, settling his fingertips in the trail of sparse hair that peeks over the waistband of his pyjamas.

"I've brought myself to orgasm so many times imagining that it's you touching me. Your hands trailing over my body, your fingertips dancing across my skin, leaving trails of sweet sensation. Sometimes the fantasies are elaborate but my favourites are the ones that could be true." He squirms in his bed, his arousal presenting itself as a throbbing between his legs, a quickening of his pulse. "I'll imagine that I'm the one doing the touching this time. That you've just come home from a shift, you're tired, but not exhausted. I greet you with a kiss, gentle to start but then you respond, opening your mouth to me, welcoming me in. I back you up against the wall, thrusting my tongue into your mouth, my hips mirroring the motion against yours. Your hands are in my hair, mine are on your backside, tugging you closer, swallowing the moans that you make. The kiss goes on until we are both light-headed and breathless, desperate for more."

Sherlock looks at John from beneath half lowered lashes, tugging his lip into his mouth and shifting his hips up. John's gaze is flicking all over him, watching Sherlock's teasing flex and pale hand playing at his pyjama waistband. John licks his lips, colour high on his cheeks, heart beating fast beneath Sherlock's other hand. He shifts slightly on the bed, easing the pressure on his burgeoning erection.

"I unbutton your shirt, kissing each bit of exposed skin, licking and nipping as I move lower, finally dragging your shirt from your shoulders, letting it hang from the waist of your trousers whilst I centre my attention on your nipples. Biting, kissing, sucking, whatever gets the strongest response from you. Whilst thus occupied I run my hand over the front of your trousers, they're your thin work trousers and I can feel the heat of you through them, your shape obvious under my fingertips. I trace the length and breadth of you, I can feel the way you harden even more under my touch, how your breathing quickens in response to me."

"At this point I need to climax, but I won't let myself. I slow my stroking, grip the base of my penis with my other hand and will myself to last. When I regain control I let myself think of you again, desperate and wanting; wanting me, wanting my touch. In my fantasy I sink to my knees and tug your shirt free; the sensation of the material sliding against your skin gives you goosebumps and your cock twitches through the material beneath my palm."

Sherlock's breath has kicked up a notch and John's is matching it. Both men are utterly unaware of their surroundings, only of each other. A moan escapes John's throat and Sherlock flexes his hand hungrily against John's chest, feeling John's shirt wrinkle under his fingertips.

"I nuzzle my face against the front of your trousers and breath deep, savouring the scent of you." Sherlock inhales deeply. "God, John, it makes me ache with want. Slowly, so slowly I can hear the click of each tooth, I undo your zip, you're being so good for me, John, so very good. My hands are on your hips and I can feel how tense you are, how much you want to thrust. Soon, John, so very soon."

Sherlock flicks open the uppermost button on John's shirt and relishes the feel of smooth, soft skin.
He can see that John's eyes have fluttered shut and that his lips are parted. He longs to kiss that flushed face but continues with his fantasy.

"I flip your trouser button open before sliding both your underwear and trousers to your ankles. Your cock.." A groan falls forth from John and Sherlock feels him lean further into his touch. Sherlock licks his lips and fights the temptation to palm himself, clenching the hand on his stomach instead. ". Your cock stands proud in front of me, flushed with blood and just starting to weep pre-ejaculate. My mouth waters at the sight of you, I smooth my nose along the length of you, from root to tip, savouring your scent. You grip my shoulders, not guiding me but supporting yourself as you start to tremble; the anticipation of what is about to happen arousing you almost as much as my touch. I take you in my hand, taking deep pleasure in the feel of you, the solid weight of you in my palm, the searing heat of you against my skin. I trace the route my nose took with my tongue, flattening it hard and broad against you, sampling how the taste of you changes over your length. When I reach the tip of you, your flavour bursts strong against my tastebuds and I have to have you in my mouth. You slide in so easily, like we were made to fit together that way. I tease and suck and lick until you are trembling; I slide my hand back, your testicles high and tight in my palm, before sliding further back and teasing at your entrance." Sherlock stops speaking, his breath coming out in pants. His eyes have slipped closed at some point; he is almost lost to the fantasy.

"And then what?"

John's voice sounds wrecked and Sherlock can picture what he looks like. Forcing his eyes open he looks to see how fantasy John resembles actual John. He is flushed and his eyes are dark with arousal, chest heaving as he keeps his gaze fixed on Sherlock.

Sherlock shrugs sheepishly, the move rather at odds with his words. "That's when I tend to climax. When the touch of you under my fingers and in my mouth feels so real that I can't separate fact from fantasy, that's when I come. I like to think that that's when you would come too."

"Christ, Sherlock. You better hurry up and recover; that was one seriously hot fantasy and I'd love for you to make good on every word of it!" John tilts his head back and covers his face with his hands, huffing out a breathy laugh. He runs his hands over his face several times before finally looking back at Sherlock. Sherlock meets his intense gaze, feeling somewhat unsure as to what happens now. John is still visibly aroused, the evidence clear, even through the thick denim. Sherlock isn't exactly relaxed, but his own erection is barely tenting his pyjama bottoms, the medication and injury still having an effect.

"What happens now?" His voice feels very small and he resists the temptation to curl up and hide away after baring so much of himself for John.

"What happens now is that we both try and calm ourselves before we do something to scandalise the staff and possibly delay your recovery." John's words are light and full of warmth. He leans towards Sherlock and smooths the overlong curls back from his forehead. "I can't wait until all the medication is out of your system so we can both enjoy this fully."

Sherlock flushes, bringing his knees up to partially conceal his wilting erection. "It's nothing to be embarrassed about, Sherlock. The meds are doing crazy things to your body. I'm impressed you were able to get it up at all." He winces and shifts on the bed, pulling at the front of his jeans. "Unfortunately I don't think mine is going anywhere soon."

"Why don't you go and take care of it?" Sherlock gestures to their small private bathroom.

"What? Go and have a wank in the middle of the hospital? Not bloody likely!" John grins. "I'll soldier through it."
"Is that what you did then? Ignore erections?" Sherlock queries, genuinely curious.

"More often than not. If I had privacy, I dealt with it quickly and quietly. Others were much more blasé about the whole thing, whipping it out whenever the need arose, so to speak." John tells him and Sherlock fights down his surprise at John's honesty. After all, they've never really talked about sex before, unless it pertained to a case, and now they're sharing personal information with barely a blink of an eye. Sherlock muses over how strange it is that things can change so quickly. Barely two months ago, he had been 'giving away' John at his wedding and now John will be coming home with him.

John studies Sherlock as he is seemingly lost in thought and steels himself for their upcoming conversation.

"If we're going to have any sort of relationship, I think it's important that we try and be as open as possible with each other. Other, less important relationships have failed because I absolutely suck at communication, I don't want that to happen with you. Ask whatever questions you need to ask and I'll try and be honest." John meets Sherlock's eyes. "And then later, if you want, I'll ask you."
The Secrets of Our Youth

Chapter Summary

"I guess the next obvious question now would be 'first kiss','" Sherlock muses, his hands in their typical thinking position, tips of his index fingers just resting on his lower lip. "So let's skip that." He meets John's curious expression with an equally curious one of his own. "First sexual experience with a man."

"Strangely, that ties in with my first kiss with a bloke. I was 17, almost 18. I'd just sat my last 'A' level and my mate, Nathan, and I decided to celebrate the end of our exams by getting utterly hammered. He got the beers in, we went to his and we settled down for what we thought would be a truly epic drinking session. We were only a few bottles in when he kissed me. I was so shocked I froze, then, I'm afraid I rather inelegantly snogged him. I'd slept with a previous girlfriend but that experience hadn't prepared me for the surge of want that I felt for him." The memory of his fumblings brings a deep flush to John's cheeks that Sherlock finds strangely endearing. He had expected to feel jealous, hearing about John's previous lovers but instead he feels only inquisitiveness.

Chapter Notes

Hello! Hello! Well, I'm back from my meanderings around London, I had a fabulous time and I think it's fair to say that my daughters and I are much closer for our time away. (11 and 13 can be such challenging ages!) I've lost count of everything we saw and did, but I did pose next to Benedict in Madame Tussaud's, I did wander down and look at the empty houses on Leinster Gardens and I also manage to pop into the Sherlock Holmes shop on Baker Street! We also saw Wicked, went on a tour bus at night, ogled the richness of Harrods and Fortnum and Masons, went round a few museums and oh, just had a wonderful time!

Thank you all for reading my little (but growing rapidly!) story! It means so much to see those kudos and hit numbers growing and every comment is a like a warm hug! I hope you enjoy this chapter too, the men finally talk about their past.

As always, love and thanks goes to Lockedinjohnlock for being the most amazing beta anyone can ask for!

"Only if you're completely sure, John. You're a very private man and I understand if you decide not to answer my questions." Sherlock winces as he tries to work the knots out of his shoulders. "I'm tired now; it's been a long evening. If, when I wake you want to talk you know me well enough to realise that I'll ask you so many questions you'll regret giving me permission." Sherlock smiles. It's slightly lopsided and all the more genuine for it.

"I'll still be sure, Sherlock." John gets up and stretches, his shirt coming slightly untucked, the
movement drawing Sherlock's eye to the slight curve of John's fading arousal in his jeans. "I'm going to turn in too, read for a while. Do you need anything? Another trip to the loo perhaps?"

"Yes, I think so." Sherlock eases his legs over the edge of the bed, pleased with his progress and the proud smile John shoots in his direction.

John slips his arm around Sherlock, and together they repeat their previous routine, their steps easier this time. On their arrival in the small bathroom, John is able to turn before Sherlock reaches into his pyjama bottoms. He waits until Sherlock flushes before turning and guiding them both over to the sink. Once again he washes both of their hands. Sherlock revels in this small attention of John's and the companionable warmth of John at his back. He remains leaning against him for a while savouring his proximity before they slowly shuffle back to Sherlock's bed.

John carefully helps Sherlock in, taking the time to ensure he is comfortable and covered as much as possible with his sheet. He lingers, apparently unwilling to move far away, before slowly moving closer and leaving a chaste kiss on Sherlock's cheek. Sherlock grumbles and, reaching out one long arm, draws John back towards him; he tilts his head in offering and sighs when John places his lips over his. The kiss itself is light, nothing more than the quick press of firm lips against his own fuller ones, but the contact helps Sherlock relax the last part into sleep and he is drifting off before John has even moved away.

Sherlock awakens with the clatter of the food trolley, surprised to see John already up and dressed, reading a newspaper. They eat in relative silence, the quiet only broken by John enquiring if he'd slept well and how Sherlock is feeling. A quick glance over at his morphine drip confirms that it is almost on its lowest setting and Sherlock vows to try and turn it down more before the day is out.

Another joint trip to the loo is performed before Sherlock is finally settled back in bed, John sitting on the mattress next to his thighs, his upper body angled to face Sherlock. Sherlock decides he is ready to ask the questions he'd been given free reign over yesterday and begins without preamble.

"Something obvious, then. When did you first realise you were attracted to males as well as females?"

John chuckles. "Going for the direct approach then? Hmmm. It really wasn't that obvious to me. I grew up always having strong feelings for certain friends, boys and girls, and I thought that was how everyone felt. It was only when friends starting talking about fancying people that I started questioning what it was that I felt." John leans back on the bed a little, his posture relaxed and Sherlock can see he is trying his utmost to be honest.

"I suppose I was 14 when I realised that I would be equally happy snogging boys or girls." The soft smile playing over his lips grows stiff. "Harry had come out at home and she got so much crap from my parents that I knew I wouldn't be coming out anytime soon. It was a hard time for her and I wasn't as supportive as I should have been, too concerned that my own secret would be outed."

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a truly epic drinking session. We were only a few bottles in when he kissed me. I was so shocked I froze, then, I'm afraid I rather inelegantly snogged him. I'd slept with a previous girlfriend but that experience hadn't prepared me for the surge of want that I felt for him." The memory of his fumblings brings a deep flush to John's cheeks that Sherlock finds strangely endearing. He had expected to feel jealous, hearing about John's previous lovers but instead he feels only inquisitiveness.

"We spent the summer together, always hiding it from our parents, but the moment the door was closed we'd be all over each other. Teenage hormones and the energy of youth keeping us very occupied and sated!" John grins. "It was really only hand-jobs and rubbing against each other until we came, too much lust for any real staying power. We cared for each other but knew we had to go our separate ways when we went off to uni, I guess the fact that we were living to a time limit added to the frisson of it all."

"Did you see him again, Nathan?"

"A couple of times, nothing happened, but we were never awkward with each other. Last I heard he was married and father to twin girls."

"Were there any other experiences with men for you?" Sherlock really wants to ask about one man in particular but he bides his time.

"Just one. I was much older, last year of medical school this time, just before signing up to ship out with the army. He was studying law and we'd see each other in the library, the only idiots daft enough to actually be studying for our exams. More often than not we'd be the only people in the library. The librarian even let us start locking up for them - personally, I think she was off for a sneaky shag with the caretaker." John laughs as he reminisces. "I knew Brian was gay and he knew I was attracted to him. My friends didn't judge either of us, but again, I kept it a secret from my family. I'm still not sure why I did that even now." He frowns, thinking about it again. "I loved Brian but we knew that I would be shipping out in a few months so we didn't try to make it more than it was. It was an odd mix of intense and comfortable."

"And was that just 'hand-jobs and rubbing against each other'?" Sherlock queries.

"Um, no." John rubs his hands sheepishly over the nape of his neck. "It was more like blow jobs and prostate massage."

"Oh." Sherlock raises his eyebrows, teasing John. "So, a different type of rubbing then? Very useful in your medical career."

"You have no idea." John laughs, shoulders shaking in mirth.

"No, but I'd like to find out." Sherlock admits, before joining in with John's laughter.

Their laughter fades, naturally and Sherlock deems it the right time to ask the one question he really wants to know about John's past.

"And what about Major Sholto?" He glances around the room, faking nonchalance.

"James?" John clarifies. "What about him?"

"Mary implied that there was a history between you two, a sexual history. And, I must admit, you looked at him like there had been."

"I bet she did." John's brow darkens at the thought of Mary and her implications. "Sholto was my
commanding officer, and yes, I admit I felt something for him, a bit of hero worship I guess; but I
never wanted to initiate anything between us even though I suspected he may have had feelings for
me. A quick fling wasn't worth the risk of my position or my reputation. Despite what the media
may say the army is still not the place for homosexual relationships to exist."

"And the 'not gay' thing?" Sherlock asks, head tilted to the side.

"Ah, yes, that. Haven't you noticed that I never said it knowingly within your earshot? I was
worried you'd pull me up on it, I didn't really want to have to get into an explanation in front of
people it didn't concern." John looks sheepish. "I'm not ashamed of my bisexuality, Sherlock, but to
me 'gay' means only being attracted to a person of the same gender and I'm not. So, I wasn't lying, I
was just being a bit pedantic with my word choice."

"So, you were chatting me up that first night in Angelo's?" Sherlock queries. He's never been
entirely sure, stopping John before he could get too far into his speech.

"Most definitely, yes." John smiles broadly. "You're gorgeous, and it was obvious even in the short
time I'd known you how intelligent you were and you made me feel alive for the first time in
months. It was instant attraction and I'm afraid my mouth was in motion before my brain was in
gear."

Sherlock studies John for a long moment, observing his still-relaxed sprawl, the carefree smile and
the way John is looking at him in return. It seems that, now John has finally allowed the true depth
of his feelings out, he is confident in his emotions; no hesitancy, no last minute doubts. They've
known each other for half a decade, been in regular contact or living together for over half of that;
if John is still sure of his feelings after all this time, Sherlock decides he will not be the one to
persuade him otherwise.

"It's your turn now I believe, John. Not that I can imagine what you'd want to know about me."
Sherlock's offhand comment is a poorly disguised attempt to mask his increasing nervousness.

"I know you've never had sex with anyone, but what about kissing? Or just attraction?" John has
altered his position on the bed, now sitting closer to Sherlock's waist than thighs, his hands linked
loosely in his lap.

"Be precise, John, don't jumble it all together." Sherlock's anxiety causing him to be more curt in
his answer than he'd intended to be. He flinches and takes a few calming breaths before attempting
to answer John's questions. "Attraction I suppose comes first. I have been attracted to a limited
number of people in my life, and even fewer of those have felt the same way about me." He fixes
his attention on John's joined hands, thinking back to his childhood.

"As a young child, I was boisterous and energetic, always questioning everything. I think I was a
bit of a handful but my parents coped admirably and, as much as I hate to admit it, Mycroft tried his
best too. He bought me my first microscope and accompanied me when I went out to investigate
the local rivers and lakes." He smiles. It's a small, private smile, one that spans many years and has
the edge of sadness.

"Mycroft had a friend, a lover really, a few years older than himself that I became quite attracted
to. I was 12 and Michael was 22, I followed him around much like my childhood dog had followed
me around. It annoyed Mycroft hugely; he didn't want to share Michael and resented that I was
always appearing and interrupting their 'moments'."

Suddenly, Sherlock looks up and directly meets John's eye. The sorrow that John sees there causes
him to reach out and hold Sherlock's hand. "Understand, I never wanted to kiss Michael, or be
kissed by him, he was an adult and I was little more than a child; but seeing how he and Mycroft were together made me realise how much I wanted something similar in my life. I grew more reserved as I matured and realised that it was unlikely I'd have that type of someone and I became more and more sour with life. Michael had become the only person I felt I could talk to and I was lucky enough that he liked spending time with me. Mycroft accepted our friendship, relieved, I think, that someone else was there to help with his increasingly out of control brother."

"What happened with Mycroft and Michael?" As far as John is aware Mycroft is single and had been so throughout the whole of their association.

"I left home at 18. Mycroft was, by then, 25 and had been living with Michael, discreetly, for a few years. I'd been at university only a year when I received a phone call from my mother. There had been a train accident and both Mycroft and Michael had been injured, Michael fatally so. I discovered later that Mycroft had held Michael as he took his last breath, waiting for help to arrive. Mycroft did not take it well, as was to be expected, locking himself away in their flat, wearing his 'promise' ring always in memoriam. When he finally did re-emerge, months later, he was a colder, harder man than before."

"Jesus Christ." John's words are hushed, almost reverent despite their blasphemous root, understanding of some of Mycroft's actions and words now showing clear on his shocked face.

Sherlock's eyes are glassy, looking into a past filled with regret.

"I was still very self-centred then, much more than I am now and I took the loss personally. I felt like I had lost both Michael and Mycroft that day, and shortly after I lost myself. My time at university was ...... challenging. ... Friendships were hard, relationships disastrous and my mind was a constant whirl of facts, figures and observations. I needed to escape; to escape the world and to escape myself. Hence the drugs. And they helped, or at least, I believed they did. Somehow I managed to scrape through my degree but it was even worse after and I purposely mixed with the wrong people, envying the dangerous life they appeared to lead. I lost track of the number of times Mycroft pulled me out of some hell-hole and put me in rehab before I finally realised I was destroying my mind as well as my future. That time the rehab worked."

Silence fills the room. John strokes Sherlock's hand with his thumb as he holds it and lets Sherlock wander the paths of his memory for a while.

Sherlock remembers how pale Mycroft had looked when he'd found him last, how similar that look had been to when he'd lost Michael and then he recalls his dream. Of a careworn Mycroft, swearing to always be there for him, reminding him that he always has been. Then, for the first time, in a long time Sherlock allows himself to think of Michael's warm smile and loud laugh and of how Mycroft would flush at the sound but laugh along. He thinks of the two men wading into ponds with him to examine the wildlife, all three laughing at the shocked disbelief on his mother's face when they had trooped into the house, dripping pondweed and water everywhere. He remembers being included in their intimate ring giving ritual, the only witness other than the trees, remembering how strongly he'd wished they could be open about their relationship and the promises he'd made to only tell those he trusted utterly. He drifts slowly out of his thoughts, gradually becoming aware of John's hand around his, the soothing touch a balm to a still-troubled soul.

Sherlock blinks, his gaze meeting midnight blue eyes, concern and care apparent.

"Sorry." He speaks quietly, not wanting to break the little bubble of understanding in which they exist.
"What on earth for, Sherlock?" John's voice matches the whispered tones of Sherlock's. He ducks his head lower, bringing it down to the same level as Sherlock's. He looks into Sherlock's eyes and Sherlock can read compassion there. "It means a lot that you trust me enough to open up to me like this. Obviously, you needed to talk about it too. Please don't apologise for showing you care."

Sherlock raises their joined hands to his lips and presses a small kiss to John's knuckle. He knows that John will correctly interpret it as the heartfelt thanks it is.

"I didn't get to the kissing part did I?" Sherlock quirks up the side of his mouth, smiling wider when John responds in kind.

"No, you rather cleverly avoided that. So, out with it, Sherlock Holmes, who did you first snog?"

Sherlock knows John is deliberately trying to lighten the atmosphere and decides to play along.

"Snog! I'll have you know I've done nothing so vulgar." He widens his eyes in mock outrage, but tellingly leaves his hand softly held in John's. "I was kissed when I was 11 by a girl named Emily Miller. She'd been dared and I was the unfortunate victim. She pressed her lips to mine and stayed there for an intolerable amount of time. I think it would be fair to say it was not an experience either of us enjoyed."

Sherlock settles more comfortably against his pillows, pulling John in closer, making their conversation more intimate.

"I was 15 for my first real kiss. His name was Morgan Lloyd-Jones, a good Welsh boy recently transferred to my school and I loved listening to the way he spoke. The way the words played on his tongue and came out all rich and rolling. One day I decided I wanted to know what it felt like to be those words and I dragged him - willingly I might add - to a secluded part of the school and proceeded to kiss him. It started out sloppy and vaguely disgusting but Morgan knew what he was doing and I'm an extremely quick learner. After that we'd often disappear and kiss, he'd whisper in my ear, knowing the effect it had, hoping to get into my pants, which he never did. Before long, he got fed up with being 'led on' called me a frigid freak and went and got his girlfriend pregnant."

"Oh, Sherlock." John sounds sympathetic but Sherlock shrugs it away.

"You mustn't be worried about me, John. I'd been called freak numerous times by then and as much as I enjoyed kissing him, I didn't lament his loss. Plus, I'd discovered that I loved kissing, it opened up a rather interesting part of my education."

"So you snogged a lot of people then?" John teases, knowing Sherlock's hatred of the word.

"No. I kissed a lot of people, male and female alike. The only time people complained was when they wanted to take it further and I refused. Luckily only a few ignored my 'no', but a quick, hard squeeze, twist and shove to their testicles was enough to put them off. Women, in my experience, have always been more understanding."

"So you consider yourself to be good then? At kissing?" Curiosity is rife on John's features. They'd kissed a few times, but by necessity the kisses had been chaste and short lived. The idea of sharing his experience with John in this area makes Sherlock's mouth water and he swallows against the sudden rush. He doesn't miss the way John's eyes are drawn to his throat and he tilts his head to the side, noting the way John licks his lips at the sight.

"No John, I consider myself excellent at kissing." He fixes his gaze on John's lips, wetting his own in anticipation before lowering his voice. "And some day, in the not too distant future, I'm going to
show you exactly how exceptional I am."

"G..good." John licks his lips again, his mouth gone dry from Sherlock's declaration. "I look forward to it."

"As you should John." Sherlock pulls John closer to him, leaning slightly forward to whisper in his ear. "I assure you, you won't be disappointed." He drifts his lips lightly over the sensitive skin near John's ear, smiling at the resulting shiver. "And perhaps then you can share your 'expertise' with me?" He allows his lips to linger over John's earlobe then presses little nipping kisses along John's jawline before resting his lips against John's, only the merest hint of a kiss apparent. He leans back into his pillow and watches John as the goosebumps on his neck slowly vanish and when John opens his eyes he looks slightly dazed.

"So you know how to snog exceptionally and I know how to shag amazingly. Christ, Sherlock, it's going to be quite the ride." John says breathlessly.

"Indeed. But just who will be doing the riding?"

John barely suppresses a moan at Sherlock's innuendo. "I'd rather hoped we'd take turns at 'riding'." He flushes at his words, fully aware of what they are discussing.

Sherlock colours, in turn, his hand flexing in John's. Meeting John's avid gaze through half-lowered lashes, Sherlock allows all his desire to show through, gratified by the sight of John's rapidly dilating pupils. "I look forward to it."

They remain holding each other's gaze until a light tap at the door alerts them to the presence of a nurse. They chuckle lightly as they separate to allow the nurse room to check on Sherlock's wound.

"You're healing exactly as we expected, Mr Holmes. At this rate, we should be able to release you into the care of Doctor Watson and you'll be able to return home in a few days."

The nurse leaves the room, barely hearing the 'I look forward to it' that follows him. A quick glance confirms that the words are not meant for him, the two men are once again lost in their own little world where only the two of them exist.
"But you know how to look after a wound at home; you've already done it." Sherlock's words are softer, but he knows he's still treading a thin line. Somehow he can't seem to stop himself pushing the point further.

"I know that, damn it!" John's temper bursts forth, quick and fiery and Sherlock flinches but moves to stand behind John, resting his hands on John's tense shoulders. "Sorry, I'm sorry. It's just that a bullet to the shoulder in an active war-zone is vastly different to being shot in the heart by your best friend's wife. I'm still having trouble coming to terms with it all." John raises his right hand to cover Sherlock's on his left shoulder, his pyjamas now dangling limply from his other hand. "I want to fix it all."

The last few words are barely a whisper and directed at the floor.

Chapter Notes

Posting a little early as I suspect my day tomorrow will be mostly filled with phoning garages and then taking numerous buses and trains (and walking) to pick up my car that decided to break down on me today! Luckily I was somewhere safe and the RAC were absolutely amazing!

A quick heads up that I may not be able to post weekly all the time, the idea fairy is being a little slow on her flight this time so future chapters may be a bit less frequent. :(

As always, huge thanks to Lockedinjohnlock for her awesome beta skills, patience and helpful links!

The days pass slowly and John and Sherlock speak more about their lives before they met. Sherlock talks about boarding school and how it wasn't all bad. He tells how his dormitory mates left him to his own devices after his second year there so he had plenty of time for observations. That his 'A' level science teacher thought he was gifted and let him into the labs late at night to conduct experiments, always staying close by but never interfering. How he had met that same science teacher at a night club a few years later and repaid him for his kindness with a kiss so sensual the man had come in his trousers. John had wrinkled his nose up at that, imagining an ageing science professor. Sherlock had clarified that the teacher had only been 24 when he taught Sherlock at 17 and that Sherlock was 22 when he kissed him, making the man only 29. John had groused a little, saying that 29 was a bit old to be coming in his pants like that and Sherlock had teased him, promising to demonstrate his skill as soon as they had the privacy.

John shares stories about his time in the army. He describes the beauty of the stars at night, about how, even when the fighting ceased, it was never truly quiet, the sounds of life still continuing around him and how comforting that had been, how he never felt truly alone out there. Then he
talks about getting shot. How he'd been tending to a casualty and the shot had taken him utterly unawares. How he'd been unable to get treatment for hours and how infection had taken hold. He glosses over his time in hospital, his fight for life, only tightening his grip on Sherlock's hand. He then describes how alone he felt when he returned to England, how he wasn't sure how he was going to carry on and how all that had changed upon meeting a mad genius in need of a flatmate and, as it turned out, a friend.

They spend time working on getting Sherlock's mobility back; the short shuffles to the bathroom gradually turn into longer shuffles to the nurses' station before eventually turning into an unaided walk to the exit and back. Sherlock is thrilled with his independence but misses John's touch, pleased beyond belief when, on their next walk, John puts his arm loosely around his waist. He'd sighed before resting his arm on John's shoulders as they'd walked around various corridors, content with each other's touch.

His last day in hospital is quite possibly the longest day of Sherlock's life, with the possible exception of John's wedding. Each minute has felt like an hour, each hour like a week. He starts wishing that night and sleep would come quickly if only so that, when he awoke, it would be that much closer to being released to go home. Sherlock is tempted to discharge himself early but knows that John wouldn't allow him to and the resultant sulk, from both of them, wouldn't be worth the few extra hours he would get at home.

Mrs Hudson had popped in earlier during the day, accompanied by Molly and the two women had fussed over Sherlock. He'd been amazed by his own good behaviour. He hadn't snapped at them to be quiet or to stop worrying; that had been John. About an hour into their visit, John had told them, none too kindly, to shut up or leave. The shocked silence that followed was broken only by the sound of a patient further down the corridor coughing. John had quickly apologised, citing lack of sleep as an excuse for his behaviour. Sherlock had been confused, knowing that John had slept well the night before but had remained quiet. Mrs Hudson had produced clean clothes for Sherlock to travel home in, along with his beloved coat and he had hugged her, her usual thoughtfulness very much appreciated. Molly had offered to take the flowers down to the nurses' office or to give them to patients who were lacking them. Sherlock had agreed but requested to keep the still-flowering cactus with him. The ladies had left soon afterwards, taking the flowers and most of John's belongings with them. The room had looked strangely bare then, adding to Sherlock's desperate need to be home and John's growing discomfort.

Mycroft and Greg continue to visit daily. To Sherlock's surprise, no new information about Mary is brought forth and their evening discussions become strangely relaxed, their talks now more akin to that of friends and he finds himself enjoying the new sensation and hopes that it will continue once he leaves the hospital.

"I hear they're letting you out tomorrow, Sherlock." Greg's voice breaks through Sherlock's thoughts of the last few days, drawing him back to the here and now.

"Yes. I'm finally considered fit enough for my care to be solely in John's hands now." He looks over at John, sharing the soft half smile with him that he considers to only be for John.

"I'm sure John will love the opportunity to get his hands on you." Greg snorts, laughing more when he sees the mock outrage on Sherlock's face before taking in the deep flush on John's cheeks and Mycroft's look of mild discomfort at the thought of his little brother having sex. Greg's laughter fades away naturally and he heaves himself to his feet.

"Leaving so soon, Gregory?" Mycroft enquires, getting slowly to his feet.

"Yeah." Greg flicks a look towards where Sherlock and John sit before moving to stand nearer to
Mycroft. "I've got an early start tomorrow. Walk me out?"

Mycroft nods, his hand drifting to Greg's lower back, this time making contact. Greg quirks an inquisitive eyebrow at Mycroft before relaxing into his touch, bidding Sherlock and John farewell. Mycroft leaves his briefcase and umbrella behind, indicating his intended return.

"Am I seeing, what I think I'm seeing?" John queries.

"That all rather depends on what it is you think you're seeing, John. If you think you're seeing teddy bears dancing around in pink bloomers I rather think you're imagining things." Sherlock smiles at his own joke before becoming more serious. "But if what you think you saw was my brother making decided overtures towards Lestrade, I believe you're correct."

"Blimey." John stares out of the door, before blinking and turning his full attention towards Sherlock. "Teddy bears in pink bloomers? I know that's not the morphine talking as you've not been on it for a while, now." John puts an arm around Sherlock's waist where they sit on the bed and draws him close until he can press a kiss into Sherlock's soft curls. "I missed your sense of humour."

"When we return to Baker Street I'd like it if..." Sherlock's words are hesitant, the worry of how John might react making him doubt himself. He clears his throat, knowing that now he has started to speak, John will expect him to finish. He looks up and meets John's eye; no worry clouds his face, only interest shows clear. Sherlock chews on his lower lip for a moment before taking a deep breath. "John. I'd like it if you would move into my bedroom when we return home." Sherlock holds John's gaze a moment longer, before ducking his head down. "With me."

"I'd... wow, I'd really love that Sherlock." When Sherlock looks up, the brightness of John's open smile is almost blinding. "Are you sure, though? You're still healing. I wouldn't want to whack you whilst I slept or something. I can fidget quite badly and you still need your rest." John's smile begins to fade as he thinks about how he could unwittingly hurt Sherlock.

"I'm sure. You won't hurt me. We've shared beds before John, I know for a fact you're not a normally restless sleeper."

The memory of a cold winter's night spent in a Cornish bed and breakfast comes to Sherlock's mind. Most of the guesthouses had been closed for the season and they'd ended up in a cold room with one bed, no heating and mould creeping along the rotting skirting boards. A storm had blown in and they'd lost the light in the room too. They'd ended up lying close together, sharing body heat and discussing old cases until John had finally drifted off. Sherlock had remained awake, listening to the sound of the waves crashing on the rocks and savouring the sensation of John's soft exhalations against his skin. He'd watched the first rays of dawn as they'd made their way through the window touch John's skin and had had to link his fingers together so that he would resist the temptation to follow their path.

"Besides," Sherlock resumes. "I still need more sleep than is my norm, so I'll probably nap during the day too." He injects as much disdain into the word nap as possible, ensuring that John understands it is not something he would choose to do. "So... my room?"

"Yeah. That would be good." John licks his lips and his eyes travel to Sherlock's mouth, they are both very aware of the tension between them, of the need for them to cross some invisible line and finally be together in a way that their situation doesn't currently allow.

Sherlock longs to feel John's hands on him, caring for him in a non-medical way. He is familiar now with the touch of John's fingers against his face - even though those simple touches still thrill
him - but he wants to feel those strong, compact hands elsewhere. He yearns to feel them on his body, touching him in a way that he never allowed anyone else to. He wants to know how it will feel to have John bring him to climax, how it will feel to have John's hand guiding him as he returns the pleasure. He wants to know what it is like to feel John pressed against him, inside him and he wants to know what it will feel like to be pressed against John, to be inside him.

His thoughts must have shown clear on his face as John let out a long, shuddering breath, clearing his throat before moving away from him on the bed. They both know that soon the tension will break and they will take everything the other has to offer. Neither wants that moment to be on a hospital bed, and Sherlock knows John is worried about his still-healing wound; unnecessarily so, in Sherlock's opinion.

"I think I'll turn in early, get some rest whilst I can. I'm sure you'll be hassling the doctors for your release papers at sunrise so I'd better make sure I'm awake enough to pay attention to their instructions." John stretches and stifles a yawn before grabbing his pyjamas from the shared wardrobe in the room.

"I'm sure you know exactly how to care for me, John. It's hardly your first gunshot wound." Sherlock winces as he realises how insensitive those words are.

"True, but battlefield care is not the same as this. Besides, I'm certain things will have moved on, I want to know I'll be doing the best for you." John keeps his attention fixed on his pyjamas and Sherlock says nothing about how the fabric is clenched in John's fists.

"But you know how to look after a wound at home; you've already done it." Sherlock's words are softer, but he knows he's still treading a thin line. Somehow he can't seem to stop himself pushing the point further.

"I know that, damn it!" John's temper bursts forth, quick and fiery and Sherlock flinches but moves to stand behind John, resting his hands on John's tense shoulders. "Sorry, I'm sorry. It's just that a bullet to the shoulder in an active war-zone is vastly different to being shot in the heart by your best friend's wife. I'm still having trouble coming to terms with it all." John raises his right hand to cover Sherlock's on his left shoulder, his pyjamas now dangling limply from his other hand. "I want to fix it all." The last few words are barely a whisper and directed at the floor.

"You will, John." Sherlock gradually turns John to face him, a hand still resting on John's tense shoulder, the other tenderly tipping John's face up until they are eye to eye. "I trust you."

He studies John's face for a long moment, reading the sadness, the worry, noticing the moment that John decides to believe him. Slowly, he lowers his face to John's, stopping when their lips rest lightly together. He sighs when he feels the touch of John's palm against the nape of his neck. The grip is both tender and strong, guiding him deeper into the kiss. Their lips part and the tension in John's shoulders melts. The kiss is still very chaste in the grand scheme of things, nothing more complicated than the soft meeting of lips and the sharing of breath but both men slide closer, Sherlock's right hand coming up to caress the side of John's face, his left going to the curve of John's back, urging him to move even closer. A small moan escapes Sherlock at the first touch of John's tongue against his. He can't believe that after all this time, after everything they've been through, they've finally arrived at this point. The soft sound is met with an echo from John and the kiss deepens, John wrapping his left arm around Sherlock's waist, his pyjamas forgotten in his hand.

The sound of a discrete cough from the doorway makes them rudely aware of their surroundings and they pull away from each other, a flush of colour apparent on both their faces.
"Forgive the interruption, gentlemen." Mycroft stands just inside the doorway, his own cheeks slightly flushed. He casts a quick glance over to where his briefcase and umbrella still remain. "I only returned for my personal effects, I took somewhat longer than I anticipated." Mycroft's blush deepens slightly and he attempts to hide the sudden colouration by walking to the chair to collect his belongings.

"Inside these walls I know that your actions will not reach the attention of Ms Morstan but please, Doctor Watson, Sherlock, keep any behaviour that may suggest John's lack of eventual return to her behind locked doors. I believe we are coming to the end of a very long game, it would be a pity to mess it up now."

As much as Sherlock wants to say something cutting to Mycroft, maybe comment on his (non-existent) weight gain or point out precisely what he was doing that took so long whilst saying goodbye to Lestrade, he knows his brother is right and merely nods his head in acceptance.

"I'll send a car to convey you both back to Baker Street tomorrow: notify me when you need it." With another brisk nod, Mycroft leaves John and Sherlock to their own devices.

John scratches the back of his neck. "Yeah, I'll just go and ..." John indicates over his shoulder to the bathroom, before edging away. Feeling suddenly very alone, Sherlock lets out a deep sigh, the end of which is cut short when John kisses him. "By the way, that was amazing." He grins before sauntering off to the bathroom to change, leaving Sherlock feeling much happier.

Sherlock wakes very early the next morning. Although the room has no windows or clock he can now estimate the time by the sounds and smells drifting down the corridor from the nurses' station. The noise of a muted radio and the smell of strong coffee would indicate that it is before six, meaning that he will need to be patient for at least another three hours when a doctor will come on duty to sign him out.

He allows himself to think about the Mary conundrum. He is still unsure as to precisely why she shot him. If it had been to protect herself from Magnussen then surely shooting Magnussen would have served her better? If it had been because she saw Sherlock as some sort of threat to her relationship with John, then she could have killed him at any other point in their relationship and with her skills made it look completely accidental. It was only once John had seen that Sherlock was capable of some sort of romantic (and therefore, implied, sexual) relationship (one that was ultimately fake) that Mary had taken such extreme action against him. If it were merely that she was afraid of what he would reveal to John about the secrets that Magnussen held over her then she would only have needed to speak to him, to trust him. She already knew that he would do anything to keep John happy and safe and if that had meant that John was kept in the dark then he would have done that. Sherlock briefly wonders if he did the right thing telling John about the secrets that Magnussen held over her then she would only have needed to speak to him, to trust him. He already knew that he would do anything to keep John happy and safe and if that had meant that John was kept in the dark then he would have done that. Sherlock briefly wonders if he did the right thing telling John who shot him, then acknowledges that it was absolutely the right thing to do. John knew that Sherlock was facing his attacker and would have kept worrying the point until he found out the hard way.

A snuffling sound from John rouses Sherlock from his thoughts. The sight of John slowly waking, safe and warm, tugs at Sherlock's heartstrings and he can't bring himself to want life any other way. Yes, he is slowly healing from a gunshot wound, yes, his best friend is working through betrayal but a resounding yes, he has John in his life in a way that he never thought would happen. There have been kisses and embraces and the promise of more to come. Sherlock looks on as John slowly opens his eyes, admiring the way his long golden lashes gradually part to reveal midnight blue eyes that almost seem to brighten when they focus on him.

"Good morning, John." Sherlock smiles down at him.
"Morning." John stretches and yawns before ruffling his hair and pushing himself up into a sitting position. "Been awake long?"

"An hour, maybe two." Sherlock shrugs, eager for John not to know what he had been thinking about. John's sharp eyes flick over him, noting the residual tension in his shoulders, but elects to say nothing and for that, Sherlock is grateful.

"Right, I'm off for a shower before the doctors come round. I bet you're looking forward to being home, finally being allowed to shower without a nurse being present or having the dreaded bed bath." John collects clean clothes from their wardrobe, smirking at Sherlock.

"Oh, I'm sure if the right person were to shower with me, or even give me a bed bath, I would find plenty about that experience to enjoy. Plus, John, you were always saying we needed to be more aware of the environment; by sharing our showers we'd be saving water too." He smiles cheekily at John before purposely turning his back and walking to the wardrobe. He can feel John watching intently as he moves and fights the temptation to show off, instead walking steadily forward, watching John's reflection in the mirror. He can see the flush in his cheeks and the way he licks his lips. Who knew that walking and water conservation would be the way to John's heart? Or more accurately, John's cock, Sherlock thinks, swallowing back a snigger.

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The doctor arrives promptly at nine o'clock and Sherlock and John both listen intently to his advice. Sherlock is to keep the wound clean and covered for the next week, then he will be able to remove the dressing if the site remains clear of infection. He has been given pain killers and antibiotics (to be used only if required) and he is strongly advised to keep physical activity to a minimum. No high impact sports for at least the next month and John adds that there are to be no cases that take him away from the flat at Baker Street. He is told he can meditate, do basic yoga and Pilates but no complicated moves and nothing that puts pressure on his wound. There is a moment of awkwardness when the doctor mentions that intimate relations are permitted but nothing 'crazy, athletic or requiring weight to be borne on Sherlock's chest.' Sherlock had opened his mouth to ask precisely what was allowable, but a quick pinch to his thigh from John had caused him to close it with a click.

Finally, they leave the hospital, Sherlock clutching his cactus whilst carefully avoiding the spikes. He is still unsure why John has chosen this as an appropriate present for him but he loves it, loves the way the delicate flowers blossom amongst the spikes, beauty within danger. He loves the short, sturdy shape of the plant itself and the way that the prickly surface protects a soft core - so very much like John.

A black car awaits them and they begin their journey home. Back to Baker Street to finally start the life that should have been theirs all along. Sherlock resists holding John's hand until they are safely ensconced in the car, then he gives in to temptation and draws John over to him by linking their fingers together and pulling. John slides across the seat, laughing, before meeting Sherlock's lips with his own, their actions a secret from the rest of the world thanks to the darkened glass of the car.
The sleek, black car pulls up in front of 221B Baker Street and John releases the breath he had been holding. All through their journey home, he had been running scenarios through his mind of what could go wrong: Sherlock relapsing in the middle of nowhere; the car not being one of Mycroft's and taking them to some dirty wasteland to meet their fate at the end of gun; a random sniper shot through the window of the car taking out Sherlock even as John held him in his arms, their lips together, oblivious to the danger; being run off a country road, Sherlock dragged away and John useless to find him. Even the soft kisses Sherlock had given during their journey was not enough to keep John from worrying. The sight of their black door being quickly opened by the ever-reliable Mrs Hudson eases the grip around John's heart and he allows himself to relax incrementally.

He opens the car door and slides out, glancing up and down the street, instinctively checking the area for threats before helping Sherlock to slide out beside him. The look Sherlock gives him is grateful and knowing. Of course Sherlock is fully aware of John being on full alert, how he had ever thought Sherlock wouldn't notice is beyond him. Sherlock eats up the distance between the car and the front door in a few easy strides and is quickly enveloped in the loving arms of their landlady. John can see the relief written clearly on her face as she strokes her small hands gently down Sherlock's arms before drawing him inside, leaving John to pick up their small amount of belongings and the cactus Sherlock has barely let out of his sight.

The brisk bite to the air and the way the light illuminates the floor of the hallway reminds John of the first time he ventured inside 221B and how, not many hours later, he had returned, minus his cane and giggled at the madness of the evening he had just had. It's quieter now, no baritone chuckles alongside his own higher pitched (ridiculous) giggles but he can hear Sherlock's voice drifting out of Mrs Hudson's small kitchen where he is no doubt pilfering freshly baked biscuits and cakes. Sniffing, John can smell cinnamon, rich in the air with the sweet undertones of icing sugar drifting out from the partially open door; cinnamon swirls it is then. He smiles; trust their wonderful landlady to bake up some of Sherlock's favourite treats. Tightening his grip on the bag and plant pot in his hands, John starts to climb the seventeen stairs that will take him back inside the only place he has ever truly considered home. The third stair creaks under his weight and the chatting in the kitchen ceases, the door easing further open.

