These Hours That Define Us
by predictably_unpredictable

Summary

"He can hear John’s giggle before it comes, the way you can smell rain in the air before an oncoming storm, and before long John's laughing, honest to god guffawing, as if Sherlock has just said the funniest thing on Earth. And oh god if only Sherlock could do that every time he said something, if only he could bring John joy with every single one of his actions instead of sadness and disappointment because seeing John happy like this is one of the best things on Earth."

Sherlock has just been discharged from hospital, not knowing what to expect or what he'll be coming home to. He's convinced himself that he should never see John again for John's well being, believing himself to be a hindrance to him. But when John shows up unexpectedly to 221B in the middle of the day hoping for a place to stay, things take a different turn, forcing them both to confront their past and their future.

Takes place during and after Season 3.
Basically, this is everything I've ever wanted out of a post-S3/during S3 fic and now that TAB has aired, I've finally plucked up sufficient courage to write one. The rating might go up... idk, this is my first fic.

UPDATE: Remember when I said the rating might go up HAH
There are footsteps on the stairs.

They're steady and sure and appear to put less weight on the steps than normal, as indicative from the creaks emitting from the stairway.

*all suggestive of a person of medium build*

There's a pause on the seventh step as the unknown figure grunts a bit and heaves themselves up towards the ninth step.

*all suggestive of a person who knows the stairs well enough to avoid the creaky eighth stair, which could mean Mrs Hudson or…*

*No it can’t be, he daren’t hop-*

“Sherlock?” a voice calls hesitantly from the stairway.

Sherlock turns his head, like a moth drawn to a flame, towards the source of the noise.

“Sherlock, are you there?” John Watson’s Unmistakable Voice calls. Judging from the footfalls, he is probably standing right outside their door (of course it’s theirs it’s always been theirs) and for once, Sherlock has absolutely no idea what to do. He’s not anticipated any scenario remotely similar to this and has, in fact, been solidly successful in preventing himself from musing about any situations involving John visiting 221B Baker Street. He has to look after Mary after all, he shouldn’t have any reason to bother with his *failure* of a flatmate.

Anyways, it’s been about a week since Sherlock’s been discharged from hospital and the only sort of conversations he’s managed to have with John in this tumultuous period of check-ups and routine visits to the hospital have been perfunctory texts like…

How’s the wound healing? Sorry I can’t come over to check up on you personally, I’m a bit busy at the moment. I hope to find time soon.

*It’s alright John, I’m doing well. I fully understand the responsibilities that come with having a pregnant wife. Hope to see you soon:- SH*

I really do hope that it is healing well. Please follow the doctor’s orders and make sure you don’t put too much stress on the stitches. Don’t want you ending up in hospital again.

*Sure, John -SH*

So in light of the evidence, it wouldn’t make much sense for John to be standing right outside their door right now... but the man clearly IS standing outside their door right now, which means that there is a factor that Sherlock has neglected to consider... which makes him very worried indeed. Judging by the tone of his voice, John doesn’t seem to be angry at him so an argument is probably not what
John came here for. In fact, Sherlock would even go so far to suggest that John sounded a little… scared.

“Sherlock, are you there?” John’s voice comes again, this time sounding a little more resigned, as if he hadn’t expected anyone to open the door in the first place and is getting more and more disappointed by the minute. This is followed by three soft knocks and the unmistakable thump of a head against the door. Jolting himself back to reality, Sherlock quickly makes towards the stairway. If there is one thing in the world he cannot stand, it’s disappointing John, although of course he has done so on numerous past occasions, the thoughts of which still irk him to his core.

“John?” Sherlock whispers as he swiftly turns the brass knob of their front door, pushing it open slowly so that John will have enough warning to shift his head away. What if this is all a hallucination? What if Sherlock has finally gone mad? He hopes to god that John is outside the door in that case but simultaneously wishes that he isn’t because if John is really showing up to 221B sounding as resigned as he seemed to be, that can only mean one thing...

“Sherlock?” John’s voice whispers back as the door sways open to reveal the stocky doctor. His hair is the same as it’s always been, a charming grey-blond, except that now it seems to be more mussed than usual, which John hates, as if he’s forgotten to brush it. His sapphire eyes, bright as ever, are now framed with dark, heavy rings, clearly indicative of a lack of sleep. His shirt seems to be more wrinkled than usual, suggesting that he hadn’t planned to come over beforehand and there’s a slight tremor in his left hand which could either be due to the fact that it is clutching the handle of a heavy-looking bag that appears to be bursting to the brim or maybe it could be something else...

Sherlock’s eyes flick downwards towards the bag which has clearly been packed hastily. The bulkiness of the luggage is indicative of poor packing and the shape is indicative of stacks and stacks of clothes… which means that this visit probably isn’t temporary and means that John isn’t planning on going back to Ma-

“Don’t.” Sherlock’s eyes whip back to John’s face, meeting deep, blue eyes that match his own grey-blue ones. “Please, just don’t,” John’s voice seems to crack.

“Okay,” Sherlock responds softly, shifting backwards into the house, giving John an invitation to come in, which he takes gladly.

John drops his bag beside the door and stands at the threshold of 221B for a moment, gaze sweeping hungrily over the surface of the flat, as if committing it to memory. He takes a deep breath, smiling softly and Sherlock suddenly feels a burst of warmth in his chest. John is back... he is finally back where he belongs and Sherlock feels like his insides are being coated with molten gold.

He has a sudden vision of John, being back here at Baker Street for good, just the two of them against the rest of the world. They’d argue over petty things like who was supposed to have gotten the milk, and why the fuck are there toes in the fridge? There’d be adrenaline fuelled cases, stupid Bond nights where John would force Sherlock to sit down and “educate himself a little on pop culture” and everything would be back to the way it was before Ma- but no, Sherlock shakes his head to bring himself out of this ridiculous fantasy, John doesn’t belong here, he belongs with Mary and her child and he Should Not Be Here. Sherlock can’t truly offer him what he really wants, domesticity and a life of normality, and he knows he never will be able to. He can’t change who he is, even if he really wanted to, and he most definitely cannot hold a candle to John’s ideal partner, Mary, who is able to offer him so much more than he ever could. So John can’t stay, he can’t, not for his own good and Sherlock will probably have to persuade him somehow to leave...

“Sherlock, I know I’ve asked you this before, but where is my chair? I mean, it was here the last time I was here,” John questions from the middle of the sitting room, gaze locked onto the discoloured
ring of carpet where his chair used to sit. He turns inquisitively towards Sherlock who realises that he is still standing like a fool in the doorway. He swiftly shuts the door, with a lot more force than he had expected, rattling the hinges. Oh god, Mrs Hudson is going to lecture him about this later.

He fixes his eyes on John’s and is shocked to see a tinge of sadness lurking behind the blue of his bright eyes. He has to say something… fast.

“It's in my bedroom!” he blurs out without thinking, immediately regretting his decision. Oh god, what is *I'm not gay* John Watson going to think. That he had shifted the chair into his room the night of his wedding and clutching fitfully to the maroon fabric, had sobbed himself to sleep? And that he'd repeated the same feat after he'd been discharged? Well that was technically true but John was not allowed to know that. Their relationship had been on tenterhooks ever since the drug situation and Sherlock was afraid that any more stress on this already delicate friendship would send John running for the hills, especially if he found out that his druggie flatmate was harbouring a secret crush on him. That could not be allowed to happen, if John really left... it might just kill him.

“It's what?” John replies, a little bit of surprise evident in his voice. His brow furrows, as if trying to puzzle out why his chair is in Sherlock’s room in all places, which means that he has to act fast to make sure that John doesn’t find out the tru-

“It helps me think,” he says calmly, at least he hopes it came out sounding calm because calm is the direct opposite of how he is feeling right now.

“I'm sorry?” John replies, his left hand clenching and unclenching.

“I find it easier to think when I view situations from your perspective. It helps me see the world through the eyes of the common man and your chair aids me in that process.” Sherlock hopes that he doesn’t sound like he's bullshitting because to be honest, this response is probably the least plausible excuse he has given for anything... ever.

“So it's like a thinking chair then?” John replies, a slight smile playing on his lips as he turns to face Sherlock.

“A what?” Sherlock replies slightly stunned. So John believes him then, or at least he seems to, but then again John tends to believe everything he says.

“You know that television show that was on CBeebies? Those times that we left the telly on by accident and there was this show with a man and his pet dog who solve mysteries together?” John cocks his head to one side and gazes up at Sherlock, as if to see if he can find any spark of recognition there.

“Was it the show with the blue dog?” Sherlock guesses, digging deep into the recesses of his memory, “the one where the owner is a sorry excuse of a detective? Personally, I've always felt that the dog was better at it than he was.”

He can hear John’s giggle before it comes, the way you can smell rain in the air before an oncoming storm, and before long John's laughing, honest to god guffawing, as if Sherlock has just said the funniest thing on Earth. And oh god if only Sherlock could do that every time he said something, if only he could bring John joy with every single one of his actions instead of sadness and disappointment because seeing John happy like this is one of the best things on Earth. He wants to take John’s musical laughter and lock it away in a music box so that he can listen to it anytime he wants, but John would probably say that that would be a bit not good.

John’s laughter slowly segues into static silence as he fixes his eyes back on Sherlock’s, an invisible
lock holding their gazes together. “God, I’ve missed you,” he whispers, but in the quiet of the flat, the words seem to reverberate across the walls, a sonorous proclamation meant for just the two of them alone.

It doesn’t take a genius to give an accurate response and Sherlock returns John’s pronouncement with a soft smile as he whispers back:

“I’ve missed you too.”

The air between them feels charged with electricity, as if there are magnets tugging at their respective bodies, an invisible force causing them to gravitate towards each other. Before the incident at Bart’s, these moments came pretty frequently, moments that Sherlock now cherishes, but ever since he came back, they’ve come few and far between and he’s relished every single one of them. He knows they both like to pretend that John’s marriage hasn’t changed anything but there’s definitely been a palpable shift in their relationship since then. Sherlock likens it to a diminuendo in a symphony, when the music gets notably softer, something that could either indicate the finale of a masterpiece or a lull in the music before a sudden and bold crescendo. It’s just that he just doesn’t know which.

He sees John give a momentary start forward, a tentative arm reaching out before it’s hastily retracted and then the moment is over. The spell breaks as the rest of the world comes rushing in and Sherlock is hyper-aware of the sounds of life filtering in from the exterior of Baker Street.

Sherlock forces himself back to reality and says, “I guess I’ll just go and drag your chair out, shall I?” giving a sheepish smile as he does so, “wasn’t too hard the last time.”

He makes towards his bedroom but feels a sudden, warm weight on his shoulder. “Stitches remember?” John says, resting his palm on Sherlock’s shoulder as he waits for him to turn around. “Don’t want them coming undone, do we?”

He pushes past Sherlock and strides into the room, rolling up his sleeves slightly as he heaves the chair towards the door. Sherlock has always admired John’s strength, and possibly his slightly muscular form, but oftentimes this admiration produces unwanted and unwelcome reactions... like right now. He can feel his face reddening like a cherry tomato and quickly makes for the kitchen before John can catch him blushing.

“I’m going to make us some tea,” he calls to John as he fills the kettle with water, “Mrs Hudson brought up some biscuits in the morning so we can have those as well.”

“Mphf.” There’s a muffled grunt of acknowledgement as John emerges slowly from his bedroom, making little shuffling noises as he drags the chair out into the sitting room, “that sounds nice.”

Sherlock sets the kettle on its electric port, flicking the switch, watching as condensation begins to coat the interior of the glass casing. “I think we’re out of Twinings so we’ll just have to use the Lipton bags today,” he adds.

“That’s alright, you always make the best tea anyway, regardless of the blend. What was it you tried to teach me the last time again? About the temperature? Something about-”

“Steep temperatures, yes, high temperatures burn the tea leaves, leaving behind a bitter taste that is highly unpleasant so a suitable temperature is most definitely necessary for a perfect cup of tea. This, of course, depends on the type of tea leaves, such as-”

“Oh that’s enough,” John chuckles. “I didn’t manage to memorise all of that the last time and I probably won’t be able to this time. We mere mortals don’t have sufficient mental capacities for mind
palaces, remember?” John smiles and says as he saunters into the kitchen, taking a seat at his usual spot... or at least that used to be his usual spot.

Sherlock grins in response to the jest, flicking the switch of the kettle, watching as the first bubbles start to appear at the glass base. He fishes John’s RAMC mug out from the cupboard, one of the few belongings that he had left behind, one of the few pieces of evidence of John’s previous residence at Baker Street. He grabs a clean mug from the sink rack and fills both with hot water, dropping a tea bag into each cup with a resounding “plop”.

He gathers the mugs, along with two teaspoons, and carries them over to the kitchen table, taking a seat opposite John who has just finished unwrapping the cling foil from the biscuits on the table. John takes his mug, obviously delighted that Sherlock has offered to make tea for once instead of being coerced into doing it. “Ta,” he says as he grabs a teaspoon and stirs his tea, watching as the transparent liquid starts to swirl with brown. He then turns to stare at the RAMC logo on the mug, as if slightly puzzled by it.

“You know I was wondering where this mug had gone, thought it’d gotten lost when I moved. Turns out it’s been here all along,” John mutters as he examines the mug.

Sherlock has no idea how on earth to respond to this, god this is the second time today that this has happened, and instead watches as John fiddles with his teaspoon as an awkward silence descends upon them.

“So, how’ve you been?” John queries, hardly a smooth conversation starter but Sherlock decides to indulge him.

“I’ve been fine,” he cringes a little at the lie, of course he’s not fine. He’s just been shot for crying out loud, not to mention the fact that he’s suffering from morphine withdrawal. However, social norms dictate that he should respond in such a way so he shall oblige John this one time, anything to make John comfortable.

“How’ve you been?” he choke out. It’s making him extremely uncomfortable, this exceedingly formal way of conversation. After all they’ve been through, after all those shared experiences of danger and exhilaration that have brought them closer together, they’re sitting around having tea and talking like people who haven’t seen each other in months... well it’s technically true. It makes him slightly sick that their relationship has come to this.

“I’m fine,” John replies, left hand visibly clenching and unclenching, which basically means that he’s lying too.

They lapse back into an uncomfortable silence, punctuated with quick sips from their mugs and the crumble and crunch of biscuits on teeth and Sherlock can’t take it anymore. It’s been slightly over a month since he’s last seen John face to face and a little part of him wishes for a slightly more intimate conversation. There are so many things that they’ve never talked about, so many things that Sherlock wishes they had talked about but now would seem like opening up old wounds if they discussed them.

“You might need to change the bed sheets,” Sherlock ventures, hoping to fish for more information on John’s sudden arrival at Baker Street, though to be honest, he’s sure he’s gotten most of it correct already. “No one’s been up there in a while so I’m not sure how much dust has collected since-”

since you left. The unspoken words hang in the air and Sherlock finds he cannot go on or he might legitimately start tearing. John doesn’t seem to notice or pretends not to notice. He sets his mug down on the table with a soft thud and replies, “Don’t worry too much about it.” He seems to be refusing to
make eye contact with Sherlock, staring resolutely at the table. “There’s always spare sheets in the cupboard if I need them anyways,” he’s still staring at the table as if there’s an interesting pattern in the wood that he’s not noticed before.

“How long will you be here for?” Sherlock blurts out. He has to know, he has to know how long he gets to keep John before he leaves again, before he leaves him for… John finally looks up from the table as he says this, sea blue eyes boring into his own grey-blue ones. There is a grim set to his jaw and a deep sadness in his eyes as he replies, “I don’t know… I really don’t know.”

“Okay,” Sherlock replies softly. “Okay.” He hates seeing John like this, seeing him so human and so infinitely breakable and wishes he could take that question back, that exceedingly selfish question, oh god he is so selfish. Over the years John has truly been a pillar of strength to him and what has he done for him in return? How many times has Sherlock watched this firmly unbreakable man crumble to pieces in front of him, and even worse, at his very own hands? Why is he always so selfish?

“If you really don’t want me here, I can always go to Harry’s,” John continues, sighing slightly, “I just thought that-”

“No,” Sherlock absolutely refuses to let John finish that sentence, “No John, you will always be welcome here. This is your home as much as it is mine and I refuse to let you think otherwise.”

John smiles a little bit at this, an unspoken thank you visible in his gaze as he finishes the last bit of his tea.

“I think I’ll go up now and unpack for a bit,” he says, getting up from his chair. “Do you mind doing the washing up?”

“I’m fine,” Sherlock replies, a soft smile now playing on his face, “go ahead.”

“It’s getting a bit late though,” John continues as he stoops to pick his bag up, “What say I finish unpacking and we go out for dinner?”

“Sounds like a good idea,” Sherlock intones as he carries the mugs towards the sink, “would you prefer Thai or Chinese?”

“Either sounds good,” John hollers from some way up the stairs, “though I haven’t had Thai in a while. Mary hates Thai, so I’ve not had it since the last time I was here.”

“Thai, it is,” Sherlock hollers back, hands now coated in soapy detergent.

“Be ready about 6.30-ish?”

“That’s fine.”

Sherlock waits for John’s door to close before setting his hands on either rim of the sink, John is back, he’s really back. It’s not a dream or a drug-induced hallucination and Sherlock is absolutely thrilled. And he’s not just back for the night, he’s here to stay, here to stay for an indefinite period of time and Sherlock feels like he’s being wracked with joy. Everything could go back to normal, everything could go back to the way it was…

Stop being so selfish, brother mine. He isn’t yours anymore. In fact… he was never yours to begin with.

“Shut up Mycroft,” Sherlock whispers, grabbing a fistful of hair in a bid to stop the Mycroft in his head from talking.
“But it’s true,” Sherlock thinks quietly to himself. He has wrecked enough damage upon John’s life, what with the fake death at Bart’s and the continuous drug use that Sherlock constantly falls prey to. He can’t keep hurting John so he can’t keep John forever. He’s done being selfish and he’s done only thinking about himself. Mary’s the one for John. He Chose Her… and not him, never him. It was never him, so Sherlock will have to let him go when the time comes and if John refuses to leave… he’ll have to persuade him somehow, because Sherlock Isn’t Right For Him. But until that day comes, he’ll cherish every single moment he has with John, every single fucking hour because he’s done wasting time. And if their relationship is running on a ticking clock then he’d better make damn good use of the time that he has left. And if these are the hours that define them, that define this husk of a relationship that remains, then Sherlock is about to make them count.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed that! Be sure to read more :)

Contact me on tumblr
"But then he turns to look at John. John with his stupid wind-tousled hair and his stupid sea blue eyes that demand to be drowned in and he thinks to himself that it wouldn’t pain him much to have his heart broken if it was John who broke it for him."

Thank you guys for your support!!! It really means a lot to me and so as a thank you present... here's the next chapter of THTDU!!! One week early!!! I actually cried writing it so good luck. Hope you're still in one piece at the end.

TW for mention of animal death

3 hours since John’s come home...

“... and then the little monster puked all over me! Just like that.”

“Ergh, that sounds absolutely vile.”

“Tell me about it.”

“Hope you got some sort of compensation for that.”

“That’s not how the NHS works Sherlock.”

It’s currently a little after seven in London and the sky has darkened to a rich obsidian, a black canvas airbrushed with faded, grey clouds. The streetlights have all come on, glowing bright in the crisp, chilly air.

They’re seated in a cozy Thai restaurant. The place in itself isn’t that large, offering only five small tables for dine-in patrons. But, the food is good. This has been Sherlock’s go to place for takeaway ever since John’s moved out so he’s familiar with the owner and the restaurant’s small team of staff - meaning that he gets discounts on his meals extremely often.

Today, he’s ordered some pad thai for himself while John has endeavoured to try the pineapple fried rice. They’ve both ordered some tom yum soup to share, the spicy dish being one of their shared favourites. Clearly, it’s a dish that John has sorely missed because half of it has disappeared already despite the food having only arrived 10 minutes ago.

They’ve fallen into comfortable conversation, keeping to safe topics like horror stories from John’s clinic and Sherlock’s experiences with the dull, idiotic people from the hospital. It’s better than
nothing and Sherlock’s just glad that they’re talking again.

“Well in Japan, they have a law whereby the accidental splashing water or mud on a pedestrian’s clothing requires the driver to pay for the cleaning of their clothes so I don’t see why not.”

“Sherlock, this is baby puke we’re talking about here,” John is now smiling that lopsided smile of his. The one he wears before he’s about to burst into a fit a giggles.

“Same principle though isn’t it?” Sherlock replies, smirking back.

John’s eyes lock onto Sherlock’s for a moment before he bursts into laughter, Sherlock following him soon after into the pits of “giggling hell”. John’s laughter has always been contagious but to be honest Sherlock is laughing for a completely different reason. Here they are, in a thai restaurant, talking about baby puke at 7p.m. in the evening, of all things. He’s certain that he can’t conjure up a more ridiculous situation in his head even if he tries and finds that he is now heartily agreeing with whoever came up with the phrase “truth is stranger than fiction”.

And here he thought that he was about to be spending the day alone. A boring, lonely day just like any other day that he’s experienced after John moved out. Oh he does enjoy being proved wrong sometimes.

“Well if you really think so,” John continues, giggles subsiding as he tries to collect himself, “then go ahead and talk to the head of the NHS. I’m sure that you of all people will be able to convince them if you tried hard enough.”

“Or... I could go and talk to Mycroft, isn’t that the same thing?” Sherlock quips back, watching with immense satisfaction as John struggles to keep his sniggering under control. He really does enjoy seeing John laugh and enjoys it even more when he’s the reason behind it.

John’s face is now raised to the ceiling, obviously in a bid to reign in the chuckles that keep escaping through his gritted teeth.

“Please don’t actually ask Mycroft about this,” John manages, an amused grin plastered on his face as he turns back to Sherlock.

“Don’t worry, I wouldn’t dream of it, I interact with him more than enough on a monthly basis. I wouldn’t put myself in a position where I would be forced to endure more,” Sherlock replies, taking a swig from his water glass.

John smiles in return and turns to grab his spoon, shovelling more pineapple rice into his mouth.

They continue on in a companionable silence, punctuated with comments here and there about the food and the state of the weather. “It’s getting hotter isn’t it? It’s not just me right?” By about 8, John has completely polished off all the food on his plate while Sherlock has finished about half of his meagre portion, prompting John to refuse to leave till Sherlock has finished all the food on his plate.

“You’re being absolutely childish, this is extremely unlike you,” Sherlock huffs, turning his nose up and pushing his plate towards John.