"John? Aren't you joining us?" Sherlock looks worried, a furrow resting across his brow, his usually multi-hued eyes currently a pale silver-blue.
"Yeah, course I am. I'm just going to take these upstairs; I'll be straight back down." John fights back the urge to just take Sherlock in his arms. He wants the first time he holds Sherlock to be in their own flat, somewhere he won't have to rush to let go, somewhere where he can let the embrace linger. "Leave some of those cinnamon swirls for me." He gives Sherlock a swift wink before running up the remaining stairs.

He pushes the door to their flat open, pausing on the threshold. For a moment, he allows the memory of the last time he was in this room to wash over him, closing his eyes against the bitter flood. He can perfectly picture Mary standing by the fireplace, seemingly unmoved by his discovery of her betrayal, any earlier tears now vanished. Even now, he can taste the memory of the bile that flooded his mouth when the red haze of anger had finally cleared. How could she betray him like that? Try to kill the person who had given him something to live for when he had returned broken from the war? His memory shifts to one of Sherlock sitting pale-faced in his chair. In retrospect, John can see the symptoms of his relapse clearly; the pale, clammy skin, the erratic breathing, the struggle for words but at the time he had been too blinded by what he believed to be the betrayal of his best friend and his wife to notice. He wonders now if, had he seen it, he would have been able to get Sherlock back to the hospital without the need for his heart to be re-started in the ambulance. A trauma that neither of them had needed to experience; Sherlock's body already weak from the abuse he had put it through and John's mind in heartbroken turmoil.

He is still standing, lost in his thoughts in the doorway, when a gentle hand pats his upper arm.

"John dear, are you all right?"

John looks round to find Mrs Hudson standing mere inches away; her comforting presence eases some of the tension that is locking him in place and he finds he is able to return her worried smile, albeit very briefly. He shakes his head, both to indicate that he's not all right and to try and shake the melancholy away. What has happened, happened; he now needs to move on with his life, a life that no longer involves Mary. He stifles a huff of laughter when he realises that in some ways, he needs to thank Mary; if she hadn't shot Sherlock, he would never have been compelled to face up to the reality of how he feels about him, much less admit it to his face.

"I'm so sorry for what you've been through, dear. I'll just pop back downstairs and leave you to get sorted." She pauses for a moment before pulling John into a motherly hug. He resists for the merest second before dropping his bag and curving his free arm around her, allowing himself to lightly rest in her embrace. The moment he feels the threat of tears, he pulls away, pinching at the bridge of his nose and clearing his throat. He manages a half-grimace, half-smile when he feels the soft skin of Mrs Hudson's palm briefly caress his cheek before he hears her walk slowly back down the stairs.

Taking a deep breath, John bends down to retrieve the dropped bag before turning sharply into their kitchen, avoiding entering the living room at all. From there, he walks the short distance to Sherlock's bedroom. The curtains have been opened and light streams into the room; dust motes drift happily in the rays and the whole room appears welcoming. John takes the few steps required to bring him to the edge of the bed and he allows himself to drop onto it. He places the bag to the side of him on the floor and carefully positions the cactus on the bedside table, making a note to move it later to avoid it getting knocked over and to prevent either him or Sherlock getting cactus spines in their hands when they reach for a drink or the alarm clock. John idly runs his hands over the sheets. They feel cool and smooth beneath his hands, not silk or satin as some would believe the pretentious detective of their imaginings to sleep in, rather some kind of expensive cotton. Eminently more practical and comfortable and, John feels, much more Sherlock.

Mrs Hudson has obviously been in and changed the sheets and John laments that he won't be able
to smell Sherlock on the sheets or the pillow before realising that tonight he will be sleeping in this bed alongside Sherlock, their scents intermingling. He longs to be able to hold Sherlock in his arms as they sleep, limbs entangled and sharing air but is unsure whether Sherlock's wound is healed enough, or, come to think of it, whether Sherlock will even be a person who enjoys being cuddled. He remembers how Sherlock had frozen when he had compulsively embraced him at the wedding, knows that he held on a bit too long, willing Sherlock to relax and maybe return the embrace. He knows now, that it was lucky that Sherlock hadn't; he's not sure that he would have been able to release him again - which would have been more than a 'bit not good' at his wedding to another person. A fond smile tugs at his lips at the remembrance of the words of one of their early conversations, Sherlock lost in the facts of the case but still realising that what he had said hadn't been appropriate and relying on John to support that conclusion. It's a pitfall many people fall into with Sherlock, thinking that he has no feelings, no empathy. John knows this all too well as it has been a pit he has fallen into himself before now, inexcusably so, when he has seen the evidence of just how intensely Sherlock feels written clearly in his body language and on his face. It's not that Sherlock doesn't feel, it's more that he feels too much, too strongly and over many years has learned how to suppress it when his intellect would be more valuable than his emotions.

Sweeping a final hand over the smooth sheets, John heaves himself off the bed, ignoring the protest from his aching limbs and slowly heads downstairs; the longing for cinnamon swirls, a cup of tea and the presence of the people he has come to think of as family, guiding him.

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Thirty minutes later, John is sipping at his third or fourth cup of tea and making a mental note to never allow Mrs Hudson to be in charge of topping up alcoholic drinks. She appears to have near-magical skills of filling his cup without him being aware, only discovering when drinking from his, once nearly empty, cup. Luckily, this skill also appears to apply to her biscuit and cake supply, which is apparently never ending. John has had three cinnamon swirls - two more than he thought he'd have after finding out Sherlock had eaten the vast majority of them - fortunately it turned out only to be the first plate of them. These were followed by two perfectly moist chocolate brownies and he is currently nibbling on a comparatively healthy oat and raisin cookie. His attention is fixed on Mrs Hudson. Sherlock has managed to sprawl on one of her too-small kitchen chairs (refusing the earlier offer of moving into the living room) and looks completely at home. Mrs Hudson is looking at him like her wayward son has returned, which in a way, John supposes, he has. He feels reticent to drag Sherlock away from this heartfelt domesticity but he can see from the heaviness of Sherlock's eyelids and the pallor of his skin that Sherlock is tiring and will soon be in desperate need of a revitalising nap. It's approaching midday and John knows that Sherlock has been awake since dawn. He's amazed that Sherlock has made it this long before needing to rest. John suspects Mrs Hudson's warm welcome has had a lot to do with it.

"I'm sorry, Mrs Hudson but I think it's time I took Sherlock upstairs. As much as he hates to admit it, he is still healing and in need of some rest." John stands and makes to help Mrs Hudson with the tidying but is quickly shushed away by her. He is handed a Tupperware box full of even more goodies and only allowed to leave once he has promised that she can make them both a wholesome lunch when Sherlock wakes.

She watches as they slowly trudge up the stairs, John's arm wrapped around Sherlock's waist and John can almost feel the way she is smiling as he walks. A quick glance at Sherlock confirms that he, too, is aware of her scrutiny. There is a slight colour gracing his high cheekbones and his lips are just twitching up into a private smile.

John avoids the living room again and directs them in through the kitchen door, leaving the Tupperware box of cakes on the table as he passes, and straight down the corridor to Sherlock's
room. Sherlock notices John's avoidance but he sensibly elects to stay silent, a gentle squeeze around John's waist providing some quiet reassurance. John guides Sherlock straight to his bed, leaving him sitting on the edge before moving the cactus from the bedside table to a bookshelf.

"Are you going to change?" John asks, making an effort to keep his voice casual. Now that they are both in Sherlock's room, the change in their relationship suddenly seems much more pertinent. John is unsure what is expected of him and despite all their flirting and frank discussions in the hospital, he is suddenly very nervous. He clenches his fist before flicking the fingers out, then deliberately steadying his hands, knowing that Sherlock can read all of his tells as easily as he can read a book. He attempts to distract himself by locating a pair of pyjama bottoms and one of Sherlock's favourite t-shirts in the chest of drawers.

John turns to hand them to Sherlock but stops short at the sight of him unbuttoning his shirt; the white bandage is stark against Sherlock's chest in the bright light of the midday sun. The rest of the skin on his chest is unblemished by scars, only the delicate kiss of a constellation of freckles and moles is apparent. John watches, lips parted, as Sherlock slips the material from his shoulders, carelessly (though no less accurately) throwing the shirt into the nearby washing basket. He flexes his shoulders before raising his arms above his head, luxuriating in the first stretch in his bedroom since being shot nearly a month ago. The muscles on his torso and in his arms flex and move and John is mesmerised by the sight. Sherlock looks so slight in his suits, almost like a strong wind could blow him over, but that is far from the truth. Even after enforced bed rest, Sherlock retains his defined musculature. It's not bulky; rather, it is streamlined and elegant. John thinks it's something akin to a dancer or swimmer, although he has never seen Sherlock participate in either (the gentle moves of the waltz he taught John could not account for the muscle definition). John has seen Sherlock in many states of undress but something about seeing him partially clothed, relaxed and ever-so-slightly rumpled, sitting on the bed they will eventually share, turns John's nervousness into something warmer. He smiles when Sherlock turns to look at him, his full lips quirked up on one side, his eyes soft and inviting. Sherlock holds one hand out to John in a silent gesture for John to join him.

"I'm not tired Sherlock and you need your rest." John is amazed at how even his voice sounds although he is warring with the urge to walk over and run his hands all over Sherlock's body. The temptation is so strong he takes an impulsive step forward.

"I've got used to you being close by when I sleep." Sherlock's voice is soft and intimate, his hand, unwavering, is still held out for John. Sherlock bites his lip, his eyes breaking his gaze with John before skittering back. John knows this is a sure sign that he has something to say that he thinks John might not like to hear. John dips his head slightly, unspoken permission for Sherlock to continue. "You're avoiding the living room, John. Avoiding the last place you saw her. Please..." Sherlock's voice cracks and something in John's heart breaks a little. Leaving the pyjamas on the dresser, he walks over to Sherlock, taking the extended hand in his own. "Please don't let her get between us now. We'll face our demons together, I promise you, John. But, for now, just lie down next to me, let us have that."

John looks down into eyes that are uncharacteristically wide and pleading, bright blue flecked with gold, the dark brown freckle in his right eye standing out stark in the bright light. Sherlock looks so vulnerable, a state-of-being he rarely allows people to see, that John can no longer resist the need to touch him, to offer comfort however he can. John's lifestyle may have been violently altered by recent events but it was Sherlock's life that was almost sacrificed.

He cups his left hand against Sherlock's cheek, feeling the slight brush of stubble against the palm of his hand, another reminder that Sherlock is gloriously human after all. With great care, John lowers his head until their lips meet. It's the briefest of caresses but John can already feel the
tension begin to creep out of his bones. Sherlock releases John's hand and pulls him down closer, large hands wrapping themselves over John's hips, anchoring him. John moves until he is straddling Sherlock where he sits on the edge of the bed, one knee on each side of Sherlock's hips, his full weight held above Sherlock's lap by the flexing of his bent thighs.

It's an unusual position for John to be in, so much taller than Sherlock but he uses it to his advantage, tilting Sherlock's head by placing two fingers under his chin. Sherlock's breath against his face smells sweet, hints of bergamot, cinnamon and sugar dancing around in the warm huffs of air. John can resist no longer and he dips his head again to taste the lusciousness there. The kiss immediately slips from chaste to something more intimate and John moves his hand to the nape of Sherlock's neck, his fingers stroked by the silkeness of the overly long curls. John gives in to temptation further and pushes his fingers up into the soft, welcoming embrace of Sherlock's hair, all the while sliding his tongue along Sherlock's, only retreating to softly nip at full lips before returning. Neither man is trying to turn this into something more, nothing more is needed. Hearts are laid open, their contents clear to see for those who look. Words are not needed, tongues speak another language now, one that both men finally understand.

Long minutes pass, the only sound that of lips moving against lips and the soft sighs of contentment, before John slowly eases away, their last kiss slow and lingering, neither quite willing to cease yet. He nuzzles his nose against Sherlock's before pressing his cheek into the soft riot of Sherlock's hair, not caring at how hopelessly romantic it may seem.

"As much as I want to keep doing this forever, you need to sleep." The words are breathed against Sherlock's scalp but John knows he has been heard when Sherlock sighs and slowly exerts a gentle pressure on John's hips, encouraging him to slide off his lap.

"You're quite right, Doctor." Sherlock's gaze is heavy-lidded, an equal mixture of arousal and sleepiness. "But....." Sherlock flashes a sudden salacious smile, "When I'm feeling more energetic I promise to take you apart with my kisses. My skills may be a bit rusty compared to my youth but I'll be back in full form before you know it."

John swallows, hard. The thought that that was Sherlock at his rustiest makes John's pulse thrum. The kisses they had shared had been intoxicating, amongst the best he had ever experienced. It takes a few moments for John to clear away the haze of sudden arousal that threatens to overtake him before he realises that his eyes had fallen shut at the thought of a well-oiled (his mind conjures up quite a distracting image) Sherlock. He opens his eyes to see Sherlock smirking at him, fully aware of the effect his words have had.

"Bastard." There's no anger in John's voice, the word is laced with affection and something more, something that is clawing at John's throat to be said, but he swallows it ruthlessly back down before grinning back at Sherlock. The grin morphs into a giggle and before long they are both laughing.

"Right, bed."

John efficiently strips off to his boxer shorts and t-shirt, the manner in which he does it leaving no doubt that he does not mean to continue their earlier encounter at this time. He can feel Sherlock's gaze upon him and quickly slides under the bedsheets, turning on to his side in an effort to hide his ever-hopeful erection. The hungry look on Sherlock's face is enough for John to know he has been unsuccessful but the attraction he can see there evaporates the last of any embarrassment he had been feeling about sprawling almost naked in Sherlock's bed.

"Now, you." John indicates Sherlock's trousers with a quick sweep of his hand.
John watches as Sherlock stands, graceful as always. With quick, efficient movements, Sherlock undoes his trousers and pushes them down, bending to remove them and his shoes and socks. He then takes the time to fold his trousers carefully, leaving them draped over a nearby chair, before sliding into bed next to John.

"Now what, Doctor?" Laughter still plays around the edges of Sherlock's words and John smiles at the sudden ease of it all.

"Now, you sleep." John reclines. "How do you think you'll be most comfortable?"

"Can I just ......" Sherlock slides over to John and rests his head on John's shoulder, wrapping one long leg over John's and easing an arm over John's torso. "... Try this?"

John tilts his head and places light kisses into Sherlock's hair before wrapping his arm around Sherlock's shoulder and placing his other hand on Sherlock's thigh where it rests over him.

"Is that going to be comfortable for you? Not too much pressure on your wound?" John whispers, sensing that Sherlock is already heading quickly towards sleep. Sherlock makes a small sound against his chest and John takes it to mean that Sherlock is quite all right where he is.

John settles more comfortably into the pillows and gradually relaxes. The last thing he remembers before sleep overtakes him is the sensation of Sherlock's deep breaths against his chest and the feeling of Sherlock's steady heartbeat.

Chapter End Notes

I just want to say I feel blessed at the fact that I'm able to be part of this creative fandom. I've 'met' some wonderful people and made some amazing friends, ones I hope will last a lifetime.
Inner Strengths and Unknown Depths.

Chapter Summary

"Listen here, young man. You are going to eat that food and you are not going to complain. I don't expect you to eat it all but I expect you to have a bloody good try. You need to eat sensibly and rest a lot. Doctor Watson and I won't see it any other way." She takes a deep breath and John notices that she's shaking, her eyes overly bright. If he's noticed it, then he's damn sure Sherlock has too.

Chapter Notes

Posting a day early as I have a busy day on the agenda tomorrow.

Thank you for all the lovely comments on the last chapter! They truly made my day (week!). I really love getting feedback and was biting my nails over how quiet the other chapter comment boxes had been... So, phew!

Mega shoutout to my beta, Lockedinjohnlock, she always does an outstanding job at kicking these chapters into shape, but this one needed a bit more than the usual amount! Stray punctuation everywhere! And more than a fair few letters and words missing in action!

John awakes an hour later, surprised that he had been able to sleep at all. He hadn't rested well at the hospital; the bed had been ok and he'd certainly slept on worse but the constant worry about being in such an open space, of how easily Mary or an associate of hers might get to them, had meant that he had rarely slept deeply. He feels much safer in Baker Street, even if the memory of Mary's presence does taint the living room and he admits that, coupled with finally being able to have Sherlock in his arms, must be to blame for his unexpected nap.

Warm, moist breath huffs steadily against his chest and neck, Sherlock's face now angled up towards his own, the weight of his head resting on John's chest. John manages to wriggle slightly so that he is able to look down upon the face of the still-sleeping Sherlock. Asleep, he somehow looks younger, less world weary. Sherlock's full lips are slightly parted and John can see the gently curved edges of Sherlock's teeth. Sherlock's eyes are darting about behind his eyelids, rapid movements showing beneath the fragile skin. A flush lies on his cheeks and for a moment John is concerned that an infection has set in before calming and realising the high colour is most likely to do with their close proximity and shared body heat. Sherlock is still sprawled over John - long limbs that look like they should be angular and uncomfortable seem to fit perfectly against John's smaller, more compact frame - puzzle pieces complementing and completing each other. John allows himself the pleasure of having Sherlock utterly relaxed against him, smiling when he realises that Sherlock has drooled slightly on him. If this were a dream, or another one of John's fantasies, he knows there would be no slight itching from where they have sweated against each other, no tingling numbness in his arm from where Sherlock is still resting on him and certainly no puddle of saliva on his chest. All of those wonderful, human, everyday things bring it home to
John that this is real. It's actually happening and it takes all of his restraint not to clutch Sherlock to him and wrap both arms around him. Happiness is bubbling up inside of him and he has to bite the side of his hand to stop himself from laughing out loud. The subtle movement of John's body as he holds back his laughter is enough to jostle Sherlock in his sleep, he lets out a noise that sounds very much like 'mmmmmph' before rubbing his cheek against John's chest and settling into slumber once more.

John rests his head back down, his free arm bent under his head, allowing him to still look at Sherlock. He moves his other hand lightly over Sherlock's exposed skin, the covers having slipped down to their waist, and mostly off Sherlock, at some point during their nap. His fingers trace the raised lines on Sherlock's back that he had noticed but not mentioned whilst Sherlock was in hospital. The scars are not large and are mostly white, well into their healing process but John knows whip marks when he sees them. At the hospital, he'd had to physically clench his teeth to keep the questions tumbling out. He'd decided to neither seek nor refuse information, but he won't avoid touching them either. John knows how he feels when people - lovers - avoid his scar and he doesn't want Sherlock to feel that way, doesn't want him to feel anything less than complete, anything less than ..... Loved. John remembers the beautiful expanse of long, pale back Sherlock had flashed at Buckingham Palace and thinks that Sherlock's back is a different sort of beautiful now. It shows who Sherlock is: a survivor. Sherlock's body is lithely muscles, defined and elegant, a pleasure to watch in motion and a joy to study at rest. John trails his fingers over the muscles of Sherlock's shoulder before moving to the curve of his bicep. Even in slumber, Sherlock's strength is undeniable and John feels his heart quicken at the thought of being able to explore that body and strength more thoroughly.

Sherlock stirs a little and John stills, not wanting to wake Sherlock from his healing sleep.

"Don't stop." Sherlock murmurs, curling more tightly against John. John smiles and softly runs his hand up and down Sherlock's arm a few more times before running his fingers through Sherlock's hair. It's in desperate need of a cut and his fingers leave a trail of fluffed out curls in their wake. Sherlock had been unable to indulge in his usual rigorous hair routine whilst in the hospital and John wonders whether Sherlock's hair will feel any different once the product is in it and the style back to its usual, organised chaos.

"I'll change it, if you don't like it."

"What? Your hair?" John leans back a little, confused, trying to get a read on Sherlock's face. Sherlock tilts his head up, eyes the bright crystal blue of a summer sky meeting John's enquiring gaze. "Not my hair, although it is in need of a cut." Sherlock rolls his eyes, the 'obviously' not needing to be said. "The product range I use on my hair. I like you playing with it, it's relaxing."

In support of the statement, Sherlock sighs deeply against John's chest and to all intents and purposes, seems like he is settled for the long haul. The contented silence is broken by the loud rumbling of Sherlock's stomach.

"Come on you, time to get up." John sniggers. "You're due some more pain killers and they're most effective when taken with food." John stretches as much as he is able with six feet of consulting detective sprawled over him. Sherlock mumbles against his chest, the sensation of Sherlock's lips against his skin causing John to hold back a shiver. "Sorry, what was that?" John cocks his head to ensure he hears if Sherlock deigns to respond.

"Comfortable here." Comes the sullen answer and Sherlock tries to worm further onto John. A sharp gasp and the sudden contraction of muscles sharply halts Sherlock's wriggling.
"Doctor's orders, Sherlock. Up you get, you need food and medication, we'll cuddle again later."
John instinctively swaps to his army doctor voice whilst carefully extricating himself from under Sherlock's weight.

"Wasn't cuddling. I was cold." Sherlock pouts. "I was making use of the nearest heat source, that just so happened to be you."

John redresses in his, now crumpled, clothes, a small smirk tugging at his mouth.

"Whatever you say. Seemed a lot like cuddling to me but I guess next time you get cold you could always try not kicking your covers off. I'm sure that would be much more effective than 'cuddling' for retaining body heat." John teases, looking over just in time to see Sherlock rolling his eyes in exasperation. He is also in time to see Sherlock wince as he sits up.

"Here, let me help." John crosses quickly to the dresser where he picks up Sherlock's pyjama bottoms and t-shirt before moving to stand in front of where Sherlock is perched on the edge of the bed. Swiftly but carefully, John lowers Sherlock's t-shirt over his head, stretching the material so that Sherlock doesn't have to move much to get his arms in before smoothing the material over his torso. It's shapeless and going threadbare in places but it's one of Sherlock's favourites. John can't help but smile at the contrast; the man dresses in Savile Row suits and charity shop t-shirts. Swiftly, John kneels before Sherlock, trying not to think about the sexual implications of the position. Bunching up Sherlock's soft pyjama bottoms, he guides Sherlock's legs into position before pulling the trousers up to Sherlock's bent knees. He instructs Sherlock to brace his weight against John's shoulders and to stand. As he does so, John pulls the trousers up the rest of the way, moving until he is standing with Sherlock's arms resting on his shoulders. A second later, the trousers are loosely tied, the whole procedure taking barely any time. John allows himself the luxury of a chaste kiss before altering his hold and leading Sherlock over to the bedroom door before helping him into a dressing gown, remembering to leave it untied.

Slowly, the two men make their way into the living room and it's not until John has Sherlock settled in his chair that he realises where he is. He straightens and waits for the anger and despair to wash over him ....... and waits a little more ....... long seconds pass and nothing happens. No anger, no sense of betrayal, only the warmth of Sherlock's body lingers against his skin and the soft sound of Sherlock's breathing fills his ears. He allows himself a small smile and looks over at Sherlock, surprising him in the midst of studying John. Whatever Sherlock sees, he approves of and John watches as he physically relaxes.

John pops briefly into the kitchen, liberating a few cakes from Mrs Hudson's Tupperware box before pouring Sherlock a glass of water. John rests the plate of cakes on the arm of Sherlock's chair before handing him the glass of water. He fumbles in his pocket for a moment before finding the small packets of tablets he had slipped in there at the hospital. Popping two out, he hands them to Sherlock. Sherlock swallows them without complaint, wincing as he lifts the glass of water.
John nods, relieved that Sherlock has taken his medication without protest.

"Right, I'm going to see Mrs Hudson about that lunch she insisted on. You'll be all right if I just pop downstairs?" John tips his head to one side waiting for Sherlock's answer. Their eyes meet and hold before Sherlock gives a brief nod and half smile whilst reaching for the nearest cake.

"John? I know about Mary ....... that she shot Sherlock." Mrs Hudson continues to stir the gravy that is just starting to simmer on the cooker top. "Mr Holmes and that nice Detective Inspector came and told me a few days ago. They offered to pay for me to go and stay at my sister's until all
the dust settles." She shakes her head before turning her head to look at John, her kindly face creased with concern and worry. "I told them no." She removes the gravy from the heat and goes to sit opposite John at her small kitchen table. Reaching out, she holds his clasped hands between her own. "I'm not leaving my boys when they need me the most."

John has to swallow against the sudden tightness in his throat. "Mrs Hudson, I ..... You....." He blinks rapidly against the threat of tears and clears his throat, desperately searching for the right words to say to this kind, brave, old lady. Her body may be frail but John realises that inside beats the heart of a lioness. England would, indeed, fall without her, just as Sherlock had suggested all those years ago.

Mrs Hudson seems to understand what John wants to say, even though he is still struggling to find the words.

"Let's get this food up to that man of yours, shall we?" She gives John's hand one final squeeze before rising from her seat and bustling about preparing a tray to take upstairs. John feels a slow smile emerging on his face as he allows the words 'that man of yours,' to sink in. No more denials are needed within the confines of 221B Baker Street and John feels like some of the weight from his shoulders has been lifted.

He takes the tray from Mrs Hudson, letting her carry her secret recipe gravy and heads back up to Sherlock. He half expects to see Sherlock asleep in his chair and is pleasantly surprised to see him tapping away at a laptop. On closer inspection John can see it's his laptop and bites back the almost automatic order for Sherlock to put it back. It had been in the bag that Mrs Hudson had brought back from the hospital with her, which means that Sherlock had felt pain-free enough to snoop around and find where everything had been put.

John places the tray on their disconcertingly clean kitchen table and allows Mrs Hudson to shoo him away as she sets out the meal.

"Set a place for yourself too, Mrs H."

John saunters over to Sherlock, carefully examining his pallor and posture as he goes. The painkillers Sherlock took are fast acting and John has been downstairs with Mrs Hudson long enough for them to take effect. John thinks Sherlock still looks a little pale, which admittedly isn't unusual for him but he is still lacking a certain something that John can only think of as his 'glow'. There's a slight flush high on Sherlock's cheeks that could be indicative of a temperature that John vows to monitor and dark bags under Sherlock's eyes caused by stress, pain and lack of quality sleep. John dreads to think what his own face must look like; he's never considered himself attractive in the conventional sense but he knows he has a certain something that he can turn on to attract and charm a prospective partner when needed. Unfortunately, he also knows that pain, stress and lack of sleep show strongly on his face. He rather expects that he currently resembles an old elephant; skin all grey and sagging, the bags under his eyes large enough for Nellie to pack her stuff in as she runs away from the circus! He snorts at the bizarre way his mind works and the sound causes Sherlock to look up. His eyes are blue-green now, the colour of a forest lake, John thinks as they flash over his face, their unknown depths reading goodness-knows-what before Sherlock breaks into an easy smile.

"I'm fine John. I ate a few cakes, you saw me take the tablets. I had a walk around, only on this level and now I'm checking my emails. Don't fuss." The words are typical Sherlock but the tone is warm. It's a request rather than an order.

John rests his weight on the arm of Sherlock's chair and dips his head to place a kiss on Sherlock's unruly mop of hair. He allows himself a moment to linger there, enjoying the warmth of Sherlock
so close to him and inhales his scent, coughing slightly when he breathes in too deep and a fluffy curl attempts to escape from the masses and down John's throat. He can feel Sherlock's silent laughter in the way that his body shakes against his arm and thigh. God, he has missed this side of Sherlock, this happy, relaxed man, comfortable in his own skin and with his place in the world. John's not an idiot. He knows that Sherlock can be an absolute brat at times; temper tantrums over seemingly nothing, destroying inanimate objects through boredom or stress, rattling off words at a thousand words a minute or not speaking for days. Luckily John knows that's not all there is to Sherlock; when they had lived together they had enjoyed relaxed evenings and days, had eaten leisurely of good, home-cooked food and enjoyed quiet times in front of the telly. John had missed all of it, all of Sherlock; the genius working on a crime, forgoing sleep and food until it is solved and the quiet, relaxed man, content to while away the hours with his violin and his good friend.

Before all the current problems with Mary had surfaced - when John had been trying to write off his doubts and worries about his impending marriage as the product of an over-active mind teemed with the abrupt return of a man he had believed dead and buried - John had worried how he would cope with quiet nights in with Mary, at the perceived boredom married life would inevitably bring. Now he knows it wasn't the quiet he was dreading, it was the quiet with Mary. The person had been wrong, not the situation. He knows it will be a long time until Sherlock is recovered enough to be running around again, solving cases and the idea of spending the many quiet days that will be required with just Sherlock doesn't fill John with dread or worry. In fact, he looks forward to it. They can talk or ignore each other in comfort; maybe Sherlock will play his violin at some point. They will watch telly and Sherlock will shout about the idiocy of the shows. They will eat, or rather John will eat and Sherlock will sulk and then steal food from John. John will ask for cold cases from Greg to stop Sherlock from being utterly bored and they will just enjoy their time together. Come what may, John knows that the rest of his life will be spent by Sherlock's side.

"Woohoo, boys? Dinner's ready." Mrs Hudson's cheery tones call them both to the table and it all feels strangely ordinary; a day like many others before Sherlock had 'left'.

John watches Sherlock carefully from the corner of his eye as he manoeuvres himself to the kitchen table. His movements are as graceful as ever but there is a tightness underlying his moves, an element of control that Sherlock is obviously exerting over himself. Sherlock catches John watching him and the flush on his otherwise pale skin deepens. John decides not to question him about it now, rather, catch him later when he's relaxed from eating and they're alone again.

Mrs Hudson has served up three generous portions of Shepherd's Pie but there is still enough left for John and Sherlock to have tomorrow. Extra fresh veg has also been provided and John notes that they are all of Sherlock's favourites, as is the gravy Mrs Hudson is currently generously ladling over their food. Sherlock sits and instantly starts prodding at the food with his fork, his nose petulantly wrinkling.

John opens his mouth to say something but is cut off by Mrs Hudson.

"Listen here, young man. You are going to eat that food and you are not going to complain. I don't expect you to eat it all but I expect you to have a bloody good try. You need to eat sensibly and rest a lot. Doctor Watson and I won't see it any other way." She takes a deep breath and John notices that she's shaking, her eyes overly bright. If he's noticed it, then he's damn sure Sherlock has too. Glancing over the table, he can see that Sherlock is listening intently, looking surprisingly repentant as Mrs Hudson continues. "You've got to stop putting yourself in harm's way, Sherlock, love. I'm not sure how many shocks my heart can take; not to mention what you're putting poor John through. And I know, I know why you jumped, but no more scares now, Sherlock." With a final tweaking of her cardigan, Mrs Hudson begins to eat, signalling the end of the, rather one-sided, discussion. John looks to Sherlock with rather wide eyes and is pleased to see Sherlock
eating, even more so when he sees genuine pleasure at the taste of the food, clear on Sherlock's face.

The rest of the meal continues with quiet chit-chat and ends with a rather delicious apple pie that Mrs Hudson retrieves from downstairs. They retire to the living room and Mrs Hudson seems in no rush to leave them and John can't say he blames her. It's obvious how much she cares for them both but Sherlock has a large part of her heart and John feels that it's just as it should be.

"So..... What should I do about Mary?" Mrs Hudson's sudden enquiry jolts John out of his relaxed state and causes Sherlock to throw him a worried glance before bestowing a glare in Mrs Hudson's direction. "Oh, don't look at me like that Sherlock Holmes. I know she shot you and I know that John is not returning to her." She glances at John, taking in his open mouth and wide eyes. "It's obvious that you've finally told Sherlock how you feel; about time too, John, and I'd think rather poorly of you if you left him after that." She glances between both men, shrewdly not mentioning their blushes or gaping mouths. "The question remains though, what do I do about Mary? Obviously, she thinks John is here looking after you as you recuperate, Sherlock, but does she know he's not going back?"

"No, she doesn't know, Mrs Hudson." John clears his throat, glancing quickly over at Sherlock before continuing at a nod from him. "And I think it's best she doesn't know at this point. We can't predict her behaviour and unfortunately we can't just take her off the streets as we need to know what else she is involved in." John licks his lips and folds his hands in his lap, willing himself to remain calm.

"She's been known to pop by unexpectedly and she's been texting me quite frequently, wanting to know what is happening with Sherlock." She waves her hand at their worried expressions. "Don't worry, I haven't told her anything, just that you were still in hospital and that I wasn't sure when you'd be home." She grins at them, a surprisingly cheeky look gracing her features. "I'm afraid I rather played up the old lady role. Said I wasn't as stable on my feet as I used to be, that my hip wouldn't cope with going up and down the stairs, how it would be a huge help to me if Doctor Watson could stay for a while, just until you were stronger. How I admired her health and fitness and how well she was dealing with her pregnancy and how proud John must be to have such a strong wife who looks after herself when he's needed elsewhere."

"Oh well played Mrs Hudson!" Sherlock says, delighted. "That has laid the groundwork for John staying here for at least a few weeks and, of course, she knows that he's angry - although she doesn't know that you know what really happened - so she will remain friendly towards you."

"Won't Mary suspect you've told Mrs Hudson what happened? Or that I've told her?" John queries.

"What, in our history together, will have set precedence for that? She knows that I am a loner, trusting very few people and I believe she thinks your pride won't allow you to discuss it." Sherlock adopts his usual thinking position, hands steepled in front of his chin, fingertips resting lightly on his lower lip. "Just keep her sweet with tea and sympathy, Mrs Hudson; John and I will do whatever is required but you must let us know if you feel at all threatened, do you understand? I won't have you getting hurt."

"Whatever you say dear." Mrs Hudson stands and smooths the crinkles out of her dress. "You can rely on me. I'm going to leave you in peace now; be sure to let me know when you want your tea. I've got some lovely fresh bread and ham downstairs, I'll make you some ham and tomato sandwiches and I'll pop out and get some of those crisps you like too, Sherlock, dear." With a final primp of her skirt and the gentle click of her shoes she disappears back downstairs to her flat.

"That woman is a force of nature. Remind me never to get on the wrong side of her!" John
remarks, grinning at Sherlock.

"Oh I will, John. Her husband made that mistake and we both know what happened to him!"
Safe Within His Arms

Chapter Summary

Sherlock has never been self-conscious about his body, appearing around the flat in anything from a full suit to a small towel when fresh from the shower. Whilst in the hospital, John had seen almost all of Sherlock, averting his eyes when necessary to give Sherlock privacy whilst being bathed or relieving himself. Now the reason for baring his skin, his body, is different and John is no longer the respectful bystander. He is actively involved, eyes devouring each inch of milky white skin that comes into view, his body responding, if the clenched fists in the blanket are anything to go by, to the overtly sexual nature of the situation.

Chapter Notes

First of all thank you for all the lovely comments! They make me so happy, the perfect pick me up!

I'm afraid the next chapter will be late as I've been busy working on an art commission and it's now the school holidays - I promise I won't take too long though. Hopefully this chapter will help you forgive the delay!

Thanks, as always, to my lovely Lockedinjohnlock. I got lots of purple when she beta'd this chapter, purple is for when she particularly loves something!

The remainder of the day passed without event. Mrs Hudson popped in again later with freshly made ham and tomato sandwiches, the plates decorated with Sherlock's favourite crisps (she always did know how to tempt his taste buds). This time she didn't stay and eat with them, pleading a prior commitment with Mrs Turner, Sherlock didn't believe her for one moment and was both relieved and disappointed. Relieved because he was on the very last ebb of his reserve of small talk and he didn't want to hurt her feelings by snapping at her. She had gone out of her way for them today and, even if it were only the one time, he was determined to show his appreciation. The disappointment wasn't so easy to clarify; it was a reaction right from the pit of his stomach and took some time to analyse. After much time spent walking the corridors of his mind palace, Sherlock identified the feeling as not being disappointment after all; it was fear. Not the mind-numbing fear he had experienced back in Dartmoor or even the fear he had felt at the hands of his captors in Serbia. It was more akin to the fear he had felt whilst standing on the edge of Bart's roof saying what could have well been his final farewell to John. Once Sherlock had identified what the emotion was, it had been a simple deduction to pinpoint that it was the fear of losing John that he was experiencing, in the relative safety and comfort of his own home.

He had spent the day tense, on edge every time John had passed him, blushing furiously when John had met his gaze or touched him. In the hospital their new intimacy had seemed easy, natural. Back in Baker Street, Sherlock was suddenly more aware of how much further he wanted things to go with John, how much more he wanted them to be. How very much more he'd have to lose.
He glances across to where John is sitting in his chair, legs crossed at the ankle, his latest novel in his hand. John's attention isn't on his book. Rather, it is fixed on the flickering flames of the fire, lost, deep in thought. Using John's distraction as an excuse, Sherlock studies him. Long, golden eyelashes are highlighted in the warm light of the fire and the green and gold pigmentation that gives John's deep blue eyes their unusual hue are easier to see. Sherlock's eyes are often commented on, the shifting myriad colours and heterochromia equally attractive and off-putting for many but John's eyes are far more compelling. At a distance, they might easily be mistaken for brown but when he's angry or happy about something they are a deep, ocean blue; when the light shines on them just right they are the endless navy blue of the sky at dusk, never-ending and so easy to get lost in. John's skin reflects the orange glow of the fire, giving it the warm hues that it had when Sherlock first met him. John naturally has a warmth to his skin tone, strangely representative of the man himself. Sherlock's skin looks more like ice but he muses that they look good together; fire and ice, milk and honey, utterly complementary.

John's face is currently largely relaxed but a deep frown belies his apparent calm. Sherlock loves the size and shape of John's face, the way it had fitted into his palms so perfectly when he had finally been able to touch him as he'd longed to. He's long been fascinated with the way that John's jawline becomes firm and pronounced when he's angry or cross, the chin dimple deepening, his cheekbones becoming more defined. Sherlock's heart thuds with want and need at that particular expression and he has been guilty of angering John in the past just so he can see it. John's face is so eloquent, the lines on his face tell the story of his life and he's an irresistible read; Sherlock spends long hours just reading John but has never quite reached the heart of the story. John is the embodiment of not judging a book by its cover; at first sight (and second and indeed third), John appears to be a mild mannered professional man, happy in his slightly baggy jeans and comfortable jumpers. He is that, Sherlock knows but he is so much more, too. The soldier is still firmly apparent but he is equally comfortable in the line of danger or reading a (very dull) book. This man's story runs very much deeper than the cover or even the first few chapters. His is a story that Sherlock would willingly spend the rest of his life discovering.

It's his very want, his need, for this man that has made Sherlock hold back all day; scared to cross some invisible line and lose everything he never imagined he could have. He is fully aware he isn't considered a 'good catch'. He is socially and physically awkward, certainly not conventionally handsome and rarely polite. He has known since the start of their friendship that John is bisexual; he's seen him giving men second looks but also noticed that John never followed those looks up with dates. Sherlock knows that John has had semi-serious relationships with men but that it had been made clear at the outset that they were going to be for a set length of time. Sherlock never thought he stood a chance with John; just because John fancied men occasionally wasn't a guarantee that he would ever think of Sherlock that way. Sherlock acknowledges that their relationship does not mean a promise of commitment. John's track record is evidence of that.

"John?" Sherlock queries, his voice quiet. "How long will it last?"

John turns his attention away from the fire, eyebrows raised. "The fire? A good couple of hours yet I suspect. Why? Are you cold?" He twists in his chair to retrieve the blanket that rests there, preparing to cover Sherlock with it.

"No. Not the fire, us. How long will we last? Now that we are ......" Sherlock twirls one agitated hand in the air, his gaze fixed on the blanket on John's lap. "... Whatever it is that we are."

"I don't know, Sherlock." Sherlock can feel John's gaze as it flicks over him but refuses to look up, not wanting to see confirmation that this is only until something better, something easier, comes along. "But I hope ..... I want ..... it to last until the end of our days. I want to grow old with you, to see the silver weave through your hair and for the wrinkles to write the story of your life on your
skin. I want to help you find your reading glasses and do up your shoes and I want you to do the same for me. I want to argue with you and laugh with you for the rest of my life. I've always wanted that, I just thought that it would only ever be as friends. This change in our relationship is more than I could have ever wished for. Truly."

Sherlock finally looks up and meets John's gaze, barely believing what he has heard but the truth of it is clear in every line of John's body, in the steady way he meets Sherlock's eyes. A look passes between them, long and loaded with intent. The words of confirmation that Sherlock wants to say, but can't, written clearly on his skin. John licks his lips, swallowing hard and his fingers tighten on the blanket in his grasp. His eyes, already dark in the dim firelight, darken more and his pulse throbs visibly in his neck.

"John, I feel in need of a shower." Sherlock rubs one large hand over his chin and cheeks, the stubble bristly and rough against his fingertips, the electric razor that he had used in the hospital not giving him the close shave he prefers. "And a shave."

John looks confused at the sudden change in topic, valiantly trying to gather his muddled thoughts and reactions. "Er, of course. Get rid of the last lingering feel of the hospital, good idea." Sherlock can see the moment John takes refuge in his Doctor mode. "Don't have the water on too hot. Leave the door unlocked in case you need me. Let me change the dressing for a clean, dry one as soon as you are done." John shifts in his chair, uncomfortably aware of Sherlock's continued gaze.

"Thank you, Doctor." Sherlock lets his voice linger over the words. "But I had hoped you'd take a more personal approach." He stands and walks to the edge of John's chair, looming over the wide-eyed doctor.

"Personal approach?" John licks his lips before casting a long look over Sherlock's body, his eyes lingering on Sherlock's lips. John briefly sucks his lower lip into his mouth, before allowing it to slip slowly out, his teeth resting on the moist flesh.

"Yes." Sherlock is unable to keep the tremor out of his voice as his hands slide to the edges of his dressing gown. The look on John's face is pure, unadulterated lust and powerfully sexy; the mild mannered doctor pushed aside for the man of action. "I believe your constant vigilance and aid will be required." Sherlock pushes the dressing gown off, enjoying the sensation of silk sliding over his body. The material pools at his feet with a sensuous whisper that is echoed by their heavy breathing.

"Yeah." John's eyes are a glimmering ring of navy blue around dark pupils in the flickering firelight. "I can do that." His voice is gruff, almost gravelly and the sound of it causes the hairs on Sherlock's arms to rise. There's something primal to it, almost predatory and Sherlock has to fight back the urge to moan.

Sherlock has never been self-conscious about his body, appearing around the flat in anything from a full suit to a small towel when fresh from the shower. Whilst in the hospital, John had seen almost all of Sherlock, averting his eyes when necessary to give Sherlock privacy whilst being bathed or relieving himself. Now the reason for baring his skin, his body, is different and John is no longer the respectful bystander. He is actively involved, eyes devouring each inch of milky white skin that comes into view, his body responding, if the clenched fists in the blanket are anything to go by, to the overtly sexual nature of the situation.

Sherlock remains standing over John, his eyes never leaving John's face but Sherlock is aware of John's every reaction. With care, he removes his t-shirt, the healing wound on his chest necessitating the slow speed, the pain killers, being at the peak of their effectiveness, allowing the motion. He can hear the hitch in John's breath as his stomach then chest, come into view. His curls
bounce as the material passes over them, the feeling sensuous against Sherlock's scalp and he yearns for John's nimble fingers in his hair. Neither soothing nor pulling, but moving through his hair with determination, angling Sherlock's head into a kiss, a gentle tug to convey urgency.

With a deliberate tilt of his head, Sherlock drifts his hands down to his pyjama ties, glorying in the way John's focus switches from his neck to his hands, torn as to which area he wants to look at. Slowly, Sherlock loosens the ties, letting the knot unravel, an unnecessary but enjoyable tease. John's focus is now unswervingly fixed on Sherlock's hands, his lower lip sucked firmly into his mouth. His upper body unconsciously leaning towards Sherlock and his hands still tightly knotted in the blanket prevent him from reaching out. With a final tug, the drawstring unravels and Sherlock allows his pyjama bottoms to slide down his legs, closing his eyes briefly as the material strokes his skin. Meeting John's enamoured gaze, Sherlock hooks his thumbs into the top of his boxer shorts and starts to push them down, heat flooding his being when John's focus skitters down his body to the slowly revealed stretch of pale skin. Sherlock bends briefly to move the material over the burgeoning swell of his erection before letting the boxers drop to the floor, kicking them to one side. He stands proud before John, exulting in his obvious approval.

"Jesus Christ." John's words are breathless. "Perfect.......you're perfect." He reaches one, slightly shaking hand out towards Sherlock, the question in his eyes clear. 'Can I really touch?'

A brief nod and John's hand makes contact, not on the swelling jut of Sherlock's cock but on the taut muscles of Sherlock's stomach. John stands slowly, the blanket falling to the floor before being unceremoniously kicked away. John's other hand makes contact on soft skin and Sherlock gasps, the simple touch flooding his body with sensation. John smoothes his palms across Sherlock's stomach, watching his hands move, until he has a firm grip on Sherlock's sides, his hands curling over the curve of Sherlock's hip bones. Sherlock is becoming more breathless in-spite-of (or should that be because of? His addled brain supplies) John's anchoring touch. He raises his hands to grip John's shoulders, an empty attempt to ground himself. The coarse rub of John's shirt under his fingertips only serves to mark the differences in their attire but bizarrely Sherlock doesn't feel helpless or over-powered. He can feel the way John is trembling beneath his palms, hear the harsh puffs of breath as John tries to calm his racing emotions.

With an effort, Sherlock moves his hands to John's shirt buttons; usually nimble fingers now fumble over the small plastic discs and he huffs in frustration. The action blows a draught of moist air over John's neck and his grip on Sherlock tightens. Sherlock forces his fingers to co-operate, finally managing to completely undo John's shirt. He pushes it down John's arms, where it bunches at his bent elbows.

"John." The sound of his name seems to rouse John out of his avid contemplation of Sherlock's body and he releases Sherlock's hips to straighten his arms enough for Sherlock to remove the shirt. With the encumbrance gone, John returns his hands to Sherlock's body, this time letting them wander. Hips ...... to chest. .... to neck ..... to face, sliding back down to hips, only to start their journey again.

Long fingers trace over the curve of John's arms, arms so often covered that their reveal is akin to Sherlock's nakedness. John has never been prudish about his body but it was rare if Sherlock ever saw more than a brief flash of legs. Now, being able to touch skin, having the opportunity to bare more, causes Sherlock's already eager erection to firm up more. Sherlock only spares a moment to feel relieved that the morphine is finally out of his system and his body back to fully functioning order before tugging at the waist of John's t-shirt. He pulls it free of John's jeans, running an exploratory hand along the waistband, fingers dipping briefly beneath the denim, pulling a breathy moan from John.
Sherlock slides his hands up John's body, large palms splayed over John's heaving chest, the soft fabric of his t-shirt gathering in folds at Sherlock's wrists. John lets out an almost silent 'oh god' as Sherlock's fingertips brush over his hardening nipples. John removes his hands from Sherlock's body and raises his arms above his head. Silently imploring Sherlock to remove his t-shirt, a swift tug and the clothing is discarded. John lowers his arms, seemingly undecided on where to touch Sherlock now. The decision is made for him. Sherlock, deciding that he needs to feel John's chest against his own, wraps strong arms around him, pulling him close. The embrace could almost be considered chaste except for the long line of Sherlock's erection nudging insistently against John's pelvis, the tip just resting on the warm skin of John's abdomen. The kiss of skin against intimate skin pulls a moan from both men and Sherlock rocks his hips instinctively against John, rolling his hot face into the welcoming dip of John's neck. He realises now that he has dangerously underestimated the effect of the touch of John's skin against his body.

Sherlock had only meant to tease and entice John, to coerce him into the shower where he would have the opportunity to examine his body fully; but the moment he had let his dressing gown fall and heard the rough edge to John's voice, Sherlock had been lost. For once, he had allowed his body to act instinctively. His mind had been there too; neither silent nor overloaded but observing each little nuance of John's reactions, adding to and complementing his own.

Sherlock stands, wrapped in John's arms, lipping at his neck, the salty taste of John's skin heavy in his mouth when he flicks his tongue over the pulse point. John groans and sags in his arms, the simple touch seemingly hot-wired to his cock. He thrusts against Sherlock, the hard ridge of his arousal evident even through jeans. Sherlock moves one hand and grabs at the short hair at the back of John's head, long fingers tugging, urging John's face to meet his. The moment their lips finally touch is like nothing Sherlock has ever experienced before. He has kissed and been kissed, sometimes passionately, sometimes in anger, yet nothing compares to the experience of John pressing his lips against his. Their previous kisses have been good, verging on wonderful but this kiss eclipses them all. Passion simmers in every touch, arousal surges at every slide of tongue but more obvious and more overwhelming than all of that, is how much love Sherlock feels in each brush of John's skin against his own. John is breathing heavily, each breath expelled against Sherlock's cheek as their mouths continue their intimate dance. John's hands grasp Sherlock's face, tilting and guiding, urging the kiss deeper. Sherlock has one hand still firmly gripping John's head, matching him movement for movement, the other tugging at John's belt buckle, frantically trying to undo the wretched thing. Sherlock growls in aggravation, the sound causing John to deepen their kiss before dropping his hands to his belt. They stay joined at the lips and with deft movements, John undoes his belt and open his jeans, pushing both jeans and pants down to his thighs. Sherlock had hoped to be able to do that but the fact that John is so sure of what he wants, of what they both want, is stunningly arousing. They are beginning to sway where they stand, each kiss more desperate than the previous. Sherlock knows his legs aren't going to continue to support him for much longer but that lying down will hurt his wound. He breaks the kiss and after a quick look round, identifies a clear space of wall and he twists them towards it. John grunts in frustration where his legs are hobbled at the thighs, preventing him from moving as quickly as he'd like.

"Off. Take them off John." Sherlock demands, voice barely more than a gasp.

"Bossy." John smirks, as he obeys Sherlock's order.

The moment John's legs are free, Sherlock is back on him, lips on lips, bare skin sliding against bare skin. Sherlock grips John firmly by the biceps and moves him back to the wall, gentling the pressure on impact. He moves until he is pressed against John, as much of their naked bodies together as he can possibly get but the angle is all wrong, their height difference too much. Swiftly, Sherlock grabs two firm handfuls of John's upper thigh and backside, lifting him off the floor in one quick move. John moans against him, wrapping his legs around Sherlock's hips, securing
himself.

"Your wound!" John manages to gasp out, the doctor still apparent.

"Damn my wound!" Sherlock growls, thrusting his hips against John's.

Their cocks line up and the first full grind leaves Sherlock gasping and holding back a whine. His kisses become demanding and John meets every one in kind, arms wrapped tightly around Sherlock's shoulders, hands buried deep in wild curls. Sherlock grinds into John, their slide together is on the wrong side of comfortable but Sherlock can't stop now, each thrust a step closer to climax. John loosens one hand from Sherlock's hair, bringing the palm round to face Sherlock.

"Lick." He demands, body rucking up against the wall with each of Sherlock's thrusts.

Sherlock does as he is ordered, thoroughly wetting John's hand, flicking his agile tongue between John's fingers, drawing out eager moans. John thrusts the hand between them, first sliding his hand over himself and then wrapping his fingers around Sherlock. His thumb sweeps over the head of Sherlock's cock, spreading the pre-ejaculate. Sherlock's grip slips on John's arse and he lifts and shoves John more firmly against the wall, biting his lip at the effort, legs trembling under their combined weight. John pumps his fist over Sherlock's cock a few times, slicking his length with the combination of saliva and Sherlock's own emissions. Sherlock shakes under John's touch, each stroke driving him closer to climax. He meets each downward stroke with a thrust of his hips, head tilting back. His fingers are digging deep into the cheeks of John's backside and are likely to leave bruises but Sherlock can't loosen his grip. John alters his hold and Sherlock cries out, sensation flooding through him at the touch of John's cock against his, John's small, yet perfectly formed hand pressing them together.

"Oh..... Jesus Christ...... Look at us."

Sherlock follows John's gaze downwards. John is watching his hand as it works them both, his breath hitching at the sight. Sherlock does whine then, a high, strangled sound. The sight of him engulfed in John's hand, slick from their actions pushes him over the edge, his orgasm barrelling through him, suddenly bordering on painful. Spurts of semen shoot up between them, coating John's chest and hand. Sherlock's grip intensifies on John's arse and his head tips onto John's shoulder, breath coming in broken gasps as he watches John's hand fly over his own length, desperately working towards his own climax, using Sherlock's ejaculate to ease his strokes.

"Sherlock!"

John's cry is loud and deep, shouted to the room at large. Sherlock's fuzzy brain mutters something about it being a good thing the windows are shut, as he registers the hot splatter of John's release on his stomach and penis. He manages to hold them up for a moment longer before his legs give and they tumble to the ground, a sweaty, messy tumble of weak limbs and sated smiles. They lie there for long minutes, each capturing their breath but never ceasing touching. John drifts fingers tenderly through Sherlock's sweat-soaked curls before drifting down onto his chest. Sherlock covers John's hand with his own, slightly shaky one, pressing it softly against his chest, just to the side of the bandaging.

"I'm fine, John." With his other hand, Sherlock smooths John's hair back, causing it to stick up in wet spikes.

"I'm pretty sure that counted as athletic sex, a definite no-no." John somehow manages to show deep concern whilst simultaneously looking very smug. Sherlock is entranced at how many emotions can show at one time on this man's beloved face.
"Yes, well...." Sherlock mumbles, averting his eyes at John's raised eyebrow. "I had genuinely meant for us to shower ......I got distracted."

"And what distracted the great Sherlock Holmes from his mission?" Sherlock can hear the laughter curling into John's voice and it gives him the courage to meet John's warm gaze head on.

"You. I was distracted by you, John Hamish Watson.... " He grins, the smile wreathing his face in carefree lines and sitting crookedly on his face. "..... And I don't regret a damn second of it."
"Dick." John mutters affectionately, putting one finger on Sherlock's lips to stop him interrupting again. "There will be kisses. Lots and lots of kisses, hot ones, wet ones, chaste ones. Ones delivered in a rush and long, slow, luxurious kisses." John presses light kisses into the long column of Sherlock's neck, enjoying the difference of smooth skin and rough stubble against his lips. "There will also be more sex, more making love, more fucking. Whatever you want to call it. But ....." John brushes his finger over Sherlock's lower lip, eyes fixed on the movement. "It's going to have to be slower, more drawn out, perhaps there will even be times where you will just lie there and submit totally to my whims." His mouth quirks up at the side and he licks his lips, obviously savouring the image his mind has provided.

For long minutes, the two men lie in a rapidly cooling heap; the floor is cold and uncomfortable but neither man can summon the energy to care. The silence of the room is occasionally broken by the sound of a loving kiss or a happy sigh being breathed into the stillness surrounding them.

It is only when Sherlock shifts slightly and John catches the hastily stifled wince that any move is made to alter their current position. John unravels himself from where he is entwined with Sherlock and gently helps Sherlock rise to his feet.

"You ok?" John queries, his voice hushed and brow furrowed with concern.

"Yes, yes, I'm fine." Sherlock gripes, annoyed that their 'afterglow' had been disturbed by anything as mundane as pain. He glances at John just in time to see the hurt at his tone of voice reflected there. "I'm fine. It's just.... " He hesitates, licking his lips before continuing. "The pain killers are no longer at their peak and my body, in general, is beginning to realise that it's not as strong as it believed." He blushes and avoids meeting John's eye. "The, er ...." A flutter of his hand between them and the wall indicates where his thoughts lie. "Our. ...... Activities ...... Seem to have taken rather more out of me than I anticipated."

John grins and strokes Sherlock's cheek gently. "We will definitely have to do that again but not until you're back up to full strength, Sherlock. I should have put a stop it, been a responsible
"John!" Sherlock looks scandalised, eyes wide and lips parted. "I've wanted you like this for so long I don't know if I can go back to just sharing a chaste kiss with you - no matter what Doctor I'm being responsible so don't argue with me' Watson has to say on the subject."

"You misunderstand me, Sherlock." John placates, running his hand over the curve of Sherlock's bicep.

"What?" Sherlock interrupts. "No kisses either? John, I never took you to be a cruel man."

"If you'd just shut up for two minutes, Sherlock, I'll tell you precisely what I mean." John admonishes. Sherlock shuts his mouth with an audible click and tries his best to look affronted, the look is somewhat ruined by his nakedness and the rapidly drying semen on his stomach and cock. John grabs at the nearest item of clothing - which turns out to be his shirt - and carefully cleans the mess from Sherlock's chest before delicately lifting Sherlock's flaccid penis away from where it nestles and wiping the worst of the ejaculate from it and Sherlock's pubic hair.

"Christ, you really are gorgeous." John whispers as he stretches up to steal a kiss from a shocked Sherlock.

"You're supposed to be explaining something to me, John. Come on, wow me." Sherlock uses his sarcasm to hide his reaction to John calling him beautiful and handling him with such obvious affection. John had been free with his praise earlier but sex had been imminent and Sherlock knows people will say anything if it seems likely to get them an orgasm in the end.

"Dick." John mutters affectionately, putting one finger on Sherlock's lips to stop him interrupting again. "There will be kisses. Lots and lots of kisses, hot ones, wet ones, chaste ones. Ones delivered in a rush and long, slow, luxurious kisses." John presses light kisses into the long column of Sherlock's neck, enjoying the difference of smooth skin and rough stubble against his lips. "There will also be more sex, more making love, more fucking. Whatever you want to call it. But ....." John brushes his finger over Sherlock's lower lip, eyes fixed on the movement. "It's going to have to be slower, more drawn out, perhaps there will even be times where you will just lie there and submit totally to my whims." His mouth quirks up at the side and he licks his lips, obviously savouring the image his mind has provided.

"I think I can concede to that." Sherlock realises he would sound more magnanimous if his voice was not quivering and his pulse had not just kicked up several notches.

"Well, that's very considerate of you." John teases, allowing his smile to bloom fully. "But for now, we need to go slower, savour each moment. We'll start with you having that shower you wanted and then curling up in bed and yes, Sherlock Holmes, you will sleep."

"I ...." Sherlock hesitates before linking his arms loosely around John's waist. "I don't want to shower alone. Would you, perhaps, care to share with me?"

"Yeah, I can do that." John breathes his agreement against Sherlock's chest as he pulls him into an embrace, heedless of the ejaculate on his body now smearing back onto Sherlock.

They walk the short distance to the bathroom, arms loosely around each other's waists, enjoying the pleasure such simple contact brings. Sherlock keeps glancing over at John, still almost unwilling to believe that it's all absolutely real. That John has left Mary, that Mycroft is having papers drawn up that will nullify the marriage, that John has returned home and that John seems to want, maybe even love, him as much as he does John. If it weren't for the slight itch of their combined semen
drying on his skin and the ache in his legs, Sherlock is certain he would be able to write off the earliest events as a particularly realistic fantasy.

He flinches at the loss of John's body heat when John moves away to start the shower running but is soon filled with a soft warmth as he watches John go about the commonplace tasks of preparing the shower. Sherlock watches the way John's muscles expand and contract as he stretches a hand under the water, adding more hot to the mix, the added stretch over to the taps elongating John's back muscles and showing their unexpected strength. Sherlock uses the time to study John; naked John is much slimmer than his bulky clothes would suggest, there's a slight softening of flesh over John's hips that Sherlock suspects leads onto John's stomach, a left-over from pre-army days when John was just slightly on the plump side. Sherlock suspects that no matter how hard John had trained or worked out that stubborn little area would just not go, he feels an irrational surge of love towards these rounded parts of John's body. Just like John himself these parts had remained true to their original form, stubbornly holding on, not changing for change's sake and Sherlock has to fight back the sudden need to reach out and run his fingers over them, to feel the smooth skin and soft give of flesh under his sensitive fingertips.

Sherlock's gaze travels up John's body to the gunshot wound on his shoulder, it's long-healed now but the damage to flesh is still vividly apparent. Silver scar tissue spirals out from a central scar, evidence of infection taking a hold before treatment was received. Sherlock knows very little about how John came by his wound. He has been able to deduce a little over the years from the way that John held his body and reacted to external stimuli and recently John had told him some of the bare circumstances. Seeing him naked provides Sherlock with the perfect opportunity to discover more, but he understands people are more than the sum of their scars. He is a perfect example after all and doesn't want John to feel that is all he is to Sherlock; another person to read; another case to be solved.

John glances over his shoulder at Sherlock, his hand still outstretched under the spray of the shower. He quirks a grin even as his cheeks flush with colour under Sherlock's gaze. Sherlock's stomach flips; something he knows to be scientifically impossible but really couldn't care less about explaining now - not with an extremely naked and smiling John in front of him - and he reaches out until his hand is resting on the curve of John's shoulder. He decides that his hand look ridiculously large and spindly and moves to retract it, suddenly conscious of his lanky gawkiness next to John's compact strength and easy good looks. He doesn't get far though before John's small hand rests over his, stilling his movement. John pulls slightly, encouraging Sherlock to move closer. He keeps pulling until Sherlock is standing so close that his flaccid penis rests against the strong curve of John's backside. He breathes out a sigh at the contact, ruffling the hair around John's ear, causing John to pull his arm further forward, linking their fingers. Sherlock slides his other arm around John's waist and closes his eyes, cutting out the sense of sight and allowing himself to just feel. He can feel the warmth that John puts out, can feel as it works its way through his skin and seems to make a home in his very bones. He can feel the slight roughness of the hair on John's legs where it comes into contact with his own, the way it tickles as they sway slightly on each breath. And he can feel the way John's skin breaks into goosebumps when he leans forward and nuzzles light kisses onto the nape of John's neck.

"Mmmm, that's so nice." John sighs, tipping his head forward in silent encouragement for Sherlock to continue with his ministrations. Sherlock brushes his lips over the soft skin and rests their linked hands over John's heart, he can feel the steady thump, thump through their joined hands. Slowly, Sherlock opens his eyes and turns John to face him, their hands now fitting snugly between their chests, his other hand resting on the curve of John's buttocks. Sherlock leans down and kisses John. The kiss is nothing more than a brush of lips against lips at first but then John parts his lips and grips more firmly at Sherlock's hand, his other hand sliding into the long hair at Sherlock's nape, guiding Sherlock's head down to deepen their embrace. As they kiss, the bathroom fills with steam
from the shower and when they open their eyes again the room appears almost otherworldly and extremely private. This sense of privacy and the way that John is holding his hand so tightly against his heart finally gives Sherlock the bravery to say something that he has meant to say for so long. He rests his forehead against John's and breathes deeply of the scent of him.

"John. I love you. I think I always have. I meant to tell you, always, but the time never seemed right. I was going to be selfish and play it off as being the love of one friend for another..... " Sherlock draws another breath of the calming scent of John. "And you are that, the very best of men and it's an honour to call you my friend." He moves so that his forehead is no longer touching John's and meets John's eyes steadily. "I, William Sherlock Scott Holmes, love you, John Hamish Watson, with all of my heart, brain and body and will continue to do so until my dying day. If, against all scientific reason, there is some kind of afterlife I will love you in that as well."

John huffs out a small laugh at the typically Sherlockian sentiment tacked onto the most beautiful words John has ever heard. If his laugh sounds a bit forced and wet, neither man mentions it. Sherlock is tugged down into a forceful kiss. He goes willingly and returns every bit of passion John imparts with his kiss equally, pulling him closer with the arm wrapped around John's waist. John eventually pulls away, panting and leans his head against their joined hands that now rest over Sherlock's pounding heart. His other hand is flexing over Sherlock's hip, tensing and releasing in counterpoint to their heartbeats. Finally, John slides his hand up Sherlock's long torso and lets it rest on Sherlock's nape. John tilts Sherlock's head down so that they are once again eye to eye.

"That sounds an awful lot like a wedding vow to me, Sherlock." He licks his lips, his mouth dry despite all the moisture in the air.

"And that's what it can be, if you wish it, John. It's the vow I should have given at your wedding. You have always had my heart, you will always have my heart. I trust you to take care of it." Sherlock's face is open and utterly sincere.

"Jesus, Sherlock." John smiles, a genuine smile that seems to light up their steamy little room. "William Sherlock Scott Holmes, I love you with all that I am and all that I will be. I will love you when we are nothing more than energy and dust. I will love you through all my life and into death. This is my vow. This is the vow of John Hamish Watson."

For long minutes, they remain locked in each other's embrace. Light kisses are shared, tears of joy are silently wiped away and skin is smoothed. It is only at the sudden gurgle from the drain that they appear to remember where they are and what their original purpose was. They part to allow John to check the water temperature again and breathe a brief thanks for the unlimited supply of hot water in their flat before John helps Sherlock under the stream of water. In silence, John washes Sherlock's hair, running his short, strong fingers through the gently waving tendrils, carefully ensuring the shampoo and conditioner stays away from Sherlock's eyes. With quiet thoroughness, John washes Sherlock, rinsing his skin clean of their earlier encounter and sensitising Sherlock's skin to his touch. Sherlock reaches to return the favour and wash John's hair but the movement aggravates his wound and he sucks in a harsh breath. John winces in sympathy and quickly and efficiently cleans himself before getting out and grabbing one of the big, white, fluffy towels Mrs Hudson had obviously placed there. No chemical stains mar its threads, no burns blemish its colour. Gently, he encourages Sherlock out of the shower and dries him. His touch is reverent and Sherlock sways into it, locking each touch and caress away for later investigation. John finally wraps Sherlock in the deep burgundy dressing gown that was hanging against the door before encouraging Sherlock to sit on the closed toilet. Swiftly, John towels himself dry and wraps the material around his waist. With quick efficiency, he collects his medical kit from under the sink and looks around the room, assessing the space and lingering moisture in the air.
"I think we'd be better doing this in your bedroom or the kitchen, it's so damp in here I doubt the adhesive will stick." John's voice sounds loud after such an extended silence but Sherlock delights in hearing its warm tones. He had spent too many years with only the memory of John's voice to hush John now.

Together they pass into Sherlock's (their) room and Sherlock seats himself on the edge of the bed, parting his knees slightly to allow John to stand there if he wishes to. John stands to the side of Sherlock and organises the stuff that he will need, new adhesive strips, new sterile pad, antibiotic cream, if needed and surgical gloves. Sherlock eyes the gloves with distaste.

"The outside of the wound is healed over, John. The bandage is more to provide padding whilst the inner layers heal than to prevent germs from entering. Must you wear the gloves?"

"I should really, Sherlock, you know the guidelines on wound care as well as I do." John holds up a hand to silence any protest and moves to stand between Sherlock's legs. "How about this for a compromise? I get some blood work done on me, make sure I'm clean and then we leave the gloves off? I'm sure between us we have a connection somewhere that can expedite the results. " He quickly pulls on the gloves and removes the sodden dressing from over Sherlock's wound. Sherlock tries to remain aloof but the sight of John in nothing but a white, fluffy towel, cream surgical gloves and a frown of concentration soon breaks through his facade. John raises a questioning eyebrow before registering what Sherlock is looking at, a quick sweep of his attire is all it requires before John's light giggle is blending with Sherlock's deeper laugh. "Yeah, yeah, I know. I'm Doctor Sexy."

"Lose the towel and the gloves and I agree with you." In one swift move, Sherlock whips John's towel away from him; John doesn't even flinch, merely stands there in his naked glory - complete with surgical gloves. Sherlock frowns as John palpates the wound area before quickly and efficiently applying clean dressing. With a flourish, he straightens and peels off the gloves and he plants a loud, smacking kiss on Sherlock's forehead before gathering up all of his medical equipment and sauntering into the bathroom. Sherlock is sure that John is putting an extra sway into his stride but is too absorbed by the sight of John's naked backside to think too deeply on the topic.

Sherlock hears the taps run as John washes his hands and the cupboard doors opening and closing as John puts away the first aid kit. He is initially confused when John doesn't return straight away before hearing the tap turn on in the kitchen. A few seconds later he hears the kettle begin to boil and the sound of mugs being put on the counter-top. The sounds are domestic and Sherlock suddenly realises how very quiet the flat had become during John's absence. He gingerly removes his dressing gown, the pain killers now in need of topping up, and slides under the duvet and into bed. The material is cool and soft against his skin and a wave of tiredness washes over him. He listens to the sound of John pottering about in the kitchen, catching brief snippets of humming and allows his eyes to drift closed.

"Sherlock? You need to take your pain killers, then you can sleep again." John's voice is soft, the care apparent in it. John's hand is on Sherlock's forehead, slowly sweeping his hair out of his eyes. Sherlock vaguely registers how soft John's skin is before the hand is moved away. He moans in sleepy protest but allows John to help him sit up enough to sip at a glass of water and take his pain killers. "They should get you through the majority of the night. I've set an alarm to wake us so that you can take the next lot before the pain becomes too much." He eases Sherlock back onto the mattress. "Do you want some tea? It's a bit cold now but I can make a fresh one if you want."

Sherlock manages to shake his head and pat the bed, wordlessly signalling that John should stop
fussing now and just come to bed. John laughs lightly before sliding into bed next to Sherlock. His bare skin is cold against Sherlock's and Sherlock instinctively jerks away. "Sorry, I got a bit chilled wandering about. Here, I'll just move away until I warm up a bit." His wriggling is halted when Sherlock throws out an arm and lets it settle heavily over John's chest, moments later a long leg is resting over John's thighs and John's chin is being tickled by a head full of wild, slightly damp, curls. "Or I could just stay here." John smiles into Sherlock's hair and brings up his arms to wrap around Sherlock.

Sherlock hums happily, turning his head slightly to press a kiss against John's chest. "What a good idea John. I'm amazed I didn't think of it." The sarcasm is heavy in Sherlock's sleepy voice but there is no malice there, just a gentle teasing.

"Cheeky bastard," John mumbles affectionately, wrapping his arms more firmly around Sherlock. "Get some sleep now, yeah? I'm going to enjoy this cuddly you whilst I can."

"Don't be an idiot, John." Sherlock's words are coming more slowly as sleep fights to win his body. "I always want to hold you, just I never could before."

"Oh." John never thought that Sherlock would admit to being a cuddler.

"Yes, 'oh'. Now, stop thinking so loudly, some of us have some healing to do." The words lose their edge because of the slurring imminent sleep brings on but they still bring a smile to John's lips. A Sherlock in love is still very much his Sherlock, all quick words and sharp edges but now there is also the added benefit of sentiment, affection and cuddles. As John's eyes slide closed, he realises the only real difference now is the cuddles. The sentiment and affection have always been there.
In The Still Of The Night

Chapter Summary

Sherlock wakes in the middle of the night. The light of the full moon illuminates his room and the quietly slumbering form of his lover. Lover. Sherlock is still stunned at how rapidly things had progressed last night. He'd meant only to tease John, to explore his body whilst they showered, perhaps to bring John to climax whilst watching every nuance of that beloved, expressive face. Instead his hormones and instincts had taken over and, surprisingly, he'd relished every second of it. His barriers had come down with a resounding crash and Sherlock had been brought to what, if he had been a more pious man, could have been the very edge of heaven at John's hands, hands that were surprisingly soft and nimble, hands that represented both strength and tenderness; that delivered lethal force and loving delicacy with equal skill.

Chapter Notes

Hello once again!

Another instalment now awaits, I hope you enjoy it. I would say we have definitely passed the halfway point for the story.

Thanks go once again to Lockedinjohnlock for her awesome beta skills and support, especially at a time when I know she is so busy herself. Huge thanks also go to Iwassoaloney for telling me I could do it when I kept complaining about how hard I was finding this chapter!

Sherlock wakes in the middle of the night. The light of the full moon illuminates his room and the quietly slumbering form of his lover. Lover. Sherlock is still stunned at how rapidly things had progressed last night. He'd meant only to tease John, to explore his body whilst they showered, perhaps to bring John to climax whilst watching every nuance of that beloved, expressive face. Instead his hormones and instincts had taken over and, surprisingly, he'd relished every second of it. His barriers had come down with a resounding crash and Sherlock had been brought to what, if he had been a more pious man, could have been the very edge of heaven at John's hands, hands that were surprisingly soft and nimble, hands that represented both strength and tenderness; that delivered lethal force and loving delicacy with equal skill.

Sherlock studies John as he sleeps; the moonlight both etches and smoothes the lines on his face, bringing different features to the fore. The rounded nose and usually furrowed brow are highlighted in the stark gleam, whilst the signs of tiredness and stress under John's eyes are hidden in shadow. His lips are slightly parted and his breath deep and even. John sleeps the sleep of the untroubled for a change and Sherlock's heart aches at the thought that when John wakes he will shoulder their troubles once more. His gaze passes down to John's bare chest, his scar is highlighted but the recesses of his clavicles and suprasternal notch are deepened, emphasising the strength that John carries even in slumber. A few of the sparse hairs on John's chest reflect the moonlight; they appear silver like many of the hairs on John's head but Sherlock knows the hair
here is still a deep honey-blonde.

For a moment, he allows himself to imagine what it will be like to be lying in bed next to this man twenty years from now. John's hair will be completely silver but still thick and luxurious, prone to waywardness when overly long. His reading glasses will rest on top of his paperback on their bedside table, little indents from their frames showing on the sides of John's nose. John's chest hair will truly be the silver it is pretending to be now and his skin will be criss-crossed with the signs of ageing. His chin may well be more rounded and less firm but no less able to take on a stubborn slant. The idea of still being with John in twenty years, thirty years - more, if possible - fills Sherlock with an equal mix of fear and contentment. Fear because he knows that losing John will be the hardest thing he will ever have to do and at some point he will lose him, either through his own death or by John's. Contentment because he finally has everything he never knew, or more truthfully - never admitted - he needed.

His gaze wanders over John's arm, observing how, even at rest, there is grace and strength in John's musculature. Sherlock shifts position so that he can take hold of John's relaxed hand. Carefully, he turns it over so that he can observe the palm. Small scars mar the surface but add to the character of the man. John's fingers are short but proportional to the rest of him. There are no womanly or childlike features to John. The glint of metal shines bright on John's finger, the cold metal of his wedding ring a harsh reminder to Sherlock that John is not yet truly free. Sherlock trails one long finger over John's palm and the action soothes the gathering tension from him, Sherlock registers once again how soft John's skin is. Slowly he lifts John's hand to his face and inhales deeply. The scent is redolent of the tones of Royal Jelly and Bergamot. It tells the story of John's routine before retiring to bed. Royal Jelly from the hand cream that John uses diligently to keep his hands in top condition and to counteract the harsh drying effects of the alcohol wash he uses between patients at the surgery and when encountering any of Sherlock's experiments. Habit means that he keeps using the hand cream at night. The bergamot is from the tea he made before bed, the steam seeping from the cup, tainting the pores of his skin. To Sherlock these scents mean home and conjure up visions of bees buzzing lazily in the setting sun as two old - occasionally cantankerous - men sip their evening tea and talk about cases, past and present.

Sherlock is so lost in the scent of John that he doesn't immediately notice when John starts to stir, the sound of a sleepy chuckle breaking through his musings.

"That tickles." John's voice is still thick with sleep but Sherlock can detect no unhappiness from John at his early awakening. "Come back up here and tell me what you were deducing."

Sherlock wriggles back up the bed, coming to a halt with his head resting on the same pillow as John's. Both men fidget a little until they are on their sides facing each other. John strokes Sherlock's cheek, smiling when Sherlock leans in to his touch.

"I love your hands, John. They are small... "

"Oi! Nothing wrong with my hand size," John interrupts good-naturedly, placing his hand around the side of Sherlock's neck, his fingers playing with the long hair at Sherlock's nape.

"Allow me to finish, John. They are small, but perfectly formed. Able to wield a gun or scalpel with equal skill. And, it seems.... " In the dim light Sherlock knows John will be unable to see the flush that covers his skin but will be able to detect the heat of it through his palm and fingertips. ...."it seems, they are able to work me with great skill too." 

Sherlock closes his eyes in pleasure when the grip on his neck tightens, briefly. It seems he's not the only one who is affected by the recollection of last night's activities. Sherlock clears his throat before continuing, his words hushed and husky.
"I've always been enamoured with your hands, John. But the touch of them against my skin last night was more than I ever thought, ever imagined, it could be. The way your fingertips slid over my length, the way they felt sliding against my skin, the way they tasted when I licked them. God, John. The touch of your penis against mine was magnificent but the touch of your hand on me, bringing me to orgasm, was sublime. I know that we agreed to take things more slowly but the thought of your hands on my skin, of your fingers inside me, is enough to make my body react and my mind rebel against rules." To illustrate his words, Sherlock nudges his half-hard cock against John, gasping in surprise when he feels that John's body is in a similar state.

"You're surprised that I'm hard, Sherlock? I was aroused when I woke to find you smelling my hand! Your, I don't know, sheer proximity, I suppose, is enough to get my heart racing - always has been. But to hear you speak about how my touch makes you feel?" John takes a deep breath, preparing himself for the words yet to come. "God, Sherlock. I want to run my hands all over you. I want to feel you come whilst my fingers are inside you and I will, I promise I will, but for now I need you to touch me. You're not the only one enamoured with their lover's hands around here."

Sherlock flushes at hearing John call him his lover. "I've watched you play your violin, pick at evidence and carefully mix chemicals. I've seen you touch your fingers to your lips on countless occasions, never knowing whether I was more jealous of your fingers or your lips. Just the simple act of you running your hands over my chest and arms last night was amazing but the way you held my backside in your palms as you rocked into me was, well, simply mind blowing." Sherlock bites back a moan when he sees the wet tip of John's tongue peek out to moisten his lips. "But now, I need to feel your hands on me, on my cock, on my balls, teasing me, stroking me........ making me come."

"Yes, god yes."

Sherlock’s hips are moving of their own volition, gently rocking his penis into the answering hardness of John's. John moves away slightly, causing Sherlock to whine at the loss of friction. The whine quickly turns into a gasp when John guides Sherlock's hand down under the covers to his cock. It feels hot and solid in Sherlock's palm and under John's guidance he tenderly wraps his fingers around it. It takes up more room in his hand than he had originally suspected, proving once again that John Watson is ever the surprise. In theory, Sherlock knows what to do now. He has brought himself to climax on many occasions using a wide range of techniques, watched as others have performed it in, admittedly second rate, online pornography. Now though, with John's penis held almost reverently in his hand, his mind has gone blank. Sensing Sherlock's momentary loss of clarity John closes his hand over Sherlock's and guides Sherlock's hand along his length. Sherlock tightens his hold at the touch of John's breath against his cheek, an almost imperceptible moan hidden in its depths. Tentatively he sweeps his thumb over the head of John's cock, thrilling at the strangely familiar sensation. John's hand is still over his as he slowly explores John's length, letting his fist move down to the very root of John. A slight twist of his wrist and Sherlock is able to use his long fingers to explore the soft roundness of John's testicles; he groans deeply as he cups them in his hand, feeling their weight and heat. John's hand is slack over his, his breath now coming in hot pants against Sherlock's skin.

In the grand scheme of things, Sherlock knows he is doing nothing to John that he hasn't experienced at other hands a hundred times before but the fact that John is falling so completely apart at his touch is just the boost that Sherlock's confidence needs. Instinctively, he knows that John has never reacted like this with any other lover; that this is only for him. Once again, he wraps his hand around John's length, feeling his own penis give a sympathetic twitch at the touch. John seems so sensitive and each gasp, moan, throb and thrust gives Sherlock ample direction on how to touch John to provide him with the maximum of pleasure. Long, languid sweeps have John whimpering and kicking his hips forwards. Teasing, rapid strokes over the head have John cursing and his cock pulsing, beads of pre-ejaculate smoothing Sherlock's strokes. Firm pumps of his hand,
whilst his other hand plays with John's testicles, is enough to have John practically howling in pleasure and pulling at Sherlock's hair, a feedback loop that is surprisingly unexpected and wholly welcome. Before long, Sherlock's exploration of John devolves into a sweating, squirming bundle of limbs, John thrusting into Sherlock's fist, whining at each stroke of clever fingers over his frenulum. Sherlock ruts against whatever part of John he can reach, gasping his responses into the top of John's hair. John's head is bowed, watching every move that Sherlock makes, gasps and guttural moans punctuated with 'Oh God!' and 'Yes, just like that...'. The word 'fuck' seemingly coming almost as often as John's breath. Sherlock picks up the pace of his strokes when he feels John thicken in his hand, his breath more frantic. John thrusts his hips and covers Sherlock's hand with his own, encouraging Sherlock to move faster, hold tighter. Sherlock's arm aches at this new angle but nothing in the world could make him stop now. John is coming apart at his touch, in his bed; each grunt and groan is making Sherlock's own climax spiral ever closer. With a heartfelt shout, John comes and ejaculate spurts over Sherlock's hand and wrist, some hitting his stomach. The wet heat against his skin is enough to send him tumbling over into the deep abyss of his own climax. White light sparks behind his eyelids and his teeth are sharp in his lip as he bites back his yell, not wanting to drown out the sounds of John's pleasure that still ring in his ears.

After what seems like hours, Sherlock finally opens his eyes. John lies, relaxed, beside him and somehow they are both still on their sides, faces level with each other. He takes in John's sweaty, flushed face and the way he seems so satiated and smiles. It's a smile that comes from the heart and the soul and he is relieved beyond words when he sees the same emotions reflected in John's eyes and smile. John raises one, slightly shaky hand and smooths back the sweaty tendrils of Sherlock's fringe. Sherlock sighs and leans into the touch. It is only when he goes to return the loving touch that he realises that both of his hands are still rather intimately touching John. His left hand is cradling John's scrotum whilst his right hand is loosely holding John's softening cock. His hand is covered in rapidly cooling semen and rather than being disgusted with the sensation, Sherlock finds he enjoys it. Realising that John is probably now over sensitised, he goes to move his hands away, surprised when he feels John's gentle touch encouraging him not to move.

"Mmmm." John hums contentedly. "That feels nice. Intimate." John closes the space between them, heedless of the pool of ejaculate between them. Tilting his head, John presses his lips against Sherlock's. They feel dry after all his panting but warm and welcoming. Soon, Sherlock gets lost in the kiss, the sensation somehow soothing and comforting. John eventually slows the action, delivering small, soft kisses against Sherlock's full lips before eventually stopping. They lie, forehead resting against forehead, for long minutes as their pulses return to normal and the sweat on their bodies turns cold.

"I'll just nip and get something to clean us up a bit and then we'll catch up on some more sleep." John's voice exudes contentment and relaxation; just the sound of it makes Sherlock want to curl up on John's chest and sleep. Reluctantly, he opens his hands and allows John to slide from his grip. John's semen feels cold and slimy in his hand, utterly perfect. Sherlock resists the temptation to bring his fingers to his mouth and taste it, knowing John will be annoyed that he hadn't waited for him to be tested first. Instead, he brings his hand level with his eyes and watches the way it moves over his skin. He imagines that the essence of John is somehow being absorbed into his pores and the idea makes him sigh in contentment.

He's so lost in his observation of John's ejaculate that he doesn't hear John re-enter the room and jolts at the touch of a warm, wet cloth against the skin of his stomach.

"Sorry, didn't mean to shock you." John wipes gently over Sherlock's stomach before carefully cleaning Sherlock's penis. He alters his hold on the flannel, guiding Sherlock's hand into its folds. Slowly, he draws the cloth over each long finger, cleaning away the majority of ejaculate. Sherlock had thought he would lament the loss but the way that John is moving the flannel over his skin
soon causes him to forget his worry. The warm cotton is wrapping around each digit, dipping into the webbing between his fingers before slowly sweeping across his palm in a way that makes Sherlock feel.... he struggles momentarily for the appropriate word...... cherished. He feels cherished beyond all measure. The level of love and care that John is bestowing upon him makes his eyes prickle and his nose tingle, an almost forgotten indicator of tears. John's loving smile falters when he sees the watery sheen to Sherlock's eyes. He throws the flannel into the corner of the room and lies on the bed, carefully manoeuvring Sherlock into his arms and away from the wet patch.

"What's the matter, love? Are you in pain? I can't give you any more painkillers, yet." He rocks Sherlock in his arms and presses kisses into the soft hair beneath his lips. Sherlock relaxes into the embrace but he can't stop the tears from coming. Years of longing and not being able to have, break through. Images of every time he should have said something but never did through fear of losing John. The heartache of standing beside John as he married someone else. And finally, the fear he had felt when he thought he was dying and leaving John alone, alone and in danger and never aware of how much Sherlock loved him. It all comes crashing through. He hides his face in John's neck and allows, if only for a short time, the fear, the loss and the pain to wash out of him. John continues to rock him, whispering nonsensical words and rubbing the nape of his neck. Eventually, the tears cease but Sherlock still remains curled into John. John's shoulder and pillow are now soaked with salty tears but neither man makes any move to alter their positions.

"Feel better now, my love?" John whispers, nuzzling the gently curling hair behind Sherlock's ear. Sherlock nods, thankful that John instinctively knows what had just happened. John's arms tighten ever so slightly and Sherlock shifts until he is more comfortable then lies still, listening to the easy rhythm of John's breathing. The comfortable silence between them stretches on and gradually, Sherlock becomes aware that he is drifting back off into much needed sleep. His gunshot wound still aches but the wounds to his soul no longer throb, his tears cathartic.

***************

They wake only once more before the coming of the day. The shrill alert from John's alarm jolts them both awake. Sherlock winces at the pain in his chest and fights against the instinctive action to curl in on himself. John slides from the warm embrace of bed, careful not to jostle Sherlock as he moves and walks into the kitchen. Sherlock is not so lost in his pain that he can't appreciate the way the light seeping in through his window accentuates the firm curve of John's backside or the assured way in which John moves. Closing his eyes, Sherlock listens to the clunk of a cupboard door as a glass is removed, the hiss of water through the pipes before the sloshing of a glass being filled overrides them. He can hear John's bare feet as they patter over the kitchen floor, followed by the crinkle of his pain medication packet. He imagines he can hear John's soft exhale as he exerts the necessary pressure needed to expel them from their blister pack. He concentrates on the sound of John walking back into the bedroom and carefully moves himself into a semi-sitting position, breathing heavily through the process. There's the sound of a glass being put down on the bedside table and then the sensation of a warm hand cradling his neck. Two tablets are pressed into his palm and he takes them without complaint, sipping at the cool water in the now proffered glass. The tablets go down easily and he nods in satisfaction before allowing John to position him more comfortably in bed. He can hear as John retraces his steps into the kitchen, the glass being rinsed and placed on the draining board before the gentle patter of bare feet signals John's return to their bedroom. There's a brief moment of cool air brushing his body as John lifts the sheets to get back into bed, then the comforting warmth of John beside him. A few seconds of gentle shuffling is all that is needed before Sherlock is once again ensconced in John's arms. The pain in his chest seems somehow less, he knows it's John's proximity and not the pain killers at work and Sherlock nuzzles into John's chest. John's breath is already deep and even, indicative of sleep, Sherlock smiles as
exhaustion catches up with him, wondering whether John had actually woken up at all during his doctorly duties.
Home Truths

Chapter Summary

"Well, as revealing as this visit has been so far, it is not the reason why Gregory and I came here. Some new evidence about Ms Morstan's background has come to light." Mycroft signals Lestrade and who hands Sherlock a copy of an official looking document. John sits on the arm of Sherlock's chair, leaning over, slightly so that he can see what is written on the page.