“I’ve let you go in the past,” John starts, voice carrying an undertone of annoyance, “but you really do need proper nutrition, especially after all the weight you’ve probably lost in the hospital.” He raises his voice slightly at this, not loud enough to be threatening but loud enough to sound cautionary. “That portion wasn’t even that large for crying out loud so Sherlock, god help me. Finish. Your. Dinner.”
Sherlock scoffs in slight annoyance and grabs his fork, proceeding to stab at and mix the noodles around his plate for a bit before picking the strands off little by little.

He finishes in about 10 minutes, under the hawk-like gaze of his flatmate who seems to have made it his personal duty to ensure that Sherlock finishes every last morsel on his plate. They get up from their seats and John fishes around his trouser pocket for a while before withdrawing his old leather wallet, pulling some cash out to pay for dinner.

“It's alright,” John insists. “You can pay the next time if you really want to,” he continues as he proceeds to shove his wallet back into his trousers.

This little remark gives Sherlock swooping butterflies in his stomach. John has just implied that there will be a next time, that there will be other times just like this one where they will go out for dinner and chat about everything and nothing at all, simply enjoying the presence of each other and Sherlock finds that he is really looking forward to these “next times”. They should probably go back to Angelo’s at some point, he hasn’t had proper contact with the man in a year… and they should probably go back to the Chinese restaurant they used to visit all the time. God knows he's been craving a proper mix of dim sum for so long but has had no one to share it with… and they could-

*Stop this now Sherlock, it’s only going to make things harder for you when he leaves if you keep thinking about all these… pedestrian situations.*

“Oh god, do shut up,” Sherlock murmurs under his breath to the imaginary Mycroft as he holds the restaurant door open for John who walks swiftly out into the night air.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t catch that,” he turns around to face Sherlock, a slightly puzzled look on his face.

“I didn’t say anything,” Sherlock mutters as he swoops his cashmere scarf into a loose knot, trotting past John who sighs and follows in his wake.

He knows it to be true though. It’s Redbeard all over again. Another entanglement, another attachment that could possibly break him the way Redbeard’s death did so many years ago. But then he turns to look at John. John with his stupid wind-tousled hair and his stupid sea blue eyes that demand to be drowned in and he thinks to himself that it wouldn’t pain him much to have his heart broken if it was John who broke it for him. Besides, has he already promised to stop being selfish? If what John needs right now is him by his side, if what John needs right now is a safe harbour to collect himself in before returning to Mary, he will willingly give it to him. He's already promised himself that he'd make the best of the time he has left with John anyways. And if he is to burn in the process, then so be it.

“Mind if we cut through the park this time?” John’s smooth voice rings loud and clear in the cool air as he tilts his head towards Sherlock’s.

“I don’t see why not,” Sherlock replies, automatically turning his face towards John’s, “it would probably cut down a considerable amount of our travelling time as well.”

“Alright then,” John replies, turning into a pathway leading to Regent’s Park with Sherlock following close behind him.

It’s about half past eight now, the sky now a powdery coal black interspersed with the silver silhouettes of passing clouds. The only light they have to guide their way is the glowing park lamps that dot the gravel pathway leading them home.

Sherlock enjoys this time of the evening, has always enjoyed this time of evening. He loves the way
the luminous lights cast their beams into the darkness, the way that they seem to set a bright halo on anything they touch. He knows that many consider him a man who has little appreciation for the more artsy side of life, like for nature and scenery. Maybe even John does after he found out that he knew nothing about the solar system. But they’re wrong, they’re so very wrong.

He’s loved nature ever since he’s been young, his obsession with it beginning with bees. He remembers being highly impressed as a child with their amazing skills of organisation, with the way that they compartmentalised their jobs and their hive. He’d been so intrigued by the little creatures that he’d come home to his parents once with his long, gangly legs covered in bee stings. He remembers the shocked looks on their faces and the triumphant look on his, eyes bright with excitement about the observations he had managed to make about the bees.

He’d discovered too late that bees were loyal, loyal to the point of death, that bees died the moment their stings were detached. He’d promised himself to be more careful the next time he visited the hive, lest more die in their honourable act of self-sacrifice.

He remembers loving the stars too. Yes, he had loved the stars as a child, when he was young and there was Redbeard. He remembers Mycroft building a treehouse on the old oak tree in the backyard one day, remembers Mycroft wiping the sweat from his brow as he informed a delighted Sherlock that the treehouse was his belated birthday present. He climbed the ladder every night, heaving Redbeard up in a pulley Mycroft had installed that had, at the time, been meant for the lifting of wooden planks for the construction of the treehouse.

He remembers his lovely telescope, the one that had had his name embellished on it in gold. He’d bring it out and pretend that he and Redbeard were sailing the high seas, that they were pirates on a special voyage to somewhere Far Far Away.

He remembers having a book of constellations that an aunt had given him for a birthday present, a book that he had cherished deeply. He remembers pulling out a torch in the darkness, pointing it at the book as he compared the constellations on the glossy pages to those that marked the night sky.

“If we know where the stars are, we’ll always be able to find our way back home,” he always called to Redbeard, his faithful first mate, who yelped in response every time he proclaimed it...

And then Redbeard died and the stars died with him.

He remembers a mound in their backyard. He remembers salty tears that were mopped away with dirt-soaked hands. He remembers burying the book of constellations together with Redbeard, never wanting to see it ever again.

That was the turning point, he muses now, where, for the very first time, he had decided to delete a huge area of study he had dedicated the best part of three years to... But then John came around, questioning him about the solar system, showing him the stars in the London sky, making Sherlock realise that he hadn’t actually deleted the solar system, he’d just locked it away, somewhere very deep inside.

He remembers telling John that he knew about the Van Buren Supernova due to their visit to the observatory, another bit of bulshitting and a lie in every sense of the word. That frightened kid at the other end of the phone line had done it, he used to muse. He had provided the key to unlocking one of the most dreaded rooms in Sherlock’s mind palace. But now, in hindsight, it might not have been the child that had done it after all but the frightened look on John’s face. It had convinced him, convinced him to look deep inside of himself and surface with an answer that could spare the poor child’s life.
A conductor of light - that’s what he is, that’s what he always will be. Sherlock turns to John now, watching as the park lights shine bright onto John’s grey-blonde hair, casting a halo over his short, stocky form. He smiles softly as he watches John plod steadily on, footsteps in time with his own. Yes, John will always be a marvel to him.

“You okay?” John queries, looking up at Sherlock who quickly shifts his face into a cold, unfeeling mask of indifference, turning swiftly away from John.

“I’m fine,” Sherlock replies, staring off into the distance.

“It’s just that you were tearing a bit there,” John continues, finger moving to imitate a falling teardrop. “Are you really alright?” he says, still looking slightly worried.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” Sherlock replies, tugging his scarf upwards to rest further up his chin.

There’s a short silence before John continues, “The park is beautiful this time of night isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Sherlock replies, smiling. He then turns to face John, John whose face is bathed in warm light, his blue eyes bright and sparkling. Sherlock looks away now, cheeks slightly red.

“Yes, it is.”

They continue on their way, footsteps in tandem as gravel crunches under their feet. John talks more about his patients and even entertains Sherlock with a hilarious anecdote from his university years, making him chuckle uncontrollably.

They eventually reach Baker Street, soft street lights aglow as they stroll up to the front step, still chortling and giggling.

“I’m truly surprised you didn’t get caught for that,” Sherlock manages through a fit of giggles.

“Nah, the school security was really thick. I’ll bet up till now they still haven’t figured out who did it,” John grins as he pulls out the key to their front door.

Once they’ve shut the door behind them, they both tiptoe up to the flat. Mrs Hudson is probably home and neither of them really want to have a conversation with her at this time of night, especially since she still doesn’t know that John is back. Heck, that’ll probably result in a lot of unnecessary probing into the reasons for John’s departure that Sherlock’s sure John isn’t ready for yet.

Sherlock giggles a bit more once they’ve reached the sanctity of their flat. It’s ingenious really, several disgruntled students pouring salt onto the field in the shape of a sad face to spite their principal. When John had described the look of anger and shock the principal had had on his face when he had discovered the huge frowny face lined with dirt where the grass had once been, Sherlock had had to grit his teeth to stop himself from laughing too hard. He wishes he’d thought of it himself honestly, when he was back in uni. Well, it’s too late now.

He smiles at John again who bursts into another round of giggles, sending Sherlock chortling along with him. He wishes that they could stay like this forever, in this bubble of warmth and happiness, where there’s only the two of them and the rest of the world is just background noise.

And then John’s phone rings.

Sherlock and John both straighten themselves quickly, their smiles falling from their faces as they simultaneously come to a conclusion on who the mysterious caller is.
There's only one person who'd bother to call at this hour. And in view of the circumstances...

Sherlock’s face hardens as John moves to pick his phone up from the mantle. He’d forgotten it when he went out it seems.

He watches as John taps the screen, bright white light stealing the colour away from his face before his face visibly darkens upon reading the Caller ID.

*Mary Watson. 19 Missed Calls.*

John flashes Sherlock a helpless look before taking the call.

“Hello,” John says through gritted teeth.

There’s a pause before he continues, anger audible in his voice, “Well where the fuck do you think I am?”

There’s another short pause before John’s face visibly reddens, “Be polite with You? With You of all people? After that shit you pulled on me at work today? Not. A. Chance.”

Sherlock has never been fond of seeing John angry, well maybe only when John has gotten angry at someone who has threatened to hurt or has hurt him. That does fill him with a sense of satisfaction, satisfaction that he actually means enough to John for him to unleash his “protective tendencies”. But this is different, this is John being threatened and afraid, being cornered into anger as a self-defense mechanism and this is something that Sherlock hates.

“I’ll come back when I want to ALRIGHT? ... ... DON’T YOU DARE GUILT TRIP ME, YOU’RE THE ONE WHO’S LIED ABOUT EVERYTHING SO FAR,” John bellows at his phone, fingers gripping it tight. Sherlock notices that his knuckles have gone white.

There’s another long pause before John rips his phone away from his ear. He gives one last fiery look at the piece of metal before setting it on silent and stuffing it roughly into his shirt pocket. His resentful look morphs slowly into one of resignation as he heaves a little bit, eyes fixed resolutely on the carpet as he does so.

“I’m sorry,” John sighs. He casts one more helpless look at Sherlock before speeding up the stairs towards his room. The door slams soon after, seeming to shake the very foundations of the flat. Sherlock hears the sound of a pillow hitting the wall and sighs in response.

He knows that John hadn’t told Mary about his departure. She certainly wouldn’t have allowed it, with her being pregnant and all, so of course it was only a matter of time before she called him. What he hadn’t known was the catalyst for John’s seemingly hasty decision to disappear. Apparently something had happened at work, most likely an argument that had soured quickly. Sherlock sighs as he takes a seat on his chair, steepling his fingers, preparing to come up with a way to go about comforting John.

It’s just at this moment that his phone goes off too.

He knows who it is before he reads the Caller ID.

*Mary Morstan*, his screen spells out in bright, blue pixels. “Oh god this is going to be bad,” he thinks as he raises his phone to his ear.

“Hello, Mary,” he says, maintaining a tone of indifference, “What compels you to call me at this late hour?”
“Come on Sherlock, you know exactly what I want to talk you about,” the harsh voice at the other end of the line says. “I know he’s staying with you,” she finishes.

“So?” Sherlock snaps back, shifting a little to get more comfortable on his chair. This is going to be a long conversation.

“Well I want my husband back where he belongs of course,” Mary continues, voice sharp and edging on sinister, “But he’s definitely not going to listen to me.”

“John is a grown adult who can decide for himself what he wants and doesn’t want to do,” Sherlock hisses. “I do not make his decisions for him and neither should you.”

“But we both know that grown adults make mistakes sometimes,” Mary continues calmly, “and that sometimes they need a push in the right direction to help them along the way.”

Sherlock remains silent so Mary continues, “Do you really think that this is what’s best for him? Living with a flatmate who is well known for cocaine addiction and destructive tendencies?” Sherlock is still keeping mum, except that he’s now gripping the armrests with such force that he thinks the leather might tear, so Mary goes on, “This isn’t like the old days Sherlock. John has a family to think about right now. He has a wife and a child. Don’t come in between him and what’s best for him.”

Sherlock is just about to retort before Mary continues, “You said you loved John at the wedding didn’t you?” Sherlock’s breath stutters a little at this. Shit. Mary knows, she knows and she’s about to use the very thing he cherishes against him. “If you really loved him, you would do what’s best for him.”

“Which is?” Sherlock grates out.

“You know what it is Sherlock,” he can hear Mary’s sinister smile through the phone, she knows she’s won, “but do you love him enough to let him go?”

Mary disconnects the call but Sherlock finds he’s still too stunned to shift the phone away from his ear.

_It’s true, all of it_, he thinks to himself as he slouches back onto his chair. He’s known this. He’s known this for the longest time, that John doesn’t belong with him. But Mary’s call is acting as a confirmation for him, a confirmation that John Watson does not belong in Sherlock Holmes’ life. “If you really loved him,” she had said and oh god does Sherlock love him. But he can’t do it, can he? He can’t bring himself to chase John out of their flat and watch him fly back into Mary’s arms. Why is he so selfish? He rests his head in his palms, distressed in every sense of the word. He has to do this, has to do this for John, maybe not right now but he’ll have to do it eventually. He’s got to bring John back to his senses. He will convince John that Mary is the one for him, even if he has to paint himself as worthless in the process and oh god he’s going to cry isn’t he?

“Sherlock, are you alright?”

Sherlock turns to face the door. Mrs Hudson is standing at the threshold of 221B Baker Street in her nightie, looking positively worried.

“It’s just that I heard some yelling and I wondered if-” she continues, “if you were in any trouble of any sort?”

“No, that was just John,” Sherlock says, face shifting into a mask of indifference as he stalks towards his bedroom. He doesn’t desire conversation with anybody right now, not even Mrs Hudson.
‘John? As in John Watson?’ Mrs Hudson exclaims, ‘What on Earth is he doing here?’

“You can ask him yourself in the morning.” Sherlock replies as he slams his bedroom door in her face.

He can hear Mrs Hudson tut-tutting about manners through the door. She eventually leaves, slippered feet stomping down the stairs to show Sherlock exactly what she thinks of his behaviour.

He turns his back to the door, landing against it with a muffled “thump” before allowing gravity to drag him down towards the floor.

He wipes his eyes and they come away wet, inciting him to scoff softly at his transport’s annoying and unwanted display of emotion.

He sits there for a while, head hidden between his knees till a memory, unbidden, of the last time he saw Redbeard crawls towards the forefront of his mind and it’s too much.

He drags himself off the floor, forcing himself towards the bed, on which he lands with a loud “floomph”. That’s when he starts crying in earnest, sobs muffled by feather down pillows, face hidden in white cotton despite there being no one else in the room.

He has no idea how long he lies there for, whimpering softly in the darkness before sleep drags him under.

Chapter End Notes

I'll try to get the next chapter up by next Sunday but I have an internship this week that leaves me with lesser time to write so it might take longer than expected...

The frowny face thing is actually a legend from my junior college that has been passed down for many years. They still don't know who did it.

Contact me on tumblr
Chapter Three

Chapter Summary

"There’s a warm patch on his shoulder where John’s lips have been and it’s like little threads of liquid gold are radiating from that very spot, threading through his arteries and veins and it feels like his heart is melting."

Chapter Notes

Thanks for your continuous support guys :D I know this chapter is up a bit late but I had a pretty tiring week (I interned at a hospital). My schedule is back to normal this week though so I should be able to get the next chapter up sooner. Also, thanks for waiting so this chapter is longer than normal as a present :)

TW for case-related descriptions of bodily harm to a victim and slight sexual references

See the end of the chapter for more notes

13 hours since John has come home

It’s 5a.m. in the morning and Sherlock is wide awake. He’d woken up at around 4 in the morning, shivering violently and immediately regretting sleeping without the covers on. He’d burrowed under the cotton duvet instantly, but the damage had been done. There was no way he was going to get back to sleep at that rate.

Sherlock doesn’t normally sleep in but today is different. He genuinely doesn’t feel like getting up, certain that his eyes are probably still sore and red from the night before and he most definitely Does Not feel like talking to anybody, least of all Mrs Hudson who will definitely make an unwanted appearance at some point to check up on John.

He rolls over onto his front, smushing his face into his still damp pillow. Why can’t his transport behave for once and give him just a few more hours of shut-eye? He lies there for another five minutes, screwing his eyes shut. It’s not working.

Sherlock groans, turning over to fix his eyes on the ceiling. ("There’s a bit of paint peeling there that has to be dealt with," he thinks to himself). He’s going to have to go out and face the world soon, another day, another mask, another battle dress. So, he might as well use the time he has now to make up his mind once and for all on how he should deal with John’s sudden reappearance in his life. He closes his eyes.
FACTS:

1. John deserves the best

So, Sherlock is going to have to ensure that John makes the correct decisions that lead him towards what’s best for him. He will not come between John and his happiness. He will most certainly not intervene for any selfish reasons.

2. John is best with Mary

Which means that he will have to relinquish his hold on John at some point. He will have to let John go when the time comes. He will let John go. He will.

3. John needs time to warm up to the idea of going back to Mary

Meaning, that he’ll still have the privilege of looking after John for the foreseeable future. He’ll have to convince him somehow that the truth of the matter is that Mary is a better long-term companion than his dangerous, druggie flatmate. But, he still has the responsibility of ensuring that John is comfortable and happy during this period of separation from his spouse and **he will enjoy every single moment of it.**

Having come to a proper decision after the tumultuous day before (god, had John only just come back yesterday?), Sherlock feels immensely proud of himself. He finally has a game plan, a parameter to work within and he knows exactly what to do next.

He leaps out of bed, rushing to change out of the previous day’s clothes into a set of fresh pyjamas (to make it look like he’d actually slept in proper attire). He slips on his blue, silk dressing gown. The one that hangs light on his skin like gossamer-thin spider webs, before tiptoeing out his bedroom door into the kitchen.

Contrary to popular belief, Sherlock does know how to cook. After all, the process of cooking does adhere to similar principles that chemistry does. He retrieves 3 eggs from the fridge (which were originally meant for a salmonella culture), 2 slices of bread from the bread box (which were actually meant for a mould-related experiment) and an onion (which still smells edible but has been there for ages)

It's the only three ingredients he has on hand. Sherlock sighs, he'll have to make do.

He starts by preparing the onion, chopping the white flesh into thin slices while simultaneously wiping away the tears that are forcibly wrenched from his eyes. He continues with cracking the eggs, mixing the yolk and white till the liquid is nearly homogeneous - perfect for omelette.

Sherlock knows that John loves omelette. It was one of the foods that Mrs Hudson used to cook for the two of them when he was still living at 221B and it would have been obvious to anyone at the time that John enjoyed it immensely. He hopes that after the emotionally draining night before that the omelette will succeed in cheering John up a little bit.

He used to cook breakfast now and then when John was still living at Baker Street. He never had the heart to tell John, but John had nightmares often… really often, nightmares that left him shouting in the middle of the night, often waking Sherlock up.

He'd never told him that he’d overheard these episodes and he never will. He does not wish to cause John any distress. His nightmares have always been something that they’ve never discussed, obviously something that John feels ashamed about.
Sherlock had therefore never brought them up.

The last thing he ever wanted to see was John feeling humiliated and embarrassed, especially over these dreams that were honestly, nothing to be ashamed about. He used to cook every morning after a nightmare, knowing that John always appreciated it immensely when he did so. John never seemed to suspect anything, taking his plate from Sherlock with joy on every one of these occasions, proceeding to shovel the food into his mouth as if he'd been starved for a week. It was one of the few surefire ways he knew how to make John happy.

He pours the egg and onion mix onto the frying pan, which gives a satisfying sizzle, before proceeding to stir it around with a pair of chopsticks. After about 3 minutes, the omelette is a golden yellow, fluffy and puffy. Sherlock gives a broad smile before proceeding to transfer the omelette to a nearby plate.

It’s just about then that he feels a solid warmth wrap swiftly around him.

He thanks his lucky stars that he’s already transferred the omelette because the probability of him dropping something right now has just statistically increased.

There’s a brief silence, a short moment where time seems to come to a standstill. It’s broken by a soft exhale onto Sherlock’s back.

“Thank you,” John Watson breathes into his shoulder, a soft whisper meant for just the two of them alone. There’s a warm patch on his shoulder where John’s lips have been and it’s like little threads of liquid gold are radiating from that very spot, threading through his arteries and veins and it feels like his heart is melting.

John takes another shuddering breath before burying his face deeper into Sherlock’s shoulder, his arms coming to clutch him tighter as if he’s afraid that Sherlock will disappear into thin air. Sherlock places a hand on the mesh of John’s hands that have wound their way around his waist. His breath stutters for a moment before he replies, “You’re welcome.”

They stay that way for a little longer, enclosed in a private bubble of mutual affection before John’s stomach gives a loud rumble, startling them both into a chorus of giggles. Sherlock’s not sure if he imagines it but John seems to give a reluctant sigh before peeling himself away from him, walking over to help himself to his breakfast and a spare plate.

In Sherlock’s opinion, that little moment had lasted a lifetime, as if time had stopped for a moment, just to give them a space and dimension of their own. He had found himself acutely aware of when he had lost all points of contact with John, as if they had been wrapped around each other for centuries, only to be forcibly pulled apart atom by atom till they existed only as two separate entities.

He flexes his hands a bit, still feeling a phantom pressure where they had rested on John’s. He gives a small sigh before turning around to face John, who is currently, with surgeon-like precision, cutting the omelette exactly in half.

John looks up, meeting Sherlock’s confused gaze.

“We can’t let the chef miss out on his own cooking can we?” he chuckles as he transfers half of the omelette to the spare plate. “You can have your cake and eat it too you know.”

Sherlock gives John a wide grin before taking the seat opposite his, proceeding to pick off the food on his plate morsel by morsel.

It's just about then that there's a loud rap on the door to 221B.
Sherlock whips his head around in shock, goosebumps erupting out of his skin as John's gaze shifts to follow his.

Oh god, it can't be.

Not now.

He watches as the door clangs open with a loud crash, revealing a very annoyed looking Mrs Hudson who comes storming into 221B. She's armed with a gleaming silver tray, its contents consisting of two cups of steaming tea and a batch of warm crumpets.

“Good morning boys,” she chirps energetically as Sherlock breathes a silent sigh of relief.

Thank god he thought it was Mar-

But the thought remains unfinished as Mrs Hudson interrupts by dumping the tray with a rattle onto the kitchen table.

“I do hope you've had a good night's sleep,” she almost snarls, smiling at John before turning her fiery gaze to him instead, "especially you Sherlock.”

Mrs Hudson puts an extra emphasis on “Sherlock”, startling him for a bit. Oh god he wasn't sobbing that loudly was he?

“Bet you slept extremely well last night after slamming a door in my face. What an excellent way to say goodnight!” Mrs Hudson continues, viciously stirring a cup of tea that Sherlock now believes to be his.