"Michael John Arthur Allen?" He reads. "Allen? That's her real surname isn't it?" He glances around at the faces of the men in the room. "Is it her father or something? I thought he was dead. An uncle perhaps?"

"Read on, John." Sherlock, always the quicker reader, has already absorbed all of the information displayed on the page.

Chapter Notes

This chapter really gets into my imagined background for Mary, be aware I have amplified her badness just for the purpose of the story. That's the joy of writing, isn't it? We get to make the characters dance to our tune.
I've tried to tag appropriately but I'm new to the darker stuff so please let me know if I've missed something. As ever, thanks for reading and I hope you enjoy it!

Deepest thanks, of course, to my wonderful beta, Lockedinjohnlock!

John wakes to the sound of clattering in the kitchen. His first instinct is to leap from bed but the warm and relaxed presence of an injured Sherlock on his chest tempers his reaction. Slowly and with great care, John extracts himself from Sherlock's embrace and slips out of bed. He walks on silent feet until he is pressed up against the bedroom door. The clattering continues but it is obvious now that the person is trying their best to make their presence known, rather than wishing to surprise the residents of the flat, but also not to wake them if they are still sleeping. John relaxes a little when he realises who it is most likely to be, the subtle scent of flowery perfume drifts under the bedroom door accompanied by the soft slip-slop of slippered feet. Mrs Hudson. Unexpectedly, the footsteps head into the living room, not the bedroom as John had originally supposed. Hushed voices momentarily confuse him and he slips into his abandoned clothes, pondering over who could be in their living room. As he opens the bedroom door, the voices become clearer, no longer muted by the wood. He shakes his head, realising he must still be groggy from sleep. There are not that many people who come to visit the flat, even fewer now that Sherlock isn't taking cases and, considering the current circumstances and the fact that there are two male voices to be heard, the only solution is blindingly obvious; Mycroft and Lestrade. John allows himself a moment to be thankful that he had cleared away the evidence of his and Sherlock's frantic coupling and that Sherlock is still asleep and oblivious of John's mistake, before walking through the flat and entering the living room.
Greg and Mycroft are sitting on the sofa whilst Mrs Hudson serves them tea, fluttering about in her motherly way.

"Morning." John's greeting appears to catch Mrs Hudson by surprise and she flushes a little before bustling off to get another cup.

"I think you'll find 'Afternoon' is a more appropriate greeting, mate." Greg's grin is wide and cheeky, the implication of his words not needing the sardonic addition of Mycroft's raised eyebrows.

"Bugger, really?" John fumbles around for his phone before realising he's left it in the bedroom. He ineffectually continues to pat at his pockets before asking what the time actually is.

"It is presently three minutes past one in the afternoon. I take it my brother is still fast asleep after yesterday's exertions?" Mycroft's words are dry and there's no sign on his features that he is implying anything more than the exhaustion caused by Sherlock's journey home but John still flushes, licking his lips when Greg's grin grows, quickly joined by Mycroft's smirk.

"Er, yes." John wets his lips again and stands taller, determined not to let Greg and Mycroft make him squirm like a teenager being caught with their hands down someone else's underwear.

John fights not to let his jaw drop in shock when Greg leans over and squeezes Mycroft's lower thigh, letting his hand linger. John knew that there was interest on Mycroft's side but it is only now that John realises that Greg returns said interest. Mycroft flushes at Greg's touch but does not remove his hand, merely patting it before clasping his hands together once again in his own lap, looking very much like the cat that got the cream. A pampered ginger Tom!

Mrs Hudson places a mug of tea by John's chair, encouraging his move to sit down. She hovers for a moment longer before disappearing back downstairs, her cheeks still a light rose-pink but a gentle smile lights her features.

"It took us a while to rouse Mrs Hudson today." Greg explains between sips of his tea. "In the end, Mycroft let himself in. I went to check on her, make sure that nothing unsavoury had happened to the old dear. Couldn't get her to answer her door either, although we'd had no intelligence to say she had left the building."

"Once again, my spare set of keys were utilised." Mycroft’s eyes are flitting over John's form, reading God only knows what. John battles the conflicting temptations of smiling smugly, giving him the good old two fingered salute or blushing bright red and hiding behind his hands. Instead, he holds Mycroft's cool grey gaze. "Upon gaining entrance, we found Mrs Hudson on her sofa. Despite our initial concerns, she was only in a very deep sleep."

"The cause of her very deep sleep, John?" Greg chips in, again smiling the smile of a much younger man. "She hadn't been able to get a decent night's sleep. She seemed reticent to say much more, but I would say the blush on the dear woman's cheeks and her frequent, unconscious, gestures and glances up to your flat, more than gave the game away."

"Oh, god." John finally gives into the temptation of hiding behind his hands, granted it's only a slow swipe of palms over his face as he looks heavenwards, but the implicit meaning of the gesture is not lost on Mycroft Holmes.

"I must say, Doctor Watson," Mycroft's use of his official title leaves little doubt of what is coming next. "I would have thought that that particular type of 'looking after' would have happened much further into Sherlock's healing process."
John opens his mouth to raise an objection but is quickly saved the effort when a cool, collected voice drifts into the room from the kitchen.

"Just because you are 'shagging' my police officer, Mycroft, it does not give you the right to criticise my doctor; or my care." Sherlock glides into the room. John half expects to see him wrapped in a sheet, knowing how much dressing drains him and that the pain-killers are coming to the end of their efficacy. Instead, Sherlock stands proud in tailored trousers and a deep blue shirt. A thin layer of sweat glistens on Sherlock's paler-than-usual skin and John bites back his original urge to chastise him for getting dressed. Obviously, it had been important to Sherlock to appear before his brother in his 'battle' wear; John is not going to belittle that.

"Sherlock!" Greg admonishes, his hand tightening on Mycroft's knee but remaining determinedly in place.

Sherlock slumps into his chair, less grace than usual apparent. Blue-green eyes dance over the inspector, reading infinitesimal clues from his clothes, his posture, the lines on his face and most importantly, the protective way Lestrade is subconsciously angling his body towards Mycroft.

"My mistake, Lestrade." Sherlock reclines a little more in his chair, one hand drifting in lazy patterns through the air. "Your relationship has not progressed quite that far. Yet. Something has held you back; doubt of my brother's affections, perhaps?"

The question hangs heavy in the air. Mycroft's gaze is fixed on Sherlock as some silent conversation expressed only through their gaze and tiny twitches passes between them. Sherlock nods slightly before softening his gaze and returning his attention to Greg.

"I assure you, Greg." The name from Sherlock's lips still sounds unfamiliar. "That my brother has held 'affections' for you for longer than I have known John." His voice becomes warmer and he looks towards John. "I have not been the only Holmes pining after another."

John can see in his peripheral vision that Greg now only has eyes for Mycroft, his eyes searching the other man's face. Whatever he sees there causes his shoulders to lose the tension they had gained during Sherlock's speech and he gathers Mycroft's hand between his own. Colour graces Mycroft's cheeks but he holds Greg's gaze, placing his free hand over Greg's. A simple smile is exchanged, an understanding gathered and then the hands are loosened and both men return their attention to the room.

John briefly excuses himself to make Sherlock a drink and to gather his pain killers and when he returns to the room, the three men are sitting in comfortable silence. John hands Sherlock his pain-killers, pressing a quick kiss to the top of his head when Sherlock, once again, takes them without complaint. He puts the empty glass on the desk before passing Sherlock his tea, overly sweet, just how he likes it.

"Well, as revealing as this visit has been so far, it is not the reason why Gregory and I came here. Some new evidence about Ms Morstan's background has come to light." Mycroft signals Lestrade who hands Sherlock a copy of an official looking document. John sits on the arm of Sherlock's chair, leaning over slightly so that he can see what is written on the page.

"Michael John Arthur Allen?" He reads. "Allen? That's her real surname isn't it?" He glances around at the faces of the men in the room. "Is it her father or something? I thought he was dead. An uncle perhaps?"

"Read on, John." Sherlock, always the quicker reader, has already absorbed all of the information displayed on the page.
John leans further over Sherlock, concentrating on the smaller text. He looks up in shock at the birth date; it is exactly the same as the birth date that had been revealed to be Mary's. Angela's, as he must try to think of her now.

"Her brother, then? But you said that her brother was dead and this is a sighting of him from a week ago."

Sherlock places a soothing hand on John's thigh. "Read on, John." The words are repeated once more and it is that, more than anything, which refocuses John's attention back on the page.

"Michael Allen was transferred from a private care facility in Ohio to a private care facility in St. John's Wood, London, six years ago," he reads. The words begin to swim in his vision a little before a gentle squeeze to his thigh has him reading aloud again. John is amazed at how calm his voice sounds. "Michael is confined to his bed due to the effects of a fire at his home during his twentieth year. Michael had fallen down the stairs during his attempt to flee the fire, thus breaking his back. He was unable to leave the building unaided and as a result, sustained severe burns to seventy-five percent of his body, leaving him virtually unrecognisable."

Sherlock flicks onto the second page of the document. A photograph shows a heavily scarred male in a well cared for, but clinical, room. Machines monitoring his well-being and delivering pain-killers are linked to his body. John winces and looks away.

"Are we absolutely positive that this man is Ms Morstan's brother?" Sherlock queries, his voice ringing out.

"Beyond doubt, Sherlock. DNA tests have been run both on him and on Ms Morstan, in her case from hair left at her flat. Ms Morstan has also been seen leaving the facility on more than one occasion. She has, of course, been heavily disguised but our facial recognition programmes have easily identified her."

"Christ." John rubs his chin, before fidgeting on the arm of the chair. "Do we know why he was listed as dead?"

"That has taken rather more time to discover but Gregory has been working with the Ohio and Michigan police departments and I have been in discussions with the CIA. Together, I believe we have formed a rather clearer picture of the events." None of Mycroft's usual smugness or superiority is apparent in his words; rather, they are delivered professionally but with an edge of something that John can only identify as compassion.

"Mary, sorry, Ms Morstan," Greg corrects at John's wince, "Lived with her family in Coldwater, Michigan; leaving, as previously stated, at 18, to join the CIA. We know now that despite external appearances of wealth and privilege, Michael and Angela lived a life filled with abuse. School records show that her brother regularly attended classes with abrasions and contusions indicative of more severe wounds. When the authorities were involved, all injuries were explained by the family as being sports related. The school were in doubt of the findings but felt there was nothing more they could do.

The Michigan police force spoke to the neighbours immediately after the fire. The Allens were described as 'good church-going folk, strict but fair with their easy-to-anger children.' Last week the Michigan police agreed to speak again to some of the people who appeared closest to the Allens. They have since said that Arthur Allen, the twins' father, was a short-tempered man who was seen to regularly beat Michael and belittle Angela whenever she showed any sign of independence or came to her brother's defence. They said they hadn't mentioned anything earlier as they did not want to speak ill of the dead." Greg pauses for breath and looks to John.
John is feeling shaken to the core, Mary.... Angela.... Had lived through a life of violence and had gone on to deliver her own form of violence. Logically, he knows that most people who have suffered abuse go on to live perfectly happy, non-violent lives, but he can't help wondering if it is the reason why Angela is the way she is.

"Re-examination of the fire reports would indicate that the fire was professionally and purposefully set. It is believed that Ms Morstan set the fire in an attempt to remove her parents from their lives and that Michael ran back into the house in an attempt to rescue them and was injured during the process. Michael was taken to the local hospital where he remained for four years. At that point, he was transferred to a private care facility in Ohio, where he remained until he was transferred here, to London. All of his medical bills have been paid by an anonymous benefactor since leaving Michigan. The medical costs that were run up there were met initially by the family's health insurance and then, as now, by an anonymous person. Michael's continuing existence was only removed from the system in the last six years, coinciding with his removal to St. John's Wood and the emergence of the alias of Mary Morstan."

"Jesus Christ. The poor kids, they led such a tough life." The care-giver in John is dominant and he can't help but wonder how Michael's life would have differed had the stories of abuse been believed and proven.

"I'm sorry, John, but that's not quite all we discovered." Mycroft's professional tone once again pulls John from his thoughts. "During Ms Morstan's teen years there were a number of unsolved crimes, mostly relating to the disappearance or deaths of young people. The Michigan police are now re-investigating the cases in light of recent new information. It seems highly likely that Ms Morstan was involved, at the very least, with their demise, if not the actual enforcer of it. New research indicates that these people were all known to her father, either through his position at the church or via his job in the local university. It would seem that she was trying to frame her father for their deaths and thus have him removed from the family home. The evidence on the bodies indicates that she showed no compassion or shame for the acts she performed; they neither show hesitation marks nor signs of being cared for or disposed of in a respectful manner."

"How young?" John's voice is absolutely emotionless and he feels Sherlock tense beside him.

"Ms Morstan would have been approximately thirteen when she started, her victims ranging between eight and nineteen years of age."

"Right. Fine. Right." John stands and starts to pace, hand alternately rubbing over the scruff of his beard and the nape of his neck. "Bloody hell." He pauses, mid-pace, squaring his shoulders, pointing directly at Sherlock. "Sherlock, you need to promise me that if she is pregnant, whether that baby is mine or not, that you will do everything within your power to see that it goes to a safe and loving home. Hell, it can come and live with us if needed!"

"I promise, John." John can see the truth of Sherlock's words in his clear blue-green eyes, their gaze steady, never wavering.

"For what it may be worth, Doctor Watson, I will ensure that you also have the support of the British Government and I am sure the Detective Inspector here will offer his full support." Greg nods in vehement agreement of Mycroft's words.

John nods in acknowledgment before returning to Sherlock's side. The touch of Sherlock's hand on his thigh grounds him, calms him.

"I guess the question that remains is, what do we do about Ms Morstan? Has any evidence been found that clearly links her to any wrong-doing under her current alias? Does enough evidence exist
to arrest her for any of her previous crimes? Have her extradited to the US, perhaps?" John questions, hopeful that they now have enough evidence against her to have her removed from his life for the foreseeable future.

"Unfortunately, not." Mycroft is, once again, the one to tackle the subject. "We suspect she had an alliance of some sort with James Moriarty but we have been unable, at this current time, to pinpoint what. We have heard through various sources, rumours that Moriarty is about to become active again."

"Preposterous." Sherlock announces, closing his eyes against the sudden vision of a very much alive Moriarty mocking him in this very living room, the back of his head missing but his eyes still sparkling with malicious delight. "Blew his own brains out on the rooftop of Bart's. You know this Mycroft, you had a team come and clean up the carnage."

"Of course it's preposterous. It is only the name that is being resurrected, the kingpin of the organisation, if you like. It is the name that invokes the respect and fear, not necessarily the person."

John can't contain the giggle that bursts out of him. "Like the Dread Pirate Roberts!" If the laughter is a little manic, nobody says anything. Greg looks confused for the merest second before mixing his deep chuckle in with John's high giggle. Mycroft looks utterly stymied at what is happening around him and Sherlock quirks an enquiring eyebrow.

"Oh come on, Sherlock! You must remember! Granted, it was a long time ago but I didn't think you'd delete it. Pirates! Sword fights! Poisons! Intrigue! True love!" John prompts Sherlock, watching for any sign of recognition.

"Nope." The p sound pops and John looks resigned before noticing the twinkle in Sherlock's eye.

'Ooh. You arse! You almost had me then!" John's giggles are joined by Sherlock's deeper laugh. Only Mycroft remains completely confused by the sudden change in mood.

"It's a film, Mycroft. Called 'The Princess Bride'. I guess it was originally meant for kids but it seems to have quite the devoted fanbase. One of the characters becomes this Dread Pirate Roberts but it is explained that he isn't the original Dread Pirate Roberts, that he was given the name by the previous Roberts, who in turn was given the name by the original Dread Pirate Roberts. The name and the fear it evoked became legend. People instinctively knew to be very afraid of him. Exactly what Moriarty seems to have been trying to achieve."

"A child's movie. You are comparing the work of one of the greatest criminal masterminds we have ever known to that of a child's film?" Mycroft looks distinctly non-plussed, sending John off into another fit of giggles.

"You'll enjoy it, Mycroft. Men in well-fitted clothing, showing off their assets. Although, don't get too attached to the Sicilian, even if you can relate to him." Sherlock warns light-heartedly.

"Come home with me, Mycroft. I'm sure I can track it down somewhere for us to watch. We'll grab some wine and some food, too; make a night of it?" Greg's words are light but even John can hear what is actually being asked.

"That would be... " Mycroft pauses, flushing before sending a brief glance over towards Sherlock. "That would be a most welcome way to spend the rest of my day. Just give me a few moments to make some arrangements with Anthea."
Greg watches as Mycroft leaves the room, his phone already to his ear.

"Look after my brother, Lestrade." Sherlock's words somehow sound more serious after the light-hearted silliness of the last few minutes.

"Yeah, course I will, Sherlock. But he hardly needs me."

"Don't be an idiot, for once in your life. All this 'stuff' that he believes he must do to keep me alive, to keep me safe, it's killing him. He's not as strong as he tries to make people believe. He is far from being the unfeeling ice man he allows people to believe. Don't let him lose himself, or lose you, in trying to protect me." Sherlock's words are heartfelt and earnest and Greg is obviously finding it hard to form an appropriate response.

"You're supposed to 'protect and serve', then protect and serve him!"

"Sherlock, that's the American police thing .... But, yeah, I get your point."

Mycroft returns to the room moments later. If he is aware of the change of atmosphere, he wisely chooses to remain silent on the matter, simply taking his leave of John and Sherlock and guiding Greg from the room.

"Heartless, my arse." Sherlock opens his mouth to query John's statement but promptly forgets what he wants to say when John crushes their lips together.
How we hide the truth

Chapter Summary

In many ways she is still very much 'his' Mary, the Mary that he fell in love with. John can admit that it was love he felt for her, it wasn't the all-encompassing love he feels for Sherlock but it was love all the same. He doesn't believe it was a love that would have lasted though, too many things had already begun to irritate him about Mary before Sherlock had even returned. Tiny things, things that, when a relationship is strong and the love is deep, would have made no lasting damage but with Mary, these things had begun to grate on his nerves. John knows he is not a very patient man even at the best of times and his relationship with Mary was beginning to bring out the worst in him.

Chapter Notes

Hello!
Sorry about the delay in updating. I've come to a very difficult part of the story and because of it my writing has slowed a little. Also the wonderful Lockedinjohnlock and I have had madly hectic lives recently!

I really hope you enjoy the new chapter! Please leave kudos and comments, they make me very happy and currently I could with every speck of happiness that may come my way.

John's mind seems to be working in some kind of loop, replaying the information that Lestrade and Mycroft had left them with. Vivid images of a teenage 'Mary' murdering innocent youngsters flash up behind his eyes. In these she is still blonde, although John knows that her natural hair colour is brunette but it is long, falling in spiral curls about her shoulders. Her eyes are wide and bright blue, the playfulness that first captured his attention apparent in them. She is more slightly built than she is now, the athletic pursuits of her youth still shaping her body.

In many ways she is still very much 'his' Mary, the Mary that he fell in love with. John can admit that it was love he felt for her, it wasn't the all-encompassing love he feels for Sherlock but it was love all the same. He doesn't believe it was a love that would have lasted though, too many things had already begun to irritate him about Mary before Sherlock had even returned. Tiny things, things that, when a relationship is strong and the love is deep, would have made no lasting damage but with Mary, these things had begun to grate on his nerves. John knows he is not a very patient man even at the best of times and his relationship with Mary was beginning to bring out the worst in him.

John sighs and tries to drag his thoughts away from Mary; they don't belong with her anymore. His attention and care belong with the man now sleeping in their bedroom. Sherlock has been asleep for a few hours, retiring soon after Greg and Mycroft had left to enjoy each other's company. John allows himself to remember the effect Sherlock's plea to Greg had on him. John had needed to bite
down the impulse to kiss Sherlock whilst Greg and Mycroft were still in the room, only giving way to his impulse when he had heard the sound of the front door closing. The taste of Sherlock still lingers on his tongue and the depth of Sherlock's care and love warms him.

Remembrance of their kiss causes John's breath to hitch; it had been full of longing and promises of more. John had pulled back to admire Sherlock's beloved face and had seen his exhaustion showing clearly as the mask Sherlock had worn during his brother's visit slide from his face. Sherlock's eyes were pinched with lingering pain and the delicate skin beneath them was painted the colour of storm clouds. John had immediately felt guilty about his negligence in not noticing how Sherlock had been suffering. John had watched as Sherlock's perfect poise in the chair had suddenly vanished and he had selfishly enjoyed the moment that Sherlock had slumped against him, his forehead resting on John's shoulder. He had watched as Sherlock's eyes had grown heavier and heavier, the healing siren song of sleep calling out to him. With barely a moment's thought, John had altered his position and swept Sherlock up in his arms. Even now, John can feel the lingering phantom of Sherlock curled against him. John knows that they should have looked ridiculous; his short, stocky body carrying the long-limbed, lethargic Sherlock but somehow they had made it work, no thought of awkwardness or ridiculousness apparent in either man's mind. Sherlock had curled closer in to John, silently accepting his help, nuzzling his nose into the warm skin of John's neck. Sherlock's huff of gratitude had raised goosebumps on John's arms but he had merely adjusted his hold, kissed the gentle rise of Sherlock's cheekbone and carried him into their bedroom. With expert efficiency, John had placed Sherlock on the bed; the covers were luckily thrown over to John's side from when Sherlock had got up for Mycroft's visit. John had quickly stripped Sherlock before dressing him in soft pyjama bottoms and a threadbare t-shirt, knowing that Sherlock would appreciate the jostling now in exchange for a comfortable sleep. John had pulled the covers up over Sherlock, tucking them around him carefully before dropping a quick kiss to the nest of glorious hair on his now sleeping love's head. He'd stood by the bed for a moment, watching the gentle rise and fall of Sherlock's chest before exiting the room, leaving the door ajar. He had meant to have a quick tidy up before joining Sherlock in bed but in the quiet of the flat the spectre of Mary had flooded his brain.

Once again, John tries to shake the memory of her out of his head. He'd tried surfing the net for a while but couldn't focus on anything he was looking at. He had quietly tidied the flat but that hadn't been enough to keep his mind busy.

John finally gives up, settling in to his much-loved armchair with the report that Greg and Mycroft had left with him. He holds the report in his hands for a long time, eyes unseeing, the paper cold and unfeeling against his fingertips. He can't help thinking how ironic it is that Mary appeared so warm and loving on the surface but he found the 'true her' via a piece of paper and a memory stick. He knows she had intended for him never to look at it, to forgive her without question, that she believed a few well-placed tears and a trembling lip would make him forget that she had tried to kill Sherlock. She had been wrong. Very wrong. John had plugged the memory stick into his computer the first moment he had a chance. Mycroft, in his omniscience, had brought John's computer to the hospital the first night that they knew that Sherlock was out of danger. John had contacted Mycroft soon after and together they had read the scant information that the key had contained. Her real name was given, her country of birth, some school reports and the fact that she had worked for the CIA; nothing that would have made John hate her if she hadn't just tried to murder the only person of any worth in his life. His gaze drifts over to the window and his fist tightens on the paper in his hands. This report contains enough information for John to hate her. A killer, a cold-hearted murderer, who sold her skills to the highest bidder.

It's her apparent lack of remorse and her single-mindedness when trying to frame her father for the crimes that she carried out in her youth that eats at John. He closes his eyes and tries to put himself in her position. He can understand that she was trying to protect Michael from their abusive father
but it doesn't make her actions any more palatable. John knows he would move heaven and earth to protect those that held his heart. He had done, shooting a cabbie without hesitation long before he realised his heart resided within Sherlock; but Jeff Hope had been a direct threat to Sherlock, there had been no time to find an alternative solution. John had acted from the gut and in doing so had rid the world of a benign looking serial killer. Mary's actions had been directed at those guilty of no wrong doings, their only 'error' that of being in some way, however tenuously, linked to her father.

He reluctantly admires her decision and dedication in becoming her brother's guardian, even if he can't forgive the setting of the fire in the first place. He understands how much time and effort she must have given to keep her brother's continuing existence a secret from their parents, although part of him wonders if they just didn't care enough about Michael to wonder about the lack of a body or whether Mary had managed to arrange some sort of death certificate or replacement body just to keep them away.

In his younger days, John had been fiercely protective of Harry, often earning a smack around the head for refusing to get out of the way when his father was on the warpath. His calves still bear the scars from where he was whipped with his father's belt, the buckle biting into his skin when he had blocked his father's way to the front door. This had given Harry time to run to her girlfriend's house and claim sanctuary. She had never returned home again and John knows she is still unaware of the scars he bears for her. John clenches his fists at the memory of their over-bearing, ignorant, arrogant, arsehole of a father. Years in the army have taught John to channel his aggression elsewhere, his single-minded focus allowing him to both save and take lives as necessary. John supposes he has his father to thank for his bull-headed stubbornness. Unfortunately, he also has him to thank for his quick-to-ignite temper and the inclination to drown his troubles in a bottle, or two, of strong alcohol.

A sharp pain in his index finger brings John's focus back to the document he is clutching. It is now crumpled in his fist, the staples cutting into his flesh and his blood marking the paper. He thinks it's somehow apt that Mary has finally drawn blood from him. He takes a deep breath, viscously suppressing the urge to pour himself a whiskey. Instead, he puts his restless energy into a few deep stretches, first bending down to his toes then stretching up high, forcing his tired muscles into submission. The slight ache directs his thoughts back to the sleeping Sherlock and he realises with a guilty start that Sherlock hasn't eaten today and it's now late enough for John to be considering bed. He knows, in the usual grand scheme of things, it's nothing unusual for Sherlock not to eat but it's intolerable whilst his body is still recovering; an unforgivable oversight on John's part.

John places the bloodied, crumpled report on his chair and walks into the bathroom, rinsing his hands and inspecting the damage the staples have caused. The skin is ragged and the marks deep but he doesn't need to do anything to them other than give them time to repair. The flash of light reflecting on bright metal in the mirror directs his gaze to his hand. His wedding ring is still new enough that it shines in the harsh fluorescent lights and with delight, John takes it off. Instantly he feels lighter, as though a dark shadow has been removed from him. He hasn't worn the ring long enough for it to make any indentation on his finger but there is a faint tan line denoting where it had sat. John rubs at the white flesh trying to bring some colour to the pale skin. He knows that the flush is only temporary but it makes him feel better to see the band mark fade a little. Leaving the ring on the shelf, John moves to the kitchen to see what he can make for dinner - although the term supper is probably more appropriate given the late hour.

A brief exploration of the cupboards and fridge reveals the remains of the meal that Mrs Hudson had made for them the previous day. John offers up a small prayer of thanks to their wonderful landlady as he sets the oven to pre-heat, habit making him check for any stray experiments first. The idea of being back in Baker Street with Sherlock and his mad experiments and evidence boards brings a warm smile to John's face. He admits to himself that sometimes it can be
frustrating to find feet where the food should go or termites in his tea but feels that the payoff is well worth it.

A quick look in the bedroom confirms that Sherlock is still sleeping, his lashes fluttering against pale skin as he dreams. Contentment sweeps over John and he allows himself a few more seconds to admire the handsome man lost in the world of dreams before continuing with gathering together a simple dinner. John puts the Shepherd's Pie in the oven to heat before searching through the cupboard and locating two dinner trays. He gives them a thorough scrub before setting them on the worktop, then he folds two squares of paper kitchen towel into triangles to use as napkins, rolling a knife and fork inside each and setting them on the tray. A plate is put centrally on each but John feels something is missing. Digging through various drawers in the kitchen unearths two stubby candles in tinted glass containers, miraculously unbroken for their adventures amongst the odds and ends found in the storage drawers of a sometimes mad scientist. John sniffs each candle tentatively in a vague attempt to detect anything noxious, shrugging when they smell of nothing more than beeswax. John places them on the trays, digging out a box of matches that he slips into his jeans, before closing the drawer. He makes a mental note never to look in that particular drawer again, at least not without gloves and a face mask; and possibly a blowtorch, he thinks wryly. The dinner requires about twenty minutes to heat through, the vegetables and gravy he can reheat in the microwave in a matter of moments, this leaves John with time on his hands. Setting the timer on his phone he walks back into the bedroom, climbing carefully onto the bed next to Sherlock and allowing his eyes to drift shut as he savours being so close.

He wakes with a start when his alarm goes off but feels more energised for his power nap. The alarm has also woken Sherlock but he appears to have awoken more gently than John. His face shows the softness of sleep, cheeks marked with creases from the pillow, eyes heavy-lidded. The smile he gives John makes something expand in John's chest and he leans over to give Sherlock a light kiss on the lips.

"Hello, Sleepyhead." John teases, ruffling his fingers through Sherlock's hair.

"Mmm, hello." Sherlock sounds content and satisfied to be waking up next to John, reaching an arm out to pull him in closer.

John returns the hug briefly before moving away, placing a quick kiss on Sherlock's nose when he whines in protest.

"I've got to go and heat the vegetables through for dinner, love." Sherlock smiles shyly and John grins as he sees Sherlock's reaction to the simple endearment. "A few more minutes and I'll be back in here with food, drink and some pain-killers. What more could a bloke want, hey?"

Sherlock studies John for a long moment, his intense gaze causing John's mouth to flood with saliva. "You. I want you." Sherlock's voice is still gravelly from lack of use but the sound of it hits John right in the chest, heat radiating out to his face and groin.

"Umm, right, " John stammers, rubbing a hand over the back of his neck. Suddenly, he remembers that he's allowed this now, he's allowed to flirt with Sherlock, to tease and tempt. "Maybe I can be for dessert?"

With distinct satisfaction John watches as Sherlock licks his lips, John's idea obviously having some merit in Sherlock's mind. He slips through the doorway and walks to the kitchen as Sherlock arranges himself into a seated position.

It's not long before John is returning to the bedroom, a laden tray carefully balanced in each hand. With a swift nudge of his foot, he closes the door behind him.
"Ok. We have the rest of Mrs Hudson's delicious Shepherd's Pie to eat, a cup of tea to drink and you have the added extra of some pain killers to take." John lowers one tray onto Sherlock's outstretched legs and places the other on the bed next to him. He rummages in his pocket for the matches and lights both their candles. "I know that we can't go out on an actual date any time soon, so I thought we could have a more private date now. I even provided candles." A further rummage produces Sherlock's painkillers which he takes without complaint.

John carefully positions himself on the bed and rests his tray on his lap. Through necessity, they are slightly apart but there is a comfort and ease that possesses the room as John and Sherlock eat. Sherlock looks a lot at John as they eat but remains quiet, merely smiling when John notices him looking. They eat their meal leisurely and John finds it hard to believe that it's the first time they have done this, shared a meal in bed together. It feels like second-nature to him, something they have always done. Perhaps on Sunday mornings or on quiet days when there are no cases or surgery to rush them from their bed; add in some leisurely (or frantic) love-making and John believes it would be the very epitome of a perfect day. He glances across at Sherlock, noting the way the candlelight highlights his features and adds warmth to his skin. Actually, John thinks, any time spent with this man is a perfect day.

Sherlock murmurs his thanks when John takes his tray away, repositioning the candles in front of the dressing-table's mirror, causing their rays to reflect into the room. John decides against the washing up, preferring to spend his time cuddled up in bed with Sherlock. He flicks off the main room light, leaving the room lit by only the candles. The room feels romantic and intimate and John's heart speeds up at the possibility of what might happen between them next. As much as he wants to feel Sherlock come apart in his arms again, John knows that Sherlock's body needs the rest, as much as their brains and libidos would love it to be otherwise. He mulls over the possibilities as he walks towards the bed, undressing as he goes until he is clad only in his boxer shorts. He slides into bed, reaching over with his left hand for Sherlock. Sherlock stops his hand before John can make contact with his body. John raises his eyebrow in question until Sherlock runs a finger over the place where John's wedding ring used to reside.

"Where's your wedding ring?" Sherlock questions. It's obvious that John has taken it off at some point during the day but Sherlock needs for John to tell him why.

"I took it off," John shrugs, the dismissive move not coming off as smoothly as he had hoped. "I felt like I was betraying you by still wearing it, somehow."

"As much as I hate seeing you wear her ring, you must put it back on." Sherlock wraps his finger around the space, making it loop John's finger.

"I will," John asserts. "Just before we see her. I don't want reminders of her constantly haunting me."

"You heard Mrs Hudson, John," Sherlock reminds him. "Mary has been known to just pop by, no previous arrangement made. Mary will notice if you keep your hands in your pockets the whole time or suddenly run off to your room to get it. You are putting your life in danger over misplaced sentiment."

"But I can refuse to see her!" John's frustration seeps into his voice and he sits up in bed, hand rubbing over his face.

"For now," Sherlock remains calm, reasonable. "But eventually you have to be seen to be making moves towards reconciliation." He reaches across and rests his hand on John's thigh.
"Then I'll put it back on at that point!" His thigh flexes under Sherlock's hand.

"John!" Sherlock's calm facade finally shatters. "You know how hyper aware she is. She will notice that wearing the ring is new to you. She won't believe that you always intended to go back to her, to make the marriage work, if you've seen fit to remove the ring at some point. Go and get the ring, John. Bring it back here."

John slides out of bed and marches into the bathroom, muttering under his breath the whole way. He grabs the ring, clenching it in his hand before stamping back into the bedroom. He barely resists the temptation of throwing the ring at Sherlock, realising that Sherlock is in the right.

"Here. Take the damn thing." John shoves the ring at Sherlock, wincing when Sherlock carefully takes it from him.

Sherlock examines the simple gold band; it looks innocuous in his large hand. He takes John's left hand in his, studying the ring finger intently. He raises John's hand to his lips, kissing where the ring will soon once again reside. John watches intently, a strange sense of rightness seeping through him at Sherlock's action. Sherlock kisses the gold metal of the ring and slides it onto John's finger, keeping hold of John's hand once the ring is back in place. He meets John's eye and John knows that whatever Sherlock says next will be from his often-ignored heart.

"With this ring I pledge my life to you." Sherlock's words are whispered, his features lit only by the flickering candlelight. Sherlock has never been so beautiful. "For as long as you wear this ring, think only of when I placed it on your finger and of the time, should you be amenable, when I replace it with a ring that we have chosen and exchanged vows over." Sherlock continues to hold John's gaze, eyes intent, searching.

"And you accuse me of being the romantic." John huffs, his eyes swimming with tears. He leans into Sherlock before pulling Sherlock towards him. Still wary of Sherlock's chest wound, John engulfs him in an embrace, whispering against his neck. "I'm amenable."
The way of lovers

Chapter Summary

The flickering candlelight plays over John's bare skin, amplifying its warm tones and revealing only teasing glimpses of his body. Both men are slightly overwhelmed by the pledge they have just made, a promise of marriage. In many ways it's sudden; they've only been a couple for a month or so but in the ways that truly matter it seems long overdue.

Easing Sherlock carefully back onto the bed until he is lying flat, John chases his lips for a kiss. He lies parallel to Sherlock, his body flush against the long length of Sherlock's side. Leaning over, he rests his weight on his elbow and deepens the kiss, tilting Sherlock's chin with his free hand. Warm, full lips open beneath his, encouraging him in with a brief touch of wet tongue against his lower lip. John moans at the teasing touch, chasing the tongue with his own. The vibration of Sherlock's answering moan sweeps through John, igniting his nerves and sending a surge of heat to his groin. John's cock twitches with interest against Sherlock's hip and again, Sherlock moans, pushing up into the kiss and guiding John deeper into it with a firm hand at the back of his head.

Chapter Notes

Sorry, it's been a longish break between chapters, hopefully this will help make up for it. 3000+ words of hot loving coming at ya!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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John moves until his body is now over Sherlock's, his weight held off Sherlock's chest by his arms, their lower bodies pressed tightly together. John eventually breaks the kiss, ignoring Sherlock's gasped protests and nips along Sherlock's jawline, groaning at the sensation of stubble against his sensitive lips. Sherlock tilts his head up, exposing more neck when he realise
putting extra pale skin on display for John to nip and kiss at. Their bodies move together, lazy waves of motion centred at their groins. As John slips further down Sherlock's body he allows more of his weight to bear down, still keeping clear of Sherlock's healing chest. Their cocks align and both men moan at the contact; John can feel the hot line of Sherlock's cock even through the layers of his boxers and Sherlock's pyjamas. He hopes that Sherlock can feel him just as blatantly. John rocks his hips, taking delight in the feel of Sherlock beneath him, sporadic trembles wracking Sherlock's frame. John laves the skin beneath his lips with attention; their height difference means he is level with Sherlock's collar bone, the loose line of Sherlock's worn t-shirt allowing John plenty of room for exploration. John has dreamed for longer than he can remember about kissing and licking Sherlock here and the reality of it is nothing short of spectacular. Sherlock's skin tastes sublime, slightly salty and musky and John salivates at the thought of how much more of Sherlock he intends to sample.

Moving further down Sherlock's body, John teasingly rubs his bare abdomen over Sherlock's covered cock, feeling the slightly damp material against his skin. Sherlock's breath hitches as John takes one of his nipples into his mouth, sucking gently through the thin cotton until the flesh beneath forms a firm nub. John skims his hands over Sherlock's sides, finally slipping his hands beneath the soft fabric of Sherlock's t-shirt. He eases it up over Sherlock's trim stomach, slowly stripping it from Sherlock's body, taking the utmost care not to jostle him. Sherlock's body rocks up to meet John's, chasing the sensation of friction against his cock. John kisses and sucks at Sherlock's now-bare nipple before switching sides, fingers gently rubbing over the saliva-wet nub. Sherlock clutches at the sheet beneath him, back arching and breath coming in pants. His reactions to John are increasing John's own arousal, his cock throbbing within the restrictive confines of his boxer shorts. John thinks his destination must be obvious to Sherlock by now but still keeps his movements slow, deliberately teasing. The ultimate prize may be Sherlock coming to completion but the road to winning is deliciously enjoyable too. John kisses around the edge of Sherlock's bandage, keeping the pressure light before gently dropping a kiss over the bandage. A gasped 'John,' is acknowledgement enough that Sherlock caught the movement and the sentiment behind it.

Pepperling kisses over Sherlock's taut stomach, John relishes the way it twitches beneath his lips, the way Sherlock's hips push up towards him. John dips his tongue into the hollow of Sherlock's belly button, smiling against Sherlock's skin when he jerks in surprise, filing the information away for later. He sweeps kisses between the curves of Sherlock's hip bones, along the waistline of his pyjamas, pulling at the ties with his teeth, eliciting a deep chuckle from Sherlock.

"These need to go," John mutters, tugging at the loose material of the pyjamas. Sherlock lifts his hips, easing the removal of his nightwear. "and so do these." John removes his boxer shorts, sighing in relief.

John settles once more over Sherlock, kissing along the deep V of muscles dipping towards Sherlock's groin. A slight shift lower and John's chin bumps against the head of Sherlock's cock. At the contact, Sherlock's hands sweep down to John's head, long fingers threading through his hair, tensing and flexing before Sherlock forces his hands away again, finally positioning one to clutch in his own hair, the other tugging at the bed sheet.

Tilting his head up, John rests his chin lightly on Sherlock's stomach, waiting until Sherlock looks down at him. "It's ok, Sherlock. You can put your hands in my hair," John licks his lips, delighted when Sherlock mirrors the motion. "You can pull at it a little too, if that's what you want to do. We're new at this, we'll learn what we both like in time."

"Not new," Sherlock gasps, "to you."
John presses kisses to Sherlock's hot skin. "With you, it is. That's the only thing that matters. I want to learn what you like and to discover what I like doing to you." He sucks on the dip of abdomen next to Sherlock's hip bone until a deep red mark adorns Sherlock's pale skin. "And you can't tell me that you aren't looking forward to doing the same."

Sherlock doesn't say anything but John feels that the fingers sweeping back through his hair are currently answer enough.

"You don't have to like everything we try, Sherlock, just let me know how you feel. Stop me if you need to. I won't mind." John is suddenly serious. Silence is Sherlock's only response.

Moving his body down further, John settles comfortably between Sherlock's spread thighs. He licks Sherlock's cock from root to tip, dipping his tongue into the pre-ejaculate pooling on its head. Sherlock gasps in response, fingers tightening briefly in John's hair. John slips the tip of Sherlock's cock between his lips, teasing the foreskin with his tongue. Sherlock's grip tightens but apart from the initial gasp he is silent. John lets him slide out of his mouth, admiring the way it glistens with his saliva before reaching his hand up and patting Sherlock on his hip, encouraging Sherlock to focus on him.

"Sherlock. I need to know that what I'm doing is ok, that you like it."

Sherlock's whole body tenses and he slowly raises his face, eyes cast in John's direction. His cheeks are flushed, his neck and chest mottled red. The small amount of iris John can see glitters in the candlelight, his pupils wide, hair awry.

"John!" Sherlock would sound exasperated if he wasn't so short of breath. "Of course it's bloody well ok! And if you don't get your mouth back on my cock this instant I shall......"

John doesn't wait to discover what Sherlock 'shall' do, cutting him off mid-sentence by the simple expedient of taking him back into his mouth. Sherlock stifles a cry, the sound coming out more like a squawk. John slides his mouth down further, taking in more of Sherlock's cock before applying light suction and moving back to the tip, before sliding off completely.

"Dear god, let me hear you." John begs before engulfing Sherlock again. This time, Sherlock allows his gasp to ring out, the sound arousing John further. His answering groan muffled around his mouthful.

Determined to make Sherlock utterly come apart in his mouth, John employs his tongue and cheeks to full effect. Firm, broad strokes along Sherlock's cock intermingled with teasing flicks and swirls soon have Sherlock making very vocal sounds of approval. Slow but deep sucks cause Sherlock to alternate between stillness and thrusting further into John's mouth, fingers tight in John's hair. Sherlock's eagerness and sensitivity drive John on further, desperate to continue wringing such reactions from Sherlock. John's cock throbs and he thrusts it against the cool bedclothes, unwilling to divide his attention between his own cock and Sherlock's. The friction against his neglected cock pulls a low groan from John, the sound muffled around Sherlock's penis. Sherlock trembles suddenly, his hand tightening in John's hair, cock swelling against John's tongue. John hums his own approval against the sensitive skin cradled within his mouth, riding the sudden bucking of Sherlock's hips, encouraging the movement further with his hands slipped beneath Sherlock's backside; strong hands gripping firm arse-cheeks. A final surge and John's mouth fills with hot, salty liquid; John swallows and swallows, relishing the flood in his mouth but gentling his hold on Sherlock. Sherlock pulses weakly once, twice more before relaxing completely onto the bed, sweat glistening on his lithely muscled body. John allows Sherlock's cock to slide from between his lips before giving it a tender lick and a loving kiss.
After a few seconds of peppering kisses over Sherlock's damp abdomen, John crawls up Sherlock's body, hands and knees on either side. He leans and delivers a deep kiss, nipping at Sherlock's lower lip, chuckling at the sight of a flushed and utterly blissed-out Sherlock.

"Mmmmmmm. I'm going to consider this particular activity a success." John doesn't even try to keep the smugness out of his voice.

"John!" Sherlock's voice is full of wonder, with an edge of curiosity. "You're getting everything tested as soon as possible. Blood, sperm, the lot! It's not fair that you know how I taste and I can't know how you taste!"