Oh so she hadn't heard him after all, thank god. Sherlock heaves a sigh of relief before Mrs Hudson’s eyes lock onto his, her razor sharp glare boring into his retinas. He can't help but choke back a gulp.

He gives John a pleading look that reads “Please help me defuse this ticking time bomb. I don't want her to explode. Please.” This is met with a shrug and a slight smirk from John, as if to say, “Sorry, you're on your own.”

Sherlock turns back towards Mrs Hudson who is stirring the tea so violently that he's afraid the cup might crack.

“Sorry Mrs-” Sherlock starts but Mrs Hudson cuts him off, raising an accusatory gaze at him as she yells, “Sorry doesn't even cover the half of it!”

“Manners matter, Sherlock!” she snaps, “And especially at my age.” At this, she grabs Sherlock’s cup and saucer, slamming them down onto the table. A dribble of tea spills over the rim, pooling in the saucer.

“But I do appreciate the apology, thank you,” she finishes, changing her tone completely as she smiles sweetly and innocently at him, proceeding to gingerly transfer John's cup and saucer over to his side of the table, setting them down gently.

He sighs in relief, crisis averted. When he's certain that Mrs Hudson isn't looking, he gives an exaggerated eyeball roll which nearly causes John to choke on his omelette.

Mrs Hudson either doesn’t notice this or pretends not to notice as she continues, “So John, how are you?”
“I’m good, thanks,” John replies, raising his teacup as an assertion of that fact.

“So how long will you be-” Mrs Hudson carries on. Sherlock can see that John is tensing up, his left hand is clenching and unclenching again. He has to do something… oh.

“Lestrade, you’ve been standing outside our door for approximately five minutes. Do make up your mind on whether you’re joining us or not,” he says in deep baritone.

There’s an audible sigh from the stairway as the door swings open to reveal a very dishevelled looking Greg Lestrade who fumbles into the room. He looks like he hasn't slept in the past few nights.

“Good morning Greg!” John says cheerfully, moving to shake the inspector’s hand. Sherlock notes with immense relief that John’s posture is now a lot more relaxed and that he looks very much at ease. Thank god for Lestrade’s sudden appearance, Sherlock thinks to himself. He definitely has no desire to see John suffer through another intrusive conversation.

Mrs Hudson seems a bit upset at being cut off so suddenly, but she shakes it off immediately.

“I’ll go and get us another cup of tea, shall I?” she calls as she makes her way down the stairs to her flat.

“So Lestrade,” Sherlock starts, standing up to greet him before sitting back down again, “What brings you here at this time of the morning?”

Lestrade strides to John's side of the table, pulling out a chair and taking a seat next to him.

“Haven't you already guessed?” Lestrade murmurs back, staring sleepily at a crumpet before John pushes the plate towards him, offering him one.

“Of course I have,” Sherlock replies, watching as Greg devours the proffered crumpet, “I just need the finer details.”

Lestrade showing up at their doorstep at this hour is a definitive indication that the MET has a case they need help with, something that Sherlock has always relished. But ever since John left, he’s been going on cases alone and on every single one of these occasions, he’s felt like a lost man without a compass. He had talked to John in his Mind Palace, using him as a sounding board for new ideas and theories but it wasn’t the same. The excitement and adventure of a new mystery had lost its spark, its lure without John’s presence. Sherlock used to puzzle about this new development. After all, he’d been fine before John came around. It’s taken him years to figure this out but he now knows the true reason for his apparent lack of interest in cases. He can now pinpoint the exact moment it started, the very first day he and John met. It was the time they came running back into 221B, sinking against the wall laughing and breathless. The very moment the cases stopped being about adrenaline and brainwork and instead, more about spending time with John. And if this is the case, Sherlock is most definitely not in the mood to sign up for another one if John is not around.

However, John has somehow obtained a notebook and pen (Sherlock should really clear out the mess that is their kitchen table) and is staring at Greg with rapt attention, ready to take notes at the tiniest notice. Sherlock smiles at this, relaxing slightly in his chair. It seems like John has made his decision.

“Well,” Greg starts, “We’ve got two women, found dead in an apartment down in East London. The toxicology report discovered bleach in their systems. It was ingested, the indication being the clear erosion of their oesophagus by a strong alkali. We initially suspected suicide…”
"But?" Sherlock cuts him off, leaning in closer. He can feel it coming back to him, the hunger for a new puzzle, a new mystery. Something he knows that John has, once again, inspired in him. "There's always a but, otherwise, you wouldn't be calling me."

"But there was a stab wound found post-mortem on one of the women’s chests," Lestrade says, his expression gloomy. "We checked, it was done approximately 6 hours after her death."

"Who found the bodies?" Sherlock interrupts.

"The landlady was the one who found them," Lestrade answers, too tired to even respond to Sherlock's impoliteness with a retort. "She lived on the floor above her tenants and had been renting the flat out to one of the deceased women for quite some time."

"She came back from a visit to her sister's to check on her, see how she's doing and all that, and now she's scarred for life," Mrs Hudson has come back with tea which Lestrade accepts gratefully. He takes a gulp as Sherlock taps his feet, clearly restless and wanting for him to continue.

"It was apparently an almost weekly thing?" Lestrade goes on, stoically ignoring Sherlock's tells of impatience. "The landlady apparently visited her every other week, offering her food and whatnot."

"Thank god for that though," he says, smiling grimly as he takes another swig of tea, "Otherwise this murder might not even have been reported."

At this, Sherlock grunts in annoyance, obviously trying to get Lestrade back on track, prompting him to flash a dark glare back at him before continuing.

"So thanks to her weekly visits... She discovered the women a day after they'd died, which wasn't so bad for forensics. But get this, upon questioning, she swore that she'd never heard of or seen the other woman before!"

At this, Lestrade throws his hands up in the air, looking thoroughly defeated.

"We questioned and prodded her! And still - zilch, nada. She had no clue who the other lady was, no clue at all!"

"So we got really curious and decided to do some research into these two women’s lives. We looked into their social media accounts, their messages... everything! But nothing shows that these two women have ever met before this, let alone known each other"

Sherlock hums, nodding his head as Lestrade scratches his head, clearly at his wit's end.

"Did you check the bins in the house?" Sherlock presses, hands steepled underneath his chin, looking for all the world like he's not just changed the subject of the conversation abruptly.

"Yes, we did," Lestrade sighs, looking extremely dejected.

"Did you check the recycling bin?" Sherlock prods. He has a few theories and he's certain that this one is correct.

"Er, no," Lestrade replies, scratching his head, "I think we might have overlooked that."

"I have a theory," Sherlock responds, "But I'll need to confirm it. Lestrade can you take us to the crime scene?"

"With pleasure!" Lestrade replies sarcastically, taking another swig from his teacup.
“We'll change and meet you downstairs,” Sherlock continues, nodding in John’s direction. John nods back. He smiles, getting up from his seat and making for the stairs. To be honest, Sherlock is absolutely ecstatic about John’s enthusiasm. It truly feels like the old times again. He remembers one of the rules he had made for himself earlier, that he has the responsibility of ensuring that John is comfortable and happy and this does fit the criteria. And yes, he will endeavour to enjoy every moment of it, he thinks to himself as he rushes off towards his bedroom as well.

“So soon after breakfast?” Mrs Hudson queries, sounding slightly indignant. “You haven't even finished your crumpets!”

“I've got that covered,” Lestrade replies as he starts on his third crumpet.

----

It takes about an hours worth of driving and one wrong turn before they arrive at the crime scene. In the interim, Lestrade had been showing John and Sherlock the case reports and the photos of the evidence they had collected.

The main report states that the two women in question had been found on a bed in the tenant’s room. One is a dark-haired lady with long, flowy hair while the other is a blonde-haired lady with a pixie cut.

They're both still fully dressed.

Forensics determined that they had died on the bed, side by side, stating clearly that their bodies hadn’t been moved post-mortem. The pictures on the other hand, indicate that they had died with their fingers laced together, their faces inches from each other.

But one thing all the files have in common was that there was definitely a large kitchen knife sticking out of the dark-haired woman’s chest. Apparently, it had been taken from the tenant’s kitchen and was devoid of fingerprints, making it harder for the police to track exactly who had done it.

However, there is one thing that is certain. As evidenced by the lack of blood on the bed, the stabbing was clearly something that had been done post-mortem.

But there’s something else, Sherlock notes.

The stab wound was directly over her heart.

The flat resides in a simple brick-layered complex, about 5 stories high. Sherlock notes that a flat on the third floor has its door wrapped in yellow police tape and makes for the lift.

The flat in itself isn’t very large, it’s a three room flat but the owner has obviously done it up to make it seem more spacious than it really is. There are mirrors here and there, wooden cupboards built into the walls and the windows aren’t glazed (or dirty like theirs, Sherlock notes), allowing lots of sunlight in. It’s a beautiful, well-furnished apartment that is now the scene of a supposed double suicide.

Lestrade leads the way into a bedroom, where the bodies had both been found. It’s a beautiful room, as nicely decorated as the rest of the house. It has an extremely earthy feel with its walls painted in light brown. Not to mention the fact that it is fitted with glossy parquet flooring and beautifully
crafted wooden furniture. The centrepiece of the room is a four-poster bed, its duvet and pillows encased in red bedsheets. The only thing that’s out of place are the lines of white chalk on the bedsheets, outlining the silhouettes of where the two women had lain. There is also a bottle of uncapped bleach on the bed, it’s approximately half full.

Sherlock views the scene before him, walking around the room for a bit before saying, “No, no and NO. Definitely not a suicide.”

“Well I guessed that much,” Greg replies, walking over to stand next to him.

“Have you dusted the bleach bottle for fingerprints?” Sherlock asks.

“Yes we did and we didn’t find any,” Lestrade replies, hands stuffed firmly into his pockets, certain that his team at least did that much right.

“Interesting,” Sherlock continues, narrowing his gaze before stalking off to the other side of the room. He bends down, face inches from the bedsheets, before standing straight up again and walking back to where John and Lestrade are standing.

“Well what is most interesting about this case is not the abundance of evidence… but the lack of it,” Sherlock starts with a grin.

John sighs in response, already used to Sherlock’s over-dramatic nature. He fishes out a notebook and pen, preparing to take down as much of Sherlock’s imminent monologue as he can.

“You said the bleach bottle had no fingerprints on it,” he starts, pointing at Lestrade, “which is suspicious because obviously the two women would have needed to have handled the bottle for them to have killed themselves right?” He extends his hands towards Lestrade whose eyes widen slightly and continues. “The other curious feature of this case is the fact that there is a lack of discolouration on the red bedsheets,” he says, pointing to the offending item, “As anyone who handles bleach knows, unless one is extremely careful, the liquid ends up anywhere. If the women had taken the bleach from the bottle, as the lack of cups seems to suggest, there is bound to have been a spillage of some sort, none of which is evident here. The bedsheets is still in pristine shape. Hence, the bleach bottle was placed here after the women died.”

John and Lestrade are looking absolutely gobsmacked as usual. John’s jaw hangs loose before he recovers himself, beaming at Sherlock.

“That’ll always be amazing,” he breathes and Sherlock feels like the luckiest man in the world. He can tell he’s blushing slightly so he turns to face the floor for a while to collect himself.

“Well if the bleach was placed there after death, then how did it get into their systems?” Lestrade questions.

“That’s an answer only the recycling bin can provide us with,” Sherlock smirks, evidently enjoying himself. “You said the crime took place only two days ago?” he says, directing his gaze towards Lestrade who nods. “Then the recycling bin should have all its contents completely intact,” he finishes this with a sudden dramatic turn, swooping off towards the entrance with his coat fanning out behind him.

He hears John chuckle before he and Lestrade follow in his wake.
“What are we looking for again?” Lestrade queries upon coming face to face with a menacing looking recycling bin that appears to be three-quarters his height.

“Anything that could have held liquid,” Sherlock replies, rolling up his sleeves before proceeding to rummage around the bin. Despite the bin’s daunting size, there is not much inside it, aside from several cardboard boxes and other varied debris here and there.

After searching for a few minutes, they've found lots of food containers that have not been properly washed before being thrown in, accounting for the disgusting smell emanating from the bin, and lots of newspapers, but nothing that could have held liquid.

They’ve almost reached the bottom when John retrieves something from the bin. He stares at it for a moment, looking slightly bewildered before calling, “Sherlock! I think I might have found something!”

Sherlock rushes over to examine the object. John’s holding up a bottle, a vodka bottle in fact. It’s empty but there’s still a trace of liquid at the base of the bottle. And the liquid is colourless, as expected of vodka. Sherlock digs back into the recycling bin, pulling out a sheet of newspaper.

It has a full page advertisement for a weight loss programme printed onto it, with a smiling woman in the centre. Sherlock upends the bottle, allowing some of the liquid to drip onto the sheet of newspaper. They watch as the lady’s smile starts to swiftly disappear, leaving the spot where the liquid had fallen a dirty white.

Lestrade and John are both gaping at him, mesmerised. Sherlock turns to Lestrade, grinning widely. “Looks like I've found your murder weapon,” he says, passing the bottle over to Lestrade who handles it carefully with gloved hands, dropping it into a plastic bag.

“A simple pH test is all you will need to confirm the obvious,” Sherlock continues, “Also, those two women were having a secret love affair.”

Lestrade and John seem shocked by this apparent non-sequitur so Sherlock goes on. “Take a closer look at the rim, you will notice that there are two very distinct red marks, obviously lipstick.” At this Lestrade holds the bottle up to eye level, carefully examining the rim. There are in fact, two shades of lipstick, one being light pink and the other crimson red.

“The probability of two people who have just met sharing the same bottle is extremely low,” Sherlock explains, “suggesting that these two women had definitely met before. So it wasn’t just some simple one night stand or other, but rather more likely something they tended to do often.”

“One night stand?” Lestrade questions, puzzled, “How do you know they were about to have sex?”

“Lestrade, they were found on a bed. For godsakes, do keep up,” Sherlock continues, slightly miffed by Lestrade’s idiocy. “Well... That and the fact that there was a bottle of lube next to the bed hidden amongst the tenant’s hair care products. The bottle had a receipt underneath, the time stamp being only a few hours before the women were supposed to have died. Your team must have found that at least,” he sighs as Lestrade mumbles something that sounds like, “we knew what it was but we didn’t think it was important.”

“So,” Sherlock continues, “Two ladies who have obviously been engaged in a sexual, or possibly romantic relationship, meet up at the house whenever the landlady is not around. It’s secret obviously. Why wait till the landlady isn’t around? Or why not have any links to each other on social
media? They meet up at the house and drink a bottle of vodka that is laced with bleach. Understandable mistake, both liquids are colourless and both give you a burning sensation at the back of your throat upon ingestion,” Lestrade cringes slightly at this, “It must not have been a very high percentage, but probably a high enough percentage to kill them. This allows them to finish the whole bottle, which is why there are no stains on the bed despite them probably having left the bottle on it. They succumb to the alcohol’s effects first, which is why they look so peaceful in death. So they fall fast asleep while the bleach works its way through their systems, killing them in their sleep. They probably intended to use the lube when they woke up, but they never got the chance.”

Sherlock turns to face John, extremely proud of the fact that he’s managed to come up with a solution so quickly, but one look at John’s face stops him in his tracks. John looks extremely upset. His brow is furrowed and his mouth is pressed into a thin line. He’s staring at the ground, eyes unseeing, left hand clenched tightly.

“John, are you alright?” Sherlock whispers softly. Oh god, did he do something a bit not good again? Has he hurt him? Will this be the moment when John decides he’s finally had enough of him and leaves?

Sherlock holds his breath, insides churning so violently that he feels like he’s shaking like a leaf. At Sherlock’s voice, John’s eyes flutter a bit, opening and closing slowly before he shakes his head.

“I’m fine,” he says softly. “It just... it kind of-” he babbles a bit before looking up at Sherlock. Their gazes meet and Sherlock sees sadness and a bit of sorrow hidden behind John’s blue eyes and he wants nothing more than for it to disappear.

“Never mind,” John finishes, eyes falling away from Sherlock’s, now staring resolutely at the ground.

Sherlock looks at him slightly puzzled. It’s then that Lestrade bends towards Sherlock, interrupting with a stage whisper, “So is there anything else?”

Sherlock straightens up at this, looking towards John who nods his head before he continues, “So we know how they died. But now the question is, who spiked the bleach and killed them?” He pauses for dramatic effect before continuing, “One of the ladies, the black-haired lady if I remember correctly, was found with a knife through her heart. That’s obviously a dead giveaway as to the motive of the crime. It’s hardly a mystery. This distinct form of symbolism and the fact that the ladies’ romantic involvement was a secret can lead us to only one conclusion, that the crime was committed by a spurned lover of one of the two women. Most likely the lady with the blond hair since she wasn’t the one who was stabbed post-mortem. Sentiment would probably have prevented the murderer from doing so. So, the murderer probably spiked the bottle of vodka and gave it to the blond-haired lady. A few hours after the murderer was sure that they’d drunk it, the murderer comes back to the flat, probably in the morning, and removes the vodka, placing a bottle of bleach on the bed. It is then that the murderer takes a kitchen knife from the tenant’s kitchen and stabs her in the heart. Really, they shouldn’t have done that, it really made this case all the much easier to solve. So we’re looking for someone who was romantically attached to the blond haired lady.”

Sherlock finishes his monologue and turns towards John, hoping that what he finds there is not anger or disgust. John surprises him though, he always has and still does. Now, he’s looking at Sherlock with a warm grin, all traces of despondency completely erased. Sherlock returns his smile, feeling slightly relieved.

“Well… the thing is…” Lestrade starts, a verbal cue for Sherlock and John who both whip their heads around immediately to face him, listening with rapt attention. “We did a thorough search of both the victims’ contacts but there’s… nothing. Neither of them had a partner of any sort.”
Sherlock’s brow furrows a bit at this. “Did the blond lady have any close friends?” he presses.

“As a matter of fact, she did. He lives not too far from here. We were the ones who broke the news. It came as quite a shock to him. They must have been really close because we had to keep handing him tissues as we questioned him,” Greg shrugs and says.

“Not too far from here, you said?” Sherlock responds, turning to John before continuing, “Are you up for a bit more investigating? I’m certain we can wrap this murder up by the end of today.”

John smirks, eyes sparkling with mirth. “Well, I’m up for it if you are,” he answers.

“But it's settled, Lestrade take us there right now,” Sherlock barks before striding off towards Lestrade’s car, mind whirring at an incomparable speed. He hears John chuckle and suddenly remembers himself. “Er… please?” he finishes, turning around to face John who gives him a wide grin. Remembering his manners has always been another surefire way of making John happy.

He waits till John catches up with him before he continues towards Lestrade’s car, the two of them keeping step, their bodies in sync. Sherlock has never felt more alive and he knows that it is less to do with the case and more to do with John. He hears a burst of footsteps behind them as Lestrade hurries to catch up.

It really feels like the old days, when it was just the two of them. The thrill of a new mystery and the lure of adventure being their sole companions as they waltzed into danger and into the unknown. And for the first time, in a very long time, Sherlock feels alive.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter is when things really start to get personal and when we finally get Sherlock and John interacting as they should be. Stay tuned for the next update :)

Contact me on tumblr.
Chapter Four

Chapter Summary

“I Have Loved and I Have Lost,” he begins, tone calm with an undercurrent of utter fury. “I have held my entire world in my hands and watched as it crumbled to dust under my care. I have given up the one thing I’ve loved the most and watched as it left me to be with another!” he barks at Cameron, glowering at him viciously. “I let the person I love leave because I recognised my own ineptitude in providing proper love and affection. I let them go. YOU. Did. Not.”

Chapter Notes

Thanks guys for being so patient and for your continued support! Sorry that this chapter is up a bit late but it’s longer than normal so... I think I might have to update this biweekly if the chapters end up getting this long phew

TW for scars/mentions of murder

See the end of the chapter for more notes

22 hours since John has come home

Cameron Campbell is a 30-year-old man who lives in a 2 bedroom apartment in East London. He’s tall, blond-haired, loves watching cricket and is currently crying quite viciously into his shirtsleeve.

“Is this about Jem?” he questions timidly. His eyes are a glossy red, synonymous with at least several hours worth of tears. He looks absolutely distraught.

Sherlock sideyes John, a signal for John to take the reins from him. John’s always been better at these kind of things than he has.

“Yes, yes it is,” John responds, “Mind if we come in and ask a few questions?”

“Sure,” Cameron sniffs, “Do come in.” He pulls the door open wide, waiting for John and Sherlock to cross the threshold before shutting the door soundly behind them.

Sherlock has told Lestrade to wait in his car till they’ve completed the investigation. Police presence is often counterproductive when it comes to situations like these and judging Cameron’s current state, any interrogation in that sort of charged atmosphere is definitely not a good idea.

The first thing that Sherlock notices when he enters the room is that it is just as cold in here as it is outside, which is strange because it’s late November.

“Why haven’t you switched the heating on Mr Campbell?” Sherlock questions, gazing curiously at the thermostat in a corner of the living room. Its surface is covered in a thick-ish layer of dust, as if
the buttons haven’t been touched in a very long time.

“You can just call me Cameron, Mr Holmes,” Cameron replies, slumping down onto a worn sofa in the center of the room, “Anyways, why turn the heating on when you can walk around in a jacket? Isn’t that the same thing?”

“Yes indeed,” Sherlock replies, moving towards the light switches. He flicks the switches on and off, gazing up at the bulbs’ luminous glow before taking a seat opposite Cameron, John moves to join him.

“Wait,” Sherlock says, suddenly remembering something. “Mr Holmes? How do you know my name? I don’t believe we’ve been introduced just yet.”

“Please,” Cameron sighs, “The whole of London knows you, especially those who read the tabloids. You’re Mr Holmes and Dr. Watson, best crime-solving team of the 21st century. So, if you don’t mind, can we please begin this investigation because I really want to find out who killed Jem.” He raises his voice a little at this, sneering slightly at Sherlock before slumping back into the sofa.

“So, you don’t think she committed suicide?” Sherlock questions.

“No, of course not,” Cameron retorts, rubbing a bit at his eyes. “Jem would never do such a thing. She’s far too…”

“Tell us about your relationship with Jemima,” Sherlock cuts in, he hates it when people bombard his head with information that is most definitely unimportant to the success of an investigation.

“Well,” Cameron choked back a sob. “She’s my best friend, or she was.” At this, he drags a sopping wet tissue out of his pocket and blows into it quite vociferously. “We’ve known each other since kindergarten. We met one day playing on the swings and…”

“Stop,” Sherlock raises his hand swiftly to make it clear that sentimental drivel such as this is absolutely useless to him. “Please tell me when your last contact with Jem was.”

“It was the morning before she died,” Cameron answers. “We had coffee at Starbucks and talked about a few things.”

“And what were these ‘few things’?” Sherlock prods.

“Well nothing much, mostly about how work has been going and stuff like that. Yeah, stuff like tha-” Cameron replies.

“Did she trust you with any secrets?” Sherlock continues, tone light.

Cameron seems to go a bit red at this abrupt change in conversation.

“How dare you!” he yells, absolutely fuming. “I was her best friend. She told me everything. Absolutely everyth-”

Cameron raises his arm, finger pointing threateningly at Sherlock. John, obviously expecting an altercation of some sort has moved to stand in front of Sherlock but Sherlock pushes him away gently, giving John a look that says “It’s okay, I’m fine”. John huffs and returns to his seat, glowering at Cameron. Sherlock continues.

“Like the fact that she had a secret lover?”
There’s an uncomfortable silence as Cameron’s glare seems to falter. “I,” he stutters, “I. No. I- She never told me about her, about that.”

There’s a bright gleam in Sherlock’s eyes, a look indicative of a cat that’s gotten its cream. John seems to have noticed it too because he’s quit staring at Cameron like he wants to murder him and is now staring, enraptured, at Sherlock’s face instead.

“How very interesting,” Sherlock continues in a lilting tone, “Don’t suppose you’ve ever heard of a Sheryl Kilgrave then?”

“No, no I haven’t” Cameron replies, his face a mask of indifference. However, his right hand is noticeably shaking.

“Don’t suppose you’re an alcoholic either?” Sherlock continues, smiling quite unsettlingly at Cameron.

“No. No, of course not,” Cameron insists. His hand has stopped shaking.

“Oh good!” Sherlock replies. “That’s very good.” He finishes with his fingers steepled under his chin, his steely gaze meeting Cameron’s rather determined one.

“Well!” Sherlock leaps up from his chair. He walks swiftly over to Cameron’s recycling bin and heaves out the heavy plastic bag from within. “This has been really nice and all, but I’m afraid we’ll have to continue this conversation elsewhere.”

“I’m sorry?” Cameron answers, looking a bit lost.

Sherlock motions to John who takes his cue and rises from his seat. Sherlock walks over to Cameron’s front door and holds the door open wide, waiting for John to stride past him before finishing, “This is hardly a suitable place for a conversation dealing with the death of your best friend.” He pauses for dramatic effect before continuing, “I suspect the interior of a police station might be a tad more conducive.”

At this, he motions to Cameron who scowls unhappily. He drags his feet towards the open door, sneering at Sherlock who promptly shuts the door behind them.

----

“So how do you know it’s him?” Lestrade queries, looking extremely curious.

They’d driven back to New Scotland Yard in silence. Cameron had been surprisingly cooperative, except for the fact that he had been constantly casting furtive glances at Sherlock, resulting in John being extremely moody and bristly throughout the entire journey. They’d marched Cameron into an interrogation room as soon as they’d gotten back and it would have been obvious to anyone that John was the one who had derived the most amount of satisfaction from this.

“It was rather obvious really,” Sherlock starts, grinning widely before continuing, “The first giveaway was the heating and the lightbulbs to be honest.”

“The heating?” John questions, brow furrowing. “What does that have to do with anything?”
“Oh, you see but you do not observe. Do you remember that the killer dumped the vodka bottle into a recycling bin? Of all places? Amateur mistake. Clearly, the killer has a slight inclination towards environmentalism. A killer that would likely refuse to have the heating on despite the weather being pretty chilly and would probably have installed energy-saving light bulbs instead of the traditional incandescent ones,” Sherlock responds, smiling widely, evidently enjoying himself.

“That’s not enough for a warrant, mate,” Lestrade replies, arms crossed, “Please tell me you have more evidence to go on.”

“Of course I do,” Sherlock scoffs, looking insulted. He reaches into his pocket, withdrawing a pink ribbon. “Not unlike any of those you see hanging around the necks of vodka bottles in the supermarkets,” he smirks and says. “Found this on his coffee table. And the man did say he wasn’t an alcoholic.”

“Also,” Sherlock continues, dumping the bag of recycling onto the floor, “Judging from this man’s character, you should probably find receipts for both bleach and vodka in here.”

Lestrade reaches for the bag, heaving it onto the nearest raised surface. He unties it, poring over the bag’s contents as John and Sherlock look on (Sherlock does so with a smug grin on his face).

It doesn’t take Lestrade long to find the two incriminating materials. He immediately drops the two into a plastic casing before passing them over to Sherlock. The timestamp for the vodka is merely hours before the two women’s deaths while that for the bleach is the morning after.

“Alright then,” Lestrade starts, observing the two pieces of paper. “Would you be so kind to reconstruct the crime for us Sherlock?” he sighs, sounding extremely tired and worn out, clearly this case has taken a toll on him. To be fair, Lestrade hasn't had any sleep since this case started.

“Well,” Sherlock begins, deciding to deal a swift end to Lestrade’s misery, “There are bits and pieces that I’m not sure of yet but I’ve generally got the whole story down. That man in that room knows me, he knows what I do. Any word he says that differs from my narrative will put him at a great disadvantage in his court case so he will be inclined to tell us as much of the truth as possible. And since he’s probably going to assume I know all of it, he’ll probably help us fill in the little details along the way.”

“Ok let’s begin. The timestamp indicates that he bought the vodka after his little Starbucks session with Jemima that morning, meaning that she said something during the conversation that provoked him to kill both of the women off. Spurned lover remember? So I’m supposing that there’s more to his relationship with Jemima than he’s let on. Probably he had a one-sided crush on her and thought that if he couldn’t have her then no one could. Such is the brutality of the world these days. He sent her the vodka, knowing that she would be meeting her lover that night and calculates the dosage so that they’d both be killed in their sleep. He comes in the next morning, sorts everything out, gets the bleach in place and leaves.”

“Well, why was he crying then? If he loved Jemima so much he wouldn’t have just killed her,” John questions.

“Probably the guilt gnawed away at him,” Sherlock responds, “It happens sometimes.”

“But, I’ll probably have to go in and have a talk with him, confirm my theory,” Sherlock mumbles, gesturing towards Lestrade, “Lestrade if you would?”

“It would be my pleasure,” Greg responds, passing the keys for the room over to Sherlock. “The two-way glass should allow us to intervene if anything goes wrong and we also have receivers in the
room that allow us to hear whatever you say,” Greg continues, motioning towards the headsets hanging by the door. “Good luck,” he finishes, walking over to grab one. John follows suit, giving Sherlock a thumbs up before walking over to stand watch in front of the glass, tensing up as he rests his hands on the screen’s ledge.

Sherlock smiles in response and strides towards the door.

The room Cameron is kept in is a simple interrogation room. It’s bare, with the exception of a table and two chairs, one of which Cameron is currently occupying. Sherlock shuts the door with a resounding thud before moving to take a seat opposite Cameron.

“So, let’s start from the very beginning,” Sherlock sneers before giving Cameron a very wide and clearly very insincere grin.

“You probably know everything already anyway,” Cameron responds, sounding listless. “Why ask me?”

“For your statement,” Sherlock continues smoothly, “It’d be best that you give us the facts and nothing but the facts.”

Cameron’s expression darkens visibly at this, his eyes narrowing into slits. A tense silence follows, with both parties’ eyes locked resolutely onto each others. Cameron breaks first. He sighs, leaning back into his chair.

“Alright fine,” he huffs, raising his handcuffed fists into the air. “All RIGHT!” he yells, slamming his hands down hard onto the table. Sherlock flinches a little.

“But let’s be clear on this one thing okay,” he raises his index finger accusingly at Sherlock, “this one simple thing - I did not mean for Jemima to die.”

Oops, Sherlock thinks to himself. This is something he hadn’t expected.

“But you did intend on killing Sheryl,” Sherlock replies calmly, shit, he’s missed something hasn’t he?

“Listen here Mr Holmes,” Cameron snarls out, “Sheryl was not a good person. She was a bad influence on Jem.”

“That’s not a sufficient excuse Mr Campbell,” Sherlock responds coolly. “But if you believe that this is enough to absolve you of your guilt then by all means - carry on.”

Cameron glowers at Sherlock before continuing, “Jem and I have been best friends for years and I only had her best interests at heart!” He pauses for a moment, breathing heavily. “She told me about a year ago that she was seeing Sheryl, that she was unlike any other person that she’d met before. And before long, I started seeing less of her. She invited me to meet Sheryl a bit later and I didn’t like her one bit. She had this really mysterious air... and this really mean demeanor... I hated her from the first time we met and I think she suspected it too. However, Jem always thought we were the best of buds so we went on group outings a few times. But eventually, those stopped altogether and then we ceased communication entirely. I heard of their exploits through friends and friends of friends and didn’t like them one bit. No one knew the true nature of their relationship though. In fact, most people hadn’t managed to put two and two together that they were even close. They were always careful enough to arrive and leave at different times. I was the only one who-”

“And what were these exploits?” Sherlock probes.
“Mostly wild parties they’d gone to, clubs they’d visited. I don’t know,” Cameron snaps, “What I do know is that just a few days ago, Jem contacted me out of the blue, asking for us to meet up. So we did, at Starbucks, but when we met up I discovered that she had become a completely different person. She- she’d changed, drastically, changed for the worse. She didn’t use to swear so much and her attitude was so- she behaved so dominantly.”

“As women should be allowed to do,” Sherlock interjects, watching as Cameron’s face contorts into something quite unpleasant for the human eye. “But please, do continue.”

“We talked a bit, she told me about her life, about Sheryl. She told me that she was going to get married to her in Spring and that she was going to meet up with Sheryl that night. That was when I decided I was done, done with all of this. I asked her if she still refused alcohol, she told me she refused to drink anything with a higher alcohol percentage than wine. So, I decided to put an end to this… this toxic relationship of hers. I bought a bottle of vodka, poured some of it down the sink and filled it up with all the bleach I had left in my cupboard. I went to Sheryl’s place and told her it was time to discuss some things and put some things behind us. She agreed so I passed her the bottle and told her not to tell Jem where it’d come from,” Cameron takes a deep breath at this, obviously trying to hold back tears before continuing, “I said it was a reconciliatory gift, she believed me. I expected her to drink it but not Jem because Jem… Jem as I mentioned before Did. Not. Drink Alcohol.”

“I expected Sheryl to drink it that night, that girl could never resist a good drink. So I fully expected to wake up the next morning and have Jem frantically calling me, telling her that her girlfriend was dead. However, no such call came so I worried and went to check on them. That… that BITCH,” he cries, the venom palpable in his voice, “Had somehow convinced her to have some of the vodka and they were both lying there dead, DEAD on that bed of hers.”

“I panicked, of course, I went to buy a new bottle of bleach, poured some down the drain and left the bottle at their place. I also took a knife from their kitchen and stabbed that bitch in the heart. Lord knows she deserved it,” Cameron spits, voice sharpened with malice.

“Hmmm… interesting… one more question for you Mr Campbell,” Sherlock drawls, “Did the girls have any pet names for each other?”

“Jem liked referring to Sheryl as “A Tall Glass of Water” and Sheryl called Jem peanut,” Cameron replies, “What does this have to do with anything?”

“The police couldn’t find their contacts on each other's phones, expected of course, young people these days don’t normally use their close friend’s exact names for their contacts. Their contacts were hidden as well, weren't they? Unable to be accessed if one didn't know what they were looking for and merely keyed their numbers in,” Sherlock gets up, pushing his chair in before striding off to the door. “Well I’d best be off,” he grins widely before pushing the door forward.

“Mr Holmes,” Cameron chokes out, “I did what I thought was best for her. You must understand that.”

Sherlock knows that he’s just trying to bait him, to rile him up but he decides to humour him. “So you’re saying that killing the person she loved the most was what was best for her?” he shoots back.

“You don’t understand!” Cameron yelps, descending once again into tears

“I understand enough to know that you didn’t truly love her,” Sherlock snaps.

The room goes deathly silent, it’s so quiet that you could practically hear a pin drop. This breaks Cameron out of his spell of despair, his face visibly reddening again. The tension in the room is now
palpable and Sherlock is expecting an explosion.

“WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF LOVE?” Cameron shouts, “I read that Janine Hawkins article, you know. The one where she disses you to high hell. What was it she called you… what was it hmmm... Manipulative? Cold and unfeeling? Don’t lecture me about my relationships when you can’t even get yours right.”

“At least I didn’t attempt to kill my best friend’s lover,” Sherlock retorts. He knows he’s getting angry, maybe a bit too angry. He knows he should break off communication with Cameron at once but he can’t stop himself.

“Like I said, what do you know of love?” Cameron laughs at this before continuing, “You would have done the same if you had been in my position. I’m sure of it.”

It’s like a switch has been flicked in Sherlock’s brain, one that seems to be preventing any sort of rational cognitive function. “Don’t you dare pretend to know me better than I do,” Sherlock responds, enunciating each word with great malice.

Cameron knows that he’s succeeded. “Well,” he says, sounding absolutely cocky, “it’s not like you’ve ever been in love before, have you? How would you know?”

Sherlock knows that he’s shaking. He can feel himself trembling with rage and it’s taking every ounce of his will to not strangle the murderer sitting right in front of him.

“I Have Loved and I Have Lost,” he begins, tone calm with an undercurrent of utter fury. “I have held my entire world in my hands and watched as it crumbled to dust under my care. I have given up the one thing I’ve loved the most and watched as it left me to be with another!” he barks at Cameron, glowering at him viciously. “I let the person I love leave because I recognised my own ineptitude in providing proper love and affection. I let them go. YOU. Did. Not.”

“Fuck. You.” Cameron grates out. There’s a short pause before Cameron lets out a blood-curdling scream, hurtling his bound fists towards Sherlock.

Sherlock waits for the blow but finds himself being suddenly tugged out of the way. He experiences a gentle collision with a soft, fabric surface before a voice goes soaring over his head.

“THAT’S ENOUGH,” John roars. His arms are cradling Sherlock’s prone form, one hand on his back and the other tight around his waist. Sherlock turns his face upwards. John’s breathing is ragged, his eyes blazing and Sherlock finds that he cannot look away.

Lestrade is there, restraining Cameron from behind but Sherlock barely registers any of it as John guides him carefully to the door.

“You guys go ahead!” Lestrade yells, pinning Cameron down, whose face is now mashed firmly into the table. More officers are arriving (clearly they’d been called to standby before the interrogation had begun) so John and Sherlock make for the door.

Sherlock is slightly shaken, not because Cameron had nearly succeeded in punching him but because he’s just come to the realisation that John has heard every word that he’s said. Every. Word. God, he hadn’t meant to have revealed that much and now he feels sick to his stomach. He should have just let the matter rest, shouldn’t have risen to Cameron’s bait. Now John is definitely going to find out. He’ll probably address it at some point, probably wait till they go home before questioning Sherlock about it. After all, John’s always been a particularly curious person. He’ll find out that Sherlock loves him, that his long-term worthless flatmate has fallen head over heels for him and then he will leave
him and abandon him for Mary- and oh god, he’s really messed things up this time hasn’t he?

John succeeds, for once, in hailing a cab. He tugs at Sherlock’s coat gently, inviting him to enter the cab first before shutting the door behind them.

They ride home in silence.

Sherlock and John stick firmly to their sides of their shared seat, sitting as far apart from each other as they can manage. Sherlock can feel it, an invisible wall growing in between them, a bubble of tension, a product of words unsaid, ready to burst. He fiddles with his fingers uncomfortably while John faces the window, streetlights ghosting past his worn features. He looks deep in thought and Sherlock notices that his left hand is trembling.

They arrive home and quickly make their way up the stairs. Sherlock charges ahead, dumping his coat on the rack before making for his bedroom door. The very last thing he wants to do right now is to talk to John.

He doesn’t want to hear the “I’m sorry Sherlock”s and the “I don’t think this is going to work out”s. He would rather wake up to an empty flat the next morning than receive verbal confirmation that John hates him and wishes to never see him ever again.

“Sherlock, I need to…” John starts, stopping Sherlock in his tracks, “I need to ask you something.”

Sherlock reaches for the doorknob, turning it with a loud ‘clack’.

“Sherlock, Please,” John pleads. Dammit, Sherlock thinks. Something about the tone of John’s voice, the utter vulnerability and humanity of it strikes something deep inside of him... Because John can’t be unhappy because of him, not again.

Sherlock turns around, feeling utterly lost and terrified. He knows that this conversation will hurt him, that John’s next few words will be sharp enough to strike him down. But, if it makes John happy, or gives him closure, then Sherlock will oblige him.

“Sherlock, I’m sorry,” John mumbles, Sherlock quickly shifts his face into a mask of indifference. However, it’s not enough to cover up the fact that he’s currently getting a frighteningly bad case of goosebumps. It feels like the roots of his hair are being electrified and he feels absolutely sick to his stomach.

So this is it then, he thinks, this is how it ends.

“I’m sorry for tugging you away from that madman just now,” John continues, scratching his forehead. “I… I could have handled that better.”

Sherlock is absolutely stunned.

It feels like his lungs have collapsed, like he’s forgotten how to breathe because once again, John Watson has managed to shock him.

“Is it okay if I have a look at your stitches? Just to make sure none of them have come out?” John questions as Sherlock holds his breath, still anticipating John to drop a bomb of some kind.

“I brought my medical kit when I came over so... I can stitch your wound back up if it’s taken any damage.”

“Oh,” Sherlock breathes. He certainly hadn’t expected that. “Oh, of course,” he manages. He breathes an internal sigh of relief. So John doesn’t actually intend to leave him after all, or at least he doesn’t wish to have that conversation right now.
“Er,” John continues, shuffling his feet awkwardly. “Is it okay if I have a look at it in your bedroom? I think it’ll be much more comfortable for you because this might take a while.”

Sherlock’s face growing red. He knows that he’s blushing and is absolutely certain that he must have spontaneously combusted.

“Er, sure,” he replies, arms behind his back, thumbs twiddling furiously.

An uncomfortable pause follows. Sherlock and John lock eyes with each other, waiting for someone to make a move. John’s the one who does it. He sighs and turns his face away, breaking eye contact with Sherlock.

“I’ll go and get my stuff,” he says. “You just go ahead and get ready first.”

At this, John turns on his heels and rushes off towards the stairs. Sherlock stares, eyes blinking in confusion. His gaze trails after John’s retreating figure, waiting till John goes completely out of view before hurrying off to his bedroom. He nearly slams the door behind him before realising that there’s no point anyway since John’s going to come in.

So it seems that despite his pretty obvious declaration of love, John’s still willing to stay with him. Well... at least there weren’t any indicators that suggested otherwise. John has succeeded in surprising him once again, except that this time Sherlock doesn’t know if he should be happy or upset about this.

John seems to be completely ignoring the topic of Sherlock’s affection for him… which is to be honest quite worrying.

Is John deliberately ignoring the issue because it makes him uncomfortable? Well, of course it would. John doesn’t remotely feel anything close to love for him so why should Sherlock expect him to feel comfortable about this? Is John trying to steer their friendship away from this grey area by ignoring the issue altogether? Or is John pitying him and just doesn’t want to bring it up for fear of hurting him? Or is John just trying to wait for a better time to tell Sherlock that he’s leaving?

Sherlock puzzles over this for a moment before flopping down onto his bed. He crosses his arms over his eyes and groans.

Feelings are not his area, they’ve never been his area, especially when those feelings deal with a certain John Hamish Watson. Dammit, Sherlock should want John to leave, shouldn’t he? He’s already promised himself that he will give John up to Mary in the end, that Mary is better for John than him so why is he still feeling so conflicted over this issue?

He grunts in frustration, turning over so that he is face down on the duvet. This is giving him a headache.

“Sherlock? Sherlock, are you alright?” a voice calls from the doorway.

“M’fine,” Sherlock replies, his voice muffled against soft down, “Do come in.”

He flips himself around, sitting up to face John who is currently clutching a rather sizeable white box. He’d really meant it when he said he’d brought his medical supplies over.

“Er, Sherlock,” John starts.

Sherlock tenses up, every muscle in his body feeling like they’re being pulled taut. Has John changed his mind? It’s only been two minutes!
“Sherlock… Sherlock you’re gonna have to take off your shirt for this to work,” John mutters, sitting down on the edge of the bed next to Sherlock, eyes fixed resolutely on his medical box.

“Oh,” Sherlock breathes, “oh, yeah.” If he hadn’t been blushing before, he definitely is now. “I forgot, um…” he continues awkwardly.

He has no idea how to proceed. Should he just take his shirt off here? Wait, that’ll make John uncomfortable won’t it? Or should he just rush off to the bathroom and undress there? Or will that make the situation worse?

“Er…” Sherlock murmurs, “Is it okay if I just undress here?”

John doesn’t bat an eyelid.

“Oh sure”, he replies, face remaining completely neutral.

Well... John doesn’t seem to be exhibiting any signs of discomfort… So…

Sherlock gulps, angling his body slightly away from John’s, beginning to unbutton his shirt and just like that, the atmosphere of the room shifts abruptly. It’s like a thick fog of tension has descended upon them, making Sherlock’s movements slow and uncoordinated. He’s starting to fumble with his buttons and there’s most definitely a fine sheen of sweat on his forehead. He’s suddenly very aware of John’s presence, as if there are invisible tendrils wrapping around them both, threads weaving the very fabric of their skin together, drawing them slowly towards each other. He sees a flash of movement in his peripheral vision, as if John has just suddenly turned his head to face him before swiftly turning it back again, but he can’t be sure.

He finishes with the buttons, slipping his shirt off with ease before tossing it in the general direction of the laundry bin. He has absolutely no idea what to do now. Should he turn around and face John? Or should he wait for John to make the first move?

Thankfully, John answers his question for him. He shifts to face him, eyes widening slightly before quickly morphing his expression into something more neutral. Is his wound really that ugly? Sherlock angles his face downwards. It’s a mess of rough, pink-ish skin with a shallow crater in the centre, same as it’s always been. Sherlock has no issue with this, he really couldn’t care less about his transport. But does John find it repugnant? The thought makes him cringe. No, he can’t possibly, he’s probably seen worse on the battlefield. But then why had he given Sherlock that look?

“So…

“Scoot up on the bed a bit,” John continues, expression morphing into one of doctorly concern, “It’d be better if you rest against the pillows. This might take a while.”

Sherlock does as he’s told, leaning back against a pillow as John proceeds to extricate a torchlight from his medical kit. He crawls onto the bed and kneels on Sherlock’s right, lowering his face till it’s inches from Sherlock’s torso. Little puffs of warm breath ghost over his chest as John sets to work, carefully and meticulously examining the stitches that are currently the only thing holding his skin together.