"I'm not going to argue with that." John replies, his voice rough, already envisioning how Sherlock's mouth would look wrapped around his cock.

Sherlock looks far too alert, considering he had just experienced a rather spectacular orgasm but John supposes it's just another quirk of Sherlock's uniqueness, another facet to love. Bright eyes sweep over John's crouching form, lingering on John's erection.

"You're imagining it now, aren't you? Me, performing fellatio on you?" Although phrased as questions both men know the words are statements, the truth of the matter already known.

"God, yes. But you know that I fantasise about that; about feeling your mouth around me, your lips and tongue working me." John's skin is flushed and his body tingles with anticipation. He aches for completion but is willing to play Sherlock's game a little longer.

"Tell me," Sherlock rasps, sliding his body out from under John's so that he is upright against the headboard. "Tell me what I would be doing, what you would be feeling, if I were able to do that now."

"Sherlock." John will deny vehemently that he is whining but in truth he knows no other way to describe the tone that his voice adopts. He rests his weight back on Sherlock's thighs, cock standing proud.

"Bring yourself to orgasm. Talk to me. Let me see. Let me see you, John." The colour is still high on Sherlock's face, his intelligent eyes fixed solely on John and John feels empowered by the scrutiny.

Taking a cleansing breath, John licks his lips and settles more comfortably on Sherlock's legs.

"We've been exploring each other's bodies with our tongues, lips and teeth. Like now, you've already come and I'm aching for release too." John wraps his left hand around his cock, eyelids fluttering closed at the contact. "I can feel every pulse and twitch; it feels like my normal reactions have been amplified." John allows himself a long stroke from root to tip and back again.

"I'm sitting up, maybe on the side of the bed or in my chair; it doesn't really matter where, and you're kneeling between my legs. You're totally naked, skin flushed and glistening, just the sight of you makes me more aroused. My breath hitches and my heart kicks up a notch at the sight of you, kneeling, waiting, breathing my scent in." John's hand glides over himself once more before being snatched away by Sherlock.

"John." The sound of his name pulls John out of his fantasy, mouth dropping open when Sherlock draws his middle finger into his mouth. Sucking on it intently, swirling his tongue around the tip before drawing it deeply between his lips once more. Sherlock does this with each of John's fingers before finally licking John's palm, thoroughly wetting it.
John places his hand back around his cock, the wetness now providing a smoothness of movement that he lacked before. His head drops forward in relief and he allows himself a few leisurely strokes before speaking again.

"I .....I can feel your breath against me, warm breath against my skin. You've moved closer, now only centimetres away and you're directing each breath over my cock, my balls. It feels amazing." John's cock twitches in his hand, a single drop of pre-come blooms at its head and John can feel Sherlock tense up beneath him.

"You ... you..... Oh god, Sherlock," John groans, speech becoming more difficult as his hand speeds up. "hold me steady with your right hand. Your fingers feel cool and strong against me, their touch causing me to rock my hips, sliding my cock through the fist you've made." John thrusts his hips up, pushing into the tight, slick fist he has made. He hears as Sherlock takes in a shuddering breath, feels the warm breath as it is expelled against his over-heated skin.

"You lick along my length, your tongue sure against me. I can feel when you groan, savouring the taste of my pre-come." John pauses, concentrating on the feel of his cock in his hand, trying to transpose that to what Sherlock's mouth might feel like. "You t....t..tease me. Swiping your tongue over the head of my cock, flicking with the tip of your tongue over my fraenulum before dipping into the pool of pre-ejaculate that has formed during your teasing."

John is bucking into his hand, the moves almost violent in their intensity. He can feel where Sherlock's large hands have moved to clutch at his backside, long fingers parting and squeezing his buttocks, riding the motions of John's hips.

"Finally, you take me fully into your mouth and it's like ...." John pants. "it's like coming home. It's everything I've ever imagined and more. You suck me, drawing me deeper in, the pressure is perfect and I know I won't last long." John chases his orgasm, his muscles are taut and his legs trembling, cock hardening further in his hand. "A few more sucks and I come. You moan and dig your fingers into my arse cheeks at the taste and sensation but you pull away whilst I am still ejaculating."

Sherlock's fingers tighten against John's skin and both men moan.

"Most of my semen is in your mouth but some of it lands on your lips and cheek." A final tight thrust and buck and John ejaculates, hot splashes of semen landing on Sherlock's stomach, pooling in his belly button. "God, Sherlock!" John fights against his natural reaction to slump against Sherlock, aware, even in his post-orgasmic state to be careful of Sherlock's chest. He sits balanced on Sherlock's thighs, hand still cradling his softening cock, breath coming out in truncated pants.

"John." John pries his eyes open and looks at the man beneath him. Sherlock looks shattered, eyes bright and wide, hair even more disorganised than it was after his own orgasm; evidence at where he has been frantically rocking his head against the pillow. His hands still clutch at John's backside but the grip is less hard but still firm, breath ragged.

John chuckles, taking in how dishevelled they both look.

"That...." John gasps between laughs, "was ridiculously hot and very satisfying." He grins when Sherlock nods in agreement, words seemingly still lost to him. "I would suggest a shower but honestly, I'm bloody knackered. I'll grab a flannel and clean us both up."

He clambers off Sherlock's lap, laughing again when his legs tremble as he tries to walk to the bathroom. He is still smiling when he looks into the mirror above the sink. He looks years younger, skin flushed and eyes bright. He can see his wedding ring shining in the small amount of
candlelight that comes in through the open door but no longer hates the sight of it. It is no longer
Mary's ring, it is Sherlock's.

He cleans off as best he can before taking a warm, damp flannel back into the bedroom. With care
and love, he cleans Sherlock's stomach, kissing the damp skin when he finishes. His legs shake
rather less on the return walk to the bathroom and he quickly relieves himself before washing his
hands and applying his hand cream. Beeswax, something he knows will appeal to Sherlock.
Entering the bedroom again, John blows out the candles, bathing the bedroom in the subdued light
of the streetlights filtering in through the curtains.

He drops into bed next to Sherlock, smoothing back damp curls and kissing full lips. Pulling the
covers over them, John settles more comfortably, waiting for Sherlock to curl into him. Within
seconds, a long, warm body is wrapped around his and he sighs deeply at the contact.

"I love you. Always have, always will." John mumbles before yawning widely, jaw cracking at the
stretch.

"I know, John. And I, you." Sherlock's lips brush against the skin over John's clavicle. "John?"

"Yes, love?" Comes John's sleep slurried reply.

"Can we do that again? Soon?"

"Whatever you want, Sherlock, love. Whatever you want." The words have barely left John's lips
before he slips into a deep and dreamless sleep.

Sherlock remains awake only a few minutes longer, making a start at cataloguing all of the new
experiences today has brought. When John's phone pings with an incoming message an hour later
neither man even so much as twitches. For long seconds the screen stays brightly lit, a single name
upon it.

Mary.

Chapter End Notes

Da Da DAAAA! Cliffhanger!
Surprises come as all types

Chapter Summary

"Home!" John snorts. "Baker Street is home. Half completed experiments and feet in the fridge, are home. Case notes pinned to the wall and cold cups of tea, are home. That woman and that place we 'shared' is not home, has never been home!" John takes a deep breath, attempting to calm himself, aware that Sherlock does not deserve to be on the receiving end of his anger. "You, and wherever you are, is my home."

Chapter Notes

Huge thanks, as always, goes to my magnificent beta, Lockedinjohnlock, she of the amazing podfic recordings!

John gets up once during the night, the sound of his alarm waking him. He goes through the same routine as the previous evening, ensuring that Sherlock takes his painkillers and settles back to sleep comfortably. John pays only enough attention to his phone that is required for turning his alarm off. Before long, John sinks back into bed, sighing happily when Sherlock snuggles back into him.

They sleep, undisturbed, until mid-morning when hunger and awareness of Sherlock's medication requirements rouse John. He stretches and dons one of Sherlock's dressing gowns, dropping his phone, unchecked, into the deep pocket. He moves around their kitchen, gathering together breakfast, re-using a tray from last night, leaving the dirty dinner plates to be dealt with later. Food settled on the tray, John heads back into the bedroom to wake Sherlock.

Sherlock is already awake and idly tapping away on his laptop; John has no idea when Sherlock brought it through to the bedroom but is grateful to see Sherlock awake and alert. A visual check confirms that Sherlock is still pale, even by his normal standards but that the deep purple-grey beneath his eyes is starting to diminish. John notes that Sherlock is perhaps still a little thin in the face but knows that Sherlock will soon regain the lost weight, Mrs Hudson's numerous gifts of food ensuring it. He knows, through very thorough investigation, that Sherlock is very fit, the bullet wound continuing to heal well. The thought of last night's activities brings a smile to John's face that is answered by one of Sherlock's when he looks up from his laptop.

They sit in companionable silence as they munch their way through toast with either jam or honey, a basic muesli topped with fresh chopped banana and strawberries and two mugs of tea. Once they've had their fill, John takes the breakfast dishes back into the kitchen. He eyes the mounting dirty crockery in the sink before firmly turning his back and returning to the bedroom.

"What time is it, John?" Sherlock queries, an odd look flitting across his features.

John fishes around the deep pockets of Sherlock's dressing gown, thumbing the phone into life. His brows furrow when he sees that he has a message, a quick click gets him into the menu and his stomach lurches when he sees the name of the sender- Mary.
"Did you know?" John queries, shaking the phone in Sherlock's direction.

"Know what, John?" Sherlock looks at John but his gaze slides briefly to the floor.

"That Mary texted me during the night. Is that why you wanted me to check the time? Because generally you seem to be able to swipe the exact time out of the air." John's arms flail about and he starts to pace. He knows that he is overreacting but seeing Mary's name has somehow shattered the illusion of safety and contentment John had allowed to creep up on him overnight.

"No, although I suspected that she might. It's been too long since she contacted you, she's given you what she deems adequate time to get settled and now she's reminding you of your responsibilities and that she needs you to go home." Sherlock's voice is calm and his body language open, sensing that John feels emotionally vulnerable.

"Home!" John snorts. "Baker Street is home. Half completed experiments and feet in the fridge, are home. Case notes pinned to the wall and cold cups of tea, are home. That woman and that place we 'shared' is not home, has never been home!" John takes a deep breath, attempting to calm himself, aware that Sherlock does not deserve to be on the receiving end of his anger. "You, and wherever you are, is my home."

Sherlock stares at John, his lips slightly parted until John shuffles uncomfortably. The movement seems to alert Sherlock to the fact that he hasn't spoken.

"I feel the same, John. What is that awful saying?" Sherlock scrunches his eyes shut, a parody of thinking. "Home is where the heart is. You already have my heart, it's only logical that you are my home too." Sherlock pats the bed next to him, indicating that John should sit. Once John is positioned comfortably, he opens his hand, his palm marked from where his fist had clenched around the phone. A simple nod is shared and John flicks open the message.

Meet our daughter. xxx

Attached to the text is a black and white image from an ultrasound. The outline of a developing baby, crystal clear.

John waits to feel something about the small image on his screen. In all likelihood he has a daughter on the way, this little black and white blob could share his DNA, could conceivably be part of his life, for the rest of his life. But he feels nothing. No surge of love. No disappointment. Absolutely nothing and he knows that he should be finding that reaction worrying.

"John?" Sherlock rests his hand on John's thigh, offering comfort through simple contact.

"I guess it means it's real then." John states dully.

"It could be someone else's scan, John. It might not be Mary's scan that we are looking at." Sherlock tries to reason but his voice sounds flat, his face carefully blank.

"The evidence is all there," John enlarges the picture, honing in on the information contained around the picture. "it's yesterday's date. She had the scan done at Bart's, she knows I know most of the people on staff there. I've either trained or worked with them or I've referred patients to them. I did a lot of work at Bart's whilst you were gone, Sherlock. I forced myself to." John pauses, taking time to calm himself before continuing with the original conversation. "I know the sonographer, Kalvindar Kular. I did some training with her before I joined up. We've met a few times for lunch, she knows Mary, likes her."

"Is there a chance that Mary bribed or threatened Dr Kular somehow to get these pictures."
"Unlikely. Kalvindar isn't easily intimidated. She faced off a gang of drunken football louts without so much as batting an eyelash. She's got no family for Mary to intimidate and I'd be very surprised if she accepted bribery." John rubs his hands over his face before exiting the messaging app on his phone. "I think we need to face it, Sherlock. She's pregnant and in all bloody likelihood it's mine."

"And if that is the truth of the matter then we will deal with it. Together. As we should have done everything." Sherlock squeezes John's thigh before looping his arm around his shoulder and tugging the man against him.

John slumps against Sherlock's side and his emotions finally catch up with him, shock and angry disappointment foremost.

"Oh god, it's all so fucked up. Why is it always my fault, Sherlock?" John begs, hands covering his face as he fights back bitter tears.

Sherlock sucks in a breath at John's repetition of words from weeks ago, words Sherlock had hoped never to hear again.

"I'm sorry, John." John leans more heavily into Sherlock, shaking his head as tears escape between his fingers.

"It's not your fault, love." Wiping his tears away, John kisses Sherlock's shoulder, "I was the idiot who had sex with her, married her."

"But I left you. Let you believe I was dead. Maybe....."

"No!" John interrupts. "We're not going down that path. We have both done things that we shouldn't have done and we are not going to rehash it all. We need to move on. I said I forgave you, Sherlock and I meant it."

"You forgave me and now you need to forgive yourself."

"I...I..." John halts, forces himself to breathe evenly before answering Sherlock, "You're right."

They sit for long minutes, side by side, drawing reassurance and consolation from each other. The sound of running water and the clattering of crockery breaks through their self-inflicted silence. John tugs Sherlock into a lingering kiss before straightening up, pulling his borrowed dressing gown tighter around him. He crosses to the wardrobe and gets out the deep blue dressing gown, a favourite of his and passes it to Sherlock. John admires the way the blue satin moves over the pale, smooth skin of Sherlock's shoulders, tracing the path John's lips took only half a day ago. They enter the kitchen together, Sherlock, much to John's surprise, linking his large hand with John's own smaller one.

"Good morning, boys." Mrs Hudson greets them with a smile, going on her toes to try and kiss Sherlock's cheek. John smothers a grin when Sherlock stoops down, meeting her half way, letting her plant a kiss on his whiskery cheek. "You need a shave, Sherlock, you're looking quite the down and out." She turns back to the sink, continuing with the washing up. "It's almost as bad as John's old moustache."

Sherlock sniggers before leading John back into the living room, pushing him down to sit down on the sofa, curling up beside him. Taking a laptop, John's this time, he proceeds to tap away, earnestly researching something or another. John knows that Sherlock will share information in his own sweet time and reaches for the TV remote, flicking through the channels until he finds something suitably entertaining, settling in for what may be the long-haul.
After what may be hours (and is at least five episodes of Doctor Who) John finds his attention being required once more.

"John?" Sherlock calls, trying for John's notice. "I believe that if I have my pain killers now and we take a cab I'll be able to accompany you on your trip to Bart's."

"My trip to where?" John queries, quickly running his mind back over the last few hours, wondering if he'd missed some crucial part of a conversation. "Sherlock, I don't have a trip planned anywhere. Unless it's to drag you to the barbers!" John ruffles Sherlock's hair, making the over-long curls even more disordered.

Sherlock simply huffs and directs one of his 'you idiot,' glares at John. "I've emailed Molly and she's agreed to test your blood and semen if we can be there within the next two hours."

John is flabbergasted, his mouth hanging slightly open and it takes him a moment to recover the power of speech. "You....... in your wisdom....... thought you'd ask our friend....... to take samples of my blood and ejaculate....." John can only get out parts of the sentence, needing to take deep breaths between each segment, embarrassment and anger fighting for dominance. "And what if I don't want to whip my cock out in front of Molly, hmmm?" Anger is winning, his face stretching into what his friends in the army referred to as his 'anger smile'.

"John, be reasonable." Sherlock sounds calm but John can hear the wariness in his voice. "Molly is the logical choice. Mike Stamford no longer carries out medical work, hiding in the world of teaching. I suspected you wouldn't want any work colleagues, past or present, involved which leaves Molly. Anything else could take weeks to arrange and gain the results and," Sherlock loses some of his bluster and John finally sees how nervous Sherlock actually is, "And I thought you wanted the results as quickly as possible."

John sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. He counts down from thirty in his head, ten having never been sufficient when dealing with mad geniuses. "Ok. Ok. You're right. Molly it is. But won't she think it strange that I'm having these tests? Or that we are having her do them? Her patients are usually dead, love."

Hearing the endearment, Sherlock visibly relaxes. "All true. But I know that she can be trusted beyond any doubt - as do you." John nods, wincing against the memory of why he knows she can be trusted. "She won't tell anyone your results; they won't even make it into the medical database if you don't wish them to."

"Right. Ok." John pulls himself to attention, actively making the decision to move the day forward even if that does mean giving blood and having to masturbate on demand. He allows himself a smirk, realising that at least he won't have any shortage of images to use for that particular activity. "Food and pain killers first, then you can at least shave the worst of that fur off - I have an electric razor you can use. Once your painkillers are up to full effectiveness we will go to Bart's. Get it all sorted."

Within the hour both men are fed, showered and (almost) cleanly shaven and standing outside the morgue in St. Bart's. John clutches a take-away coffee and Sherlock sips at a tea, the steam curling in tendrils around the short stubble on his cheeks. They both take much longer than usual to finish their drinks. John knows why he is delaying, good old fashioned embarrassment, but he can't work out why Sherlock is doing the same.

The corridor is cold and dimly lit, a stark reminder of what lies on the other side of the wide doors. John has always found this part of the hospital strangely reassuring, he knows it's more to do with the fact that people like Molly will be there, looking after his body long after any spark of life has
left it. It's what he found comforting when he allowed himself to think about Sherlock's 'death' (long after the actual fall but before he had met Mary)! that is was Doctor Molly Hooper who personally took care of Sherlock. Would have cleansed his body, positioned his limbs, sewn up his injuries and rinsed out his curls. John had oscillated between jealousy and gratefulness that she had been the one to care for Sherlock.

A firm squeeze to his bicep shakes John out of his memories and back into the present.

"Ready, John?" Sherlock's bright eyes fix on John, reading so much more than John's discomfort. Eyes that are a light, clear grey today, luckily miles away from the bright sky blue they had been when Sherlock lay 'dead' on the wet, uncaring pavement. John gives a brief nod, lips pinched together, jawline pronounced and strong, determination radiating from every pore before both men push the doors open, entering the cool sterility of the morgue.

"Hello Sherlock, John." Molly smiles up at them. She's her usual self, hair pulled back with tendrils escaping or fluffing around her head like the soft feathers on a baby bird. Her white lab coat sits open over a fluffy jumper that even John has to fight not to cringe at. She chatters away inanely about various investigations she has already completed today and about a night out she has planned with some of the girls from work and leads them into her small office.

John can't quite hold back the smile that pulls at his lips. Here and there are photos of her cat, Toby and although her office is organised and efficient, Molly's personality has made its mark. Little cat figurines nestle amongst the medical books, a framed photo of Molly and Toby sits next to the light-box used to read X-Rays. A baby pink scarf rests over the back of a black leather office chair, it's softness at odds with the solid bulk of the chair. He sits in the chair that Molly directs him to, taking off his coat and jumper and rolling up the sleeve of his shirt.

"I know I don't really have to explain the procedure to you, John. I'll do as many of the tests as I can immediately and the others I can do over the coming week, I'll let you know the results as soon as possible." Molly prepares John's inner elbow before expertly sliding the needle in, swapping the vacuumed test tubes as they fill. John had expected to feel the needle, for Molly to fumble it slightly, after all, her patients would not complain about pain or sloppiness and he is pleased to be proved wrong. Sherlock is watching the procedure avidly, smirking slightly when he reads John's surprise.

"Ok, John, ummm.." Molly colours and shoves a wrapped, sterile, plastic beaker in his hand. "Sherlock ordered, I mean requested, ummmm..." The blush of Molly's cheeks is endearing, as is her stuttering and John would feel more kindly towards her if he weren't fighting embarrassment of his own. He can't help feeling rather idiotic about it all; he's had more personal and intrusive tests done in the past but the fact that Molly is a friend and obviously knows precisely why he's having these tests is unnerving. "I'll just...ummm...leave you two to it, then."

Molly has almost disappeared out of her office door when Sherlock stops her.

"I think John may be more comfortable doing what is necessary for this test somewhere a little less public. Somewhere without windows would be ideal, a lock on the door preferable. The little area you wash in, perhaps?" Although it's worded as a question Molly realises that it's more of a polite demand than a request. Blushing furiously, Molly retrieves the bathroom key from her pocket and gives it to Sherlock.

Suddenly she faces John, her shoulders pulled back, professional demeanour firmly in place. "As I'm sure you know, John, you need to wash your hands thoroughly before either touching yourself or the receptacle. Don't allow anyone else to touch you or the receptacle unless they have also thoroughly washed. Hands only please." A slight tinge of pink crests on Molly's cheekbones but
she maintains eye contact and continues. "Capture as much as you can in the receptacle, cover it back over and bring it to me immediately." She pauses, a naughty grin suddenly gracing her pretty face. "I would offer to go over to the Sexual Health Clinic and borrow some of their magazines to help you find the correct mindset for this," Her gaze drifts over to where Sherlock has returned to sit in his chair, taking in long legs encased in close fitting trousers, the purple shirt straining across a slim chest and the way Sherlock can't seem to keep his eyes off John for longer than twenty seconds. "But I really don't feel that that's going to be an issue." Her smile grows, taking in the stunned looks on both men's faces. "Have fun, boys!"

The click of the office door rouses John from his shock. He grips the pot more firmly in his left hand, staring at the door of Molly's bathroom. Squaring his shoulders, he marches over to Sherlock, holding out his hand in a silent request for the key.

"Oh no, John." Sherlock's gaze slides over John, causing the hair on the nape of his neck to rise, there's something almost predatory in Sherlock's intense stare. "We have to make sure you do this right, no errors."

"I'm fairly certain I know how to wank, Sherlock." John swallows, licking his lips when Sherlock's eyes dart down to follow the movement of his Adam's apple.

"Really? I rather hoped I could lend a hand." Sherlock looms over him, taking his face between his large hands, looking intently into John's eyes before meeting John's lips with his own. The kiss that follows leaves John breathless. It's searing in its intensity and in a few short minutes has John beginning to get hard in his trousers, desperate for Sherlock's touch.

Sherlock unlocks the bathroom door and hustles John inside the room, locking the door behind him. They both reach to undo John's jeans, Sherlock managing the task first, gently pushing the material of jeans and underwear down to expose John's cock to the air.

"This feels faintly ludicrous, Sherlock," John mutters as he shuffles over to the sink, filling the bowl with warm water.

"Trust me, John," is all that Sherlock has to say on the matter. He washes his own hands before pulling John's into the water and cleaning them, working up a layer of suds between their skin. John gasps when Sherlock grips him in a warm, wet, foamy hand and holds Sherlock's waist for stability. Without letting go of John, Sherlock moves slightly so that he is sitting on the lid of the toilet and John adjusts his hands to Sherlock's shoulders. Sherlock keeps his gaze firmly on John's face as he works him, smoothing along John's cock, cleaning and teasing him. John doesn't even try to hide his reactions, letting them all show through, although he does stifle his moans and gasps, biting firmly on his lower lip. Sherlock releases his hold on John, rinsing the suds off his hands beneath warm, running water. Taking John back in his hands, Sherlock rinses the hot skin of John's cock until no suds remain, his skin flushed dark pink with the flow of blood that rushes to make him hard and throbbing in Sherlock's large hands. With swift strokes and twists Sherlock has John at the edge of his orgasm in what feels like record time. He digs his fingers deep into the muscles at Sherlock's shoulders and somehow Sherlock has the uncovered pot positioned in exactly the right place. John ejaculates almost violently, biting on his lip hard enough to draw blood in an effort to stop shouting out. Sherlock releases his hold on John, carefully covering the pot and placing it to one side before pulling John's clothes up off his thighs. He tugs at John's waist, directing John to straddle his lap before pulling him into a deep, lingering kiss, finally moving to nip along his jawline, stopping under his ear.

"That is something I'd be very happy to repeat," Sherlock whispers, the tip of his nose nuzzling against John's ear, plush lips over John's frantic pulse. "without the pot, of course." Sherlock
chuckles, the vibration of it against his neck causing John to shiver. Sherlock licks John's neck, tasting the fine film of sweat before easing John off his lap.

John dresses himself properly, amazed at how little mess they made and watches as Sherlock washes his hands. Long, elegant fingers are covered in soap and carefully rinsed and John allows himself a moment to really revel in how those beautiful hands had held him, teased him, worked him until he'd had an amazing orgasm.

When they emerge, the office is still, thankfully, empty. John can see Molly working at one of the computers in the lab, earphones in, her back deliberately turned. He leaves Sherlock sitting in the office, the flush on Sherlock's cheeks now starting to subside, and walks down the stairs to see Molly. She starts slightly when he taps her, quickly removing the earphones.

"Sorry. Sorry, I could still hear so I put some music on." She holds the earphone up to John and he flinches away when AC/DC blasts out at him.

"Er," John clears his throat, "Good choice." He leaves it up to Molly to decide whether he means her playing music to cover their noise or her choice in music. "I'll bring the sample down, shall I?"

Molly nods, thankful that John is the one to raise the subject. A few moments later and Molly is settled at a microscope, a sample of John's sperm on the slide.

"I'm giving it a visual check first, John. Checking for obvious abnormalities or diseases. I'll run other tests later." John nods, surprised that Sherlock isn't itching to look, too.

Molly makes notes of what she can see before frowning and adjusting the focus. She removes the slide and applies a fresh sample to another slide, focussing once more and frowning more deeply.

"How fresh is this sample, John?"

"What are you talking about, Molly? You know precisely how fresh it is. You saw how flushed and relaxed John was when he handed you the sample." Sherlock snaps.

Molly ignores him, directing her focus purely at John. "Did either of you touch anything other than the soap and water?"

John opens his mouth to answer but Sherlock interrupts. "Well obviously I touched John but other than that, the sample was collected under the exact conditions you requested."

John's jaw closes with a click but he walks over to where Molly is now encouraging him to look through the microscope lens. He looks, glances at Molly then gestures for Sherlock to look. Sherlock studies the slide for a long time before switching to a new sample. He looks at John, emotions warring for supremacy on his face.

"John. You're not the baby's father."
what the future may bring - part 1

Chapter Summary

"I don't know what I'm allowed to say, John. I'm not good at empty platitudes and I promised I wouldn't lie to you but I'm afraid I'll hurt your feelings if I tell you how I'm actually feeling." The deep furrow at the bridge of Sherlock's nose even more pronounced than usual, one hand is wrapped around his mug, his fingers white under the tension whilst the other hand skitters over the arm rest.

Chapter Notes

Hello! Trying something a bit different. I've been very busy relaxing recently, first beautiful West Wales and now London. It has meant that my internet access has been sketchy at best! I finally have internet but I'm struggling to get the story to copy across which means I am re-typing the whole of this chapter (challenging with limited time and two daughters! One teen, one pre-teen) as such I am going to post only half of the chapter today and try my best to type up the rest very soon there after.
Please, please, please excuse any mistakes (drop me a polite pointer though) my beta worked tirelessly on this but I've probably made loads of mistakes on the re-typing!
Oh! And what about that snippet of S4 we got to see?! Oh my goodness!

Back at Baker Street, Sherlock resists the temptation to pace but his emotions are too near to the surface, too much for him to be able to cope with whilst seated in his armchair. He clenches at the armrests, his fingers making deep indents, his knees bounce with the effort of keeping his feet still.

"Sherlock? You've been very quiet since we left Bart's, are you ok?" John asks, holding out a sandwich and a cup of tea. Sherlock accepts the offerings before taking the painkillers John gives him.

"I don't know what I'm allowed to say, John. I'm not good at empty platitudes and I promised I wouldn't lie to you but I'm afraid I'll hurt your feelings if I tell you how I'm actually feeling." The deep furrow at the bridge of Sherlock's nose even more pronounced than usual, one hand is wrapped around his mug, his fingers white under the tension whilst the other hand skitters over the arm rest.

"Tell me what you are feeling, Sherlock. You might be surprised by my reaction." The sound of John's warm voice goes a long way towards calming Sherlock and he tips his head up from where he has been staring daggers at the rug. He studies John, unable to read any signs of stress on him. John is actually as relaxed as he appears to be, sipping at his coffee (no caffeine for an already jittery Sherlock) and eating his sandwich with apparent enjoyment.

"I feel beyond happy that you seem to be sterile, John. That the chance that your sperm could have fertilised Mary's egg is so microscopically small as to feel impossible." He draws a deep breath, glancing at his sandwich and picks at the crusts, rolling the bread into small balls between his
fingertips. "That it means she will have no hold over you, nothing to pull you back into her orbit. That I get to keep you."

"Why would any of that hurt my feelings?" John asks, empty sandwich plate moved to his side table. He leans forwards, elbows on his knees, his face earnest. "I'm not so insecure to think that the fact that I probably can't father a child makes me any less of a man. I didn't want to be a father, hadn't really accepted the fact that I might be one. Like you, I'm beyond relieved that in all likelihood I'm not going to be."

"But aren't you shocked by the results?"

"A little, if I'm perfectly honest. I've had a few mates I served with who have since found out they're sterile. We used to joke that it was the conditions we lived in and whatever chemical crap the current enemy were bombarding us with. Not such an idle joke, it seems. I guess we will know more after the next test and Molly has arranged for a new sample to go through the Computer Assisted Semen Analysis system, find out what is going on." John shifts so his hand is resting on Sherlock's knee. "Besides, my life partner doesn't require for me to be able to father a child. If, in the future, we decide to have children of our own then we can adopt or hire a surrogate and use your sperm."

Sherlock knows he must be doing the 'blinky thing' John had teased him about when he'd asked him to be Best Man but he can't seem to force himself to stop. He focuses on the weight of John's hand on his knee, its presence anchoring him, slowing the blinking and allowing him to think.

"Children?" He queries, voice lifting at the end, certain that he couldn't have heard correctly.

"Yeah, maybe one day," John grins, his face soft with sentiment. "Marriage first," he chuckles. "I'm a traditionalist, after all."

"Traditionalist!" Sherlock's voice returns to its full power, sounding almost harsh to his ears. "You're in a sexual relationship with a man!"

"I guess that would depend on whose traditions I'm following; the Ancient Greeks didn't seem to have a problem with it." John is still smiling over at Sherlock, his eyes twinkling.

Sherlock narrows his eyes, fingers pressed together and resting on his lower lip. "I believe you are having fun at my expense."

John squeezes Sherlock's knee before leaning back in his chair, grinning. "Maybe a little but that doesn't mean I wouldn't be open to the idea of kids with you at some point in our future."

"Yes, well." Sherlock shuffles in his chair, utterly at a loss for words. A family has never featured in any of his visions of the future but the idea of sharing a child with John has a certain appeal. A child with his own dark curls and sharp intellect but tempered with John's compassion and humanity? Maybe that wouldn't be a dreadful future to have. He eats his sandwich, visualising what a future like that might bring and being surprised at how content it makes him feel.

Early evening finds Sherlock dozing on the sofa and John dozing in his chair in front of the telly, the sound a distant mumble. The sound of Mrs Hudson talking unusually loudly whilst walking up the stairs startles them both fully awake.

"Mary dear, you're looking well, positively glowing. I'll just pop up and let the boys know you're here, shall I? Mrs Hudson twitters away, sounding every inch the slightly batty landlady that Mary has always presumed her to be.
"Oh there's no need, Mrs Hudson, I can't imagine they'll mind me just popping by. Just want to remind myself what my husband looks like."

Mary's laugh jars Sherlock, making him flinch and his chest throb. He moves from the sofa to his chair, wishing that he felt strong enough to lean against the fireplace or stand by his case board, anything to give him an advantage over Mary. His limbs are tired and his chest aches; the trip to Bart's, the reality of the baby and John's vision of a hopeful future for them has thoroughly exhausted him. John looks in his direction, rising partially from his chair and Sherlock shakes his head, indicating for John to stay where he is.

Mary and Mrs Hudson enter the room and Sherlock makes an effort to stand and greet Mary, working to keep his face devoid of any negative emotions - after all, he is supposed to have forgiven her for her actions and understand her reasons.

"Mary. What an unexpected surprise. Do sit down." He gestures to the sofa, wincing when she makes a deliberate move towards his chair.

"You'd be more comfortable on the sofa." John is abrupt in his speech, eyes avoiding Mary. Sherlock is grateful Mary isn't paying him any attention now, her eyes locked on John. She moves her head in a vaguely reptilian manner before taking a seat on the sofa, twitching her coat out around her.

"Oh, I do exist then. I thought the fact that I sent you a photo of your daughter last night would be worthy of a response, but apparently not." Mary's eyes are cold but her hands are grasped in her lap, whether resisting the temptation to attack or to prevent her from wringing them, Sherlock does not know.

John rises from his seat and walks over to where Mary is sitting. He looks down at her for a while, his gaze taking in her face and the gentle swell of her stomach beneath the ill-fitting shirt she is wearing. His face softens and he sits near her on the sofa, looking directly in her eyes.

"You're right," John's voice is intimate but he has kept it clear enough that Sherlock can hear every word. "I should have answered your message, told you exactly how I felt about the baby. I'm just finding it much harder than Sherlock is to move past the fact that you shot him." He holds up a hand, seeking her silence. "The baby makes it all much simpler, doesn't it? We all need to be in the correct places when she comes along don't we?"

Sherlock realises that he never gave John the credit he deserved when it came to his acting skills and verbal diplomacy. John is giving Mary all the right indications that he is coming home without actually saying the words. He's acknowledged the baby and has very carefully but not overtly neglected to claim her as his own. Mary takes John's words as they stand, not expecting any duplicity from him.

"Yes, John. You need to be at home." She reaches for John but drops her hand when he backs slightly away.

"Home is precisely where I will be, Mary." He twiddles with his wedding ring, smiling at a memory. Sherlock knows precisely what is bringing that crooked smile to John's lips and his heart skips as he fights down his own answering smile.

"You seem very attached to that ring for a man who isn't living with his wife." Mary quips, nodding her head at John's hands.

"Sherlock needs me, Mary." John deliberately lets her assume that he means whilst Sherlock
recovers. "And yes, I love the ring. It has special memories attached to it. Every time I see it, or touch it, I remember when it was placed on my finger and it makes me happy. I think of all the good times that have been and all the good times yet to come." Sherlock watches as John keeps his focus fixed on the ring, acknowledging neither him nor Mary but Sherlock knows that John means when he had placed the ring back on John's finger.

"Oh, John!" Mary's eyes are bright with unshed tears and John allows it when she moves to press a kiss to his cheek. Sherlock notices the way that John's shoulders twitch at the contact, worrying that Mary may have seen it too. No, her eyes are shut, the moisture of escaping tears clinging to her lashes.
What the future may bring - part 2

Chapter Summary

"Everything ok?" John stretches for his phone and checks the time. "Are you in pain? You're not due your meds for a few hours yet." John yawns and pulls himself up into a sitting position, weight resting against the pillows gathered behind him.

Sherlock stares at John, at all the bare skin on display. The light filters through Sherlock's thin curtains and casts a soft glow over John's skin and Sherlock's hands twitch with the need to feel that skin beneath his fingertips. He wants to trace the way each muscle sits and moves in John's torso, to run his fingers through the smattering of hair over John's chest, follow the darkening trail on his abdomen to where it dips beneath the sheets.

Chapter Notes

Here it is! The much awaited (hopefully!) part 2! I had a nightmare of a time getting it to transfer! 3 times I wrote it directly into AO3, losing it twice! Please forgive any mistakes that I've made in my copy across, I wrote this whilst staying at my in-laws, blithely pretending I wasn't writing gay sex!

Last week I had a wonderful time in London, explored Hampton Court Palace, Camden Market, Portobello Road and goodness knows what else. I only passed through Baker Street on a train but next visit I'll spend more time there.

I was lucky enough to meet with one of my readers, and dear friend, the lovely Angel Annunnaki and she introduced me and my daughters to the delights of Mauritian food, heaven on a plate! Thank you so much, I'm sure that Sherlock would appreciate those delights too!

Long seconds pass before Mary pulls away and when she does, her first glance is towards Sherlock. He catches the look of victory in her eyes before she swiftly alters her features, adopting one of cautious happiness.

"Sherlock. I've been so rude sitting here worrying about my problems. How are you doing?" Mary asks and Sherlock reflects how the casual observer would never know that everyone in the room was fully aware of just who shot him in the first place.

"I'm doing well, thank you, Mary. John is an excellent doctor, nagging me to eat when necessary and ensuring I take my medication. You know, the dull stuff." Sherlock tries to downplay how much he needs John to remain with him, knowing that if he let Mary know just how much he needs John she will find a way to take him with her.

"You must be tired after your day at the hospital though?" Mary queries, her voice light and conversational.
"I am." Sherlock doesn't bother to ask how Mary knows he's been to Bart's, refusing to join in with her mind games.

"Are you having problems, Sherlock? Has an infection set in? I can check it if you like?" Sherlock fights down the shudder that threatens to overtake him.

"No infection, just a series of tests I wanted Molly to run whilst I was injured. She appreciates my morbid curiosity and she never could say no to me." He fixes a suitable smirk to his face, relieved when Mary loses interest.

"Well, as long as you are both well I'll say goodnight. I don't want to be out too late, this little one is already making me tired." She laughs and pats her tummy.

She presses another swift kiss to John's cheek before leaving the flat. John watches her until she leaves the building, moving to the shadows around the window to watch her progress down the street, fist clenched at his side.

"The bloody cheek of that woman!" John expels. "How dare she come here and pretend like she hadn't tried to kill you."

"It's fine, John. I'm fine," Sherlock soothes, moving to stand behind John, looping his arms around his waist.

"It's not.", John tilts his head back, resting his head lightly against Sherlock's shoulder. "But it will be." He turns in Sherlock's loose embrace, gazing up at him. "Oh love, you're exhausted. Let's get some toast into you and the last of today's painkillers and head to bed."

Sherlock nods in agreement, his eyelids drooping heavily. Together they shuffle into the kitchen and Sherlock leans against the counter, eating the toast when it is offered and taking his tablets. Another shuffle gets them both into the bedroom where John helps Sherlock get undressed and comfortable before going to lock the flat up. Sherlock stays awake only long enough to feel John's naked body cuddled up against his own. Both men are asleep long before the sheets even warm up from their body heat, the day's adventures taking their toll.

The night passes quietly and Sherlock and John only wake for the early morning medication call, falling asleep again soon after.

Sherlock wakes an hour after dawn and feels more invigorated than he has in weeks, months if he's honest with himself. John stirs at the movement of Sherlock leaving the bed, blinking bleary eyes in his direction.

"Everything ok?" John stretches for his phone and checks the time. "Are you in pain? You're not due your meds for a few hours yet." John yawns and pulls himself up into a sitting position, weight resting against the pillows gathered behind him.

Sherlock stares at John, at all the bare skin on display. The light filters through Sherlock's thin curtains and casts a soft glow over John's skin and Sherlock's hands twitch with the need to feel that skin beneath his fingertips. He wants to trace the way each muscle sits and moves in John's torso, to run his fingers through the smattering of hair over John's chest, follow the darkening trail on his abdomen to where it dips beneath the sheets.

"Everything is fine, better than fine, in fact. I'm just restless, I need to be doing something, John. A case, an experiment, anything." Sherlock smiles down at John, silently reassuring him that he still loves him, isn't bored by him.
"That's good then, let me get dressed and I'll dig out some of the cold cases Greg gave me for you or I can help set up your stuff in the kitchen. It's still too soon for you to be lifting anything heavy." John swings his legs off the edge of the bed causing Sherlock to salivate when John flicks off the covers.

"Later." Sherlock moves to stand between John's parted thighs, aware that it puts his burgeoning erection at John's eye level, before slowly sinking down on to his knees. "I can think of other ways to use my excess energy,". Sherlock smirks and lowers his face until it is level with John's cock.

"Oh yeah?" John's voice is husky, an appealing mix of just-awake and aroused. Sherlock leans into the hand that slides into his hair; the touch of John's fingers against his scalp delivering a sensuality Sherlock hadn't allowed himself to experience before John. "And what might they be?"

John gasps when Sherlock sweeps down and kisses the shaft of John's cock, breathing deep of the scent of him. He moves when John clutches at his hair, encouraging him to move away. John pants, battling with letting Sherlock continue despite not knowing if he definitely has a clean bill of health, and doing the right thing and putting a stop to it. Reason wins.

Sherlock observes John's features as he makes his decision, sighing when the decision is made. He licks his lips and allows his eyes to close, imagining that he can still taste John on his skin, feel the hot, silkiness of John's penis against his sensitive lips.

"You're a sensible man, John. Condoms have always been in use during penetrative sex with previous partners. Any one night stands you've had you've insisted that protection was in place for any sex. On the few occasions you've performed oral sex on another without protection you've had yourself tested." Sherlock stands up, pulling John with him. "But I understand your concern and I won't do that again. At least, not until we know you are clear of any disease."

He pulls John in to a kiss, dipping at the knees slightly to deepen the kiss. Sherlock loves the way John kisses, he pours his whole soul into the action, lips and tongue delivering messages of love, lust and adoration. He kisses down John's neck, mumbling words of love into the hot skin before suddenly moving away. John starts to make a noise of protest but laughs when he is being pulled into the bathroom.

Sherlock leans over their bath and turns the tap on. He debates over adding some bubble bath but knows that John will protest at the possibility that Sherlock's wound may become irritated.

"You want to share a bath?" John questions. Sherlock resists the temptation to roll his eyes and merely nods. John laughs aloud and Sherlock realises that perhaps he hadn't resisted the eye roll temptation as thoroughly as he had thought. "That's a lovely idea, but keep it shallow and we'll change your dressing directly afterwards."

Sherlock nods in agreement, smiling at the way that John is naked except for his smile, his erection eager for attention but he still summons the doctor to the forefront when he's needed.

The bath fills quickly and Sherlock gets in, directing John to sit between his spread legs, thankful for the room their old fashioned bath gives them.

"I can't lean against you, Sherlock." John states as he gets in.

"No, but I can lean into you a little. I trust you not to hurt me."

Sherlock reaches for the shower gel and squeezes some into his large hand. The smell of citrus fills the warm, moist air and Sherlock knows he will never be able to smell lime again without
visualising his hand on John's skin. He thoroughly washes John's back, trailing his fingers over John's scar, the place where the bullet left his body forever marked with knotted scar tissue and a testament to John's life story. Sherlock slides his soapy hands over John's shoulders, exploring their strength with his fingertips before dipping beneath his arms, working his fingers through the soft, fine hair. John wriggles slightly, ticklish and Sherlock moves his hands so that they glide over John's chest. He can feel the way John's nipples harden beneath his touch, the way that John fights the instinct to lean back against Sherlock, gripping at the sides of the bath instead. Gradually, Sherlock works his hands down John's body, dipping them under the water to take John in his hand. Yesterday he had needed to be quick with actions, bringing John to climax before self-consciousness of their surroundings had fully hit him. Today he means to take his time, to feel John as he reacts to each stroke and slide before finally climaxing at Sherlock's hand.