This is probably the closest they’ve ever been, Sherlock thinks, the most intimate situation they’ve ever been in. It’s then that he feels a gloved hand pressing lightly on his flesh and he can’t take it, it’s too much. He can feel that patch of skin there immediately erupting into goosebumps and oh god, he’s going to have to look away if he wants to avoid any more embarrassing reactions like this because the feel of John’s bare skin on his own is positively electric.

He turns his head to face the ceiling, deciding to count how many cracks there are in the wallpaper to
distract himself.

One, two, three, four, (he should really get the ceiling repainted), five, si-

He stops counting, his brain going temporarily offline. One of John’s hands is clutching the torchlight and moving dexterously over the surface of his skin but the other hand, The Other Hand, is currently resting, palm-down, on Sherlock’s chest - right over Sherlock’s heart.

Sherlock gives up counting, deeming it a pointless and unhelpful exercise. It sure isn’t helping him now.

His heart is racing, he can hear the muffled “lub-dub” in his ears in the quiet of the room and oh boy, this isn’t good because John’s going to notice. He has his hand right over his heart for God’s sake.

Lithium, Beryllium, Boron, Carbon… Sherlock tries reciting the first period of the periodic table in his head but John shifts his palm, dragging his fingertips across his bare skin before his hand comes to rest further down his chest. The motion sets Sherlock’s skin on fire and it feels like the room has suddenly gotten way too hot. His breathing rate is most definitely speeding up now and shit, what comes after Carbon?

It’s then that Sherlock suddenly feels a loss of contact, as if John’s hands have suddenly disappeared. He deems it safe enough to look before angling his head back down, realising that John has indeed shifted his hands away and is currently digging into his medical kit.

John obtains an alcohol swab, ripping away the paper packaging before proceeding to dab at Sherlock’s wound a few times. He then sits back, surveying his work quizzically.

Sherlock’s skin is cool where the alcohol swab has been, a far cry from the warmth of John's skin, an unpleasant coolness that makes him feel bare and bereft. He suddenly feels a growing desire, a burgeoning hunger for more of John’s naked flesh against his. He wants John’s hands back on him… desperately. But HE SHOULDN’T BE THINKING ABOUT THIS BECAUSE JOHN IS MARRIED AND NOT TO HIM.

WHAT IS HE THINKING?

“It seems fine,” John announces, jerking Sherlock out of his internal moral crisis. John’s left arm coming up to swipe away the sweat from his forehead, “It seems like the doctor who treated you used dissolvable stitches… so we don’t have to bother with removing them. That aside, your wound does seem to be healing quite well, you should be-”

John suddenly stops mid-sentence, his face taking on a ghostly pale colour as he fixes his eyes on Sherlock’s shoulder. Sherlock frowns in confusion, turning to stare at the spot that John is looking at and oh, oh no.

“I can explain,” Sherlock blurts out, suddenly feeling like a young boy that’s been caught in an act of wrongdoing.

“Sherlock,” John starts, voice level, “Turn around.”

“John, I- I was going to tell you,” Sherlock stammers out, fingers clutching the bedsheets tightly.

“Sherlock. Turn Around.” John insists, voice carrying a more authoritative tone this time.

“John,” Sherlock whispers. John really sounds angry this time, is this when he decides to leave? Sherlock can’t take it. He’s sure that his face is revealing way too much right now. He draws his legs
up to himself, burying his face in his knees. Dammit, John wasn’t supposed to find out this way.

“Sherlock, please,” John pleads. His voice breaks, losing its firm tone, leaving it hollow and empty. Sherlock would go so far as to say that John sounds... afraid.

Sherlock lifts his head, meeting John’s worried gaze. John knows, he’s seen it, the deep gash on his left shoulder. Sherlock should have been more careful, should have insisted that John could not, under any circumstances, see him shirtless, but it’s too late now. He’d forgotten, forgotten all about the scars on his back, the crisscrossing lines that are a daily reminder of his failure at evading capture on his final mission. He’d locked it all away, that whole trip to Serbia, deep in the recesses his mind palace. However, that hadn’t stopped the memories he’d gained from this horrific experience from haunting his every waking moment. He can’t even hear the backfiring of a car now without flinching a little

That experience that he’d had in that one cell in Serbia is probably one of the most traumatic experiences that he’s ever had. And that’s saying a lot. John was never meant to know. He was not meant to know. The issue of his fake suicide and return has always been a hard and considerably impossible topic for them to discuss, so they’d never discussed it, never sat down and had a proper conversation about it. Well, there’s no turning back from this right now. Sherlock sighs, letting his head droop before turning his body around to face the wall.

The room is deathly quiet.

Sherlock would have expected some kind of reaction from John at least... but he isn’t getting any, which is starting to worry him.

“John?” he whispers, voice quivering as he turns his face around, hoping that John isn’t too repulsed by the scars on his back.

There’s a moment of abject shock that all people experience when they’re about to be hit by an oncoming object. It’s a deer in the headlights moment. Sherlock knows it all too well, after all he’d just experienced it slightly over an hour ago. It’s a moment when people stand absolutely still, eyes wide, unable to do anything, surrendering to the possibility of imminent pain. This is the look that John currently has on his face.

“John?” Sherlock whispers again, voice edging on concern.

At this, John flicks his gaze abruptly upwards, meeting Sherlock’s eyes and it’s as if all the light has been sucked out of those blue eyes. John stares solemnly at Sherlock with mouth slightly agape. His lips are quivering.

“Sherlock,” John whispers back, voice cracking. His eyes are getting a bit moist at the corners.

“Sherlock, can I?” he continues, before clenching his lips tightly together. He immediately turns to face his lap, as if ashamed at himself for even daring to ask Sherlock such a question

“Go ahead,” Sherlock replies, turning back to face the wall. If this is what John needs right now, then by god he will give it to him.

It’s then that Sherlock feels light fingertips whispering across his skin. He hears John give a shuddering breath before he presses a palm to his back, feeling the ridges of the scars that mark his back. John’s fingers caress his skin, tracing the lines from the top of Sherlock’s neck to the waistband of his trousers, leaving a trail of warmth from the top of his back to the base. With every stroke of John’s fingertips, Sherlock feels like the horrible memories that these scars have come with are
fading away, that they’re being replaced with the fresh memory of John’s skin on his and it feels absolutely cathartic.

It feels like an eternity before John’s fingertips fall from his skin. Sherlock takes this as a cue to turn around.

The sight that greets him isn’t pleasant.

John looks absolutely wrecked. His beautiful blue eyes are red-rimmed and puffy and Sherlock’s heart almost breaks at the sight. Tears stream slowly down his face, curving around the lines of his jawbone to meet at his chin and Sherlock wants nothing more than to reach out and wipe them away before he remembers who he is and what they are - nothing more than flatmates, nothing more than best friends. His help would not be welcome.

John’s lips are trembling as he struggles to talk. He moves his jaw, his lips but no sound escapes. John puts his arm forwards, reaching for Sherlock, before hastily withdrawing it. He turns his face away from Sherlock, looking down steadily at the white bedsheet.

Sherlock decides that he’s had enough.

He raises his arm, extending it towards John, resting a hand on his shoulder. John lifts his face to Sherlock’s, who gives him a reassuring nod. John sighs, burying his face in his palms.

“Sherlock,” John starts, choking back tears, “Sherlock, when did this happen?”

Sherlock debates the possibility of lying to John. After all, talking about “The Fall” could only possibly aggravate the situation rather than make it any better. He goes over it for a while before replying.

“It was the last mission I had before I came home. In Serbia… I- I made a mistake and I got caught.”

He doesn’t say any more, knowing that John is smart enough to draw his own conclusions.

John’s hand comes up to rest on Sherlock’s extended arm. He grips it tightly, squeezing a few times as if wanting to prove to himself that Sherlock is still there. He then lets go, allowing his hand to fall from Sherlock’s arm. It comes to rest on the stretch of bed in between them. Sherlock notices that John’s hand is now clenched tightly into a fist.

“I’m going to fucking kill whoever did that to you,” John spits. His eyes have now taken on a fiery quality, not much different from the look that John had given Cameron during that confrontation earlier. John’s brow is furrowed and as he turns to face Sherlock, Sherlock notes that his lips are pressed into a thin line. They’re not trembling any more.

“Well,” Sherlock starts, removing his hand from John’s shoulder and instead resting it on John’s clenched fist, “Mycroft has probably gotten there first. I was assured that their base was destroyed immediately after we’d escaped.”

“We?” John questions, sounding puzzled. “Was Mycroft there with you the whole time?”

John’s voice has taken on a strange quality that Sherlock can’t exactly place but he responds nevertheless.

“No, no he wasn’t. He was only there on the last mission, all other contact we had was through mobile devices.”
Sherlock doesn’t think it’s possible for John’s fist to clench any tighter than before but apparently it is.

“Why didn’t you bring me along?” John asks, looking absolutely dejected. “This… this wouldn’t have happened to you if I’d been there, I’m sure of it.”

“John,” Sherlock replies gently, squeezing John’s hand before continuing, “You know perfectly well why I couldn’t do that.”

John goes silent. He uses his shirt sleeve to wipe away the tears that have gathered at the base of his face before continuing, “You could have at least told me, could have at least contacted me somehow…”

“There was no way of doing that,” Sherlock responds, “When Moriarty and I met on that roof that day, he threatened to kill you, Mrs Hudson and Lestrade. Despite the fact that the gunman on site had seen me survive, Mycroft was able to convince him to put down his gun and tell the other two snipers that I had successfully committed suicide. If anybody outside the few of us, especially one of Moriarty’s remaining contacts had known that I’d survived, they might have decided to finish the job. I couldn’t let that happen.” He sighs before continuing, “Although, I can’t lie. Mycroft and I had been planning this trip for a long time. We were planning on eliminating Moriarty somehow and taking down his web.” At this, John turns to face him, expression incredulous.

“So you intended to leave me in the dark from the very beginning?” John growls.

“No!” Sherlock retorts, “No, definitely not. Mycroft had captured Moriarty a few months earlier, and with my permission, fed him some information about me, enough for him to think he’d gained the upper hand, before letting him go. Moriarty started to spread fake rumours about me as you know, making me look bad in the public eye. We were waiting for Moriarty to show his hand, knowing that he’d only do so if he deemed me to be at my weakest point. Before you arrived at Barts, Mycroft and I decided on me meeting Moriarty on the rooftop. We worked out several ways that this could go, knowing that it would have to end in my suicide… well, fake suicide. So, I texted Moriarty to meet me on the rooftop.”

“The man was getting too dangerous, that much was clear after he’d committed that mass break-in. His network was getting too extensive, he had to be stopped. What we hadn’t planned for, was Moriarty killing himself. We’d initially planned on capturing him after he threatened to kill you.”

"He shot himself, making it impossible for us to make him retract that command, meaning that everybody in his network knew that you were to die if I did not make the jump. Which is why we had to make some modifications to the plan. I jumped so that you could verify my death, your word would have been the best proof for my apparent death that went unseen by anyone else other than the few that were in on the plan. We also refrained from telling you later for your own safety, something that I had initially planned on doing, lest someone come after you to finish the job or even worse, interrogate you over my whereabouts if they’d found out I was alive and we’d made contact. I could not let that happen John, I could not.”

Sherlock’s voice cracks on the last word. He brings his palms up to his face, hiding his face in his hands.

There’s suddenly a soft pressure on his side. He raises his head in slight confusion and is greeted by the sight of John leaning against his right arm, his head is resting on his shoulder. Sherlock’s breath catches as John turns to face him. Their blue eyes lock onto each others before both of them sigh simultaneously and relax back into the pillow behind them. John reaches for Sherlock’s hand, which Sherlock gives gladly.
Sherlock has no idea how long they lie there for, but it feels like an eternity. John’s thumb traces
patterns on the back of Sherlock’s hand while the other has reached around his back to rest on his
bare shoulder, his fingers gently stroking the deep gash there. Sherlock feels like he’s just run an
emotional marathon and somehow managed to come out unscathed because how on earth could this
human being, this impossible human being still wish to lie here with him after finding out about their
plan? That despite Sherlock’s best intentions, that despite the fact that Sherlock had wanted to tell
John that he was still alive, he had still intended on leaving him behind anyway. How could John
accept that?

Sherlock leans back onto the pillow, sinking further down till his face is level with John’s. John
seems to sense this movement because he shifts to rest his face against Sherlock’s.

“Is it okay if I sleep here?” John whispers. Sherlock can feel his jaw moving against his cheek. “It’s
just for tonight. I just…”

“Yeah,” Sherlock replies, “Yeah, sure.”

Sherlock turns to arrange the pillows while John strips down to his singlet and boxer shorts. He
throws his shirt and pants across the room, aiming for the laundry bin, but they come to rest on top of
Sherlock’s shirt instead.

At this, John yawns, burrowing under the covers. Sherlock follows suit, drawing the duvet up to his
chin.

What should he do now? Should he face John? Or should he turn and face the other way? Or will
John deem that as a rejection of what has just transpired between them? But he shouldn't be getting
this close to John, Mary wouldn-

“Sherlock,” John mumbles, voice sleep heavy, “Sherlock can you come a bit closer?”

Screw it, Sherlock thinks to himself, he turns his body so that he's resting on his side, his head facing
John's. He shuffles a bit closer, not sure how close John wants him to be exactly but John meets him
halfway. Sherlock realises belatedly that he should have put on a shirt but he really cannot be
bothered right now because John's arms are coming round to encircle him like a protective barrier,
pulling them both impossibly closer.

His head comes to rest under John's chin, his forehead pressed against John's Adam's apple. John
smells the same as he always does. He smells of his body soap and the salonpas he uses to keep his
shoulder from aching, a scent that's uniquely his.

Sherlock knows his brain is going sleep-addled, that this behaviour is A BIT NOT GOOD but at this
point he really doesn't care. He nuzzles sleepily into John's neck, inhaling John's scent, a welcoming
aroma that sets his lungs aflame. He has no idea what to do with his hands but his sleep-fuzzed brain
seems to think that resting them on John's chest is a good idea, which he does. He searches for
John’s heartbeat, spreading his fingertips out across his chest, sighing softly when he feels the
reassuring thumping of John’s heart before balling his hands up, clutching tightly to John's singlet.
He hears John's breathing hitch but he's so far gone he doesn't think much of it.

“I'm sorry,” John mumbles, breaking the silence. His warm breath caresses the top of Sherlock’s
head as his fingers fan out possessively over Sherlock's back, gently stroking the numerous lines that
have been marked there.

“For what?” Sherlock replies groggily. His voice comes out muffled because his lips are mashed up
against John's neck.
“For… for a lot of things,” John continues, fingers still reverently drawing patterns over Sherlock’s scars.

“It’s okay,” Sherlock slurs. His eyes are closed now and he can feel sleep pulling him under. “M’sorry too.”

He feels safe and secure in John’s arms. They’re not so much a cage as they are a warm refuge. He yawns softly and feels John’s arms tighten around him instinctively, drawing him close. John shifts his hand to rest on his head, his fingers slowly and gently carding through Sherlock’s hair, an exquisite feeling that makes Sherlock smile against John’s neck.

He burrows closer to John, relishing in the tenderness of his embrace. He rests his head against John’s chest, listening closely to the beating of his heart, a familiar tempo that finally tips him over the edge, allowing sleep to finally claim him.

He's not sure if he imagines it but just before he drops off the deep end, he feels a warm pressure against his forehead. It feels rough but at the same time soft against his skin and it’s gone way too soon for him to figure out what it is.

But if Sherlock were to be honest with himself, he'd say it felt very much like a kiss.

Chapter End Notes

I think the next update is gonna be two weeks from now because… Chinese New Year is a really busy period :P

Contact me on tumblr
Chapter Five

Chapter Summary

"He feels a sudden blossoming of warmth in his chest, a tiny ember glimmering feebly in deep darkness before bursting into flame. It feels like golden treacle is seeping through every vein, every pore in his body, winding its way around his coronary arteries into his heart, and Sherlock, for the first time in a very long time, watches as a tiny spark of hope springs to life."

Chapter Notes

Thanks for sticking with me guys! And here is the next chapter of These Hours That Define Us, just in time for Valentines' Day!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

40 hours since John’s come home

There's a warm hand in his hair - that much Sherlock is sure of.

There are soft fingers tangled in his curls, fingertips tracing circles gently onto his scalp.

He sighs and relaxes back into the smooth cotton of his sheets.

*If this is a dream, I don't want to wake up*, he thinks to himself as he relishes in the light, alternating pressure around his temples, purring contentedly.

He suddenly feels those fingertips press sharper into his skin, nails now scratching a hard line down his scalp and Sherlock shivers in ecstasy at the sensation.

Groaning sleepily, Sherlock arches his neck, inclining his head towards the delicious pressure...

Someone's breathing hitches at this... someone that isn't Sherlock.

*Shit*, Sherlock thinks, dragging himself abruptly back to reality as memories of last night come flooding back to him.

*It's John*, he thinks, *Ohgodshit*

He opens his eyes wide, the fuzzy edges of his consciousness sharpening into something more tangible.

The first thing he notices is that he's surrounded by a sea of honeyed beige.

His eyelids flutter, shaking away the sleep dust as his vision sharpens.
His face is pressed up against John's chest, his nose digging into the bare vee in the centre, which is strange because Sherlock's pretty sure John went to sleep with a singlet on… oh.

One of his hands is clutching the neckline of John’s singlet. His fingers are curved and digging into John's skin, stretching the neckline down to rest level with his own chin. He must have done this during the night because he would never have done this consciously. NEVER.

He feels like he's going to die of embarrassment.

The next thing he notes is that there's a warm pressure on his thigh. He raises his head slowly, peeking over his hip.

Their legs are interlocked, their silhouettes visible through the duvet. Their calves are tangled with each others, one of the Sherlock’s soles resting against the toes of John’s foot.

Sherlock's breath catches at the sight.

“Morning,” John murmurs groggily, his fingers continuing to card through Sherlock’s hair.

“Mo… morning,” Sherlock replies, his response punctuated by a particularly loud yawn as he struggles to gather his wits.

Bright sunshine is pouring through the open window, pooling in golden patches on the carpeted floor, suggesting that it’s around… 11 in the morning? Which means the Sherlock has slept for 10 hours straight, the longest stretch he's ever managed at one go.

And John is still here, Sherlock thinks, he's still here. He thought that John would have snuck out at some point in the morning. After all, sleeping with your male flatmate, even non-sexually, probably crossed the line into “gay behaviour” territory.

Well, for all of John's previous protests of “I'm not gay” and “We're not dating”, he doesn't seem to be particularly bothered right now. Sherlock relaxes back into John's arms, giving himself over to the sensation of his friend’s warm body.

“We're going to need to get up at some point you know,” John murmurs, the hand that's not in Sherlock's hair reaches around his neck to drag his fingertips roughly down Sherlock's spine.

Sherlock shudders, leaning into the touch.

“No,” he slurs, fingers gripping John’s singlet resolutely.

“We need to have breakfast,” John replies, burying his nose in Sherlock’s hair and inhaling deeply.

“Dull,” Sherlock replies, bottom lip jutting out in a pout as his other arm reaches round John's body, palm resting possessively on John's back.

Silence once again descends upon them, except that this time, it isn't the kind of awkward silence that has haunted their conversations since the beginning of John’s return. It's a warm kind of silence, it’s edges smoothed with affection and Sherlock wants nothing more than to drown in it.

Let me have this, he thinks, just for a while, as John's dexterous fingers continue to weave in and out of his curls, the pressure of his fingertips alternating between soft and hard.

They lie there for a moment, trapped in a bubble of their own making, stuck in a reality where there is only John and Sherlock and Sherlock and John. Sherlock allows his consciousness to narrow
down to the sensation of John's fingers in his hair, finding bliss in the simple movement of John’s skin against his.

It's then that John's fingers stop moving. A soft whine escapes from Sherlock’s lips at the loss of contact. He immediately clamps his lips tightly shut before he makes any more embarrassing sounds.

“Sherlock,” John's sleep drenched voice rasps. He clears his throat loudly, Adam’s apple bobbing up and down before continuing.

“Sherlock, can I ask you a question?” he says.

“What kind of question?” Sherlock responds in deep baritone, arching his neck to look up at John.

He blinks sleepily, watching John's face swim into focus. Their eyes meet, their gazes locking. There's an expression there in John’s eyes that Sherlock’s never seen before. His pupils are blown wide, the whites of his eyes a mere afterthought. His mouth is slightly agape and his cheeks are flushed and Sherlock finds that he's drawn to this undisguised look of… something…

But Sherlock blinks and just like that, it's gone. John’s expression dissolves back into something more neutral, his eyes losing their glazed over quality as he raises his head to look over Sherlock’s head instead.

“It's something…” John continues, deliberately facing away from Sherlock, “something quite personal.”

Sherlock freezes at this, his blood running cold.

So John's going to discuss it now, he thinks, mentally preparing himself for the conversation that's about to follow.

“Go ahead,” he replies with a slight tremor in his a voice.

John takes a deep breath, shifting his hand to cradle Sherlock’s neck.

“Did you really love Irene Adler that much?” he blurs out, still refusing to look Sherlock in the eye.

“Wh-what?” Sherlock stutters, eyes wide. That was not what he'd expected at all.

“As in… “ John sighs, shaking his head, “yesterday… when you were interrogating Cameron…”

“John, she was nothing more than an intriguing puzzle,” Sherlock rolls his eyes and says, “Don't be so deliberately obtuse.”

“So you didn't love her?” John questions, turning to face Sherlock.

So John hadn't realised that Sherlock was talking about him. God, Sherlock thinks, he really gives the man too much credit sometimes.

“No. I. Did. Not,” Sherlock replies firmly, enunciating each word clearly, hoping that John finally gets the idea.

“Oh…” John breathes, “oh… Well whoever she is… she's one lucky-”

“He,” Sherlock blurts out before slamming his mouth shut. His natural instinct to correct others is not working to his advantage right now.
“Oh,” John gasps, “oh…”

There’s an awkward pause before John continues, “Well he’s one lucky sod then-”

Wait, Sherlock thinks, lucky?

“- Do I know him?” John finishes.

“Er…” Sherlock murmurs. He runs through a list of his possible options before replying.

“You do,” Sherlock responds, “Sort… Of…”

“Do I know him well?” John questions, blue eyes boring straight into Sherlock’s.

“That’s a matter of your own opinion,” Sherlock quips, “But I’d say you do.”

John is silent for a moment before clearing his throat. “I knew you always had a thing for Greg,” he says.

Sherlock chokes, lunging forward to cough ungracefully into his hand as John stares on, confused.

“Are you serious!?” Sherlock recovers himself and snaps.

“Give me some leeway alright,” John pouts, glaring at Sherlock, “We can't all be geniuses.”

“I expected you to be mildly intelligent at least,” Sherlock huffs, glaring back at John.

Which is when he's hit right smack in the face with a pillow.

“Childish!” Sherlock’s yell is muffled by a layer of soft cotton.

He peels off the pillow and sits up, a frown plastered onto his face, finding himself staring at a John Watson whose eyes are sparkling and full of mirth. He's trying to reign in his chuckles but is failing miserably.

Smirking gleefully, Sherlock flashes John a wide grin before grabbing the pillow, proceeding to bring it down right over John's head.

John rolls away just in time, the pillow colliding with white fabric instead as he shifts to grab another.

Sherlock scowls, but there’s little venom to it. He has hardly any time to respond before John attempts to whomp him in the stomach.

He brings his own pillow down to defend himself, sparring with John as he proceeds to rain down soft blow after soft blow upon him.

They're both laughing now, giggling with each collision and Sherlock feels like this is the first time he's had proper fun in ages.

It's then that John flashes him a playful grin, dropping his pillow and proceeding to fling himself in Sherlock’s direction.

Sherlock barely has any time to react before John falls softly on top of him, a pillow in between them acting as a cushion for his landing.

Sherlock watches enraptured as John drops his hands to his sides, proceeding to rake his fingers up
and down his skin.

*Dammit,* he thinks as his vision fades to white.

“I knew you were ticklish!” John chuckles as Sherlock doubles over with laughter, “You look like the sort.”

“Prick,” Sherlock manages in between giggles, his body writhing uncontrollably as John continues his unforgiving onslaught of tickles. “Ok, ok not a prick. NOT A PRICK,” he yells as John tickles him with greater intensity.

John chuckles as he allows his fingers to fall from Sherlock’s side, collapsing on top of Sherlock. John waits for Sherlock to catch his breath before resting his whole weight on him, their faces inches from each other.

Sherlock tries to collect his wits but John flashes him a goofy smile, wrenching another giggle out of him - which in turn causes John to giggle.

John rolls off him, landing back down on the bed. He sighs happily, the corners of his lips upturned but his reverie is cut short by a mouthful of cotton.

“I win,” Sherlock grins and says, pulling the pillow off John as John proceeds to sit up. It's now his turn to scowl half-heartedly at Sherlock.

“Childish,” John repeats, beaming at Sherlock.

“Well, that didn't stop you before,” Sherlock replies, smiling back.

They stare at each other, eyes full of mirth as they once again descend into a fitful of giggles, both of them collapsing backwards onto the bed.

Sherlock’s sides are aching, his lungs gasping for air but despite that, this is the happiest he's been in ages.

He turns his head to face John's, watching as John wheezes uncontrollably, his face glowing. John mirrors Sherlock, turning on his side as well, finding himself face to face with Sherlock, their noses barely inches away from each other.

The last strains of their shared laughter fade away as their giggles subside into static silence.

John's eyes find Sherlock’s instinctively, their twin gazes locking. Sherlock watches as John’s smile fades away, his lips parting slightly as his breaths deepen. The laughter in his eyes seems to have been extinguished as well, his eyes taking on a more open look as his pupils expand slightly. They're as dark as black holes now, his irises orbiting around them as they draw Sherlock closer and closer into John’s space.

The air in the room seems to thicken, a dense, syrupy ocean that washes over the two of their bodies, settling deep in their bones.

Sherlock blinks shyly as John reaches a hand towards him, brushing away a stray curl on his forehead. His hand comes to rest behind Sherlock’s ear, cupping his cheek.

The pressure of John’s fingertips is electric, setting Sherlock’s skin aflame as he skims his hand across his cheekbones, their faces now less than an inch from each other.
Sherlock sighs, allowing his eyes to fall closed, giving himself over to the sensation of John's ministrations.

John's breath hitches at this, his hand stilling momentarily. Sherlock's lids lift slowly, his lashes fluttering as John lets out a soft gasp.

John's eyes have reverted to that glazed over look from before, his thumb continuing its path across Sherlock's cheek, rubbing lightly over the outline of his cheekbones.

“Sherlock,” John whispers. He speaks his name softly, yet the word in itself is weighted with deep gravity, the way someone would refer to something that is most precious to them, the way that someone would refer to a lover.

Sherlock is drawn to John’s voice, charmed by the sonorous articulation of his name. He doesn't realise he's moved any closer till he bumps noses with John, watching him with his eyes wide as John licks his lips, a swift swipe of his tongue against chapped skin.

Sherlock gulps, staring enraptured as John's other hand comes to wrap around the other side of his face, cradling his cheek reverently.

“Sherlock,” John repeats, voice cracking, “Sherlock there's something-” At this, he flicks his eyes down towards Sherlock’s lips, his thumb coming to brush the corner gently.

“Sherlock there's something I should tell you,” John breathes, his exhales coming out in short puffs against Sherlock’s lips. Sherlock shudders, watching as John’s thumb continues to rub circles against where pink lips meet pale skin.

“John,” he whispers back, his voice seemingly loud and clear in the silence of the room, a word said like a prayer, an invitation.

John moves first, his fingers gently guiding Sherlock’s face forwards till their foreheads are touching. They sigh in unison, John’s hand coming to rest at the nape of Sherlock’s neck.

“Sherlock, I-”

“GOOD MORNING BOYS!”

Sherlock’s skin prickles, his eyes shooting wide open as he immediately launches himself away from John, burrowing swiftly under the blanket so that only his head is visible.

He feels John jerk away in response as well, pulling away so that he's as far away from Sherlock as possible. Sherlock laments the loss of contact but immediately directs his attention to the door.

“MRS HUDSON,” he hollers, cheeks a bright red as his landlady bursts like a hurricane into their room.

“Oh don't mind me boys,” Mrs Hudson tuts. She's carrying a tray of scones with clotted cream and two cups of tea. She sets the tray gently down at the foot of the bed, beaming maniacally at the two of them. Sherlock cowers internally under her vulture-like gaze.

“Just some lunch for you,” she says sweetly, rubbing her hands against her apron.

“I came in this morning to pass you breakfast but you were still asleep!” she sighs and says, putting on a faux expression of utter dejection. Sherlock’s blood runs cold, oh god how much had she seen?
“I had to drink the tea all by myself!” she chides gently, “Do try to be up earlier next time.”

Sherlock risks a glance in John’s direction, finding that John is looking just as embarrassed as he’s feeling.

“Also Sherlock,” she says, her eyes glancing knowingly in his direction. Sherlock shivers slightly, clutching the duvet tightly as he steels himself for the worst.

“You shouldn’t sleep starkers at this time of the year, god knows it’s cold.”

Mrs Hudson winks at this, looking like a cat that's just gotten the cream. Sherlock feels like he's physically shrivelling into a ball of nothingness as their landlady shoves the door open, shutting it soundly behind her.

“I DID NOT,” he recovers himself and yells in the general direction of the door. He buries his face in his hands, feeling the raw embarrassment leaking out of him pore by pore.

“I need to use the loo,” he mumbles, grabbing a wrinkled, white T-shirt from the bedside, pulling it on swiftly. He dashes for the toilet, cheeks burning furiously, realising belatedly that he’s still wearing his pants from last night and must look a sight.

He shuts the door loudly behind him, slumping against it to catch his breath.

What had just happened there? He thinks to himself as he shifts away from the door, bracing himself against the sink instead.

There’s way too much information for him to process right now so he decides to start from the beginning.

What did John mean by all of that? Wha- what is going on because Sherlock has utterly no clue at all as to what all of that meant.

And why did Mrs Hudson have to interrupt him before he finished, GOD!

He hears an audible sigh emanating from the bedroom (the walls were never really that thick) and the rustling of fabric as John shifts about on the bed, probably preparing to attack the scones.

Sherlock grips the sink tap tightly, adjusting it slowly. He lets the water run for a bit, waiting till the temperature changes from an icy cold to lukewarm before splashing some on his face.

This is real isn’t it? What just happened? It wasn’t just some hallucination.. was it?

Sherlock turns off the tap, listening carefully. He hears the crumbling of pastry and heaves a sigh of relief, turning to wipe his face on his towel.

So John’s still there, he’s still there, which means that Sherlock hasn’t gone mad and conjured up some hyper-realistic mind palace version of him. But if all of that really happened, then why isn’t John leaving? Wouldn’t he have felt embarrassed by Mrs Hudson’s intrusion on their privacy and her insinuation that they were a couple? He is still married to Mary, so shouldn’t he be angry at Mrs Hudson for suggesting that he was unfaithful and committing infidelity?

But if John really prized his relationship with Mary, then wouldn’t he have avoided snuggling up to Sherlock at all costs? Wouldn’t he have seen that as an infringement on the vows he made to Mary? After all, bed-sharing can hardly be considered a platonic act.
And then there was the intimacy. Sherlock shudders just thinking about it, feeling a phantom pressure where John’s head had leant against his forehead, a ghost of hot breath on his lips. Why had they gotten so close? John had never done that before... the John he remembers from before the fall would have asserted his heterosexuality painstakingly. But then again, John had changed after his return, he’d changed a lot.

“Well he’s one lucky sod then-”

He hears John’s voice echo within the confines of his mind.

*Well he's one lucky sod then,* what did that mean? Did John seriously think that it would be a privilege to be loved by Sherlock Holmes? Because being loved by him would be an absolute train-wreck of miscommunication and insecurity. Sherlock knows himself well, knows that he will never be good at relationships, knows that he will never be the perfect partner that anybody would ever seek after.

*But John thinks so,* he thinks to himself. John who has seen him at his absolute worst. John who has watched him cauterise eyeballs in the middle of the kitchen, John who has seen him fire rounds into the wall in a fit of boredom, John who Sherlock has blamed multiple times for things he hasn’t done. And yet, despite all this, John still counts the person that Sherlock loves lucky?

He feels a sudden blossoming of warmth in his chest, a tiny ember glimmering feebly in deep darkness before bursting into flame. It feels like golden treacle is seeping through every vein, every pore in his body, winding its way around his coronary arteries into his heart, and Sherlock, for the first time in a very long time, watches as a tiny spark of hope springs to life.

*Maybe John said that because he-*

He can’t say it, not even in his own head…

Because the idea is so LUDICROUS.

He balls his hands up into fists, bringing them upwards to rest firmly against his forehead, chasing the sensation of John’s forehead against his own away. He feels that bubble of hope popping, a spark that fizzles and dies in his chest because no, John does not like him in that way, no he DOES NOT. He can’t, he can’t possibly… ever.

And even if he does, Sherlock can’t allow him. Sherlock loves him too much to watch him break under the strain of an unfulfilling relationship with him. He can’t break John’s heart, he can’t.

Anyways, what had he spared Mary for? She’d never called an ambulance that day, she’d meant for him to bleed out onto the ground, dying in John’s arms as he watched on pitifully so that she could make her escape.

But he’d survived, survived against all odds, knowing that Mary knew that he was the one thing obstructing her from having a perfect relationship with her own husband. He knew it too, knew that as long as he was around, John would never go back to Mary. And Mary was good for John, was what John had always wanted in a partner.

After all, she was intelligent, kind of. She was all talent with a razor sharp wit and she came with a skill set that Sherlock could never hope to acquire (unless of course, he took up a career in killing people for a living). She was quite like him in several respects actually, except for the fact that she had a greater domestic presence than he had, a quality that he knew John always looked out for in potential partners.
Mary is perfect for John, she is, not forgetting that John chose her, he chose her, which definitely has to count for a lot. That was why Sherlock had refused to implicate her in her, quite unsuccessful, attempt at killing him. Because if John found out he would never have gone back to her and he would have regretted it for the rest of his life.

They have a child for god’s sake! Of course John would have regretted it if he hadn’t gone back to her. And he’d always wanted to be a father, something that Sherlock will never, in his wildest dreams, hope to offer him.

Sherlock sighs, letting his hands fall his face, his fingers unfurling as they come to rest by his sides. John doesn’t love him, he doesn’t, not in that way...

John loves Mary, not him....

He is delusional and incredibly stupid for thinking that John could ever-

“Hey Sherlock!”

A loud voice at the door startles Sherlock out of his thoughts, grounding him back in reality. “Yeah!” he calls, fumbling for his electric shaver as he struggles to collect himself. “You alright in there?” John’s voice comes again, sounding extremely concerned. “Yeah, yeah I’m fine,” he replies, pressing a switch on his shaver so that it whirs to life. “Just taking a bit longer than normal.”

He can hear John’s frown through the frosted glass. He can hear it in the shuffling of his feet and the swift exhale that counts as a very soft sigh. “Come out soon alright, these scones aren’t going to be warm for much longer.”

Sherlock listens carefully for John’s footfalls, waiting till the soft padding fades to the muffled crackling of bedsheets before letting out a deep breath he didn’t realise he’d been holding.

Sherlock sighs, proceeding to lather on some shaving cream haphazardly before putting the razor to his skin, listening to the mechanical whirring of the machine as what remains of his morning stubble is sheared off.

He faces the mirror, slowly watching the progress of the razor against the foam. Look at you, he thinks to himself, gazing at his reflection in the mirror. All he sees is riotous curls and a face that is way too angular to belong on a human being.

How could John possibly love you?

He lets out a deep sigh, tears threatening to form at the corner of his eyes. He wills them to disappear as he rinses the remains of the cream off, turning to grab his toothbrush.

How could he?

He finishes, wiping his face on his towel as he prepares to step outside. Sherlock prods the door gently, feeling the hinge give a bit before pushing it fully open.
Everything he’d thought of in the last few minutes evaporates at the sight of John’s face.

His eyes meet John’s from across the room immediately. And there’s that expression again, that curious expression that Sherlock has yet to give a name to. But Sherlock could really care less about that right now because John is staring at him like a man entranced, his tongue appearing once again at the corner of his lips, swooping down to lick the crumbs off his bottom lip and Sherlock finds that he can’t move, that he is rooted to the spot because he feels like John’s complete attention is on him.

If there is a heaven, this is it.

John’s eyes watch him closely as Sherlock edges forward, dragging his feet across the ground before dropping down on the bed next to him.

This seems to break John out of his whatever-addled state, his eyes blinking as if they’ve been laced with treacle as he turns towards the plate of scones, passing them over to Sherlock.

“Thanks,” Sherlock mutters to himself, cheeks growing steadily redder.

He can feel John’s gaze boring into his skin, a red hot reminder of John’s presence that makes Sherlock choke a little bit on the scone he’s munching on. He slathers on more clotted cream and continues on eating, resolutely refusing to make eye contact with John.

Because as electrifying it is to have John’s undivided attention, he cannot allow himself to think that John has any interest in him beyond being best friends.

There’s a bit of clotted cream on the corner of his lip. He tries to lick it off, but the cream edges further up his lip instead. He sighs, dabbing at it with his index finger before bringing it up to his lips to lick it clean.

At this, John’s breath hitches, his breathing taking on a heavier, denser quality. Sherlock freezes, turning to look at John, finding an intense expression carved out on John’s face. His blue eyes have taken on a deeper shade, irises swirling circles around his rapidly expanding pupils. His eyebrows are angled fiercely downwards, his lips slightly parted and Sherlock gulps.

Shit, was he not supposed to have done that?

At this, John turns his face swiftly away, looking slightly… guilty? Sherlock’s brow furrows slightly. What did he do this time?

He finishes what remains of his scone, grabbing his cup of tea to wash it down.

“Er, Sherlock,” John starts, voice sounding slightly hesitant.

“Yeah?” Sherlock responds, willing his voice not to tremble as he gazes resolutely at the dregs sitting at the bottom of his cup.

“I- I’m sorry about just now,” John continues.

Sherlock freezes, his bottom lip feeling like it’s been glued to the bottom rim of his teacup.

“I mean, I shouldn’t have done that- er, gotten that close to you especially since there’s that guy that you like. Sorry if I made you uncomfortable… in any way,” John breathes, looking extremely upset. His bottom lip quivering slightly.

Sherlock is absolutely speechless.
Oh god, how can he still not know?

“John, it really doesn’t matter,” he replies, resting his palm on the bed beside John’s leg, his pinky finger only just about brushing his thigh.

“It does if I’ve hurt you in any way,” John murmurs, looking steadily down at his thighs.

“Trust me John, you have nothing to worry about,” Sherlock responds, gazing up at John.

“Really?” John breathes, finally turning his head to face Sherlock.

“Really,” Sherlock replies, smiling. He grabs another scone, biting off a small chunk before continuing.

“After all, he’s an idiot.”

John stares, eyes transfixed on Sherlock for a moment before bursting into giggles.

“I thought you didn’t like idiots,” John chuckles, taking a swig of his tea.

Sherlock is silent for a few seconds, his mind struggling to generate an appropriate response.

“Well, I’m friends with you, doesn’t that count for something?” he says, the corners of his lips upturned in a cheeky grin.

John grins widely at this, his face positively radiant and Sherlock can feel his own face mimicking John’s.

John eventually breaks eye contact, chancing a glance down at his watch, smile faltering slightly as he stares at the white digits.

“I was supposed to have gone back to my old clinic and cleaned all my stuff out by now,” he frowns and says, grabbing his tea cup and downing the rest of his drink in three successive gulps.

“You’re not working there anymore?” Sherlock questions.

“Nah,” John replies, shaking his head, “Too many bad memories.”

He drops his teacup down on the metal tray with a slight rattle, moving to get off the bed.

He doesn’t elaborate further and Sherlock doesn’t probe, watching as John shuffles toward the bedroom door.

“There’s a GP quite near here that’s got an opening,” John continues, turning around as he clutches a corner of the wooden door. “So I think I’ll work there for the time being.”

“I’ll bring all my stuff back to Baker Street first. It might take a while because I haven’t packed it all up yet so I should be back around… let’s say mid afternoon?”

“Okay,” Sherlock responds, reaching for another crumpet. “Do you wanna have dinner in or out?”

“I think in would be a great idea,” John replies, grinning, turning to exit the room.

He shuts the door soundly behind him, the sound of metal catching onto metal ringing in the silence as Sherlock finishes the final scone and flops back down onto his bed.
Because what exactly is he going to do with John Watson?

He sighs loudly, stretching out on the bed.

*He doesn't like you in that way.*

Sherlock shifts so that he's resting on his side, his arms bending upwards so that his face rests, pillowed on his palms.

But just now, all of that? Didn't that mean something at least?

Sherlock curls up into a ball, his knees coming to rest against his chin as thoughts whirl haphazardly, untamed by logic, through his head.

*Just stop thinking about it, it's not going to do you any good anyway.*

He gets up, running his hands through his curls, attempting to calm them somewhat but failing miserably.

He hears the latch of the en suite toilet door click, the one that's not facing his bedroom, listening as footsteps rapidly pad across carpeted floor and down the stairs.

He must have been stuck inside his own head for quite a bit then, he muses as he catches the slamming of their front door.

So John’s only just left then and it's... Sherlock glances at his bedside clock, currently 12.43 in the afternoon, which means that John might be back only just in time for dinner instead of the mid-afternoon he’d promised.

Sherlock grabs the tray laden with empty plates and teacups, heaving himself off the bed.

He heads for the kitchen, dumping the tray down on the table. He doesn't want to talk to Mrs Hudson right now, especially after that embarrassing moment, god the thought of it gives Sherlock chills. Anyways, she'll come up to retrieve it eventually. Sherlock makes his way to the living room, dropping down on his leather chair.

He admires his attire for a moment, the mismatched combination of wrinkled white T-shirt and posh jet-black pants. He should really change out but he can't be bothered.

He angles his face upwards, the back of his neck resting on the head of the chair, watching as the dust motes dance circles in the morning light streaming in through the windows.

And for once it’s not just his own dead skin, his own dust floating around solitarily in the atmosphere above his head, it's John Watson’s as well.

It's their dust. It's their dust mingling, soaring and swirling spirals around each other and Sherlock is deriving a certain amount of satisfaction from this.

A purportedly unhealthy level of satisfaction.

He could probably do this forever.

Well, there's nothing else for him to do anyways...

Suddenly, an idea pops into his head, a tiny spark setting off fireworks in his brain because Sherlock now knows exactly what to do with the time he has before John gets home.
John had marvelled at the idea of eating in, probably expecting takeaway of some kind and Sherlock knows exactly how to surprise him.

He leaps up from his seat, racing to the kitchen only to remember that the fridge had been sucked dry from yesterday’s breakfast and is absolutely empty.

He scowls, stalking off towards his bedroom to change… and probably shower.

He's probably going to have to get the groceries himself, just this once.

It's not that he hates supermarkets but that he hates queues and will hate them to the end of time. He buys everything he needs off eBay and Amazon half the time to be honest, preferring to wait a week or two for his package to arrive rather than waiting 10 minutes in a queue.

He’ll do it just this once, just for John.

He strips and gets into the shower, giving himself a good scrub, washing away the dirt and grime from the previous day.

He enjoys the sensation of warm water beating down against his bare skin, reaching up to thread his fingers through his hair to massage the shampoo into his scalp.

There’s a brief moment where he remembers the feeling of John’s fingers in his hair.

He turns the knob so that the water temperature switches immediately to icy cold.

He towels himself off, taking the time to style his hair before changing into suitable clothing (which by his definition is one of his more casual looking suits). He puts on his coat, stuffing his hands into his pockets and feeling around for his wallet, determining that it is there before striding out the door of 221B.

Cold air hits his face the moment he steps out onto the street, the icy breeze a sharp contrast from the warm, comfortable temperature of 221B. He sets off for the nearest Waitrose (the food’s always better there than the stuff at Tesco’s anyway), pulling his coat collar up to shield his cheeks from the chilly air.

He feels terribly excited, grinning slightly in anticipation of John’s reaction to his cooking. He’ll probably make it a four-course meal, he has enough money for it and enough time to cook after all. And he knows exactly what to do for the main course.

John’s going to absolutely love it.

He hopes.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter should... SHOULD be up within two weeks. Next week is a bit iffy cause I have an internship again but I'll make do

Contact me on tumblr
Chapter Six

Chapter Summary

“Are you one hundred percent certain that John and I are in danger?” Sherlock prods, watching Mycroft carefully.

Mycroft pivots himself on his umbrella, moving to stand up.

“Yes, indeed you are,” he replies, with an air of gravity.

Chapter Notes

OK THANKS FOR STICKING WITH ME GUYS! :> This update has been a long time coming and I'm sorry for keeping you waiting. But enough of this! On to the fic! TW: really graphic dreams

Also, you'll notice that the rating has gone up.

hmmmm....

Also I haven't managed to do a full readthrough of this chapter yet so if there are mistakes I'll come back and fix them later

See the end of the chapter for more notes

46 hours since John’s come home

Sherlock now remembers why he hasn’t done grocery shopping in years.