The small room fills with the gentle splash of water as Sherlock's hand moves, John sighs and moans at each touch, his body swaying in tandem with Sherlock's. Sherlock presses light kisses to the nape of John's neck, before delivering open mouthed kisses along the line of his shoulders, tongue stealing a taste as he moves. His right hand dips in and out of the water, stroking along John's cock, exploring each ridge and vein with dexterous fingers along the line of his shoulders, learning the feel of him and how to bring John close to climax without tipping him over the edge. His own penis bobs rigidly in the water, ignored for now as he enjoys every element that John offers. John's arms are rigid, his hands clenched against the bath edge, tendons tensed and his moans are almost continuous. Sherlock delivers another long stroke, teasing around the tip of John's cock and nips at John's shoulder when he feels John get even harder in his hand. This time, he allows him to tip over, John's hips lift and his cock breaks the waterline, ejaculate spurting up before falling back in the water. The bath water moves in waves before settling as John's body stills, his head hanging forward as he attempts to regain the use of his body. Sherlock leans forward and wraps John in his arms, resting his cheek against John's heaving back.

"I love you." Sherlock basks in the simple joy of being able to tell John what he feels. He knows he doesn't have to limit it to after sex but it feels right to say it then, too.

"I love you, too." John huffs out, smiling over his shoulder at Sherlock. "And what is it with you and handjobs in bathrooms?" He teases, eyes sparkling.
"Christ. Sorry, love. You must be famished and here I am falling asleep when I'm supposed to be the one looking after you." John twists slightly so he can run his fingers through the riot of curls that fan around Sherlock's face.

"It's only transport, John. Lie back down, your proximity was soothing."

Argh! First off I'm dreadfully sorry about how long it has taken to get this chapter out to you all! It's been mostly ready since June but lacking that last few hundred words.

This chapter is unbetad as my lovely beta is rushed off her feet with her glorious podfics. In fact I'm in need of a beta reader! Anyone interested? I'm a fussy bugger I'm afraid, I'll mostly need my beta to help with rogue punctuation and over use of words.

This story sticks to the series 3 premise of Mary not being a nice person.

John's offer to reciprocate in the bathroom had been met with a long and lazy kiss, broken only when Sherlock's eyes flashed open and he suddenly yelled 'Anderson!' much in the manner of Archimedes yelling 'Eureka!' Scant seconds had passed before Sherlock was scrambling out of the bath and rushing into the bedroom, leaving John giggling in the bath.

John watches from the living room as Sherlock paces their kitchen, phone pressed to his ear, skin still damp and the hastily dragged on dressing gown doing nothing to cover Sherlock's state of nakedness. Sherlock's arousal has mostly abated but John licks his lips at the sight of Sherlock's still slightly plump penis, wanting nothing more than to take Sherlock into his mouth and feel him return to complete hardness. Instead the Doctor in him steps forward, noticing that Sherlock's wound dressing is wet and in need of changing. He stands and walks into the kitchen, wrapped once again in one of Sherlock's spare dressing gowns, gesturing to get Sherlock's attention. He points to Sherlock's chest, then points to the chair, frowning at Sherlock's eye-roll and irritated gesture to the phone.

John gives Sherlock a gesture of his own, much less polite and points to the chair again before folding his arms and staring at Sherlock.

Sherlock huffs before moving to sit down.

"Thanks for that, Phillip. I'll see you later, John's insisting I have my dressing changed." Sherlock flaps at him when John tries to take the phone away. "Yes, Phillip, I'll be sure to tell him." Sherlock hands the phone to John with another huff. "Couldn't this have waited, John?"

"No. Now sit there whilst I get the new dressing." John rifles through the bag that the hospital had given him, retrieving a sterile dressing, tape and the antibiotic cream. As he gets himself organised he has to bite down a grin in response to Sherlock's annoyed muttering, Sherlock is obviously
feeling much more like his old self again.

Laying the medical paraphernalia out on the kitchen table, which is still strangely free of apparatus, John queries what the phone call was about.

"Phillip?" He keeps his voice casual, trying not to let the slight, unwarranted, jealousy he feels be heard.

"Yes, Phillip. As in Anderson." The 'obviously' goes unsaid but John can still sense it fluttering in the air.

He focuses on the task of removing the sodden bandage from Sherlock's chest, surgical gloves firmly in place, and battles with trying to pull off the wet tape without exerting any unnecessary pressure or extracting any of Sherlock's fine chest hairs.

"Annnnd there's that face again." John snorts, dropping the wet bandage onto a clean part of the table with a splat.

"The usual one?" Sherlock queries, peering up at John from under his fringe, his mouth twitching into a smile.

"Yep. The 'we both know something' face. So what's the deal with Anderson? He doesn't work with the Met anymore, not that you ever found him useful anyway, so what was with the Eureka moment and the phone call?" John touches the skin around the entry site gently checking for any signs of excessive heat that might be indicative of infection. Pleased with the healing progress he tapes on a new bandage, seeing no need for the antibiotic cream. John places the soggy bandage in the special waste bin along with his surgical gloves.

"Whilst I was... away.... he ran a little.." Sherlock wiggles his hand around, searching for a better word, failing to find a more suitable alternative he grimaces as he continues to speak. "fan club' about me. Made your little blog seem quite tame, they wore badges and... hats. Stop laughing, John!" John fights to swallow his giggles back but succeeds only in making his eyes water.

"Sorry, sorry." John wipes the tears away from his cheeks and takes a few deep breaths. "Carry on."

"Really, John. If this is all the understanding I can expect from you I'll keep my thoughts to myself." Sherlock sniffs and strides into the living room, John watches as Sherlock hesitates before lowering himself onto the sofa, eschewing his usual sprawling flop.

"Sorry, love, but the idea of you turning to Anderson for help is surreal. I just can't get my head around it." John sits on the edge of the coffee table, facing Sherlock. "What is it you're hoping to find out from him? Is it a new case? I hate to get all bossy on your arse but we agreed no new cases yet."

"Not a new case, our current one. Mary." Sherlock meets John's gaze, watching as John gives a slow nod in acknowledgement before he continues. "The timing of Mary's involvement in your life has long bothered Mycroft. Lestrade let it slip that Anderson had been 'raving' about crimes being solved across the globe, accrediting them to me and at one point, announcing very publicly whilst in a bar, that I wasn't dead."

"Well I'll be damned, that obnoxious arse knows something after all!" John interrupts, stunned that it was Anderson, of all people, that worked out that Sherlock was alive. "And the crimes being solved, they were you?"
"Yes, but that's beside the point currently."

As the realisation of what Anderson had achieved sinks in, John can feel the prickle of tears and quickly pinches at the bridge of his nose, a tried and tested method at keeping his tears at bay.

"So, if I'd bothered to look, the clues would have been there? I would have known you were still alive?" John questions, dark blue eyes focus intensely on Sherlock.

"No. Yes. Maybe." Sherlock meets John's gaze and John can feel him silently apologising, yet again, for all the pain he had caused. "The whole point was you weren't supposed to know. You were supposed to think I was dead. It was the only way to keep you safe. Please believe me, John, I would have much preferred to have been with you than ...." Sherlock stops suddenly, seemingly realising he had said too much.

"Than what, love?" John keeps his voice calm and quiet but lets the need to know show on his face. He moves to sit on the floor in front of the sofa, his head at the same level as Sherlock's.

"Than......" Sherlock swallows, flicks his gaze away and chews at his lip. John moves instinctively, smoothing his hand over Sherlock's cheek before gently combing his fingers through the soft curls that tumble against the sofa pillow. Sherlock meets John's eye again and John can see the pain of events past echoed in their silver-blue depths. "Than taking apart Moriarty's network and all that involved. So many people, John. I had to hurt so many people. I don't think I'll ever feel truly clean again but I'd do it again, in a heartbeat, if it meant keeping you safe."

John knows from the way Sherlock's voice broke on the word 'hurt' and the way his eyes turn bright blue with unshed tears that Sherlock had to do a lot more than just 'hurt' people. He leans forward and presses a kiss to Sherlock's forehead, he briefly fights the temptation to kiss Sherlock's eyelids and when Sherlock closes his eyes John can resist no longer.

He can taste the salt of escaping tears on his lips and wraps his arm over Sherlock's side, gently pulling him into an embrace.

"They say 'All's fair in love and war.' We've both fought our wars, now it's our time for the love." John breathes the words into Sherlock's soft hair, inhaling the unique scent of the man he loves.

"What a ridiculous saying." If Sherlock's words are a little sniffly and wet John wisely says nothing, merely cuddles into Sherlock more.

Long moments pass and John can feel Sherlock starting to pull himself together, he sits back on his knees, studying Sherlock's face carefully for any sign of distress before resuming his seat on the edge of the coffee table.

"Anderson took note of whom was attending his odd little meetings, most came regularly but he also had some who only stayed for a short time. It's those I want to find out more about." Sherlock's voice isn't quite as strong as usual but John is pleased to hear some of the usual imperious tones returning.

"Why? What will that tell us?" As usual John feels like he is several days behind on the conversation, a quirk of Sherlock's eyebrow is all that it takes to make John realise what Sherlock is looking for. "Mary? You think she went to these meetings?"

A slight nod is all John gets as confirmation. "But wouldn't have Anderson recognised her later on? Surely even he would have thought it was a bit extreme that a super fan of yours would end up marrying me?"
"That's what I intend to find out, John. It's unlikely that Anderson would have seen her since she attended the meeting. There's a slim possibility he has seen photos of her on your blog and in newspaper coverage of the wedding but she could have changed the way she looked since he saw her last. We know her hair isn't natural blonde, that it has a tendency to curl, what else could she have altered? Going unnoticed was her job for many years, we'd do well not to underestimate her."

"Yeah, think we've learned that the hard way." John says with a grimace.

"Quite." Sherlock presses a careful hand to his chest, wincing at the sudden surge of pain. "I've asked him to bring all his records over. There's a slim chance, but one I'm willing to take, that we will recognise Mary or an associate of hers in the photos or descriptions."

"Are you up to this, Sherlock? We said no cases." John keeps his voice soothing, not wanting to upset Sherlock.

Sherlock absent-mindedly rubs at his wound site and John carefully removes his hand, keeping the long, elegant hand clasped between his own smaller ones.

"I'm not going to be leaving the flat, John. We are just going to be looking at records, it's no different from looking at the cold cases Lestrade brought round." John raises his eyebrows, the fact that they both realise that it's far different from a cold case remaining unsaid. "I can do this, John. I need to do this."

"I understand, love. I'll be there right beside you, nose in the documents except when you need me to make tea, just like the good old days, hey?" John raises Sherlock's hand and presses a gentle kiss to his knuckles. "So, when are we to expect the twazzock then?"

"After lunch, about one." Sherlock clears his throat and looks unusually hesitant. "He wanted me to tell you something before he arrives."

"Yeah? Can't imagine he has anything to say to me that I want to hear." John lets Sherlock's hand go and gets up from the coffee table, trying to distance himself from anything Anderson may have to say.

"He said he's sorry." Sherlock says the words without emotion.

"Sorry? What for? He doesn't know who shot you, does he?" John feels a rush of anger directed at whichever member of their close knit team has broken their trust.

"No. No-one has broken your trust, John." John smiles slightly at Sherlock's comment, amazed once again at how Sherlock manages to read his mind. "He wanted to say he was sorry for his involvement in the events that led up to my .... my ...." Sherlock pauses, seemingly unable to continue.

"Death." John finishes for him. "So he bloody should be!"

"Maybe the information he provides us with today will be enough to start putting him back in your good books."

"Back? He was never in my bloody good books to begin with! He made the wrong impression the first time I met him and did nothing to alter that in the time that followed. The information he provides us with needs to be nothing short of fucking miraculous for me to even think about opening my 'good book' for him!" John can feel the blood rushing to his face and is aware that he must be glowing red in anger, the tendons taut in his neck. He crosses his arms in an effort to calm his agitation.
"Come here, John." Sherlock gestures to the empty space he has made on the sofa. John is too lost in his bitterness to realise why Sherlock wants him to sit by him.

"Why?"

"Because you are in need of comfort. You derive a high level of it from physical contact and I want to give that level of comfort to you." Sherlock holds up his hand, stopping John's next 'why'. "You are my partner and my lover, surely that is reason 'why' enough."

"You just want to get your hands on my hot body!" John jokes feebly in an effort to push aside the surge of emotion he feels at Sherlock's words. He sits next to where Sherlock is reclining and submits, without complaint, as Sherlock pokes and prods him until John is positioned to his liking.

"I always want to get my hands on your body, John. The only difference is that now I can."

Sherlock huffs into the nape of John's neck. John shivers at the contact of moist air against his sensitive nerves and snuggles carefully against the warm length of Sherlock at his back.

John sighs when Sherlock's arm rests over his stomach, the reassuring weight of it easing away the last of John's stresses. John relaxes more deeply and is just on the cusp of sleep when he feels Sherlock's hand slip inside the front of his dressing gown. Dexterous fingers paint soothing patterns on his bare skin and John wishes he could extend this moment indefinitely, the peace and tranquility lulling him back to sleep.

It feels like he has only been asleep for mere minutes when he is awoken by Sherlock nuzzling at the nape of his neck. John decides he could get used to being woken like this, wrapped in the arms of the man he loves. The deep sound of Sherlock's stomach rumbling, shortly echoed by his own, is enough to rouse John from his daydreams and to ease himself into a sitting position.

"Christ. Sorry, love. You must be famished and here I am falling asleep when I'm supposed to be the one looking after you." John twists slightly so he can run his fingers through the riot of curls that fan around Sherlock's face.

"It's only transport, John. Lie back down, your proximity was soothing."

"Transport or not, Sherlock, you're eating. It's too late for breakfast now so let's call it brunch. The fridge is all stocked up so how about I throw something together and you have a quick wash and brush up and get ready for Anderson arriving?" John is already moving towards the kitchen as he speaks, the idea of a cooked lunch very appealing to him. Not as appealing as continuing to lie in Sherlock's arms but probably the safest option when Anderson is due at any moment.

"If I must, John. I must say my transport has become very bothersome since your arrival. Previously I could happily ignore all of its wants and just provide the minimal amount for its needs." Sherlock raises himself carefully from the sofa and John makes a mental note to provide Sherlock's next dosage of painkillers with their food when he sees a slight wince flash across Sherlock's face.

"Transport that receives only the minimal amount of maintenance does not run as efficiently as it should. Risks of breakdowns and accidents are higher than if maintained at a reasonable rate." John says, his voice sounding almost as if he is reciting from a textbook.

"Yes, thank you for that scintillating information, Doctor Watson. Now, if you're quite finished I'm going to go and wash my 'transport', unless you have something to say on the manner in which I cleanse myself?" Sherlock pulls his dressing gown around his slim body, tying the belt tightly before striding out of the living room, walking by John in the kitchen and into the bathroom,
closing the door with a resounding thud.

John chuckles as he gets various items of food from the fridge and cupboards. It's strangely reassuring that Sherlock is still a haughty bastard at times, John knows he wouldn't want him any other way. That is the man he fell in love with and that is very much the man he wants to spend the rest of his life with; black moods, laughter, rooftop chases and dinners by the fire.

"Yeah, love you too, you daft pillock!" John calls out, the sound of deep laughter from the bathroom confirms that Sherlock has heard him.

John puts some water on to boil, adding just a dash of vinegar for poaching the eggs. Whilst waiting for that to heat up, John chops up some mushrooms and puts them to one side whilst he chops up some garlic. He heats up a frying pan and adds a strip of bacon for Sherlock, cooking it slowly just how he knows Sherlock likes it. The water finally begins to boil and John breaks two eggs into the water. A quick flick of the bacon and John gets out a smaller frying pan ready for the garlic mushrooms, deciding to be decadent John melts some butter before adding the mushrooms. Beans are heated through in a small saucepan before John pops a couple of slices of bread into the toaster. John hums to himself as he stirs and flicks, fries and butters; this type of meal is a rarity for them. It takes too much time and creates too much washing up to be an endeavour that John undertook too often when he lived at Baker Street before but today feels like the ideal time to spoil Sherlock with one of the few meals John is sure he will eat.

As John prepares their brunch he almost feels like he can hear Sherlock splashing around in the bathroom. Realistically he knows he can't; the distance is too far and the food he is cooking is sizzling and bubbling away loudly enough to drown out even the most energetic of bathing. Just the knowledge that Sherlock is so close to hand and engaged in such an ordinary day-to-day activity is enough to make John smile. He had missed this part of their life together, the simple give and take of living with someone that you were so in sync with. He hears the bathroom door open just as he begins to serve the food onto two plates, the scent of Sherlock's aftershave reaches John's nostrils and the smell of it makes his mouth water more than any of the food before him.

"Better?" Sherlock's tone is intimate and warm, matching the sensation of his skin against John's. John sighs and nods, rubbing his cheek against Sherlock's.

"Mmmm, very nice." John turns in Sherlock's arms, pressing his lips against the freshly shaven skin. The freshness of the aftershave makes John's lips tingle a little and his nose twitch. John decides they are sensations he will gladly repeat if it means he can have Sherlock's soft cheek in such intimate closeness. "As much as I don't want this to stop, you need to eat and top up on your medication before Anderson arrives." A quick press of lips and John motions for Sherlock to sit down, placing a fresh glass of water and his pain killers in front of him. John watches as Sherlock swallows the pills down before tucking into his brunch, surprised enjoyment on his face. John sniggers before eating his own food, glad to see Sherlock taking nourishment on board.

They chat about nothing much as they eat, easy companionship as always flowing around them. Before long John is scraping the last of the leftovers into the bin and running hot water for the dishes.

"You might want to put something a bit less revealing on." John gestures at the dressing gown that Sherlock had slipped back on after his shower. "Unless you're after giving Anderson a cheap thrill." John sniggers at the look of extreme disgust wrinkling Sherlock's face. "I guess not then!"
Sherlock leaves to get dressed and John makes short work of the washing up, surprising himself at how quickly he gets through it all. Before long he is up in his old bedroom donning his own clothes. A simple jumper, pants and jeans, he keeps the layering minimal, face heating a little when he acknowledges that the reason he keeps his clothing that way is to give Sherlock ease of access.

The sound of the bell and Mrs Hudson's warm voice pulls John out of his daydream and down the stairs. He enters the living room to find Phillip Anderson looking about him awkwardly, obviously very unsure what to do with himself. Mrs Hudson is bustling about in the kitchen and Sherlock stands by the fireplace, one arm resting along the mantle piece, eyes narrowed at Anderson, taking in every element of his clothing, posture and goodness knows what else. John's eyes are drawn to the thick folder that is tucked under Anderson's arm. It's contents could affect the rest of his life.
Surprising sources

Chapter Summary

Anderson moves to sit, warily eyeing the items in front of him before nervously lowering himself into the chair. The file he carries is placed almost reverently on the desk before he adds some discs to the pile, slipping them from his shabby coat pocket. As in all the other times Sherlock has seen Anderson in recent months he looks disheveled and his skin sallow. His patchy beard gives him the look of one of the many homeless men that Sherlock has been known to utilise. Anderson's clothes indicate that there is no Mrs Anderson on the scene and that other relationships have been thin on the ground, if not non-existent for him. Sherlock briefly rubs his own chin, pleased he was able to remove the last of his own stubble before meeting with Anderson. As much as he grudgingly allows that Anderson may now be of use, Sherlock wants as little in common as possible with the distasteful man who sits before him.

Chapter Notes

I am so sorry this has taken so very long to hit the page! Most of it has been done for ages but I really struggled with the last 1,000 words. Not because the ideas were unforthcoming but because RL really decided to get in the way big time!

Please forgive any mistakes you see in the text, my writing app is refusing to play nicely and I had to type the whole chapter directly into AO3, very tedious and I'm sure I've made load of mistakes!

Sherlock leans against the mantelpiece feigning nonchalance but inside he's shaking, fear of what they may find in Anderson's notes and how it may affect John, tearing him apart.

He observes as John glances at the thick file tucked under Anderson's arm, following the way that John's Adam's Apple moves as he swallows and Sherlock begins to count down. Three. Two. One ......

"Tea?" John asks gruffly, rapidly escaping to the kitchen, not awaiting an answer. "I'll go put the kettle on."

Sherlock sighs as John leaves, stifling the sound when Anderson glances curiously in his direction. A dismissive wave of his hand is all the response that Anderson gets before being directed to take a seat at the desk.

Anderson moves to sit, warily eyeing the items in front of him before nervously lowering himself into the chair. The file he carries is placed almost reverently on the desk before he adds some discs to the pile, slipping them from his shabby coat pocket. As in all the other times Sherlock has seen Anderson in recent months he looks disheveled and his skin sallow. His patchy beard gives him the look of one of the many homeless men that Sherlock has been known to utilise. Anderson's
clothes indicate that there is no Mrs Anderson on the scene and that other relationships have been thin on the ground, if not non-existent for him. Sherlock briefly rubs his own chin, pleased he was able to remove the last of his own stubble before meeting with Anderson. As much as he grudgingly allows that Anderson may now be of use, Sherlock wants as little in common as possible with the distasteful man who sits before him.

221B is silent except for the noise emanating from that kitchen as John puts a tea tray together, obviously trying to delay the moment of finding out just how duplicitous Mary has been. Finally John returns to the living room, putting the tray down and politely asking Anderson how he takes his tea before handing Sherlock his mug, removing his own and taking the tray back into the kitchen. The sound of John opening and closing cupboards and the fridge as he puts the tea stuff back away drifts back into the living room.

"John." Sherlock hints, his tone is soft but carries which causes John to visibly tense but the gentle prompt is enough for John to stop his delaying tactics. The moment that John decides that enough is enough is as clear as day to Sherlock. John's shoulders square, his chin comes up and when he turns around his cheekbones are defined due to the clenching of his jaw. He looks strong and indestructible but Sherlock knows better, he knows that it is merely a disguise that John wears and Sherlock clenches his hands as he fights back the urge to go and comfort him. Instead Sherlock meets his eye, nods and gently spreads his hand over John's lower back as he directs John over to where a confused Anderson awaits them. Sherlock can feel when John's muscles relax slightly and is thankful he was able to at least provide some small level of comfort to John in his time of need.

John sits down opposite Anderson and glares at the file set between them; if the fire in his eyes and the heat in his blood could be transferred the papers would be incinerated, vanishing into nothing but ash and memories. But, as in the nature of things, the papers remain stubbornly unburied, mocking John with their innocuousness. John takes a deep, calming breath and drags his hands over his face, the drag of his stubble against the delicate skin on his palms somehow grounding him.

"OK." He breathes out, grabbing the file. "Let's get this the fuck over with."

Anderson opens his mouth to protest but one look at John has him closing it quickly and conceding the papers. The first sensible thing that Sherlock believes Phillip Anderson has ever done.

"Um. So the first page contains the names of the people who came week after week. People who actively, and regularly, sought out information on Sherlock and participated vocally during the group." Anderson scratches at his scraggly beard before gesturing to the second page, the list is smaller, containing less than ten names. "These are people who came sporadically. If you could give me more information on what you are looking for I could probably narrow the list down further for you." He looks hopefully from John to Sherlock.

A quick shake of John's head and an impatient eye-roll from Sherlock is enough for Anderson to understand that he will not be privy to their investigation.

"I also filmed the sessions, they're all there on the discs." Leaning over, Anderson flicks through the file once more. "These are all the regulars." He points to the first in a series of photographic print-outs. "Where possible I put personal details about them on the back of the sheet. Name, address, marital status; that sort of thing."

Sherlock is impressed despite himself. It seems that on the few occasions that Anderson thinks with his brain rather than his prick he is actually mildly useful, his natural distrust of his fellow man being currently invaluable.
Leaning over John, Sherlock allows the brief transfer of body heat between them to calm his own residual nerves and reaches for the stack of photographs.

"No. No. No. No." He flips each photograph away and John watches as each frozen face flutters to the floor, their expressions unchanging as their fate is summarily announced. Within seconds Sherlock reaches the end of the pile and huffs in frustration before snatching the list of names away from John. "These names are of no use without images, Anderson. We need faces, names are transient things, as changeable as the British summer!"

"Well, those aren't strictly above board." Anderson fidgets, wringing his hands and nodding in the direction of the discs. "But as I said, I filmed every meeting, they're all there on the discs."

"So, what you're trying to say, Anderson." John queries. "Is that you illegally filmed these weird little meetings of yours and no-one was aware? No-one at all?"

"Er, yes." Anderson can't decide whether to be proud of his actions or to feel guilty for his duplicity. "I was only going to use them as reference, at a later date, to verify certain facts that came up during the meetings. Some of their theories were very good. Feasible, really." Sherlock raises his eyebrow and Anderson rushes on. "Course, some of them were stupid, ridiculous."

Whilst Anderson speaks Sherlock loads the first of the discs into the computer, flicking through the scenes rapidly, clear grey eyes studying each person before disregarding them and moving onto the next scene. The sound is on but the scenes are being played so fast that it sounds like nothing more than cartoon mice arguing. It occurs to John that in other circumstances he would find this amusing, maybe even sharing a giggle with Sherlock.

John gathers up the photos from the floor, giving each a cursory glance before putting them back in the file. No face looks familiar to him and he swallows against the wave of disappointment.

"Thanks." The word is directed at Anderson but John still can't bring himself to be more than coldly polite to the man, keeping his gaze fixed on a point slightly to the side of Anderson's head.

"John." It's the urgent tone that catches John's attention rather than the sound of his name. "Look at this."

Sherlock has paused the disc and the screen shows a slightly grainy shot of the inside of what, John presumes, is Anderson's living room, the people little more than defined blurs. Taking a deep breath, John moves closer to the screen and the details of their features becomes clear. He stands with his hands clutched firmly behind his back, knowing that if he has them anywhere else they will betray his emotions. Bright grey eyes scan his face, Sherlock nods and moves out of the way, allowing John to take the seat in front of the computer.

John can see a rag-tag mix of people, some he would call 'geeks and nerds'; people he's not surprised to see at Anderson's strange little fan-club, others are more well-presented but equally involved in whatever the discussion had been. Leaning forward John studies the features of each person, trying to see whatever has captured Sherlock's attention. At first superficial details grab his attention; hair colour, eye colour, clothing style but then he looks deeper, taking in posture and stance and uses his imagination to alter the superficial; changing brunette hair to blonde, dark eyes to blue.... And there she is... Lurking in the background but apparently joining in with the conversation enough not to look suspicious. His breath leaves him in a whoosh, he honestly hadn't expected to see evidence of Mary's actual involvement in the group. A reassuring hand grips his shoulder and he breathes out, releasing his death grip on the table's edge.

"You see it too." It's not a question, the inflection is flat, a pure statement of fact.
It's undeniably her, even with her blonde hair hidden beneath a wig of long, dark brown hair tied loosely in a plait. On closer examination John can see that her blue eyes are hidden beneath brown contact lenses, her facial structure subtly altered via the use of contouring make-up.

"So she knew all along then? Who you were, despite her denials, and that you were alive and coming back?" The questions require no answers and just for a moment John allows the pain of Mary's betrayal to flood over him again. Their marriage was never destined to work even if his heart hadn't already belonged to another. Mary had only sought him out as part of some deranged plan, to woo him and have him close by in case he knew more about Sherlock's whereabouts. John snorts aloud, it seems he was the last one to know the truth about Sherlock's so called demise, Mary had wasted her time and effort by being with him. For a second he wonders if she ever did care for him or if it was only ever a job to her before shaking it off and meeting Sherlock's concerned glance. "It's fine. It's all fine." The words sound weak as they leave his mouth but John knows it's the truth, or at least it soon will be.

"Erm." Anderson is hesitant to interrupt whatever is passing between Sherlock and John but his curiosity gets the best of him. "What's fine? Who did you recognise?" The ever present petulant whine of Anderson's voice causes Sherlock to flinch and clench his fist but, to John's surprise, Sherlock answers calmly enough.

"Just an old girlfriend of John's. A person of little importance or influence as it turns out. We thought she may have had some connection to a recent crime that had been a year in the planning but it would seem her only 'crime' is that of attending your bizarre little group." Sherlock shows his teeth in the parody of a smile. "I wonder if you remember anything in particular about this woman?" Sherlock enlarges the picture so that only a grainy image of Mary shows.

Anderson sidles around the desk and squints at the picture, brows furrowed. "I think she said her name was Helen .... Helena? Something along those lines anyway. She came fairly often at the start, not regularly enough to make the list but, well .." Anderson scratches at his beard and something akin to embarrassment colours his sallow cheeks. "I thought she was quite attractive so I noticed her straight away."

"Not enough to remember her name though." Sherlock answers pointedly.

Anderson ignores the comment and continues. "She appeared intelligent enough but only spoke when she felt something really needed to be said. Mostly she just listened and, I suppose, people watched."

"When did she stop coming so much? Was it after you were certain that Sherlock was alive?" John queries, his face strangely devoid of all emotion even as his heart hammers away inside his chest.

"Yes, actually, now that you mention it, it was." Shock shows clearly on Anderson's face as he registers the strange coincidence. "I'd been down the pub with Greg and I'd noticed a pattern on the map which seemed to indicate that whoever was solving the crimes were making their way, albeit slowly, back to Britain. Of course, I told Greg but he thought it was just another of my 'crackpot' ideas and brushed my claims away. Didn't even listen to me properly." He takes a gulp of his nearly cold tea, licking at his chapped lips before continuing. "I showed the map and explained my findings to The Empty Hearse that night..."

"The Empty Hearse?" John interrupts, incredulous.

"The name of the group," Anderson answers, a light flush on his cheeks. "Because, well, the hearse was empty, wasn't it?" He pauses, waiting for confirmation, when none is forthcoming he continues with his narrative. "They agreed with what I'd seen, that it was Sherlock solving the
crimes and that he was on his way back home. I remember Helen, or whatever her name was, studied the map quite intently, more so than anyone else. After that meeting she didn't come for quite a while, maybe a month, six weeks? And from then on, only every few weeks. I know she definitely wasn't there when we received the news that Sherlock was alive."

With a quick flourish Sherlock gathers all of the discs together and puts them, along with the paperwork, back into the file Anderson had brought with him. The disc he had been studying stays securely in the computer.

"Thank you, Phillip." Sherlock pops the final p as he takes Anderson by the shoulders and carefully, but no less forthrightly, guides him out of the flat. "Your file, against all my expectations, has been very informative." Sherlock starts to close the door but Anderson pushes it back open, protesting that he isn't ready to go and wants to know what is actually happening. Sherlock fixes another grimace-come-smile on his features and firmly removes Anderson's hand from the door. "Most helpful. Don't let me keep you. Goodbye." This time the door closes with a decisive click. The sound of muttering accompanies the thud of footsteps as Anderson clomps down the stairs. Neither John nor Sherlock move until the door to the street slams shut, moving to the window as one to observe as Anderson walks away.

John watches, feeling strangely disconnected, as the figure gets more distant, eventually getting lost in the usual bustle of activity in Baker Street. His eyes remain fixed on the world outside but his brain is a frantic hub of activity. Snippets of memories crawl painfully across his mind, moments of perceived joy with Mary now tainted with the information that Anderson's files have confirmed. The way that Mary had shyly approached him at work, had gradually drawn him out of his shell is now seen clearly for what it was; her heartless way of making him notice her, need her.

Another memory drags itself out. Mary flushed in their bed, covers tucked demurely over her breasts even though her high colour and tangled hair show clearly what they had been engaging in mere moments before. John remembers that he had thought her so beautiful; she had been so kind and understanding of the fact that it had taken a while for his brain to engage enough with the act so that his body responded. She had encouraged him, offered words of support and a persuasive mouth and hand until he had been fully hard. For a moment he had been able to forget everything he had lost, the opportunities he had missed. Now, seeing the memory in the cold, harsh light of day John can see that Mary's eyes had been strangely cold, her mouth more a smile of derision than one of joy and her body firmly hidden from his appreciative gaze.

The gentle touch of a warm hand to the small of his back draws John out of his increasingly unpleasant remembrances.

"John?" The tone is unusually gentle, the expression on Sherlock's face when John looks up is uncommonly kind. John shakes his head and leans into Sherlock, his forehead gently pressing against Sherlock's pectoral muscle, even in his turmoil John is conscious of Sherlock's injury. One large hand curls around his bicep, causing John to sigh and relax, the other hand trails gently over his back, soothing his cares away, before coming to rest at the nape of his neck. John allows himself to be silently comforted, enjoying this softer side of Sherlock that he had denied existed for so long.

After long moments Sherlock leads John over to the sofa, drawing him down to sit next to him, for a while they just share body heat, leaning into each other, seeking and receiving comfort and strength.

"She never loved me then. It was all just a lie." The words are coldly spoken, their delivery flat. John leans back to gaze into Sherlock's face, refusing to look away from the pain he sees there.
"Truthfully?" John nods. "Truthfully, I don't know. I stopped deducing her when I saw how much she meant to you. I didn't want to potentially ruin your life again so I stepped away, became the friend I should have been rather than the jealous hopeful lover I'd been acting like before."

Sherlock takes a deep breath and forces himself to say the next part. "For what it's worth, John, I think you became more than just a job to her. There were moments, obvious to even me, when her affection for you shone through."

"But not love, never love." John states, resting his head on Sherlock's shoulder.

"Forgive me for saying so but she's hardly the first person you've had sex with who hasn't loved you."

John tilts his head up so he can see Sherlock's expression, it's apologetic but determined. "True." John admits. "But she is the first one I've married." John leans in and presses a soft kiss to the long expanse of Sherlock's neck. "I don't know why I'm so upset really. I already knew she wasn't who I believed her to be and I've admitted to myself, and to you, that I never loved her as I should have."

"You loved her as much as you could have though, John. You trusted her and she broke that trust and we both know you don't trust easily." Sherlock feathers gentle kisses into the softness of John's hair, nuzzling his face into the warm, comforting smell of him.

"I did try to love her, that's true but I never trusted her, Sherlock. Never." John sighs at the touch of Sherlock's lips to his temple. "I did what Ella advised me to do, I locked the distrust away, at the time it seemed like the logical thing to do. I had nothing other than gut instinct to say I shouldn't trust her so I put it down to my usual paranoia and tried to 'move on'. Christ, that was a mistake."

"I'm sorry John. I should have let you know I was safe, that I was on my way back." Sherlock tilts John's head up and presses a light kiss to his lips. "That I was coming home to you."

John closes his eyes and chases the kiss, deepening it momentarily before drawing away. When he opens his eyes he meets and holds Sherlock's gaze. "No more blame, Sherlock. No more should have. This is what we have now, who we are. It may have taken a cock-up of colossal magnitude but we're here now. I love you. I trust you. You are mine and I am yours. Really that's all that matters, isn't it?"

Sherlock can feel how his eyes prickle and knows that John must be able to see the tell-tale sign of repressed tears. "It truly is." He kisses the end of John's nose, startling a laugh from him. "But I believe we should give this Kalvinder person who took Mary's scan a call, something just doesn't ring true for me there."

"I'll do it now love. Then we'll have an early dinner and an early night." John pulls out his mobile and walks into the kitchen, putting the kettle on to boil as his phone connects with Kalvinder's.

"Hi Kalvinder? It's John Watson." John's voice carries clearly through into the living room and Sherlock sits up straighter, unconsciously trying to hear both ends of the conversation. "Yes, I'm doing well. Keeping busy. You?" There's a pause as Kalvinder answers. "That sounds great, never a dull moment!" John grins as he lowers two mugs onto the counter, popping in teabags and pouring boiled water into both mugs. "I've got a cheeky favour to ask. Mary mentioned that she'd been to see you to have her scan done and she was wondering if she could have another copy of the scan print out?" John pauses briefly before adding sugar and milk to the correct mugs and stirring. "Yes, my Mary. She came in to see you recently?" John quirks his head to one side, listening intently. "For a dating scan for our baby? Yes, within the last week." Once again John stills. "Oh, I'm sorry Kalvinder, my mistake. I was sure it was your name on the form. Yes, that's a distinct
possibility!" John grins and his shoulders loosen. "Let's not mention this to Mary, eh?" He laughs. "She'd kill me if she knew I was messing up on important baby stuff this early!" The rest of the conversation devolves into pleasantries and Sherlock zones out until John holds a fresh mug of tea and a plate of biscuits out to him.

"Tea, tablet, biscuits. Doctor's orders." John smiles down at him, his eyes sparkle and he looks years younger. Whatever Kalvinder has told him has worked wonders at clearing away his tension.

"What did you find out?" Sherlock almost snaps out, his eagerness to know eclipsing any manners.

"Tea, tablet, biscuits." John states again, savouring the taste of his own tea.

Sherlock shoves the offered tablet into his mouth, gulps down his tea and rapidly gobbles down two biscuits, glaring at John's laughter. "What did she say?" Sherlock grinds out, every word over enunciated.

"There is no baby." John answers, returning his attention back to his custard cream.

"What? What do you mean there is no baby?" Sherlock is up and out of his chair before he has even finished speaking, leaning over John.

"Mary is not pregnant. She never saw Kalvinder. She never had a scan. If she can lie about those facts I feel fairly safe in saying ..." John pauses again, sips his tea and smirks at the annoyance he sees in Sherlock's expression. "there is no baby."

"No baby?" Sherlock questions as he sinks to the floor.

"No baby." John confirms.

"Oh god." Sherlock collapses against John's legs, his head resting on John's thighs. John combs his fingers through Sherlock's hair and wisely chooses to say nothing about the tears of relief he can feel soaking through his trousers, or about his own running down his cheeks and dripping off his chin.
"What are friends for?" Molly answers, she hesitates. "John?"

"Mmhhm?" John’s mind is already drifting to how the results of his tests will alter the sexual explorations between him and Sherlock and a faint blush heats his cheeks.

"Look after him. He feels more than he lets on." Molly's voice takes on a hard edge that John has never heard before and he automatically pays attention. "If you hurt him, the last time you will have any contact with me will be when you're under my knife on the autopsy table. The being dead part is not mandatory."

"Message received loud and clear, Miss Hooper. I won't hurt him, Doctor and soldier, remember." John gently reminds her.

"He doesn't need a doctor or a soldier, John, he needs a friend and maybe a lover." Molly asserts.

"I know, Molly and I will do my best, everyday. Thanks again. For everything."

"Goodbye, John." Her voice softens.

"Bye, Molly."

Chapter Notes

The first thing I have got to say is a huge, huge apology for the delay of this chapter. Usual excuses apply, real life and parental duties needing to come first. Plus the fact that I get hugely embarrassed writing sexy bits! That being said please enjoy my offering of loving sexy bits!

Thanks so much for sticking with me!

"Time for that early dinner I think." Sherlock tilts his chin up and smiles shyly at him, eyelashes dark from the dampness that clings to them. "How about we get a delivery? I'm not really in the mood for cooking tonight, or for going out to pick something up, let's have someone else put in the effort."

Sherlock shifts, allowing John to stand and walk into the kitchen. He listens to the sound of the wooden drawer sliding open and the rustle of menus being gathered together before moving slowly to sit on the sofa, long legs stretched out in front of him, each noise the comforting symphony of home. He feels strangely light of heart, his mind calm; it is a rare sensation for him and he resolves to savour it whilst he can. He doesn't realise he has shut his eyes until the sound of take-away menus being flapped under his nose rouses him out of his quiet contentment, he opens his eyes to
see a smiling John gesturing at him with their food options.

"Come on then genius, pick us a meal." John teases, continuing to flap the glossy menus.

"I will use my advanced powers of deduction to choose what we most desire tonight." Sherlock teases back before pulling John into a sudden hug, John's weight ends up braced through his arms on the back of the sofa.

"What was that for, you ridiculous man?" John laughs, pressing a kiss to the laughter lines at the edge of Sherlock's eye.

"I chose what I most desire." Sherlock smirks, lowering his voice as he moves his hand to gently cup John through his jeans. "And I believe what you most desire, too."

"Christ!" John chokes out, still shocked at being able to experience this physical, loving side of Sherlock. He begins to grow hard under the warmth of Sherlock's touch, pressing himself more firmly into the hold, eyes fluttering shut. "Yeah." He clears his throat and opens his eyes again, their dark blue twinkling in delight. "Yes, most definitely. But as dull as it may sound to you, you really need to eat, keep your strength up."

Sherlock opens his mouth but his protestation is cut off at mid-point. "I have plans for you, Sherlock Holmes...". John kisses Sherlock, allowing it to deepen briefly before pulling back. "And I need you fighting fit for it."

"Is that so, Doctor?" Sherlock breathes against John's lips, his often cold eyes warming at the implied promise. He reaches for a menu without looking, grabbing one at random. "This one. Order from this one."

"Ok." John moves to get his phone but his movement is stopped when Sherlock grabs his arm, pulling him back towards him, whispering fervently in his ear, lips just brushing the delicate skin there.

"Order it now, John. Tell them we will pay extra for quick delivery. Don't order too much. Don't take too long to eat. I don't plan on waiting too long to have you naked and in our bed."

John shivers at both the declaration and the sensation of warm lips brushing against his skin, nodding before sliding away and grabbing his phone. He chooses blindly from the menu, not overly caring what he selects, offering an appropriate monetary incentive for the order to be completed quickly.

John has just settled back on the sofa when his phone rings, he's tempted to ignore it and continue enjoying the comfort that is Sherlock's long body leaning against him. However, before John has the chance to make up his mind or even twitch, Sherlock picks up John's phone from the coffee table, glancing at the display before promptly handing it over.

"Molly." Sherlock states and in an unusual display of consideration Sherlock removes himself from the living room and pops into the bathroom to give John some privacy.

"Hi Molly, what's up?" John queries, wriggling to get more comfortable on the sofa, already missing the warmth of Sherlock's body.

"Hi I just wanted to let you know that I've got your test results back and they're showing all clear, nothing untoward. So...." John can almost hear her blushing down the phone line. "There's no need to be using prophylactics within committed relationships unless it is as a form of birth control or.. " A muffled giggle. "To lessen the mess of sexual encounters."
"Um, right, thanks for that, Molly." John rubs the nape of his neck before sucking his lower lip in, fighting his own embarrassment down. "I appreciate you taking the time to get the tests done so quickly and for letting me know personally."

"What are friends for?" Molly answers, she hesitates. "John?"

"Mmhmm?" John’s mind is already drifting to how the results of his tests will alter the sexual explorations between him and Sherlock and a faint blush heats his cheeks.

"Look after him. He feels more than he lets on." Molly's voice takes on a hard edge that John has never heard before and he automatically pays attention. "If you hurt him, the last time you will have any contact with me will be when you're under my knife on the autopsy table. The being dead part is not mandatory."

"Message received loud and clear, Miss Hooper. I won't hurt him, Doctor and soldier, remember." John gently reminds her.

"He doesn't need a doctor or a soldier, John, he needs a friend and maybe a lover." Molly asserts.

"I know, Molly and I will do my best, everyday. Thanks again. For everything."

"Goodbye, John." Her voice softens.

"Bye, Molly."

John ends the call and taps his phone against his lips, contemplating what Molly has told him when Sherlock returns, tucking one arm between John and the sofa so that he is able to wrap his arms around John's waist.

"Good news, I see John." Sherlock observes, his suit jacket has been exchanged for his blue dressing gown and his feet are now bare.

"Yep. My results are back from Molly. All clear." He shifts on the sofa until he can slip his arms around Sherlock's neck. "I'm sure you can deduce what that means then." He breathes a kiss against the full lips offered to him.

"Oh yes, it means that I get to taste you tonight." The words are bold but a flush plays over Sherlock's high cheekbones. “All of you.”

John guides Sherlock into a kiss, his hand firm on Sherlock’s nape, their lips meeting tenderly before briefly parting and meeting again, this time more deeply, the touch of their tongues a welcome addition.