The reason being that he looks absolutely ridiculous.

He’s currently clutching several plastic bags, all of which he had had to pay for because he’d forgotten to bring bags of his own. He might have gone a little overboard, he muses, seeing as he’s bought at least two jugs of milk and three cartons of eggs (one never knows when one might need raw materials for experiments).

Turning abruptly on his heel, Sherlock makes his way to the edge of the sidewalk, the shopping bags swaying dangerously in his wake. It doesn’t take long for a cab to arrive - he’s always been pretty good at hailing cabs.

Sherlock hauls the bags into the back seat of the cab, struggling to settle the bulky groceries in an orderly fashion to allow himself some comfortable sitting room before calling out a chaste “221B Baker Street” to the cabby.

The taxi lurches forward, forcing Sherlock to grab the bag of eggs hurriedly before it tumbles to the
floor. He scowls, clutching the bag tightly as the taxi begins its trek towards Baker Street, swerving wildly around corners at a, probably, illegal speed.

Sherlock runs through a mental list of his purchases in the interim. He’d initially only meant to buy food for this evening but had ended up purchasing mostly general groceries instead. A lot of it had actually been canned food, an appropriate option for him and John seeing that they gravitated towards easy to cook meals due to their hectic lifestyles. He hopes the cupboards in the kitchen can hold all the cans he’s bought but either way the cupboards will finally be full again, a rather homely detail that will make the flat look lived-in and cherished.

Sherlock smirks, thinking about how he’ll probably have to shift his scientific equipment out of the way. The retort stand will probably have to remain there but all the organic chemicals will probably have to be shifted out, as will the glassware. He’ll probably have to disinfect the whole area first, come to think of it. He vaguely remembers the presence of an uncompleted experiment sitting on the top shelf somewhere to the right hand side of the cupboard. It’d been one of those biohazardous ones… yeah he should definitely get that cleaned up.

He’s bought some chicken fillets for dinner, along with an assortment of spices in the form of a spice rack (it was on offer!). Paprika chicken has always been one of Sherlock's favourite dishes, a childhood meal that his mother used to bake for Mycroft and him every now and then, especially after they’d come home from school.

His mother had truly put a lot of effort into raising them, he muses, given that she had put her work on hold for a more domestic and boring lifestyle.

Mummy had always been “the weird one in the relationship” as his father used to lovingly put it. She was the woman who had given Sherlock and Mycroft their characteristic brilliance, being no short of intelligence herself. Sherlock remembers poring over his mother’s essays at the age of eight, understanding absolutely nothing.

She’d been a role model for him, well his parents both. He does have to give his mother a large amount of credit though. She’s no doubt an intelligent woman, most definitely on par with or possessing a higher IQ than him or Mycroft. Stopping work to take care of both of them probably took a great toll on her, Sherlock supposes, seeing that even he can only go so long without mental stimulus before driving himself absolutely up the wall. Despite all of that though, she’d never let it show, always presenting herself as an exuberantly caring and doting mother.

She’d kissed away every cut and bruise, cradling him closely whenever the other kids had bullied him, constantly telling him that he was special and loved and that the other kids were all idiots.

Sherlock smiles a little at this, seeing as how his mother’s huge impact on his life even shows through his speech patterns. His father had also played a large role in his life, though his influence had truthfully been mostly confined to his teenage years.

He had gravitated towards his father in secondary school, not because of a loss of respect or love for his mother but rather - that Sherlock had started noticing something special in his father’s eyes, a quality that his mother, though intellectually gifted, seemed to lack.

There was something about his father, something about the openness and the sincerity of his gaze that had drawn him towards him, a gaze that parallels the looks that John gives him now.

Although equally affectionate, while his mother had been books and knowledge, his father had been art and culture. He’d been the one who’d taught Sherlock about the stars years back, the one who’d encouraged him to take up the violin and the one who’d supported his enjoyable, yet somewhat brief,
foray into dancing, seeing as that he’d been a dancer himself. While his mother had never scoffed at any of his artistic pursuits, she sure hadn’t pushed him to try any, seeing as she had little artistic background herself. Sherlock’s passion for the arts had been his father’s gift to him, an interest that had given him, as a child and up till now, an escape route. A way to shut off the world when everything got too loud and fuzzy at the edges.

His parents had been such inspirations to him.

How sad that he had disappointed them by doing drugs.

But enough of that- Sherlock remembers his childhood in fragments of happy and particularly bad moments but there was always one memory that had always been one of his favourites. He remembers watching his parents as a child, half-drunk and giddy with delight one Christmas evening as they swayed to slow music, swirling circles around each other. His father sure-footed and graceful and his mother fumbling precariously every now and then as they waltzed around the room.

He remembers Mycroft rolling his eyes and scoffing at their parents, slumping back into a chair, immersing himself deeply in a book. But Sherlock had refused to turn away, watching enraptured as his parents swayed to the music, their eyes locked onto each others, refusing to let go.

They were two very different people, his mother and his father, both gifted in such different areas and yet so complementary when together. He remembers being extremely fascinated as a child, wondering how either party could have fallen for the other seeing as they had barely anything in common.

Except they did, he realises now, they loved each other, that’s what they had in common.

And that had been enough.

The taxi halts abruptly, jerking Sherlock out of his thoughts as the driver hollers at him about whether he’d like to pay by cash or card.

Sherlock digs into his coat for his wallet, thrusting some cash at the partition that separates him from the cabbie as he gathers his shopping bags, barely managing to fit through the door. He shuts the door behind him, preparing to put some of the bags down on the porch to extricate his keys from his coat before realising that the door is slightly ajar.

Which is strange because Sherlock knows that he definitely locked the door before leaving. He pushes it open with his shoulder, hearing the hinges give a little creak before the door shuts quickly behind him.

John couldn’t possibly be back this early, could he?

Sherlock sniffs the air, his nostrils pinching tightly with the effort.

Oh god.

No.

He makes his way up the stairs slowly, ensuring that every creak is heard by the intruder that is likely sitting in his living room right this very moment.

He purposefully puts extra pressure on the creaky eighth stair, arching the heel of his foot and listening as the wood gives a satisfying groan under his weight as he pads up the next few steps.
Swinging the door wide open, he purposefully ignores the character sitting on the sofa in the corner of the room, making his way swiftly to the kitchen.

“Good afternoon, Sherlock,” a voice calls tonelessly from the sitting room.

Sherlock retrieves several cans from the bags, piling them swiftly and noisily into the cupboards that he deems clean enough.

“Good afternoon to you too, brother” he sneers, dumping another can into the cupboard. He listens as it gives a satisfying rattle before striding back into the sitting room, taking a seat on his own leather chair.

“What do you want,” he grates out, a demand rather than a question.

Mycroft shifts in his seat, getting up from the sofa to take a seat in John’s chair opposite Sherlock.

“You know why I’m here,” Mycroft replies. He’s still clutching his umbrella, twirling it quite vigorously between his thumbs. He inclines his head slightly towards the doorway inciting Sherlock to follow the motion, his eyes coming to rest on John’s extra jacket and scarf.

“Well unfortunately for you, I appear to be quite clueless as to the reason for your presence today,” Sherlock replies with a deliberately neutral voice, “So do enlighten me, god knows you enjoy it so.”

Mycroft sighs at this, allowing his head to dip forwards.

“Please don’t be difficult Sherlock,” he sniffs, raising his head.

Sherlock instinctively straightens his back, eyeing Mycroft suspiciously.

“It’s quite important, Sherlock,” Mycroft continues, “So please do pay attention.”

Sherlock slouches back in his seat immediately, right leg coming upwards to cross over his left.

“Go ahead,” he replies, the corners of his lip curved upwards dangerously.

Mycroft gazes up at Sherlock and sighs again before leaning further back into John’s chair.

“It has come to my attention that John Watson has returned to 221B Baker Street,” Mycroft begins, levelling his gaze at Sherlock.

There’s a short, awkward pause as Mycroft gazes somewhat snootily at him before Sherlock narrows his gaze, his eyes sharpening into slits.

“And?” he responds, folding his arms.

“Sherlock,” Mycroft responds, voice sure and certain, “There are some things I have to discuss with you concerning John Watson.”

“Oh really?” Sherlock responds sarcastically, “I hadn’t guessed.”

Mycroft scowls at this, tipping his nose upwards in slight disgust before continuing.

“Since you’re being so spectacularly intolerable, let me get to the point.”

“John’s unprecedented move back to Baker Street has set in motion a series of events, each inevitable in their own right,” Mycroft starts, voice grave, eyes boring into Sherlock’s, “However,
John’s exceptionally timely return has accelerated their progress.”

Sherlock hums, rapping his fingers on the sides of his chair as Mycroft continues.

“We’re running out of time Sherlock,” Mycroft straightens up, his hands pressed firmly onto the handle of his umbrella. “I can’t tell you exactly what for just yet-”

“Why,” Sherlock demands.

“The material we've obtained so far isn’t completely concrete,” Mycroft responds, “We still have yet to make genuine progress with our sources who have merely given us tidbits of information-”

“I’m assuming that the only reason the head of the British government is unable to coerce necessary information out of a respondent is because they hold similar power themselves,” Sherlock mocks, glaring contemptuously.

Mycroft remains silent at this, turning his gaze from Sherlock’s to rest on a corner of the room instead.

“As for the information that we have currently,” he begins, “It has been made clear to me that you and John Watson are in grave danger.” He pauses for a moment, letting the silence sink deep into Sherlock’s bones before continuing. “The only way to remedy this would be if you were to convince John Watson to move back in with Mary Watson-”

“Not. A. Chance.” Sherlock spits, absolutely livid. “He’s just as safe with Mary as he is with me.”

He has a sudden flashback to when his parents were dancing, lost in each other eyes as Mycroft looked on disdainfully, absolutely disgusted.

“You can’t fool me,” he finishes, glaring daggers.

Mycroft sighs, rolling his eyes. “I knew you wouldn’t be amenable to that option.”

“In that case, I will suggest that you allow my men to set up perimeter security here at 221B,” he posits, sounding defeated. “It won’t be anywhere intrusive or invasive- although cameras monitoring the access points of the flat will be needed.”

“If this is some half-hearted attempt to spy on me, I-”

“Sherlock!”

“Mycroft-”

“Sherlock please-”

Sherlock blinks, Mycroft’s face swimming into clear view. He tilts his head, scrutinising his brother’s face.

He’s always thought that Mycroft eyes looked like chiselled scratches carved roughly into hard granite, like those of still, unfeeling marble statue masterpieces. However, this time, there’s a roundness to them, slight curves around the edges that make Sherlock stop in his tracks and look just a little bit closer.

Is it him or for once does Mycroft actually look properly concerned?

And sincere about it?
Sherlock drops his gaze, uncrossing his legs as he bends forwards, resting his forehead in his palms.

“Fine,” he says softly, “fine.”

He raises his head, watching as a wave of relief appears to wash over his brother's face, smoothing out the lines of worry that had been etched there before.

“Are you one hundred percent certain that John and I are in danger?” Sherlock prods, watching Mycroft carefully.

Mycroft pivots himself on his umbrella, moving to stand up.

“Yes, indeed you are,” he replies, with an air of gravity.

There’s a brief silence as Sherlock scrambles to collect his thoughts.

In danger?

From whom?

The only person who’d been hell bent on making his and John’s life miserable is dead.

He shot himself in the face.

He’s dead.

His phone chirps suddenly, letting out a series of staccato beeps.

“You’d better get that,” Mycroft suggests, “I’m sure it’s important.”

He makes his way to the door, his umbrella hanging lightly on his forearm almost perfectly, leaving zero creases on the well-starched fabric.

“And one last thing Sherlock,” Mycroft says, whipping around just as he’s nearly out the door.

“Watch out for Mary Morstan.”

He gives one final sideways glance in Sherlock’s direction before letting the door slam shut behind him.

Sherlock listens, waiting for the footsteps to recede before springing into action. He races to the kitchen, swooping his mobile up in one swift motion.

There’s a text from John.

*Oh god, did Mycroft seriously mean it that they were in danger? Did something happen to him?*

Sherlock hurriedly opens up the message, John’s words popping up in pixelated text.

Sherlock, something cropped up at work and I might not be able to make it home on time.

Sorry.
Sherlock heaves a sigh of relief, rereading the text, suppressing the slight disappointment that’s beginning to settle in his chest. John seems to be fine, or at least he was at 2.34 PM…

Are you alright? - SH

He sends the message, eyes riveted to his mobile as the text bubble floats up slowly onto the screen. He waits a miserable three and a half minutes, most of which is spent furiously twiddling his thumbs, before he gets a response.

I’m fine. Don’t worry about me. I’ll just be home late so don’t wait up.

Don’t wait up?

Oh, they were supposed to have dinner together.

So much for that plan.

Okay, see you later - SH

See you later alligator.

Sherlock smiles, his gaze falling from his mobile as he moves towards the pile of groceries, resting his phone face-down on the countertop.

Looks like he’ll have to have dinner on his own after all.

He pulls on a pair of gloves, retrieving a rag and some disinfectant from the sink cupboard before swinging the rest of the cupboard doors wide open.

It feels like being hit by a bus, his nostrils immediately assaulted by a foul stench which seems to be emanating from the back of one of the higher shelves.

It turns out that Sherlock had indeed left an experiment there to rot before he got shipped off to the hospital.

The corner of the shelf is coated in spidery white fungus, a petri dish barely visible through the stringy mess of dust and mould. He scrambles off to his bedroom to grab a handkerchief, tying it tightly around his neck before proceeding to clear out the detritus and dirt from an experiment long forgotten.
He extricates the petri dish from the spidery mesh, transferring it to the sink before proceeding to clear out the fungus, grabbing it in fistfuls and dumping them immediately into the bin.

He disinfects the entire area, including the shelves above and below, spraying it with solution mercilessly until the shelves are covered with foamy, glistening soap.

Satisfied with his progress, Sherlock begins scrubbing at the panels, watching as a year’s worth of grime and dust falls richly onto his palms.

He finishes up, wiping away the solution with cold water. Sherlock leaves the glass doors open wide for the shelves to dry before turning to tie up the plastic bag with the fungus, heaving the bag over towards the rubbish chute.

Well, that’s taken care of.

Removing the handkerchief, Sherlock uses the maroon fabric to wipe his brow as he proceeds to remove the rest of the groceries from the bags.

He dumps the chicken into the freezer, feeling crushed as he slams the freezer door back in place. He honestly doesn’t feel like having it anymore, especially since John isn’t coming home…

Sherlock gives his head a violent shake, forcing away thoughts of John as he turns back to the groceries, proceeding to unpack more of the foodstuff.

He crams the vegetables and mushrooms into the chiller, working with a single-minded desperation to ensure that everything slots together perfectly. He gains a slight sense of accomplishment as he watches the food pile up, the main compartment of the fridge getting the same treatment (although most of it is milk and eggs).

When he finishes, Sherlock takes a step back to view his masterpiece. He’s actually quite proud of how the fridge looks now. The shelves glisten with cling-wrapped packets, filled to bursting with various food items and it looks so domestic that Sherlock’s heart stutters slightly at the sight.

_Wait till John sees this, he thinks, god he’s going to be so happy._

After all those years of pestering Sherlock to do the grocery shopping, John’s wish has finally been granted.

But John isn’t here right now.

Sherlock growls, whipping back towards the cans, shoving the rest into the dry shelves like a man possessed. He leaves a packet of instant noodles out on the countertop so that he won’t have to retrieve it later for his own dinner.

He whisks his phone off the countertop, settling down in John’s chair as he begins to flick through the emails he’d received when he was gone, although honestly there’s barely anything.

Sherlock slumps back, sinking into the soft fabric. He hurls his mobile across the room, the electronic device coming to rest on the sofa opposite.

_Letting out a huge sigh, Sherlock screws his eyes shut as he struggles to chase threads of thought that seem to be purposefully eluding him._

_It seems he’s really going to be faced with the prospect of a John-less afternoon._
He pushes away the burgeoning disappointment that’s starting to pool deep in his stomach again at the thought of John’s name.

*It’s not John’s fault that he couldn’t come home on time.*

*Come on Sherlock, you shouldn’t be so clingy.*

*It’s not like he even has an obligation towards you.*

Sherlock reaches behind, grabbing John’s union jack pillow. He buries his face into the dusty fabric, trying to drown out all thoughts of John but it only serves to make things worse because it *fucking smells like him.*

He dashes off to his bedroom immediately, tears threatening to form at the corners of his eyes as he strips off his clothing, hurriedly pulling on a T-shirt as he burrows under the covers.

This is seriously the most emotional week he’s ever had a.k.a. the most terrible week he’s ever had, except that John came back and oh no NO. He has to stop thinking about him.

Sherlock tumbles towards the left side of the bed, rolling up the blanket into a burrito-shaped cocoon.

He can’t lie to himself, he really had been looking forward to dinner, to cooking even, but now that John’s not coming back he does feel quite crushed. He wheezes several times, struggling to calm down. His breaths eventually even out, his chest ceasing to heave and Sherlock gives a soft sigh of relief.

He props himself up on his pillow, his body encased in warm cloth as his mind begins to settle.

Oh.

Oh, Mycroft.

He’s forgotten all about Mycroft.

Sherlock shifts so that he’s lying sideways, his head and shoulders cushioned by soft down. He rubs his eyes gently as he jumpstarts his brain, the gears in his head beginning to rattle and turn as he struggles to make sense of his earlier conversation with his brother.

Mycroft had been extremely vague, which was basically him being his normal dramatic self. However, Sherlock suspects that Mycroft is expecting him to piece together a semblance of something from his extremely ambiguous statements.

Mycroft had said that John’s return had accelerated a series of events… but what could he be referring to? And why would John returning to Baker Street have any effect on anything concerning his brother?

It just doesn’t make any sense, there has got to be something he’s missing.

Sherlock turns over, mashing his face firmly into his pillow.

And what did Mycroft mean when he said that the two of them were in danger? Moriarty is dead and Sherlock has dismantled most of his web. Who could possibly be after them now? All of Moriarty’s most dangerous allies are either dead or have been incarcerated.

So maybe it’s not Moriarty?
“Watch out for Mary Morstan.”

What had that meant?

Is Mary in danger as well? Why does he have to watch out for her, she’s a trained assassin, she’s fully capable of taking care of herself.

Or maybe that’s not what Mycroft meant…

Maybe…

No, no it can’t be.

Sherlock sits up immediately, scratching his head.

Has he been reading Mary wrong this whole time?

He shakes his head viciously, his palms coming to cup his ears.

No, it’s just the jealousy talking, it’s-

*She did try to kill you, you know.*

People make mistakes, Sherlock reasons, maybe she’d just been that desperate to keep John? Maybe she’d just loved John that much?

“So you’re saying that killing the person she loved the most was what was best for her?”

The conversation he’d had with Cameron comes flooding back, his own words echoing back at him.

“I understand enough to know that you didn’t truly love her.”

But Mary loves John.

Doesn’t she?

Sherlock digs his nails into his cheekbones, his head hanging low.

No, no he cannot allow himself to follow that thread of thought.

Because walking down that road could have severe repercussions for both John and him and Sherlock is sure as hell not ready to face that.

So Mary loves John, period.

Which means Mycroft meant that Mary is in danger.

Maybe from Magnussen? That’s a thought.

Sherlock flops back onto the bed, curling up in his blanket cocoon as he struggles to connect the dots.

Maybe Mycroft wanted John back at Mary’s place because Mary would be safer with John around? Maybe that’s it.

But what on earth had he and John done to piss Magnussen off, so much so that they were, as Mycroft had put it, in grave danger.
It just doesn’t make sense.

Sherlock sighs, reviewing the information several times over before giving it up as a completely hopeless endeavour. Hopefully, Mycroft’s security will be able to protect them for the time being while his brother struggles to extract information from any relevant parties.

Levering himself up on one arm, Sherlock wraps the blanket even more tightly around himself as he pads out of his bedroom into the kitchen.

He gets two pots of water boiling, one for the noodles and one for the soup, waiting till the water bubbles over before dumping in the noodles and seasoning.

He has his noodles in front of the television, channel surfing till he finds a programme on National Geographic that he deems interesting enough to watch, finishing three episodes of Dog Whisperer before letting out a huge yawn. Smacking his lips together, he waddles back to the kitchen to do the washing up, struggling to keep his blanket above his sleeves during the process.

As the last of the suds drain away, he lets out another yawn before shuffling back into his bedroom. He turns the lights off, flopping down on his bed, scratching at his eyes as he turns to face his bedside table.

The clock on the table reads 11:54PM, which doesn’t seem right because how can John not be home yet?

Sherlock suddenly feels very much awake.

*Shit, has something happened to him?*

He scrambles for his phone, reaching for the electronic device before typing out a quick message to John.

> Where are you? - SH

Thankfully, he only has to wait a few seconds before receiving a reply.

> In a pub down at Leicester

> Don’t worry about me I’m with Mike

Sherlock heaves a soft sigh of relief before texting back.

> Okay. - SH
He sends the message, waiting till the notification that John has read the message pops up before resting his phone face down on the bed, his fingers clutching it tightly.

If John’s out at a pub, it means that something truly bad must have happened at his old workplace. After all, John almost never drinks, his sister the primary reason he normally avoids alcohol like the plague. He only ever drinks on special occasions and when he’s had a particularly bad day. Sherlock suspects that in this case, it’s probably the latter.

It also means that John is going to come home late or maybe... that he’s not going to come home at all. At least that’s how it used to go in the old days - but he is married now after all.

Sherlock tosses and turns, remembering the early days of their companionship when he used to stay up late, working on some experiment or other as he waited for John to come home. On some occasions he did but on most occasions he didn’t.

At least he hadn’t brought any of them home, Sherlock muses. He doesn’t think he would have been able to keep it together if John had done so.

He remembers John coming home on those mornings, his hair ruffled and his clothing creased, smiling at Sherlock as if Christmas had come early. He shivers at the memory of those days, knowing that John’s smiles were not actually meant for him but for the person he’d slept with the previous night.

But John is different now, they’re both different now. John’s married and he has proven to be extremely loyal to the ones he loves. Which means that Sherlock has to thank Mary for the fact that he will no longer get any intrusive thoughts of a very naked John having sex with a very naked woman.

Sherlock exhales softly, his fingers gripping his mobile phone even tighter as he lets his eyes fall closed.

*John’s with Stamford, he’s going to be fine.*

He relaxes, allowing his tensed up muscles to slacken, his body sinking deeper into the mattress. His breathing slows slightly as his body begins to shut down.

He feels a phantom pressure of fingers on his back before sleep claims him.

---

Something’s wrong

That’s the first thing Sherlock’s mind registers as he stirs into consciousness.

He sits up groggily, struggling to open his eyes.