The sound of the doorbell interrupts their kiss and they part with extreme reluctance. John grudgingly decides to save Mrs Hudson the journey and runs down the stairs in his stockinged feet, virtually wrenching the door open in his eagerness to retrieve their food and get back to Sherlock. He takes their order, giving the delivery kid several ten pounds notes; more than enough to cover their order, its delivery and a huge tip. He looks up at John with shocked eyes at the cash; before he is able to sort out any change the front door is shut so swiftly that the door-knocker jangles and the kid wisely decides to leave Doctor Watson and Sherlock Holmes to whatever case has made the good doctor so absent-minded.

Back in their flat John rapidly plates up, only fully realising at that moment that he had ordered a selection of delicately scented Thai dishes. His taste-buds water and his stomach gurgles in approval, reminding him of the very human need for sustenance. Pain relief is also required for
Sherlock; even though he has been coping with his pain so much better today John is taking no
chances on setting Sherlock's healing back. Within moments he has two plates of take-away ready
and he calls Sherlock in to the kitchen to eat. The table remains free of Sherlock's scientific
equipment and John decides to make use of that rare opportunity whilst he can. He digs around in
one of their many junk drawers until he locates some old but ornately decorated chopsticks for
them both and a pair of mismatched napkins. By the time Sherlock arrives at the table John has
decided to allow them both half a glass of wine, deciding that the delivery of his health results and
Anderson's information is cause for celebration. On a whim John also adds a candle to their table
and enjoys the way it tints the early evening light that is starting to filter in.

Dinner is a quiet affair, shy glances are exchanged and feet entangled beneath the table; gentle,
light hearted but mostly silent flirting. John is quietly surprised by how much Sherlock eats and
keeps tempting him to try bits from his own plate, enjoying the way that Sherlock's lips wrap
around the end of the chopsticks and his eyes close as the flavour hits his tongue. His own appetite
is stronger than it has been in a while and he knows it's because he is sharing the whole experience
with Sherlock, back where he belongs. The wine indeed adds to the celebratory atmosphere and
somehow it feels like tonight is the real start to the rest of their life together and despite the rising
tension between them and their acknowledged eagerness to be sexually intimate, neither man is
rushing this moment.

They take the time to tidy together, foil wrappers and paper lids duly put into the recycling, the
small amount of leftovers boxed up and put on the appropriate shelf of the fridge. Small touches
are exchanged and light kisses stolen, the candle burns low as the evening light slips in. The simple
domesticity of the moment somehow more perfect than any ‘romantic’ contrivance that Sherlock
can imagine.

“Bathe with me, John.” Sherlock holds out one elegant hand, briefly closing his eyes when John
takes it softly between his own, pressing a kiss to the knuckles.

“I'd love to, truly I would, but we only changed your dressing this morning.” Despite his,
admittedly very weak, protests John allows Sherlock to guide them into the bathroom.

“True. But I no longer require the dressing, and I’m sure you would agree upon that fact with any
other patient of yours. Anyone who wasn’t me. The outer layers have healed well and you said that
if your tests came back clear you'd touch me without gloves. It's time for skin on skin, John.”
Sherlock starts to undo his own shirt buttons, dropping his hands with a smirk when John pats them
away and takes over. “Let's get really, really clean so we can get really, really dirty.”

John giggles, leaning his forehead against Sherlock's chest, well away from the wound,
unsurprised that Sherlock can say such clichéd lines and still sound sexy as hell. Sherlock’s
chuckles join in and he rests his cheek against the top of John's head. The simple intimacy taking
his breath away. Sherlock's breathing deepens when he feels the slide of his shirt being untucked
from his trousers, the soft glide against his skin making the fine hair on his arms and the nape of
his neck rise. John's lips follow the route the shirt takes as it slips from Sherlock’s shoulders, each
kiss feather light but the heat against his skin and the deep emotion behind the actions causes
Sherlock to shiver in pleasure. His eyes drift shut and he allows himself to bask in the sensation he
is feeling, to truly feel the love that they are both exuding. He sighs when John's kisses trace over
his chest, biting his lower lip when John draws his nipple into his mouth, trying and failing to hold
in a moan. John responds by gently sucking the nipple further in and teasing at it with his teeth,
Sherlock gulps, John's touch leads seemingly straight to his cock, which swells and lengthens
within the confines of his underwear.

“John.” Sherlock sighs breathlessly. He wants so much; everything, all of it, now; but conversely
he wants to draw out each brush of lips, each slide of fingertips over exposed skin, each gasp and moan indefinitely.

“I know love, I know.” John sounds just as overwhelmed as Sherlock feels. Sherlock briefly opens his eyes and the sight of John, flushed and wanting, causes him to react instinctively. A large hand clasps around the back of John's neck, drawing him up into a kiss. Sherlock puts every piece of his considerable knowledge and experience into the kiss, from the way he moves his lips to the way his tongue plays alongside John's. Before long John is whimpering under his administrations, hands flexing on Sherlock's hips as he melts into the kiss. Sherlock smiles against John's lips and deepens the kiss further, a hand drifting into John's hair, long fingers sliding between the tresses, entwining themselves in the length.

It is only when the chill air of the bathroom plays over his overheated skin that Sherlock remembers that he had intended to get John to bathe with him. He longs to see John wet again, with only the minimal amount of bubbles playing over his skin, tracing the lines of surprisingly firm muscles. With reluctance Sherlock breaks the kiss, smiling when John makes to follow his lips. He leans briefly over the bath, putting in the plug and getting the water to run at the right temperature before pulling John back into a searing kiss. He grips the bottom of John's jumper, moaning into the kiss when his fingers brush over the hot skin of John's torso, the ability to be able to touch John so intimately still overwhelming to him. In one easy movement he has John stripped of his jumper and is soon savouring the feel of John's naked skin against his own. He knows they have been intimate before but this is less rushed and somehow feels more intense, more real.

They carry on kissing and a high sound escapes Sherlock when John undoes his trousers, the touch of John's strong, skilled fingers so close to his penis pulling something that sounds too close to a needy whine for Sherlock to admit to. He steps out of his trousers but keeps a firm hold of John, not allowing the kiss to completely break. Sherlock is overly aware of how all of his body is straining towards John, eager for his touch. He shivers as John's gaze travels slowly over his body, unconsciously wetting his lips when his attention stills briefly on Sherlock's boxers and the undeniable shape of a full, hard cock.

“God, you're so gorgeous. Intelligence, power and beauty. Perfect, bloody perfect” John's whispered words are heartfelt, pouring out of him without his permission, intense despite their lack of volume.

For once Sherlock's eloquence fails him and his features speak for him. Eyes soft in a way that he's previously only allowed to show when he knew John wasn't looking. All his longing laid bare and clear for John to finally see, his clear blue-green eyes shimmering with the depth of his emotions.

John gulps at the evidence before him and wonders how he could have ever missed this side of Sherlock. He briefly laments the time that has been lost between them, mostly due to his own hard-headedness, before grabbing inelegantly at Sherlock. One hand reaches for Sherlock’s pale shoulder as the other lands on Sherlock’s buttock, squeezing and savouring the firm flesh that he has cupped within his hand. His thumb sweeps along the waistband of Sherlock’s underwear, causing Sherlock to arch against him. Their groins meet briefly and both men groan before Sherlock pulls back and strips his pants off, standing naked and unashamed in front of John. The steam from the running hot water lands on his skin, dampening it slightly and, in John’s lust-ridden mind, he almost glistens, making Sherlock seem unearthly in his natural beauty.

“Oh god.” The words are barely a murmur, John’s gaze continues to travel over what seems like acres of porcelain skin. He adores the fact that it is not a bare canvas but rather dabbed here and there in hues of honey and chocolate, freckles gathering in little clusters or streaking paths across smooth skin. Here and there darker marks daub his skin, in days gone by these would have been
called beauty-marks and John wholeheartedly agrees. His eyes are reluctantly drawn to the bandage that still rests on Sherlock’s chest and with gentle fingers he draws the bandage away. The injury still stands red but is no longer angry, well on its way to being just another scar that tells the history of the brave man who stands before him. John allows himself a moment to mourn the fact that people had treated the canvas before him poorly, his own wife tearing a hole in it and unknown entities apparently trying to rip the skin of Sherlock’s back into shreds.

Sherlock twists to turn the taps off, testing the warmth of the water by trailing long fingers through the gently bubbling water. The position puts the very scars that had just been plaguing John’s thoughts directly in his line of sight. Frowning he reaches a shaking hand and trails a curious finger over the raised white stripes, wondering about their cause and who had been there to help heal Sherlock. His thoughts are drawn away from their unhappy path when Sherlock turns back away from the bath and a strong hand caresses the side of his face, a tender thumb rubbing gently along the line of his cheekbone, soothing John’s disordered thoughts.

“John, let it go. The people who inflicted the wounds on my back are long gone and Mary’s turn will come. Let it go and be here, wholly, with me.” Sherlock’s words are soft, his eyes pleading. “Don’t let old ghosts come between us, not now we are so close to having everything we’ve ever wanted.”

“I won’t. She’ll never come between us, never again.” John knows which ‘ghost’ in particular Sherlock is referring to and presses a soft kiss to Sherlock’s lips. “I swear.”

Sherlock eases John back into his embrace, encouraging his lips to open under his, taking small tastes of John’s mouth. With ease he draws John’s tongue out to slowly dance and twine with his own and sighs against John’s strong lips as John’s hands once again drift to his backside, unconsciously massaging the muscle there. He can feel when John’s passion once again overrides his concern, the grip on his behind stronger, the massaging making his cheeks part and meet rhythmically, causing his hips to rock and his penis to rub against the rough material of John’s jeans.

Sherlock breathes deep, the scent of John making him light headed with longing. Almost without a thought he lowers himself to his knees, he smirks at the sound of a quickly stifled gasp and wraps his hand around the back of John’s ankle, encouraging John to lift his foot. Sherlock slips his sock off and presses a lingering kiss to the top of John’s foot, smiling when John chuckles. He repeats the process on John’s other foot and then slides his hands up John’s calves, over his knees and along his muscular thighs. Sherlock can feel the slight tremble under his fingers as John reacts to his touch, he traces the seam of John’s jeans until his fingertips trail under John’s balls, moving up along the line of the zip. He can feel the heat of John’s cock through the thick denim and moves his face until he is nuzzling into John’s crotch, enjoying the warmth and strength against his cheek, his nose, his lips. Sherlock’s fingers tremble as he draws back and pops the button of John’s jeans, easing the zip down slowly. His eyes are fixed on the dark burgundy material of John’s pants as he come into view, he gulps when he sees that a damp spot is evident on the fabric, concrete evidence of the level of John’s arousal and attraction to him.

Seconds later Sherlock eases both John’s trousers and pants down and off, leaving him naked and wanting in front of an equally wanting Sherlock.
Sherlock slides his hands back onto John’s buttocks, drawing him forward until the heat of John’s cock is caressing his own skin. The scent of John’s arousal floods Sherlock’s nostrils and he can resist no longer; he fights against his own need to move and engulf John quickly, instead he steadies John’s cock in one hand and licks a slow stripe along his length, lingering at the tip. The flavour floods his tongue, a strangely pleasant bitterness that Sherlock knows he will never tire of. He licks again along the length, unconsciously collecting data; the length, breadth, approximate weight and level of arousal, consciously his focus is purely on John’s taste and the way his skin feels against his tongue. John groans above him, his grip tightening slightly in Sherlock’s curls, legs trembling as the warm wetness teases him. Tentatively Sherlock opens his mouth, sliding his lips over the very tip of John’s cock, exploring the way the texture changes between head and shaft. He swirls his tongue around, gathering more of John’s flavour, salivating when an intense pulse of that flavour hits his tongue as John twitches slightly in his mouth.

“God, Sherlock...” John’s words stutter to halt when Sherlock takes more of his cock in to his mouth. Sherlock cups his tongue and increases his suction, following John’s non-verbal clues instinctively. Sherlock sucks and licks, closing his eyes and making stifled moans at the pleasure he is receiving from the act. Each pulse of fresh liquid against his tongue is reciprocated with a pulse of liquid escaping his own penis. John begins to rock his hips subtly and Sherlock mimics the movement, sliding his mouth up and down John’s cock, his tongue keeps up the cupping motion and his hand on John’s backside encouraging John to keep up his gentle thrusts. Sherlock’s other hand slips down to his own penis and he begins to pump his hand in rhythm to John’s movement. John’s gasps and moans echo in the tiled bathroom and each noise encourages Sherlock to take him deeper. Soon John’s sounds are coming quicker, louder and Sherlock moans around his mouthful, eagerly accepting John’s thrusts as they get more and more frantic, his own hand matching the pace. John’s grip suddenly tightens in Sherlock’s hair and he stills briefly before pumping himself once, twice into Sherlock’s mouth. Sherlock’s mouth is flooded with warm bitterness, a flavour he has come to love in such a short time. The taste of it and what it represents sends Sherlock over the edge and his penis pumps out ribbons of ejaculate on to the bathroom floor even as he sucks at the remnants of John’s orgasm.

Sherlock feels John tremble against him and reluctantly removes his mouth, guiding John down on to the floor with him. They lean against one other, each panting and savouring the sensation. As their hearts slow John gathers Sherlock to him, drawing him into a gentle kiss.

“Fuck.” Sherlock knows John wants to be able to say more, to express himself more clearly but that his brain is still off-line, he can’t help but feel a little bit smug.

“Mmm. I was thinking maybe later John.” Sherlock nuzzles into John’s hair. “Let’s have our bath and maybe we can think about the fucking after.”

John moans against Sherlock’s shoulder, Sherlock’s casual use of profanity far more arousing than he had expected it to be. On loose limbs the men stand and wobble the short distance to the bath, they arrange themselves as before, John in front and resting lightly on Sherlock. Neither man speaks, after all, there’s nothing that needs to be said.
Sherlock needs to be inside, needs to feel John around him. He opens his eyes to ground himself, John always keeps him right, he knows he can rely on him for this too. John is sprawled beneath him, naked and wanting but smiling up at Sherlock; trusting and ready. The image is enough to vanquish Sherlock’s impulse to take and his breathing eases out and the shaking begins to subside. There’s nothing to fear here, nothing to overwhelm him in the wrong way; it’s just the two of them, as it always should be. Despite his outward calm, Sherlock is still trembling, his breath betraying his excitement and nervousness, easy enough for someone who knows him well to read.

Hello! It's me! I'm so sorry for the huge delay, life has been a very interruptive pain in the backside lately and although I could visualise this chapter perfectly I just couldn't shake the words from my brain on to the page!

I really hope you enjoy this chapter. xx

Steam curls in slow tendrils from the surface of the bath water up to the ceiling, drifting around the light fixtures in a lazy dance before dissipating into the gently cooling air. A warm, deep chuckle echoes around the tiled room in reaction to small, strong hands tugging lightly at dark auburn leg hair. A higher pitched giggle follows in its wake when long, dexterous fingers find a ticklish spot on a naked, wet side. The heat of the bath water measures the passing of time as two men share whispered conversation, intimate laughter and loving caresses. The temperature passes from hot, to comfortably warm, until finally bordering on cool.

John shivers as the air nips at his exposed shoulders and knees, sinking lower into the water only to realise that it is now barely above body temperature and giving no real warmth.

“I think it’s time for us to get out, my wrinkles are in danger of getting wrinkles and I think I’m starting to turn blue!” John jokes as he raises himself to standing and steps, rather awkwardly, on to the awaiting fluffy bath mat.

John glances back to see a very relaxed Sherlock sprawled in the bath, the tips of his hair floating in the water, his full lips quirked into a smirk.
“Now, that’s a view I could very much get used to.” Sherlock’s smirk broadens into a full smile when John colours and takes a playful swipe at him with a towel.

John watches transfixed as Sherlock stands, his eyes tracking the way water runs down Sherlock’s lean frame. The droplets trace random patterns over his body, altering their course when they encounter fine body hair or the smooth line of a hip. Accepting the towel that John is offering him Sherlock steps out of the bath with seemingly effortless grace before wrapping the towel casually around his hips. It is only when John observes that the inside of his mouth is dry that he realises he has been watching open-mouthed. John closes his mouth and wraps his own towel loosely around his hips, valiantly ignoring the way one part of his anatomy is attempting to respond in a very physical way.

“I believe the doctor recommended early nights as being essential to my rapid recovery.” Sherlock pauses in the doorway to their bedroom. “Care to join me? Doctor.” With a final wink Sherlock takes long steps into the bedroom, hips moving enticingly.

“Bloody tease.” John huffs out as he hurries after Sherlock. The sight that greets him steals all the air out of his lungs and his cock gives a very eager twitch under the weight of his towel.

Sherlock lies languidly upon the bed, towel abandoned carelessly on the floor. His right hand rests lightly upon the flat plane of his stomach, his left arm is tucked, bent, under his head, allowing him a clear view of the way John remains frozen a few feet into the room. Water droplets glisten on Sherlock’s skin in the warm light of the bedside lamp and John has the sudden urge to lick and kiss the wet away, to nuzzle his face in the still damp thatch of pubic hair curling at the base of Sherlock’s erect cock.

“See something you like, doctor?” Sherlock teases, laughter adding a rich lilt to his voice. “Why don’t you come over and examine me properly?” Sherlock runs his hand over his penis, fingers curling ‘round its width, biting his lip at the sensation.

With quick steps John covers the remaining space between them, dispensing with his towel on the way. In smooth moves that surprise even himself, John climbs onto the bed, moving until he is braced on his hands and knees over Sherlock.

“If anyone else used those bloody corny lines I’d probably laugh in their face but somehow, you cock, you make me want you more.” John nips at Sherlock’s lips before deepening the kiss. Sherlock moves his hand from his penis to cup the back of John’s head, encouraging him to prolong the kiss. He tilts his head and guides his tongue into a delicate dance with John’s; twirling and swirling, stroking and curling. When John’s arms begin to shake Sherlock alters his position
and uses both arms to pull John against him, moaning when their cocks align. They quickly lose themselves in the kiss, bodies rocking against each other instinctively, a distant part of John acknowledges that he will be more than happy if all they do this time round is rock to completion. Sherlock parts his legs, encouraging John to slip between them, his long legs wrap over John’s thighs, locking him securely in place. A groan slips from John’s mouth at the new position, he moves down Sherlock’s body until his cock slips down and nudges at Sherlock’s cleft, making both men moan.

“Christ, Sherlock, feels so good.” John sighs before peppering Sherlock’s shoulders and chest with sucking kisses. “I want ... I want to...” Unable to find the words for what ever it is he actually wants John laves his tongue over Sherlock’s nipple, loving the way it causes Sherlock to arch up against him.

“John, John!” Sherlock gasps. “Stop a minute, we need to talk.” Gently he manoeuvres John so that he is lying beside him, leaving scarce inches between their bodies.

“Talk? You want to talk now?” John feels too aroused for logical thought but knows that this must be important to Sherlock and forces himself to take deep, cleansing breaths to calm both his body and mind a little.

“Yes, now. Now is the perfect time for this particular talk.” Sherlock huffs, taking the sting out of his impatient words by trailing long fingers through John’s chest hair. “You’ve never had penetrative sex with a man, either in the giving or receiving position, but from what you said at the hospital about us ‘riding’ each other I got the impression that you would very much like to try that with me.” Sherlock briefly raises his gaze from where he had been watching the lazy tracks of his fingertips, before flushing and looking away.

“That’s right.” John answers, clearing his throat.

“But why now? And why me?” This time Sherlock meets and holds John’s gaze, eyes wide and curious.

Resting a warm hand on the slight indent of Sherlock’s waist, John closes his eyes and takes another deep breath before opening them. He vows that he will be as honest as he can be with Sherlock, despite his current discomfort. “Because before you that type of sex didn’t appeal to me, not in the slightest. I found nothing arousing in the thought or the image.”

“And your partners understood?” Sherlock queries, his fingers continuing their idle quest.
“Nathan and I were too caught up in the whirl of hormones and the need for instant gratification. I don’t think it was something that either of us had really thought about. I’d seen anal sex being done in a couple of gay porn films but it looked like it would take far too long to prepare for.” He squeezes Sherlock’s hip, a wry smile on his lips.

“And with Brian?” Sherlock asks.

“We talked about it. I know Brian would really have liked to, he’d had penetrative sex in previous relationships and he’d really enjoyed it; but it still wasn’t something I wanted to do. Luckily Brian was very understanding and never questioned my choice.”

“But he still got to be inside of you, he had his fingers in you, he made you climax that way.” There’s a definite edge to Sherlock’s tone, a subtle hint of jealousy.

John coughs, surprised at the way his body is reacting to the slight hint of possessive jealousy Sherlock is unknowingly displaying. His cock, that had been softening during their conversation, once again begins to fill and harden. “Yeah, he did; but I never felt like I wanted it to go any further; for it to be more than his fingers.”

“But you want that with me, for it to be more?” Sherlock states, his voice drifting into a questioning tone.

“Desperately so, yes; but only if it’s something that you want too and only when you feel ready to try.” John slides his hand along Sherlock’s thigh, enjoying the way the soft hair on Sherlock’s leg feels against his fingertips.

Sherlock pulls his lower lip between his teeth, nipping it lightly before releasing it, deep pink and glistening. He peeks up at John from beneath dark eyelashes; an almost coy look but John knows Sherlock well enough to see through the display of false innocence. Even with that knowledge, the sudden flare of heat in Sherlock’s eyes and the wicked turn of his lips causes John’s breath to stutter and his heart to pound. Anticipation bubbling through his veins like champagne.

“So you want to feel my cock inside you? Stretching you? Filling you?” Sherlock’s voice drops several octaves to a predatory purr. “Or would you rather feel my tight heat around you? Welcoming you in?”
“God, yes..” John eventually gasps out, his mind in overload at the mental images that Sherlock’s words provide, the posh boy with a mouth of sin.

“Which, John? Be specific.” Sherlock presses the length of his body against John’s and John can feel the way that Sherlock’s heart races too, can feel the firm press of Sherlock’s penis against him.

“Either.... Or..... Both. Christ, Sherlock. I want all of it, all of you. In whichever way you want.” John grinds out, fighting against his natural instinct to just take, take, take.

“You. I just want you.” Sherlock breathes into his ear. John muffles a groan and works hard to make himself think clearly through the haze of heat and lust.

“I think this time, our first time, you should be inside of me.” John manages to say. “It won’t put any pressure on your wound and you can control the pace. If it becomes too much for either of us, or one of us doesn’t like it, then I trust you to stop.” He leans into Sherlock and steals a kiss before finishing. “But mostly I just really, really want you to fuck me.” Laughing when he feels Sherlock’s cock pulse against him, a small drop of pre-ejaculate painting his skin.

John grins when Sherlock ducks his head into the curve of John’s shoulder, John can feel the harsh pants of Sherlock’s breath against his skin and knows that Sherlock is working hard on regaining control, that his simple, heart-felt, though somewhat less than clean words, had succeeded in nearly unmanning Sherlock. Slowly Sherlock’s breathing calms a little and he lifts his flushed face and meets John’s gaze, his eyes intent in their study. “One hundred percent sure?” He asks softly.

“One hundred percent sure.” John reassures him before pulling Sherlock into a kiss; he uses Sherlock’s momentary distraction to turn them so that Sherlock is now lying on top, his long body draped over John’s more sturdy form.

Sherlock freezes for only a moment before giving himself over completely, taking control of the kiss with ease, pouring all of his fervour and need into it, drowning John in the possibilities of their life together. It could be seconds, minutes or hours that pass as they lose themselves in each other. Their surroundings becoming nothing more than a hazy blur, their focus only on each other. Eventually the kisses become shallower, less all encompassing until finally little pauses start to appear between each kiss. Slowly, Sherlock pushes himself slightly up on his arms so that he can gaze back down at John. John’s face is flushed with arousal and a fine sheen of sweat glistens on his temples. Dark blue eyes appear even darker and his lips are red and full as a result of their extended kissing. His mobile mouth is spread in an easy smile which Sherlock automatically returns before stretching over to reach inside his bedside cabinet drawer. He fumbles around for a second, his task more difficult as he refuses to move his focus from John, before evidently finding what he was searching for and closing the drawer with a victorious smirk. He places the cold tube of lube on John’s chest which then shakes as John laughs, his eyes sparkling.
“Great investigative work, love.” John teases.

“Well, I am a detective!” Sherlock chuckles before sliding the lube away and taking John in a lingering kiss. Their bodies rock together as they embrace, finding their own natural rhythm, their skins slick with arousal; warm sighs turn into throaty groans as desire once again takes over. John’s hands unconsciously drift into Sherlock’s hair, fingers twining in the long, soft curls; John could happily spend hours pressed against Sherlock, lost in the feel of him, the taste of him.

The kisses get more and more heated and John gently tugs on Sherlock’s hair causing Sherlock to thrust his hips harder and pulse out more pre-ejaculate, making their thrusts even more smooth, more pleasurable. John gasps when Sherlock moves to nibble along his jawline, each graze of teeth sending surges of pleasure straight to his groin. Sherlock lingers over the small, barely-there cleft on John’s chin before drifting down to suck at the delicate skin of John’s neck, bringing the blood to the surface, creating a deep pink blush on the tender skin. Sherlock continues kissing his way down John’s body, loving the way that John moans, gasps and writhes under his ministrations; he spends long minutes teasing John’s surprisingly sensitive nipples, licking and nipping lightly at them, encouraging them to form hard buds that he either torments with greedy lips or pleasures with eager fingertips.

Still Sherlock continues his journey down, nuzzling into the soft skin and hair of John’s abdomen and groin, pausing to breathe in the clean, masculine scent that pools there before resuming his explorations lower. All his attention goes on his investigation of John’s legs and feet; the way John’s thighs tense and twitch under the path of his tongue, the way John’s leg hair darkens in colour and density the further down his leg it grows, darkening from a pale gold to a dark honey blonde. Sherlock traces patterns over the scars that adorn John’s knees and lower legs, wondering briefly about their origin before drifting his lips over John’s feet. He dips his tongue between John’s toes, repeating the manoeuvre when John’s soft moans are broken by a surprised giggle. Each toe is lovingly sucked and tasted as long fingers travel along the arch of John’s foot. Once that leg is complete Sherlock begins his examination of the other, this time starting at the foot, not stopping until he is once again nosing at John’s pubic hair.

Sherlock takes his time, licking slowly at John’s cock, tasting the fluid that leaks from its tip before taking more of him into his mouth, massaging John’s length with the flat of his tongue. Trailing his fingers back Sherlock gently explores John’s cleft, drifting one cautious finger over John’s furled entrance. A pulse of bittersweet liquid coats Sherlock’s tongue and he swallows around John’s cock, humming with undisguised pleasure when John’s hand settles back in his hair. Reaching up Sherlock takes the tube of lube from where it has been resting against John’s side and, with a little careful adjustment, squeezes the cool slick fluid onto his fingers. Slowly, and with great care, Sherlock again drifts his index finger back over John’s entrance, massaging until he is able to glide the very tip of his finger inside. John moans again and then sighs out Sherlock’s name, moving his hips to try and accommodate Sherlock. Encouraged by this, Sherlock withdraws his finger before carefully pushing in a little further. He pumps slowly in and out, lost in the sensation of John around him, even such a seemingly insignificant part. John feels so warm and tight and Sherlock genuinely worries he will come before he has even been fully inside John. His
cock is pressed hot and hard between his stomach and the bed and he fights against the almost overwhelming temptation to thrust, to seek out some relief for the ache he is feeling, but he fears that any friction at this point will tip him over the edge and into orgasm.

Sherlock returns his focus to where his finger breaches John’s body and presses further in until his finger is in to the knuckle. He closes his eyes and slides his mouth once along John’s length before letting him slip out, a trail of shimmering wetness apparent on his lower lip. Withdrawing his finger slowly Sherlock lines up his middle finger next to his index and gradually increases pressure until both slide inside of John.

“Oh god, Sherlock!” John grinds out between clenched teeth, sweat dancing on his brow, the intensity of the sensation overloading him. An overwhelming mix of too much and nowhere near enough.

Sherlock groans in reaction to the way that John responds to his every touch, the way that he gives himself over utterly, no restraints, no boundaries. After a few calming breaths Sherlock reapplies himself, carefully moving his fingers until he strokes across a bundle of nerves that causes John to shout and squirm.

“Holy fuck!”

Sherlock chuckles, brushing his fingers once more over John’s prostate.

“Good?” He asks, knowing his question is unnecessary from the way John continues to respond to his caress.

“I ...I’d forgotten quite how.......” He chokes out as Sherlock teases him, “bloody fantastic that feels.”

“My turn next then, I believe.” Sherlock rumbles, dipping his head to suck briefly at John’s cock, relishing the feel of him in his mouth, the intimacy of it washing over him.

“More, Sherlock, I need more.” John begs, it doesn’t take a man of Sherlock’s investigative skills to realise that John is asking for more fingers, deeper, inside of him. He sucks John deeper as he manipulates a third finger inside, moving slowly until he feels John relax around him, his fingers sliding back and forth with more ease.
“Sherlock, now, I need you now!” John begs, his head pushed back into the pillows, one hand tugging at Sherlock’s hair, the other flailing at Sherlock’s back, encouraging Sherlock to move up.

“Are you sure, John?” Sherlock studies John’s face intently, looking for any sign of hesitance or the need for more time.

“I’ve never been more bloody sure of anything in my life.” John growls, both hands pulling Sherlock closer to him, leaving red marks on Sherlock’s pale skin. “Now hurry up and fuck me!”

“Always so demanding my dear John. Patience is a virtue.” Sherlock pauses, passing a lingering look at where his fingers and mouth had just been. “Although perhaps not one of the many virtues you possess.” Sherlock chuckles. his breath falling in soft breaths on John’s skin.

“Not usually one of yours either. Please love, I’ve been wanting you for so long, please, I need you inside me. Stop teasing.” John pulls Sherlock in for a tender kiss, their lips parting slowly. “I’m not above begging.” The words, initially meant to be joking, slip out in barely more than a whisper.

“Oh, John, you’ll never need to beg me for this.” Sherlock’s words are reverent, his features softening as he positions himself more comfortably between John’s thighs.

He presses the tube of rediscovered lube into John’s hand. John takes the hint and pours some into his hands, massaging it with his fingers to warm it. Sherlock shifts slightly, raising himself up so that John can reach his penis more easily. John’s hand glides silksly over Sherlock’s length, Sherlock closes his eyes and allows his head to sag, John’s touch causes him to shudder as bliss rushes over him. Now that his concentration is not purely focussed on John, Sherlock’s own arousal crashes over him, he breathes deeply, fighting to retain his tenuous grip on control. John’s gentle caresses over his skin, the intimacy, has Sherlock shaking and breathing in broken puffs.

Sherlock needs to be inside, needs to feel John around him. He opens his eyes to ground himself, John always keeps him right, he knows he can rely on him for this too. John is sprawled beneath him, naked and wanting but smiling up at Sherlock; trusting and ready. The image is enough to vanquish Sherlock’s impulse to take and his breathing eases out and the shaking begins to subside. There’s nothing to fear here, nothing to overwhelm him in the wrong way; it’s just the two of them, as it always should be. Despite his outward calm, Sherlock is still trembling, his breath betraying his excitement and nervousness, easy enough for someone who knows him well to read.

John senses Sherlock’s nervous energy and runs a reassuring, if slick, palm along Sherlock’s side, confirming wordlessly that he is ready for this to move forward whenever Sherlock is. Sherlock
breathes deeply at John’s simple touch, sighing with his exhale.

“Alright love?” John’s voice is intimate, rich with love and care and that instinctive need of John’s is enough for Sherlock to relax totally into the situation. Sherlock meets John’s concerned gaze for a moment, a soft smile curls his lips before he leans in to kiss John. The kiss contains all of the passion and love of before but none of the desperation of their earlier kisses, it breaks slowly, easing in to gentle nips, neither man willing to stop. It falls on Sherlock to end what he began and he pulls away just enough to speak, his lips whispering over John’s.

“I’m ready now, John.’

This time it’s John’s turn to tremble, it’s only brief but it’s enough to reassure Sherlock that he is not the only one experiencing strong emotions about what is happening between them.

Sherlock lifts away from John, quick eyes study their position before he reaches for the spare pillow on the bed, John raises his hips allowing Sherlock to tuck the pillow underneath.

“Perfect.” John has the distinct impression that Sherlock is talking about more than the new position the pillow has placed him in.

“Yeah.”

Sherlock follows the way his own body speaks to him and the clues that John’s body is providing and takes himself in hand. He is still slick from where John had applied the lubrication, his erect penis in his hand is the only thing about this situation that is familiar but he instinctively knows how to proceed, how to make this good for them both. Sherlock guides himself to John’s entrance and slowly eases inside, he slows each time he feels John tense but continues to slide in, knowing that John is only tensing at the unfamiliarity of the sensation, their previous preparation has ensured there is no pain. Sherlock stops moving only when he can feel himself completely inside John, he has the almost overwhelming urge to utter something ridiculous like ‘John, I’m inside you,’ but manages to content himself with kissing John once more.

John reaches up and grasps firmly on Sherlock’s nape, the other hand wanders restlessly along the length of Sherlock’s spine, leaving goosebumps in its wake. He shifts his hips, trying to encourage Sherlock to move, the fullness he is experiencing feels incredible and now he wants to feel more, wants to know what it feels like to be fucked, to be made love to. John has the man he loves right where he wants him and with whispered instructions and endearments he gets Sherlock to start thrusting, it’s gentle at first but John increases his grip on Sherlock’s neck and runs the fingernails on his other hand down Sherlock’s back, ending by digging them in on Sherlock’s hips,
encouraging a whimper in response.

“Make me feel it love, let me feel you move.’ John mutters, his lips almost crushed against Sherlock’s damp shoulder. “I ache for you.”

Sherlock thrusts, his movement more erratic than before, the lithe strength of his body bringing bright sparks of pleasure to John.

“I can’t John, I’ve waited too long for this, it can’t be over in nothing more than a handful of minutes.” Sherlock’s speech is punctuated with pauses and breaths as he continues to rock in to John.

“Oh love, you being inside me is only another part of us having sex, we've been making love for hours. I need to feel you come inside me and I need to come against you. Please, you are everything I need.” John’s voice is deceptively calm, if stuttering, as his body matches the rhythm that Sherlock is setting.

Sherlock alters the angle of his body and shifts John’s legs up higher until John is almost bent in half, his knees close to his shoulders. The new angle increases the depth and intensity of Sherlock’s movements and soon both men are lost in the sensations, moans and deep sighs punctuate the air, accompanied only by the sound of bed springs. John’s grip tightens on Sherlock’s sweaty skin and his own head is thrown back in pleasure. Each thrust seems to be a direct hit on John’s prostate and he is soon crying out his approval and encouragement. Sex has never felt this good to him before, this all-encompassing, in the tiny part of his brain that is not utterly lost in the moment he fervently hopes that it’s good for Sherlock too. A second later and even that little bit of brain is lost as Sherlock’s pace becomes erratic before stopping utterly. John looks on in wonder as Sherlock becomes totally lost to his bliss, his face open and his lips forming a perfect O before his eyes fall shut. The look on Sherlock’s face and the sensation that fills John is more than enough to send John plummeting head-long in to his own orgasm.

Sherlock collapses slightly on John, letting John’s legs flop on to the bed. For a moment both men are silent, contemplative, except for their heavy breathing and then the silence is broken by laughter. It starts off tentative but ends in deep chuckles and high giggles as Sherlock finally pulls out and collapses in an ungainly sprawl of long limbs next to John. John takes a moment to stretch his legs out before moving closer to Sherlock, he rests the length of his body against Sherlock’s side, resting his head in the dip of Sherlock’s shoulder. He plays with the fine, dark curls that pepper Sherlock’s chest before tilting his head up to meet Sherlock’s tender gaze. How could he have ever thought this man unfeeling? All of Sherlock’s emotions are clear to be seen if John had only bothered to look. He lets out one more low laugh before leaning up for a kiss, its duration is short because of their lack of breath but it lacks no tenderness for its brevity.
“That,” John pauses, searching for eloquent words to express the depth of emotions he is feeling, he gives up after a fruitless search, his shrug merely moving the already creased bottom sheet. “That was bloody amazing, I have no clue if we will ever top that but damn I’m looking forward to trying!”

Sherlock’s eyes sparkle with amusement, his full lips purse briefly before his mouth relaxes into a satisfied smile. “Mmmmm, well I have several ideas on how you can top that, although I think I’m ready for some of that rest the doctor keeps ordering.”

He wraps his arm over John’s shoulder, pulling him in closer, with a little squirming they manage to ease the slightly stained sheet over them. It drapes, almost artistically over their legs and hips, covering their nakedness but in no way hiding what happened between them. The air is redolent with the smell of sex and their skin still glimmers from their sheen of sweat. John’s hair is tousled, the short silver-blonde sticking up in clumps, giving him a boyish appearance as he falls into slumber. Sherlock’s hair is damp along the hairline, the curls there beginning to tighten as they dry, the rest laying in an almost angelic halo against his white pillowcase. Sherlock looks younger too, his worries from the last few weeks wiped from his features as he sleeps.

Neither man hears when the door to their flat is unlocked, the door silently swinging open just enough to admit one person. Nor do they hear when that person moves silently around in the kitchen or when their bedroom door is nudged open and someone looks in upon their sleeping forms. They don't notice how this person’s gaze sweeps over them, taking in the way they lie entwined, lips parted and breath soft and slow with sleep. Nor do they notice the smile this person allows to cross their features at seeing them resting so intimately and trusting together.
Hidden in plain sight

Chapter Summary

“Mrs ‘Udson? Sorry to disturb you so late but Mr ‘Olmes said if I ever needed ‘elp I should come ‘ere. I saw your light were on and ‘is weren’t and I didn’t wanna bovver ‘im. I know ‘e’s been through the ringer lately but I’m too nervous to go back out there tonight, ‘e said I could always find shelter through ‘im and I didn’t know where else to go.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Earlier that evening.

Mrs Hudson has lived a long life and, on the whole, she’s happy with her lot. She has a nice place in central London that she calls home, plenty of money in a few well-placed banks, a very posh sports car she keeps squirreled away and enough energy to live her life to the full; despite her dodgy hip. It’s a life that has been much more full than she would have expected ten years or so ago. That’s when the whirlwind that is Sherlock Holmes blew into her life, spreading justice and chaos equally in his wake. Mrs Hudson has never been blessed with children but she likes to think any son of hers would have been like Sherlock, all eager need to right the wrongs of the world and manic energy formed from the jumbled emotions he tries not to wear on his sleeve; emotions that she has always seen so easily. Of course, she’d prefer him without the drug problem but she understands that this is how Sherlock has chosen to deal with those things that he can’t deduce or solve; John’s marriage for example. The poor man had been left broken-hearted and had, understandably in her opinion, run away and hidden himself in a drugged haze, letting each day blur in to the next. Of course, there had been that odd relationship with the girl, Janine, but it was blatantly obvious that was never going to go anywhere. She had seemed perfectly nice but Sherlock needed more than nice, he needed bossy, easy to anger, easy to laugh, happy to lead or be lead, oh, and he needed a penis attached to all that. In all the time she has known him Sherlock has never shown a romantic or sexual interest in a female, not even the manipulative Irene Adler had stayed on his mind for long. She’d seen him cast a curious glance or two in the direction of a handsome male but, as far as she knew, he had never done anything more than look. Then John Watson had limped into his life and she had seen how Sherlock’s eyes would linger, how his cheeks would flush, how he would show off for this seemingly ordinary army doctor. Sherlock could hide it from the rest of the world, oh yes, but he couldn't hide it from her.

Mrs Hudson sighs and eases herself out of her comfy armchair. Her hip is aching and she’d hoped for some quiet time in front of the TV before bed but the laughter and splashing coming from upstairs is enough to bring a blush to even her worldly cheeks. She is thrilled that her stupid boys are finally seeing each other clearly but she really doesn’t need to hear every step forward in their relationship; their very loving and active relationship if the change in sounds is anything to go by. Mrs Hudson ensconces herself in her little kitchen and reaches for her radio, the first channel is classical music, she usually uses it to soothe her to sleep, but no - not tonight, she shakes her head ruefully as a load groan followed by what she knows to be an aroused chuckle filters down, she needs something loud. She finally settles on something with a thudding, heavy beat and, deciding that peace and quiet will be absent guests this evening, pulls one of her favourite cooking books off
its small shelf and grabs her mixing bowl from under the sink. From the sounds of activity coming from upstairs she thinks that her boys will benefit from a sugar-loaded snack in a few hours time. She flips through the glossy pages of her recipe book and hums along to the music blaring out of the radio, eyes flicking at each photo of gloriously decadent desserts before finally deciding that they all seem just a bit too ‘fussy’. After a little bit of scrabbling through various bits of paper Mrs Hudson retrieves a simple sheet of lined paper that is covered in beautiful, old fashioned cursive writing. It’s an old family favourite, a recipe for mince pies written out by her mother and given to Mrs Hudson as a wedding gift to ‘help keep her husband happy.’ A wry smile crosses Mrs Hudson’s gently wrinkled face as she allows herself to think of her husband and their marriage during better times. They’d not known each other for very long but the chemistry between them had been instant and living in a time when sex outside of marriage was frowned upon a wedding was the obvious next step in their romance, especially when she had thought she was expecting. Mrs Hudson unconsciously pats her slim stomach, no baby had ever lasted long inside her, she simply hadn’t been destined to have children that were genetically her own. With a deep sigh she breathes out her fleeting sadness and thinks of her ‘sons’ that are finally getting their own lives together. They’ve brought her as much happiness and worry as sons of her own blood could ever have done and she loves them with a protective force that still sometimes takes her by surprise.

A loud thud followed by raucous laughter from upstairs breaks Mrs Hudson’s musings and returns her to her original task. She gets the various mixing bowls, spoons, flours, fruits and spices that are required for her treats to come to life and flicks the radio a little louder. Before long she is singing and tapping away to the music, keeping the rhythm with her spoon or her whisk; her dancing days may be long gone but they aren’t truly forgotten, her old bones remember still. It’s only once the mixture is almost ready that Mrs Hudson allows her focus to drift a little and becomes aware of the sound of a gentle but persistent tap at the back door. It’s a pleasant enough evening but it is fully dark outside and heading towards midnight, she opens the door slightly, letting the kitchen light stream out over the slight figure of one of Sherlock’s homeless network. The figure is not overly tall, maybe on a par with Mrs Hudson’s height, and not even the many layers can hide the slimness of the person, what they can do is hide any obvious clues as to whether the person is male or female. Mrs Hudson studies the dirty face that is surrounded by badly cut black hair, wide brown eyes stare back from a face older than the slight build would have suggested. Life on the streets is cruel and this face shows some of the effects of that cruelty; there’s a fresh cut high on a cheek which is just beginning to make the eye and surrounding area swell, the lower lip is split and seeping blood and Mrs Hudson can just make out a ragged earlobe where an earring appears to have been torn out.

“Mrs ‘Udson? Sorry to disturb you so late but Mr ‘Olmes said if I ever needed ‘elp I should come ‘ere. I saw your light were on and ‘is weren’t and I didn’t wanna bovver ‘im. I know ‘e’s been through the ringer lately but I’m too nervous to go back out there tonight, ‘e said I could always find shelter through ‘im and I didn’t know where else to go.”

Mrs Hudson takes a few seconds to study the figure further before stepping to the side, allowing access to her home.

“Come on in, Sherlock’s lot are always welcome here. I’ll just nip upstairs and get Doctor Watson, he’ll soon have you fixed up and feeling better.” Mrs Hudson makes a move in the direction of her door which connects her flat to the main house hallway.

The stranger steps in quickly and places a small, dirty hand on Mrs Hudson’s arm, the grip is light but it stops Mrs Hudson in her tracks.

“Nah Missus, don’t disturb the good doctor’s sleep. I’ve ‘ad worse, sure I will again. If you don’t mind I’ll ‘ave a little wash and brush up ‘ere an’ then I’ll be back on me way. I were shook up
“more than anything, I’m feeling better already.” They give a quick grin that reveals a line of dirty yet straight teeth.

“At least let me make you a nice cup of tea and patch you up the best I can.” She smiles confidentially. “If you wait another thirty minutes or so there’ll be some nice mince pies fresh out of the oven. I’m making them for my boys, the mix is all made I just need spoon it in to the pastry cases and then pop them on to cook. I’ll do that after I’ve seen to those cuts and put the kettle on.”

“Only if it ain’t too much bovver, Mrs ‘Udson.” Wide eyes take in Mrs Hudson’s homely little kitchen, flicking from spices, to washing hanging over the radiator to dry, to the cake mix waiting to be made into little pies and baked.

“It’s no bother at all, dear. Sit yourself down and I’ll put the kettle on, then fetch the first aid kit.” Mrs Hudson bustles off and spends some time shuffling around in her drawers before she locates what she needs. She lets the tap run before filling her kettle and then turns on the hot tap to wash her hands thoroughly. When she turns ‘round her guest is just sitting down at the table, eyes still wide in wonder. “Now dear, what’s your name so I can chat to you properly whilst we’re getting all nice and cozy here?”

“Enid, Missus, named after me Gran. Me mum said she was a stubborn one and that I took after her. She never knew whether to laugh or despair at me. Broke me Gran’s ‘eart, it did, when I up and left but I couldn’t stay at ‘ome, it weren’t a ‘ealthy place to be.” Enid scrubs at her cheek with a grubby hand and sniffs, apparently staring at nothing.

“I’m sure your Gran would be proud of how strong you are, it’s not easy on the streets.” Mrs Hudson pulls on a pair of thin latex gloves and dabs antiseptic solution onto some cotton wool. “Can I ask what happened to you tonight?”

Mrs Hudson receives an eloquent shrug before Enid starts talking, wincing occasionally when the antiseptic solution catches something particularly sore.

“I were asleep in me usual spot in the park, it’s sorta away from the paths and in the trees, don’t usually get any bovver there, when I was woke up by someone grabbing at me.” A fine shudder rolls over Enid’s thin shoulders. “E put ‘is ‘and over me mouth and started pulling at me clothes. I’ve lived long enough on the streets to know what ‘e were after and it weren’t me jewellery. ‘E stank of booze and fags, I could smell it on ‘is breath but pissed as ‘e was ‘e were still stronger than me. I struggled but I only managed to kick me blankets off and earn meself a clump to the ‘ed for me troubles. ‘E tried to shove ‘is tongue in me mouth and I bit ‘im, ‘e split me lip for that. Bloody tosser.” Mrs Hudson nodded vaguely in agreement. “Well, ‘e got much more forceful after that but my mouth was free to shout, I bloody yelled like me life depended on it; and it may well of done. I didn’t think I ‘ad any ‘ope when another shout made ‘im pause. ‘E sat up a bit and looked ‘round, obviously saw something that worried ‘im ‘cos ‘e ripped me earring out and then bloody scarpered. Coward. ‘Though I didn’t ‘ang ‘round either, some of those coppers are worse than the flipping criminals, I weren’t taking any chances. Next thing I know I’m knocking on ‘yer door and praying someone will ope it.” Enid lays her hand over Mrs Hudson’s hand on her shoulder. “Yer a life saver, Mrs ‘Udson, and thats no lie.”

“That’s sweet of you to say, dear. Now, why don't you just get comfy in that chair and I'll make us that cuppa. How do you take it?” Mrs Hudson gathers up all the first aid paraphernalia and disposes it in a special bin John had left with her, then removes her gloves, binning those before washing her hands thoroughly again.

“Usually ‘owever it comes but milk and two sugars would be lovelier.”
Mrs Hudson pours the water in to a teapot with a couple of her best teabags and leaves it to brew whilst she busies herself with putting the mince pies together. Before long they are in the oven cooking away and two cups of tea are sitting companionably by each other on Mrs Hudson’s little table.

A particularly loud thud sounds from upstairs and Enid raises a quizzical face skywards.

“Is everything alright with them up there?” She reaches for her tea with a slightly shaking hand.

“Hmmm?” Mrs Hudson sips peacefully at her tea. “Oh yes, they're fine. Sherlock is slowly recovering so I expect he's got poor Doctor Watson moving his bedroom around so that he can keep on with his experiments without straining himself. I suspect Doctor Watson can't wait to get back to his wife. They’re expecting, you know, early days yet but I’ve never seen him so happy.” The lies slip easily over Mrs Hudson’s tongue.

“I ‘adn’t ‘eard ‘e were expecting.” Enid replies, taking a slurp of her tea. “I was real surprised when I ‘eard e’d got ‘itched, thought it would be just ‘im and Sherlock for life, like.”

“Stay with Sherlock? No, Sherlock doesn't need people in that way; chatting to Doctor Watson or an inanimate object, it’s all the same to Sherlock and Doctor Watson is eager for a quiet life with his Mary. Oh, I’m sure he’ll pop round from time to time for the odd case, or answer the occasional plea for medical advice but mostly I expect he’ll set up a nice little practice of his own.”

The beeping of the timer cuts off any response that Enid may have been about to make and hot mince pies are placed on a cooling rack on the table. “Another cuppa, dear?” A gentle smile graces Mrs Hudson’s kind face.

“Go on then.” Enid grins back, her smile grows wider when two of the hot mince pies are put on a plate in front of her and two more go in front of Mrs Hudson.

They continue to make small-talk until Mrs Hudson starts to yawn discreetly and her eyes grow heavy, she covers her mouth with her hand briefly and blinks sleepily at Enid.

“I’m sorry, dear, old age is getting the best of me. You stay and have some more tea and mince pies and let yourself out. I’m a trusting old fool but if you’re one of Sherlock’s lot I know I can trust you. Goodnight dear, I’m so pleased you came by tonight.” She gives Enid one more sleepy smile before pottering off to her bedroom. She has just enough energy to check her special mobile phone, one given to her by Mycroft and Inspector Lestrade, nodding at the coded message that flashes up on its screen.

Enid finishes her tea and nibbles at the very edge of her mince pie, musing over how it’s such a shame that she can’t eat the whole thing, the pastry tastes wonderful but she can’t risk eating even a small amount of the filling. After ten minutes Enid gets up quietly and goes to look in on Mrs Hudson. The old dear is sprawled out on her bed, her head at an awkward angle. Enid moves her until she appears more comfortable.

“You really are such a trusting old thing, bit too trusting. If I wasn't working to a time limit tonight I think I’d enjoy teaching you the danger of trusting too easily, maybe at a later date.” Enid reaches up and removes the badly cut wig that she is wearing, her own hair is now dark and cropped short and she feels more herself than she has done for years. The blonde hair she used to sport was fun for a while but the length and the constant need to re-colour was beginning to wear on her, give her an easy-care hairstyle anytime, especially in her field of work. She leans over Mrs Hudson’s dressing table to peer into the mirror, she blinks at her reflection before removing the brown contacts she has been wearing, revealing bright blue irises beneath.
“Welcome back, Mary.” She smirks at herself. “Or should I say welcome back Angela?” The name feels odd on her lips it’s been so long since she's gone by it. She repeats it again, this time using her natural accent, the name still feels odd to her but she knows, given time, it will feel normal again.

She returns to the kitchen and prepares a plate of mince pies and waits for the noise from upstairs to quieten. When it has been silent for over twenty minutes she walks silently upstairs with her ‘gift’, she places it in the exact place she knows that Mrs Hudson tends to leave her baked goods and then gives in to temptation. Mary eases the bedroom door open and wrinkles her nose at the stink of stale air and sex that hits her but refuses to take her gaze from the bed and the semi-naked forms of the men who rest there. The thin sheet that covers them is crinkled and stained but neither John nor Sherlock appear concerned, they rest peacefully in each others’ arms. She notes, coldly, that John has no problem being cuddled up to when it is Sherlock he is with, he had always hated that level of intimacy with her, claiming it made him feel caged in. A slow smile drifts over her lips as she allows herself to think of all the things she can inflict on John that would show him what ‘caged in’ meant; but first she needs to get Sherlock out of the picture. She was getting paid extremely well for killing Sherlock but she hasn't been told to make it quick, something she was thankful for, she intends to make Sherlock suffer for taking something that belonged to her, even if it was something she had never particularly wanted in the first place.

Mary returns downstairs and awaits the inevitable night time nibbles to hit John, as they always had done after they’d had a particularly energetic round of sex. She admits it hadn’t all been bad, having to pretend an attraction for John Watson. He was attractive in an understated way and she hadn’t been totally bored by him, there was some intelligence there. In fact, she mused, she could almost, almost mind you, see why Sherlock was so taken with him. She had thought when she’d been hired to seduce John that she’d hate every moment of it but he had been unexpectedly … sweet. He’d been a gentleman through and through, so much so that he would only drop the gentlemanly behaviour in bed after she had him thoroughly aroused, she had greatly enjoyed that, after all, it wasn't dissimilar to torture, the teasing and denial and teasing again until the poor man was sure he would die if he couldn't come right this minute. She’d always let him in the end and he’d been so grateful, and so had she, in a different way, she always has taken joy in a job well done. A muffled thud comes form upstairs and she knows that John has taken the bait, she only has to wait a few seconds before she hears the deep tones of Sherlock’s voice calling after John, querying if he’s ok, a few more seconds and quick footfalls are heard. Time to make an appearance.

Mary doesn't make the effort to mute the sound of her footsteps on the stairs, Sherlock will have realised something is wrong the moment he was unable to rouse John.

She opens the door straight in to the kitchen of Sherlock’s flat and is greeted by six foot of naked detective. He is, surprisingly, unarmed and squatting next to where John is passed out on the floor: a decidedly unflattering position for the great detective to be in, in her opinion.

“What did you do to him?” Sherlock demands, one hand quivering over John’s wrist, seemingly just moving from taking John’s pulse.

“Nothing he won't recover from, more’s the pity. I put some sleeping drugs in the mince pies, I knew he wouldn't refuse a little post-sex snack. He’ll be fine, a little groggy and a headache, nothing that won’t stop him ‘enjoying’ everything I have planned for him once I’m finished with you.”

“I won’t let you hurt John.” Sherlock stand to take a protective stance in front of John’s fallen figure.
“Sherlock, honey, you won’t be around to stop me.” She grins. “Now, the choice is yours, you can either eat the mince pie and fall peacefully asleep and I’ll take you elsewhere or…” She reaches into the pocket of her ragged coat. “I can shoot John, you can watch him bleed out and then I take you away anyway.”

She watches in amusement as Sherlock hastily eats three mince pies in quick succession. “Good boy, Sherlock. Now I need you to walk down the stairs in front of me and to the backdoor, a couple of my colleagues will meet you there. Quickly now, we wouldn’t want you to pass out on the stairs and hurt that pretty face of yours.”

At the rear door of the building Sherlock is met by two more ‘homeless’ people, their ragged, dirty clothes effectively hiding their appearance. He stumbles as his sight goes blurry and his knees give, the drug in the mince pies taking quick effect on his weakened body. The last clear sensation is that of concrete smacking against his cheekbone as he falls to the ground, his surroundings going black.

Chapter End Notes

So, dear readers, we're approaching the end of this story, I hope you've enjoyed it and will join me in further adventures after this. Writing for this fandom has been a joy and something I look forward to continuing for many years yet!
The Showdown

Chapter Summary

“I have always believed you to be dangerous, Mary. I tried to ignore the evidence in front of me, to convince myself that I’d read you wrong, it does happen, more than I’d like to admit. I wanted to believe that you would be good for John, that you offered him that mix of danger and security he craved, that you truly loved him.” Sherlock manages to work some spittle into his mouth, allowing his words to come out more smoothly, a hint of bitterness tainting them.

Chapter Notes

Welcome to the penultimate chapter! I'm nervously chewing my fingernails in the corner! I hope you enjoy it.

Sherlock rouses slowly only to be welcomed back into the world of the waking with a searing pain in his head and lower arm, dried blood in his mouth and a swollen eye. It takes all of his effort to lift his head, his neck muscles feel too weak, the ligaments like jelly; with what feels like a superhuman effort he finally manages it, breaking out in a cold sweat for his efforts but it’s to no avail. The blurred glance he gets around him is much too brief to give him any pertinent information. He is now aware that he is in a large and spacious room, most likely a warehouse with no natural light filtering in, the only light is coming from a single bare bulb hanging from the ceiling; that the air is cold and stale and smells slightly of river water; the floor is solid concrete, smooth and chilled beneath his bare feet. None of the evidence he gathers in his quick glimpse sets this warehouse apart from any other warehouse that lines the length of the Thames and Sherlock groans weakly in frustration.

Sherlock tries to arrange his limbs so that they are more comfortable and to relieve the pain in his forearm but on moving he becomes aware that he is tied securely to a chair. A brief investigation with his fingertips and a study of the shape he is being forced into indicates an upright chair made from metal of some kind, any cushions that may have provided even minimal comfort have long been removed. His hands are forced behind his back and secured together with what feels to be plastic covered wire, it cuts into his wrists and he can feel the stickiness of drying blood between his palms. Sherlock concludes the pain in his forearm is either from a strain or a break, he moves slightly to test his limitations and almost vomits from the sudden flare of pain: almost certainly a break. Sherlock closes his eyes and works on compartmentalising the pain; he will push it aside and deal with it at a later, more suitable, opportunity. The pain starts to ebb and he is able to concentrate on how his legs are positioned. They are spread wide and his ankles have been tied with the same plastic covered wire to the rear chair legs, pulling his thighs down at an awkward angle. Any efforts to escape will tip Sherlock straight on to his face on the concrete, causing him mild concussion at the minimum and he’d still be tied to the bloody chair for his troubles. The final thing that registers is that he is still in the same naked state he had been when Mary had taken him. The air in the warehouse is several degrees colder than the autumn air outside, bordering on frigid; depending on how long he remains in the warehouse hypothermia is as much of a danger to
him as anything that the currently absent Mary may inflict.

“Had enough time to get a feel for the situation, Sherlock? Realised that there’s no getting away?” Mary’s voice echoes eerily from out of the gloom, her accent is back in full and coloured with mirth. “Afraid yet?” She taunts.

“Fear is wisdom in the face of danger, it is nothing to be ashamed of.” Sherlock grits out, his head spinning.

“So now you believe I’m dangerous? Shooting you was too subtle a hint?” She mocks.

“I have always believed you to be dangerous, Mary. I tried to ignore the evidence in front of me, to convince myself that I’d read you wrong, it does happen, more than I’d like to admit. I wanted to believe that you would be good for John, that you offered him that mix of danger and security he craved, that you truly loved him.” Sherlock manages to work some spittle into his mouth, allowing his words to come out more smoothly, a hint of bitterness tainting them.

“You talk as if you care, Sherlock.” Mary snaps, her cool demeanour momentarily ruffled. “Do you even realise what you meant to John before you decided to vanish for two years?”

“I was his flat-mate. His colleague. His best friend, I believe.” Sherlock answers, gasping as pain shoots along his hurt arm.

“And yet he never meant anything more to you than an extra pair of hands at a crime scene, someone to praise you and clean up after you.” Mary insists, her voice growing shrill in her anger. “Even now he means nothing to you. You’re only fucking him because it’s the easy way to keep him. No effort required on your part, you can just lay there and think of England while he thrusts and groans.”

“John Watson means everything to me. He has always meant everything to me.” Sherlock’s voice is strong and adamant, it echoes briefly in the empty room.

“You’ve had a funny way of showing it, Sherlock Holmes, pretending to be dead and even making him witness the moment you took your own life.”

“He wasn't meant to see that, he was meant to be with Mrs Hudson, I didn't want him to see that.” Sherlock insists, he shakes his head in denial, lights blur his vision in response. “I only did it to protect him, to save him.”

"And you did, sweetheart.” Mary mocks. “You saved him for me.” She walks into the light, she's had time to change and wash since taking Sherlock from his home. Now she wears a simple pair of black trousers and a red top, her slim figure on full, deliberate, show. Sherlock bears his teeth in response but says nothing, his defiance angering Mary. She walks calmly forward before striking Sherlock with a closed fist, splitting his lip and wrenching his head to the side, prompting him to speak.

“Why are you acting as if you care, Mary? You’re love is as fake as your pregnancy, it seems.” He spits a mouthful of blood on to the ground at her feet.

As he had predicted, she strikes him again, this time with the back of her hand across his cheek. The force behind it is so hard that it causes the chair to rock dangerously and for a moment Sherlock believes he is going to strike the floor but the chair merely teeters before regaining its equilibrium. Sherlock’s eyes water and again he spits out blood, he cautiously explores the inside of his cheek with his tongue, the skin has been shredded by his teeth and blood continues to leak
into his mouth.

“I’ll allow you that, Sherlock, just this once. I may not have loved John according to your definition of the word but I did grow to care for him. How could I not? I got to fix him, mould him in to what I wanted him to be. He’s mine, Sherlock and he will stay mine. As for the pregnancy, I tried to get pregnant but he’s such a stickler when it comes to using a condom, saying we weren’t ready to start a family. That really only left the good old padded belly trick; and he fell for it hook, line and sinker. God, I do love dealing with trusting men, it makes my job so much easier.” Mary laughs and Sherlock’s fists clench again with the urge of wanting to hit out at Mary, to cause her physical pain.

“What job? Who put you up to this?” Sherlock’s mind sharpens and focuses on the only relevant sentence in the whole of Mary’s speech.

“I see no problem in telling you, after all it’s very unlikely that you’re carrying a wire on you, unless they’ve got very devious at where they hide them now.” Mary is almost crowing in her defeat of Sherlock, it’s been a long time coming and she is determined to savour every moment of it. “And I’m certain you’ll be in no condition to speak when I’m finished with you, Sherlock. In fact, you’ll be in no condition to breathe.” She laughs at her own macabre humour and squats in front of him.

“Originally the job was given to a man named James Moriarty.” She notices the flinch that Sherlock tries too late to suppress. “Yes, I thought that name might garner a reaction.” She smirks. “Apparently he succeeded in his task but paid for it with his death. Although he was rather more successful in killing himself than you were.” She smiles at Sherlock, almost as if they were friends sharing a secret, Sherlock shudders. “Whispers eventually reached my employer that perhaps you weren’t as dead as you wished the world to believe. I was hired to find out more about these rumours and seduce a certain army doctor. That was no hardship at all.” She leers into Sherlock’s face.

“But who employed you? Who masterminded this whole farce?” Sherlock demands, eyes cold and teeth bared.

“Oh, I don’t know that, you silly man. I know they wanted a job done and that they’d pay well for the privilege. I did get the impression that they weren’t always able to be as free as they wished.” Mary speculates. “And I’m fairly certain I felt the influence of a female behind the demands.”

Sherlock closes his eyes in a desperate attempt to access his mind palace, to try and place who this person could be; but it’s to no avail, Mary won’t allow him the time he needs. Another blow lands on his face, bruising his cheek further and causing more blood to well in to his mouth. This time he spits the blood directly on to Mary, he only has a moment to appreciate the way it drips down one cheek before he is hit once again. This time the chair tips fully and Sherlock has a moment to experience exquisite pain before he blacks out.

He is unsure how much time has elapsed when he regains consciousness once more but the blood that pools beneath his head is cool and growing tacky. He tries to move his head but lacks the physical strength to shift it far, even the small movement he has made is enough to make pain lance through his head and stars to blur his vision, his hearing is also marred by a persistent ringing; all indicative of concussion. Before he has had even a moment to quell his queasiness he is wrenched back upright in a surprising show of strength from Mary. He has the satisfaction of vomiting a thin stream of bile on to her shoes before she backs off with a moue of disgust.

“When John believed you were dead he used to tell me stories about your life together.” Mary
continues as if nothing has happened, as if she hasn't just caused Sherlock to lose consciousness with her casual violence. “I don’t think John realised that he’d placed you on a pedestal, spoke of you as if you were some sort of miracle, he either didn't realise what his true feelings for you were or he didn't want to admit to them.” She muses, speaking almost to herself. “He used to get this sad smile sometimes when we ate, I asked him once what caused that secret smile. He said he was thinking of you and how you never ate on cases, said you claimed it slowed you down but that you’d always find room for one of Mrs Hudson’s mince pies. That she made them throughout the year just so you had some to eat at whatever ungodly hour suited you.” She pauses in her speech and fixes her gaze upon Sherlock, ensuring she has his full attention. “So, of course, they seemed the ideal place to put the sedatives.”

“J.. John?” Sherlock’s question lacks force or volume as he battles against vomiting again.

“Is not here and not likely to be here any time soon. My people have doctored all of the cameras around Baker Street, nothing but peace and quiet is on show there. No-one followed us from your house, my people have ensured that too. You are all on your own, Sherlock Holmes, and you will die all on your own; when I deem the time to be right. But first I will make you suffer.”

“No, Mary, you will not.” Footsteps echo as a lone figure walks from the shadows and halts, unarmed, a few metres away from Sherlock and Mary.

“John? It seems I underestimated your tenacity.” Mary moves so that she stands between Sherlock and John, blocking their view of each other.

“You have underestimated me in many ways, Mary. Untie him, let him go and I swear to you that you will leave this building alive.” John’s voice is emotionless and although he speaks at his normal volume the words carry crystal clear.

“A brave speech, John my love, for a man on your own.” Mary mocks.

“I’m not on my own, Mycroft and Greg are here, others too.” John takes another calm step forward, allowing the light to fall on the person who has been standing in his shadow.

“How do you think Mr Holmes and the Detective Inspector knew you had Sherlock so quickly, dear? I notified them. I knew it was you as soon as I opened the door. It takes more than a change of hair, a bit of dirt and, quite frankly, an appalling accent to fool me.” Gone is Mrs Hudson’s usual air of slight dottiness and frailty.

“I always knew you were an interfering old bitch but I thought you were harmless, I won’t make that mistake again.” Mary snaps, angry at herself for leaving both John and Mrs Hudson alive.

“No, you won’t, as you’ll be rotting in jail just as you deserve.” Mrs Hudson’s voice is lined with a touch of steel. “Did you honestly believe that you could try to kill my Sherlock and I’d sit back and do nothing?”

“You’re still doing nothing! You’re just standing there, chattering on!” Mary shouts, exasperated.

“Wrong. I sent an emergency code to Mycroft when I went to put the kettle on, he increased
surveillance around Baker Street. Real people, not those silly little cameras you thought you put out of commission and not the people who let themselves be seen by your people. I drove John here as soon as he regained consciousness and we had co-ordinates to aim for. Oh, and most importantly, whilst I’ve been standing here, chattering on as you put it, Mycroft’s and the Inspector’s men have incapacitated all of your people. But don’t mind me, I’m just the landlady.” Mrs Hudson radiates righteous indignation.

Sherlock thinks the concussion must be causing him to hallucinate, he can hear both John and Mrs Hudson but can think of no scenario that would require Mrs Hudson to be there, he concludes that John must be a figment of his imagination too. More footsteps sound in the shadows and another voice rings forth, one he chooses to believe he would never imagine.

“Miss Allen, step away from Sherlock Holmes.” An upper class accent with an almost non-existent northern lilt rings true in the silence left behind by Mrs Hudson’s revelations.

“Ah. Mycroft Holmes. Stepping up to protect your baby brother?” Mary’s dispassionate tone does little to mask the fact that she had started at Mycroft’s words. In one careful move she reaches into her trouser pocket and retrieves her handgun.

“You, of all people, Miss Allen should know the importance of protecting those that share our DNA.” Mycroft shifts his stance so that he is no longer leaning on his ubiquitous umbrella, his grip on the handle subtly altering.

“Oh, you know about that too. I should have guessed, but you always were the clever one.” Mary raises her gun, taking aim, not at Mycroft but at Sherlock. “Take one step further, Mr Holmes and I will shoot your brother.”

Sherlock feels cold steel pressed against his temple and closes his eyes, at least he will die surrounded by the people he cares about; his family.

“I’m warning you, Mycroft, any closer and you will be the cause of your brother’s death. It will be a shot straight to the brain this time and there’s no coming back from that.” Mary’s tone and stance has returned to her former level of confidence, she is certain that the outcome will be in her favour.

“Sherlock!” A shout rings out and then several things happen at once. Sherlock feels Mary’s pressure on the gun falter and wrenches his head back. Footfalls pound in his direction, oddly accompanied by the distinct retort of gunshots. A human form falls against him before rolling to the floor, at the same time he registers the dull thud of a body hitting the ground in the near distance. Slow seconds pass before a gentle hand is on his cheek, it’s a touch Sherlock knows and loves. Blearily he forces his eyes to open and looks up in to the worried face of John Watson and he hopes with all his heart that this isn’t part of a hallucination.

“John?” Sherlock mumbles and presses his face more firmly into John’s palm. Finally he believes what all his senses are shouting at him, John is here, Sherlock is safe, he can go home. Sherlock is just beginning to allow himself to relax when a loud shout breaks through his reverie.

“John! I need you over here now. Mycroft’s down!” Lestrade’s voice sounds clear over the space but the usual assertive tone is edged with worry.

“You! Over here now and untie Mr Holmes! Be careful about it, those ties are cutting into his flesh.” The military doctor is in full operational mode now.

Sherlock feels compassionate hands loosening his bonds, pain lances through him but with the pain comes a clarity of vision that he has been lacking since he hit his head. In the distance he can see
his brother on the concrete floor, blood pooling around his thigh. Voices drift over to him, unmuffled by the people surrounding Mycroft. John is in attendance, applying pressure to the wound, Lestrade is sitting on the floor, Mycroft’s head cradled in his lap, their hands clasped.

“Hold on Myc, an ambulance is on its way, it won’t be long.” Sherlock feels almost guilty intruding on Lestrade’s distress.

“D..do try to struggle on to the end, Gregory love, you know how I abhor the shortened form.” Mycroft’s voice is faint and laced with pain but his words are enough to make Lestrade sob in relief.

Sherlock’s gaze shifts to the body at his feet. Mary lays in a pool of expanding blood, her fist clutched to her breast. Her eyes are fixed on John and a sudden rage fills Sherlock, he will not allow her to taint John with her dying stare. The moment his legs are released he pulls himself shakily to his feet and cradles his injured arm to his chest, ignoring the pleas of the man behind him to sit back down. He stumbles unsteadily forwards until he can stand in her view, blocking her sight of John completely. He watches her face, her weakly moving lips, until the light in her eyes finally dies and her hand falls lax on to the cold uncaring floor.

Strength escapes him at last and he falls to the ground, his descent only being slowed by a pair of strong arms about his waist.

“Whoops, there we go.” John’s breath is warm on his face and tiredness overtakes Sherlock. A soft tap on his cheek rouses him slightly. “You can’t sleep, Sherlock. I need you to stay awake. Can you do that for me?” Sherlock can feel John’s chin as it rests lightly on his head, not even the pain from his wound is enough to make Sherlock move out of John’s embrace. “Mycroft is going to be ok, it’s a clean shot through his thigh muscle and the air ambulance is on the way to take both of you to hospital. Greg and I will meet you both there, there won’t be enough room in the helicopter for us all. In the meantime Greg’s men will clean up in here and take Mary’s body away.”

A warm blanket is wrapped around Sherlock and he lays content in John’s arms, listening to the lull of John’s words and blinking slowly, determined to stay awake.

“If you have to look along the shaft of an arrow from the wrong end.
If a man has you at his mercy then hope like hell he's an evil man.
Because the evil like power over people and they want to see you in fear.
They want you to know you are going to die.
So they'll talk and they'll gloat.
They'll put off the murder like another man would put off a good cigar.
So hope like hell your captor is an evil man.
“A good man will kill you with hardly a word.”

*Terry Pratchett.*
And at the end..

Chapter Summary

“Shut up and drink your drink.” John stalls as he fidgets, trying to get as comfortable as is possible in a hospital chair, visually making sure that Sherlock is also comfortable and drinking his warm drink as instructed. “I returned to consciousness to find Mrs Hudson leaning over me, I had a wet face and a tea towel over my dick.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sherlock is propped up in a hospital bed wearing a pyjama top and a jumper, John knows that hidden underneath the many hospital sheets and blankets Sherlock has on pyjama bottoms and that his long feet are encased in thick socks. A cup of hot, sweet orange juice sits on his bedside cabinet alongside a thermos containing more of the warming liquid. Despite these signs of hospitalisation, Sherlock’s bruised and battered face wears an expression of quiet determination and not-so-quiet boredom, his broken arm resting over the bed covers, the cast gleaming a bright white even in the dimmed lights of the hospital room.

“Can we go home now, John?” Sherlock whines, the fingers of one hand tugging at the collar of his jumper.

“As I told you the last five times you asked, no, not yet. We’re waiting to get the all clear on your head injury and the mild hypothermia you came in with.” John explains, somehow sounding much calmer than he feels. Every time he closes his eyes, even just to blink, John can clearly see Sherlock strapped, bruised, bloody and naked to a chair, suffering, and all because of his wife. Ex-wife, he supposes, very much ex. That makes him a widower, he muses, strange how he felt so much more bereft, no, scratch that, devastated, when Sherlock ‘died’. It’s part of the reason it took John so long to forgive Sherlock, he had trusted and he had been betrayed - at least that’s how he had seen it at the time; he knows better now.

“This is dull. I don't do well with dull.” Sherlock’s complaining draws John out of his increasingly depressing thoughts and back to the present day. As usual, Sherlock ignores the muttered ‘no kidding’ John gives and ploughs on. “Tell me what happened earlier, you've done well at avoiding giving me any information so far but that won’t last, so admit defeat now and tell me.”

“Shut up and drink your drink.” John stalls as he fidgets, trying to get as comfortable as is possible in a hospital chair, visually making sure that Sherlock is also comfortable and drinking his warm drink as instructed. “I returned to consciousness to find Mrs Hudson leaning over me, I had a wet face and a tea towel over my dick.”

Sherlock’s snigger makes John grin in response, his cheeks flooding with colour at the memory; Mrs Hudson had thrown a glass of water over him, but only after she had taken the time to cover his cock with a handy piece of cloth.

“Mrs Hudson informed me that Mary had taken you but that I wasn't to ‘freak out’ as she knew where you were and that as soon as I was dressed she’d take me there.” John doesn’t mention that
Mrs Hudson had addressed the whole of her speech to the wall just behind his left ear, it’s a story he will tell when his emotions feel less raw.

“How, John? Mrs Hudson is an amazing woman but I don't believe she's omnipresent, so how the hell did she know where to go?” Sherlock queries. He hates not knowing things, especially things pertaining to him.

“I’ll take this one.” Greg answers as he enters the room. “Mycroft is fine, Sherlock, I’ve been kicked out while he makes some phone calls, bloody man gets shot and he still tries to run the world.” He answers before Sherlock can even formulate the question.

“I don’t care who tells me, just as long as someone actually does! Whose idea was it to involve Mrs Hudson?” His usual animated arm gesticulations are curtailed by his injuries and the pain they cause.

“Hers; she’s a persistent old dear.” A small smile accompanies Greg’s words. “Wouldn't stop badgering us until we agreed to set her up with a method of contacting us covertly. Mycroft’s team designed and produced little devices that could be easily activated and notify us the moment that Mary made contact.” Greg explains, his whole posture radiating deep respect for the old lady.

“That’s unacceptable, Lestrade, she should never have been put in the line of danger like that. What if Mary had found the devices? Mrs Hudson would have been at serious risk, she could have been killed.” Sherlock’s voice is sharp, his words clipped, genuine fear for his landlady shining through. Sherlock resists the urge to pace but only because he can see John tensing, ready to forcefully put Sherlock back in his bed if necessary.

“As she pointed out, repeatedly may I add, she was already at risk simply by remaining at Baker Street. A risk she willingly undertook, Sherlock.” Greg asserts, holding up his hand to stop Sherlock from interrupting. “The devices were brilliantly disguised; they looked like calculators, or old remote controls; stuff you'd expect to find around the house. The rest you know. Mrs Hudson used one of the devices as soon as the opportunity arose and that alerted myself and Mycroft that, to quote you, the game was on.”

The silence that greets this statement lingers on until John clears his throat, concerned at how introspective Sherlock now looks, eyes closed, one hand near his full lips. The noise makes Sherlock open his eyes and it takes him a second to centre himself. Cool grey-blue eyes study John for a moment before flicking over to where Lestrade stands, hands casually in his pockets. Sherlock’s eyes flick over Lestrade, taking in everything from his loosened neck-tie, his dishevelled shirt, his blood-stained trousers to his badly scuffed shoes. Nothing passes his gaze, including the way the smile on Lestrade’s lips doesn't quite make it to his tired eyes.

“Take me to my brother.” It’s worded as a request but the demand is clear.

“Sherlock…..” John begins, moving to stop Sherlock from moving out of the bed.

“John, I have no dizziness, no nausea, I’m adequately warm and my arm is fully supported. There is no reason why I cannot leave this room and find my own way to my brother. Now, you can either walk with me and put your mind at rest that I really am ‘ok’ or I will make my own way and you can worry further at your lip and then follow me anyway.” Despite the harshness of Sherlock’s words his voice is soft. “Greg needs to be back with my brother, I need to see my brother, the logical thing to do here is for us to go and see my brother.”

“I’m not happy about this Sherlock but if you're going then you're doing it my way. Stay right there until I come back.” John walks towards the door, stopping by Greg’s side and grasping his
shoulder. “If he tries to get out of that bed, Greg, you have my permission to lay him out cold.”

“Understood, John.” He grins back at Sherlock, chuckling when Sherlock rolls his eyes but makes no attempt to get out of the bed.

Less than three minutes pass before John is back, pushing a wheelchair in front of him.

“Right, you remember the drill, good arm around me, let me take the majority of your weight and into the wheelchair. I’ll then tuck you back in and you’ll take that flask of drink with you. You’ll do what I’ll tell you to do, or, so help me, Sherlock, I’ll push you down the nearest set of stairs and Greg here will help me make it look like an accident.”

"And I thought I was the drama queen.” Is the muttered response but Sherlock does as he is told and soon is in the wheelchair, tucked in, with the flask cradled in the crook of his unbroken arm.

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Mycroft is sat in a comfortable leather chair, something that had obviously been provided specifically for him, a tube leads to the crook of his arm, supplying him with blood to replace what he had lost from his wound. Mycroft looks pale and pinched but somehow manages to retain an air of officiousness, despite his right pyjama leg being cut off high on his thigh. His thigh is wrapped securely in clean, white bandages and his right foot is slightly raised on a low stool.

Mycroft is on the phone when Sherlock trundles in, he barely catches the word ‘Sherrinford” before Mycroft ends the call with a curt ‘see to it’.

“Brother mine, I see you're out and about. Here for a statement of the case so far, are we?” Mycroft tries one of his customary smirks but it comes out as a grimace, the pain he is still in, evident.

“No, Mycroft. I am merely ensuring that Greg returns to your side. You are not as emotionless as you would like the world to believe. If you are feeling anywhere near as distressed as I have felt today then you need a friend, a loved one, with you. I believe the Detective Inspector here will be just what the doctor ordered. John?” Sherlock twists in his chair to look at John, catching him as he closes his mouth from the shock he had been portraying at Sherlock’s uncharacteristic words of compassion towards his brother.

“Er, yes, exactly as I would order.” John concurs, pushing Sherlock further into Mycroft’s room.

"Hmm, rather juvenile, Sherlock, but I,” Mycroft swallows against the unfamiliar words. “appreciate the sentiment.” Mycroft leans his cheek on to Lestrade’s hand where it now rests lightly on his shoulder. The movement is stilted, obviously still quite new to him but the soft smile he receives from Greg is worth going against his normal first reaction of denying any need for human help or comfort.

Mycroft presses a kiss to the back of Lestrade’s hand before clearing his throat and sitting upright in his chair, wincing when the movement aggravates his injury.

“As we are all here I believe now would be a good time to update you on what has happened in regards of Ms Morstan aka Ms Allen and her associates.”

Greg remains at Mycroft’s side but John settles on the empty bed, his hands clasped tightly in his lap, his lips pursed. Sherlock is positioned just out of reach but he is minutely aware of every breath that John takes.
“Can you refer to her as Ms Morstan? I don't think I can get my head around her other persona currently.” John asks, his voice devoid of emotion.

“As you wish, Doctor Watson.” Mycroft acquiesces. “Ms Morstan currently reposes in the morgue of St. Bart’s Hospital, Molly Hooper is in charge of her remains.” He pauses, allowing John time to acknowledge the details. “I’m sorry to ask this of you, John, but as next of kin it is your decision as to what happens with her remains.”

“Honestly Mycroft, she can be put out with the rubbish for all I care.” John pauses, thinking the problem over. “Can her body be left to science? Perhaps she can be of some use in death, if not in life.”

“That can be arranged.” Mycroft makes a note in a small book that has been resting on the table next to him. “With this in mind, I will inform Ms Morstan’s parents that her daughter died whilst AWOL from the military. It may give them some much-needed closure over her whereabouts.”

“And what about her brother? Michael, wasn't it?” John queries.

“Michael John Arthur Allen will remain at the facility in St. John’s Wood for the rest of his natural life. A life, I’m afraid to say, that is considerably shorter than we originally believed it would be. Michael has terminal cancer. Ms Morstan would have been unaware of its existence as it is a very aggressive strain that has only developed recently. The current prognosis is that he only has a matter of weeks left to live.”

“Shit.” Lestrade mumbles.

“Quite.” Mycroft concurs. “As his parents already believe Michael to be dead I have arranged that when he does pass away he will be cremated and his remains flown to America to be placed, covertly, into his existing grave. The Americans have agreed to meet all costs from this moment forth.”

“Least they could do considering they let a mad woman slip through their grasp.” John mutters, his fingers digging deep into his skin.

The comment goes unaddressed and John allows the conversation to move on.

“What of the other people at the scene, Mycroft? Were they able to provide any more information on Mary’s employer? On future plans?” Sherlock questions, leaning forward in his wheelchair, his broken arm tucked against his stomach.

“Of the five surviving people, two have been very forthcoming and we have some interesting leads to follow up. One remains on life support, the other two are being more reticent but I believe they will yield soon.”

“Anything specifically relating to her current employer? The one who ordered her seduction of John?” John winces at Sherlock’s question but stays silent.

“Nothing definite as of yet but I do have some communiqué that I will be investigating further.” Mycroft’s body language shuts down and Sherlock knows not to push the issue further.

“So, that’s it then?” John queries. “No more Mary? No more living in the shadows for Sherlock and I? I’m not going to lie if people ask, though. I will say that she shot Sherlock and that she ended up dying as a direct response to this. I can’t live a lie anymore.”

“And you won’t have to, John.” It’s Greg’s turn to speak. “It’s been an active case, that active
case is now resolved.” He glances at Mycroft for confirmation before continuing. “We are going to release a statement to the press that you and Sherlock having been actively aiding us in researching the woman that went by the name of Mary Watson aka Mary Morstan. That, together with the American government, we have been investigating crimes that she committed both on British and American soil. We are going to say that you voluntarily went undercover, John, that the marriage was an unusual move in a long-term operation.”

“But that’s just wrapping it all up in a different lie!” John protests, standing from the bed and pacing.

“John.” Sherlock reaches out for him, finally making contact. “I’m afraid some lies are necessary. Trust us. You know that Mycroft could have cut us out of this investigation long ago, and that he still could if he believed it to be necessary. I think if we want to continue to know what comes from this madness you’ve lived through recently then you’re going to have to accept this lie. In the grand scheme of things it barely makes a dent in the universe.”

“Just for once, Sherlock, I want to be true to myself. I’m with you, I love you and I want people to know that. No more hiding.” John answers, his voice thick with emotion.

“No more hiding.” Sherlock agrees. “Tell the press what they need to hear, Lestrade, but keep John’s involvement minimal. Don’t turn him into a victim or a hero; make him human.” His eyes never leave John’s face, his hand on John’s forearm.

John’s only response is to nod, but it’s enough for Sherlock to know that John agrees with the compromise.

“Take me back to our room, John. I think we are finished here.” Sherlock looks over to his brother. “Mycroft, don’t let the ‘game’ take over your life, you could lose the only thing that truly makes life worthwhile.” His glances significantly at Lestrade before allowing John to wheel him out of the room.

The journey back to Sherlock’s room is quiet, the atmosphere strangely tense. Sherlock believes that John is still angry about the upcoming press release and is, therefore, taken by surprise when John wheels him into his room, shuts the door, lowers the blind and drops to the floor in front of Sherlock.

“John?” Sherlock runs a trembling hand through John’s hair, his fingers running easily through the strands.

John looks up, but instead of the tear-streaked face that Sherlock had expected to see, John’s face shines with happiness.

“It’s over, Sherlock. It’s actually fucking over. I feel like such a bastard to be so happy over someone’s death but I can’t help it. She’s gone, she’s actually fucking gone.”

Sherlock’s words escape him so he continues to run his fingers through John’s hair, basking in John’s happiness.

“Kiss me. We’re free men, Sherlock. Kiss me and let’s start living.” He raises up on his knees, his face level with Sherlock’s. “I love you, you annoying, wonderful man.” He laughs before pressing his lips against Sherlock’s.

The kiss starts out remarkably chaste, just lips against lips, John’s smile making it hard for it to become anything more. Sherlock’s fingers tighten in John’s hair and the kiss finally deepens.
Sherlock’s lips part to allow John’s tongue entry and he groans at the sensation. He leans further forward in his wheelchair, losing himself in the kiss. His heart pounds and he begins to harden when John pulls back.

“John!” Sherlock protests, attempting to pull John back into the kiss.

“We need to stop, Sherlock. Otherwise I’m going to have you here.” John gasps, his breath coming in shallow pants.

“Have me?” Sherlock plays innocent.

“Fuck you. Lay you on your back and strip you. Use my tongue and fingers to open you up, relax you, make you ready for me.” John lays kisses over Sherlock’s lap. “Then, when you’re begging me, I’ll take you, slide my cock into you. I’ll pleasure you until you come, then I’ll slowly make love to you until you’re hard again; when you are I’ll take you hard and fast until we both climax.”

“Get me out of here now, John.” Sherlock demands, his heart racing, a light layer of perspiration on his skin.

“Shit. I wish I could but we still need to get you the all clear.” John reaches down and adjusts himself in his trousers then leans forward to rest his forehead against Sherlock’s.

“You can give me the all clear.” Sherlock breathes, his hand still in John’s hair.

“No. I’m not your doctor in here, conflict of interests.”

“John!”

“I don’t make the rules, Sherlock.” John laughs, more relaxed than he has been in months.

“No, but you can help me break them!” Sherlock persists, his own laughter breaking through.

“I could, but I won’t.”

“You could push me by them so fast that they don't see us.”

“No!” John giggles.

“We could steal the air ambulance.”

“Sherlock!”

“Shimmy down the drainpipe?” Sherlock jokes.

“Nope!”

“Dress in drag and waltz by the nurses?” Sherlock giggles.

The suggestions grow more and more ridiculous and the sound of giggles drift through the closed door and echo in the corridors.

Whatever problems John Watson and Sherlock Holmes may face in the future, one fact remains
true, they will do it together.

Chapter End Notes

And that's it, the final chapter! It's a bitter sweet moment for me, I've loved writing this and am just surprised at how long it took me to complete it!

I want to thank every one who has stuck with me throughout this story and to welcome those who have found it since. I really hope you enjoy this story as much as I have enjoyed writing it.

Dxx

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!