It’s pitch black, his body barely visible in the darkness of the room, his bed a flickering silhouette against a backdrop of charcoal shadows.

His bedsheets are missing… and so are his clothes.
Wait, when did that happen?

He bolts upright, mind racing frantically as he scans the room for any intruders.

His gaze wanders around the room, eyes sifting through the surroundings as if ploughing through sticky tar.

There’s definitely someone else here.

He can feel it.

There’s a rustle in the corner of the room.

Sherlock whips his eyes around, finding himself face to face with sparkling blue eyes that shine brightly in the darkness.

He gulps, watching with anticipation as the dark figure crawls closer till his vision narrows down to two glimmering opals, beautiful blue eyes that gaze back at him knowingly.

The figure is barely visible but Sherlock recognises those muscled arms and thighs and he is especially familiar with those eyes that are currently curved slightly upwards, like how John’s eyes look when he smiles.

“John?” he breathes, watching as the figure blinks, their fingers coming up to rest on his right cheek, caressing his skin softly.

Sherlock practically melts into the mattress at the gentle touch, his head thrown back in ecstasy as the figure continues to stroke his cheek reverently, leaving soft kisses on his exposed neck.

Maybe he’s died and gone to heaven, maybe he’s died and is being reborn but who cares really because the feeling of those fingers against his skin feel positively electric.

He whines as the pressure on his cheek is lifted, watching as the figure gives him a cheeky smile before their eyes disappear entirely. There are fingertips dragging against his neck, digging hard into his collarbone as the figure bends themselves, arching their back. A mouth descends on his right nipple, tonguing at it lightly before sucking slowly, laving it lavishly with their tongue as Sherlock mewls and cries out, his hands coming to rest on the figure’s back, digging in as their fingers continue their slow trek down his chest.

It feels like he’s on fire, like his whole body is like a bow that is high strung, taut and ready for release because Sherlock is extremely keyed up here, absolutely losing himself to the thrilling sensation of someone’s skin against his own.

The fingers skirt along his pubic area, swirling circles around his inner thighs and it feels like a switch has been flicked in his brain.

He grinds upwards off the mattress, his thighs clenching as he writhes and squirms, trying to get closer to that delicious pressure as the figure continues to lavish his skin with satin stained kisses.

They bite down sharply on his collarbone, startling Sherlock into a muffled scream as he raises his legs, tightening his hold on their body so that his slender legs bracket strong thighs.

It’s then that the figure raises their head, blue eyes boring into Sherlock’s as their gazes meet.

Sherlock is absolutely entranced, raising his hands to cup their cheek, planting a soft kiss on their
“Is this real?” he whispers, drawing his face away from John’s as John looks on steadily, his blue eyes blinking in the darkness.

The figure blinks once more, cocking its head in slight confusion.

And then the spell breaks.

The figure disintegrates, its body crumbling, dissolving into a stream of smoke, startling Sherlock as it curls around the room, spiralling higher and higher before disappearing entirely.

Sherlock gulps, head raised to the ceiling, looking upwards inquisitively just as the floor gives way below him.

He’s falling, falling into pitch darkness. He closes his eyes, waiting for the ground to come up to meet him, for the earth-shattering pain he knows will immediately follow.

It doesn’t come.

He opens his eyes slowly, finding himself swathed in a set of thick winter jackets, standing in the middle of what seems to be like a forest.

He lets out a long exhale, watching as his breaths turn to puffs of white, curling and mixing with the dust in the air before vanishing.

He hears the dogs before he sees them.

One. Two. Three sharp, clear barks in the crisp night air before the ground seems to rattle, the rocks shaking and shivering as he bends down to inspect them.

He hears voices yelling in the foggy darkness.

Voices yelling in Russian.

He stumbles away in horror, picking himself up off the ground as he begins to run, his heart thumping violently in his chest as the voices begin to get louder.

And louder.

There are lights on him now, shining brightly into his eyes from overhead as he fumbles through the undergrowth.

He hears the crack of a whip in the distance, a sharp strike that cuts through the night air like a knife.

He picks up his pace, pushing his way through the trees, desperately seeking shelter somewhere, anywhere?

He’s breathing heavily now, his skin covered in goosebumps because he knows what comes next.

After all, this isn’t the first time he’s had this nightmare.

He trips over a tree root, his ankle twisting painfully as he falls face-first into the ground. He scrambles to get up, his eyes widening in terror, only to find that his leg is stuck, wedged underneath a fallen tree branch.
He knows how this ends.

The voices are coming nearer, the cracking of the whip sounding closer and closer as the tree roots surrounding him spring to life, curling around him and trapping him where he lies, the tendrils forcing him down into the ground.

There’s a burly man standing above him, his eyes filled with glee as he raises his whip, the tip glimmering brightly in the helicopter lights before he brings it down.

Sherlock screams.

He wakes up immediately, finding himself drenched in cold sweat as he shivers and shudders, sitting up on his bed as his arms come to wrap around his thighs, rocking himself back and forth slowly.

His bedroom door creaks open but he merely dismisses it as background noise as he continues to rock his body forward, his eyes clenched tight as tears begin to drip slowly down his cheeks.

The spot on the bed next to him dips downwards as a warm pressure presses lightly into his side. Sherlock takes the hint and rests his head on the figure’s shoulder, burying his face into what seems like a wool jumper as tears continue to stream down his face.

The figure sighs softly, an arm reaching around Sherlock’s body to rest on his shoulder, pulling him gently onto their lap.

There are fingers in his hair, gently stroking and caressing his curls as Sherlock begins to calm down, his breathing slowing as the arm on his shoulder squeezes his biceps lightly.

“It’s alright,” John whispers.

John’s soothing voice a godsend in the terrifying darkness of the room as Sherlock begins to wheeze, his body spasming in bursts of adrenaline as his shivering becomes less and less noticeable.

“You’re alright,” comes John’s voice once again as Sherlock grabs hold of John’s jumper, his fingers dragging and digging into the wool as he breathes slowly into John’s chest, struggling to calm himself down.

“You’re safe now.”

They stay that way for a while, Sherlock heaving into John's jumper as John continues to stroke his forehead gently.

His breathing eventually slows, his body relaxing as he slumps against John’s chest. He relaxes his grip on his jumper, John’s fingers continue to card through his hair.

Sherlock lets out a long sigh, his arms slackening as they fall to his sides. His breaths even out as he clears his throat.

“I think I might have left a damp patch on your shoulder,” Sherlock murmurs, his eyes closing as he presses himself up against John’s chest, feeling the rumble of a chuckle before John replies.

“No worries,” he replies gently, his other arm now dipping lower to rub slow circles against Sherlock’s back, “There’ve been worse things on it.”

“Like what?” Sherlock whispers back, feeling his body slackening as it melts into John’s.

“Like that time you elected to conduct an experiment concerning the effects of bubble gum on
refined wool.”

“Ah,” Sherlock sniffs, “So it’s that jumper then.”

“I’m afraid so,” John responds, bending down to bury his nose in Sherlock’s hair.

“What a pity,” Sherlock replies, his voice still sounding rusty. He shifts so that he’s now sitting up, facing John. “I never liked that jumper. I thought you would have at least thrown it away after that fiasco.”

John’s eyes widen, a spark of realisation blooming in those sea-blue eyes.

“So you did do that experiment on purpose!” he says, his eyes sparkling humorously, “I knew it! I knew you did it on purpose”

Sherlock scoffs, smiling at John.

“Well, my plan didn’t quite work out now did it,” he says, beaming back with weary eyes.

“No, it didn’t,” John whispers back, clutching Sherlock tightly as he grins back at him, eyes dancing with laughter.

They remain silent for a while, John continuing to trace patterns into Sherlock’s back as Sherlock exhales softly into John’s jumper, nuzzling wearily into his chest.

The sweat on his body has cooled, leaving him feeling icky and gross. He shivers, trembling in John’s arms as a cold draft seeps in through the window that he’d left slightly ajar.

John seems to have noticed because he pulls away, continuing to stroke Sherlock’s hair, grounding him as he whispers.

“Hey, what say we get you into a warm bath?” John says, shifting away from Sherlock till he reaches the end of the bed, holding out his hand.

Sherlock takes it, grasping John’s hand tightly as John pulls him upwards, steadying him as they shuffle, hand in hand towards the bathroom.

John plugs the drain and sets the taps running. He puts the toilet seat down, gesturing for Sherlock to sit on top of it, which he does, taking John’s offer gratefully.

His head seems to clear as the bathroom begins to fill with steam, transparent water vapour condensing on cool air particles as the bathroom begins to get hotter and hotter.

John reaches down into the bath water, his hands skimming the surface slowly before gesturing to Sherlock that the temperature is alright.

Sherlock’s cheeks redden as he gets himself out of his clothes, tugging off his shirt and toeing off his pants sluggishly before turning to John shyly.

John’s breath hitches, his cheeks going slightly pink before reading Sherlock’s gaze and turning his face away as Sherlock pulls off his boxer shorts, stepping toes first into the warm water.

He sighs as the water engulfs his legs, swathing them in warmth as he bends down, adjusting himself till he is lying down in the tub. He grabs some soap from the dish built into the wall, rubbing it against his skin as bubbles begin to fill the top layer of the tub, hiding his body from sight.
Shivering slightly, Sherlock notes that his head is still covered in sweat, his hair matted against his scalp. John notices this and rushes to grab Sherlock’s shampoo, lathering it up between his hands before hurriedly kicking a stool in front of the bathtub, sitting down and gently massaging it into Sherlock’s scalp.

He relaxes at the touch of John’s hands as John rubs the shampoo into his skin, cupping his palms every now and then to draw water out from the bath, pouring it gently over his head. Sherlock closes his eyes, savouring the sweet, alternating pressure on his scalp and the feeling of warm water cascading down his cheeks as he inclines his head towards John’s, smiling softly at him.

John seems to choke up slightly at this, his hands stilling in Sherlock’s hair for a moment before he grins back, a smile plastered onto his face.

Sherlock, satisfied, turns back to the bath, sinking deeper into the water till his neck disappears underneath the soapy bubbles.

“What kept you?” he murmurs, watching as foamy bubbles pop and burst on the surface of the bath, prickling his skin.

John sighs, scratching his nose gently with his sleeve before replying.

“There was just a lot of stuff to pack up,” he begins, sneezing before continuing, “It took me a while to finish and when I was done I grabbed all my bags and walked out the door—”

“- face first into Mary.”

He finishes there, Sherlock letting out a quiet “oh” before going silent, the soft rippling of water the only sound echoing across the bathroom walls.

“She accused me of abandoning her,” John continues, brow furrowing as he shifts his fingers lower, massaging the nape of Sherlock’s neck.

“She did it in the waiting room too, in front of everyone. The cashier, the regular patients, basically almost everyone I’d come to befriend during my time there.”

“She yelled about how bad a husband I was, about how I was a bad father and how I should come home instead of hanging out with my-”

He stops there, stilling for a moment as Sherlock extends a soapy hand towards John’s arm, tethering him before John continues.

“They were all looking at me with such shock and disgust and I just couldn’t… It was the same thing with the neighbours all over again on the day that I left, the day that I came back here and I felt like it was just too much…”

“Sorry Sherlock, I just needed to have a drink to calm my nerves, I was just so upset, I-”

“It’s okay,” Sherlock rumbles, stroking John’s wrist gently, “It’s not your fault.”

John sighs, turning to face him. He gives him a look that reads “No, it really is.” before motioning to Sherlock to dip his head down, rinsing the shampoo out of Sherlock’s hair.

Grabbing a bottle of Sherlock’s conditioner, John marvels for a moment at the brand and the price tag beforeslicking his hands with the silky mixture, applying it to Sherlock’s curls.
He rubs the conditioner almost lovingly into his hair, taking deep care to avoid the roots. Sherlock purrs softly in contentment, smiling at John who mimics him with a goofy-looking smile of his own.

The water goes cold after a while, the temperature becoming increasingly lukewarm and uncomfortable so John gives Sherlock a knowing glance before exiting the bathroom, leaving him alone to towel himself off. He dries his hair meticulously, slinging the towel low on his hips as he stumbles out of the bathroom, finding John holding out a set of pyjamas for him, blushing furiously.

Sherlock takes them gratefully, slipping on his T-shirt and pants quickly while John averts his gaze, looking pointedly at a dark patch on the ceiling.

He finishes, dumping the towel back on the rack before walking towards his bed.

Sherlock hesitates for a moment, stopping in his tracks, fearful of the additional nightmares that the rest of the night could bring before John brushes past him. He slips under the covers as Sherlock watches on like a deer in the headlights.

Sherlock’s leg is halfway under the covers, his arm pressed down against his blanket and he probably looks like an idiot but he cannot help but stop and stare.

He’s frozen where he is, watching as John smiles and pats the spot next to him, inviting him to get in with him and Sherlock can’t think because... how did he get so lucky? How did he find someone who was willing to carry him through his nightmares? Someone who was willing to wash away his fears with gentle caresses and soft scented baths and Sherlock feels like his heart is going to burst.

How did he find someone like John?

He takes a tentative step forwards, his body turning inwards so that he’s facing John as he draws up the covers.

He probably looks like a nervous wreck right now, his hair all frazzled and messy without the product he normally uses but John smiles at him all the same, his arms wrapping tenderly around him. Sherlock burrows into John’s chest, breathing a sigh of relief as he feels John’s grip tighten around him, grounding him and pulling him closer.

“It’s alright,” John breathes as Sherlock trembles in his arms, nudging his forehead into John’s chest.

“You’re safe here with me,” John finishes. And this time, John most definitely kisses him on the forehead, startling Sherlock slightly before he returns the favour, drawing up John’s wrist to his lips as he kisses the pulse point there.

John’s chest heaves at the sensation, growling slightly as Sherlock kisses his wrist once more before resting his palm against his lips, coating it with warm puffs of air.

“No one can hurt you now,” John whispers, his voice echoing around the room as Sherlock shudders at the promise of John’s words.

“No one can hurt you now,” John breathes again before kissing Sherlock’s forehead once more, chapped lips brushing against alabaster skin but Sherlock doesn’t believe it.

He can’t believe it.

They’ve never been safe, either of them and they never will be.

“Are you one hundred percent certain that John and I are in danger?” “Yes, indeed you are.”
And it’s only a matter of time before one of them gets hurt again.

He only hopes it won’t be too soon.

Chapter End Notes

Next update in 3 weeks because I'm getting my A level results back on friday and I don't know how I will feel about that haha.

Contact me on tumblr for any fic updates
Chapter Seven

Chapter Summary

"John had looked so beautiful, his eyelids crinkled shut in sweet slumber, snuffling softly into his pillow. The streetlights had shone faintly into the room, stretching their fading arms to caress John’s sleeping form, throwing his face into a brilliant masterpiece of light and shadow, a greyscale chiaroscuro of previously unfathomable proportions and Sherlock had been absolutely entranced."

Chapter Notes

OK I’VE GOT A LOT OF EXPLAINING TO DO HAHA
1. I got into the uni course I wanted!!! Yay!!!
2. The reason I didn't update was not because I was wallowing in self-pity (ok maybe I did that for a bit) but because I had an internship that lasted one and a half months that sucked my creative well dry
3. Past perfect tense is a bitch. I literally gave up at one point. This is when a beta would come in handy HAHA. I'M NEVER DOING THIS AGAIN
4. Past perfect tense is also a bitch cause there's a bit where I use "had had had" and that really PISSES ME OFF
5. If you follow me on tumblr you would know that I said this chapter would be over 10k but no it's not. That's because I decided to divide the plot up a little bit more which means you guys are getting the next chapter sooner than normal! Yay! Hopefully by next week if nothing goes wrong uwu

See the end of the chapter for more notes

214 hours since John’s come home

They sleep together every night after that.

Sherlock has no idea how it happened really. When he’d woken up the morning following John’s steely encounter with Mary, he’d found the opposite side of his bed cold and empty. The bedsheets smoothed back meticulously, the corners carefully tucked in.

It had felt like all evidence of John’s presence in his bed had been erased entirely and Sherlock had buried his face back in his pillow, desperately trying to prevent his brain from jumping to conclusions on what that had meant.

He’d pulled a late night in the kitchen that night.

It hadn’t been intentional, honestly. It was just that he had needed something to distract himself, something to prevent himself from drowning in a merry-go-round of speculation and conjecture. Because, really for all he knew he could have misread the situation, extrapolating the evidence once
again and reading too much into John’s actions.

Anyways, the situation would resolve itself when John came back from work so why should he be so hung up about something that was imminent anyway?

Except that he’d been so engrossed in his experiment that he’d missed John’s return.

He remembers surfacing from his thoughts around 2 a.m. in the morning, finding himself standing alone in the kitchen like a fool, swaddled in his crumpled dressing gown and yesterday’s pyjamas. He’d sighed deeply, folding up his plastic goggles before stumbling towards his bedroom, swaying a little from sleep deprivation.

He’d been about to fall into bed when he noticed that the blanket was moving, shifting slightly upwards and downwards in a gentle motion, sending waves of creased fabric rippling downwards to pool on his side of the bed.

He’d stood there absolutely speechless, his heart thudding furiously in his chest before moving to peel the blanket back slightly, revealing John’s well worn face, peaceful in sleep. He’d smiled then, a bright grin tugging the tired corners of his mouth slowly upwards as a warm feeling settled in his chest.

Changing quickly into a new set of pyjamas, he’d burrowed under the blanket, snuggling up closely to John with practically no regard for his friend’s personal space before falling soundly asleep.

He’d woken up the following morning to the sound of quiet traffic and the feeling of someone else shifting against him.

He remembers lifting groggy lids only to find himself face to face with John. John who had propped himself up on his good arm, steadying himself so that he could slowly untangle his limbs from Sherlock’s.

He remembers John chuckling softly, maneuvering Sherlock’s thigh off his leg. He had whispered a hushed “see you after work” before patting his arm gently and moving to stand.

He’s not sure if he remembers the kiss on the forehead.

This became the pattern for the next two days, Sherlock waking up just in time to see John off to work.

John truly had a soporific effect on him it seemed, seeing that he had somehow managed to sleep for seven hours, three nights in a row, without interruption. There hadn’t been any more nightmares, no more dark shadows that dulled the edges of bright dreams that now seemed to greet Sherlock every time his head hit the pillow.

Most of the dreams that he had had had been surprisingly pleasant, often having to do with either John or Redbeard. They had played out like any other typical dream sequence, a mess of splattered colour on white canvas as scenarios morphed and changed with the waxing and waning of his sleep cycle. One moment, it could be John and him alone in a sunny meadow, watching Redbeard as he snuffled and pranced through swaying grass. Another moment, it could be the two of them racing through gritty london streets, mouths open in gasping laughter as they chased after another elusive suspect.

On the third morning however, Sherlock had woken up hours before John, blinking sleepily as his eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness of the room. He remembers fumbling a little to sit up so that he could check what time it was. Instead, he’d been greeted by a sight so ethereal that at first he thought
he might have been dreaming.

John had looked so beautiful, his eyelids crinkled shut in sweet slumber, snuffing softly into his pillow. The streetlights had shone faintly into the room, stretching their fading arms to caress John’s sleeping form, throwing his face into a brilliant masterpiece of light and shadow, a greyscale chiaroscuro of previously unfathomable proportions and Sherlock had been absolutely entranced.

He remembers watching the slow heave of John’s chest, resting his palm gently on the curve of John’s hip to reassure himself that he was really here and that this wasn’t a dream before maneuvering himself back down, curling up next to John as sleep pulled him under once again.

On the fourth morning, John had been long gone when Sherlock woke up, the other side of his bed proving freezing cold when one of Sherlock’s feet had mistakenly crept towards the patch of bed that John had once occupied.

There’d been a note on the side table, a hastily scribbled apology saying that John would be back late that day and that Sherlock should probably go and have dinner without him.

He’d sighed in slight disappointment, tentative fingers reaching to wrap around off-white paper as he had made to stand. Depositing the note deep in his pocket, he’d made his way to the living room, his legs struggling forwards as if stuck in thick treacle. Restarting his brain after a long sleep was probably one of the worst things in the world, something that Sherlock had previously been able to successfully evade before John had started sleeping in the same bed as him.

Not that he was complaining really.

It was then that he had caught a whiff of chicken. He’d whipped his head quickly around to face the kitchen, his gaze falling on a solitary, still steaming bowl of chicken broth and a cup of tea.

There had been a note sitting innocuously next to the bowl as well.

“Found some chicken in the fridge,” it had read, “thought that it’d made a nice broth for breakfast.”

There’d been a lopsided smiley face at the bottom of the note as well, a speedily scribbled smile that mimicked the one drawn across Sherlock’s features as he moved quickly to grab a chair and spoon. He’d slurped the soup up in greedy sips, trying to prevent himself from grinning and failing miserably.

At least the chicken he’d bought hadn’t gone to waste after all.

The fifth morning had been a Saturday morning, meaning that John didn’t have to go into work early. Sherlock had woken that morning to bright sunlight streaming through the open windows, pooling in satin puddles in the dips and creases of their shared blanket. He’d snuffed sleepily, lowering his eyelids to dim the glare of the Sun as he turned to John. John’s arms had been resting possessively across his shoulder, his fingers spread across his arm in a slackened grip. Sherlock had shifted his forehead till it rested against John’s chin, rolling his arm slightly forward so that John’s palm now perfectly cupped the curve of his shoulder. He hadn’t been ready to get up just yet.

It was then that John’s breath had caught in his throat, alerting Sherlock to the fact that John had woken up. Freezing still for a moment, the knowledge that this intimacy might not be very welcome came flooding back to him. He had shifted uncomfortably, wondering whether he should move to get off the bed and flee or if he should stay put and let John flee instead.

John had made the decision for him in the end, surprising him with a slight nudge to his forehead before letting out a long exhale. He’d tightened his grip on his shoulder, his fingers digging in deeper
into pale flesh as Sherlock sighed softly, allowing his head to drop slightly in relief.

He had drifted off to sleep eventually, listening to the sound of John’s breathing, a symphony of soft inhales and exhales, a gentle lullaby that had slowly lulled him back to sleep. When he’d woken up again, John had already left.

He’d sat up and stretched his arms, listening to the telltale crackles of cramped muscles before moving to stand, smiling to himself as he made his way out of his bedroom.

Those mornings had been blissful peace, each waking moment in itself a special, magical time bubble that Sherlock had stored away deep in his mind palace, ensuring that they’d never been forgotten.

This morning however.

“Come on lazybones, we don’t have all day you know,” a voice calls, piercing through the morning quiet like a knife before Sherlock is hit squarely in the face with a soft but heavy object.

He groans miserably, drawing the blanket to rest further up his chin as he screws his eyes tightly shut.

“Lemme sleep,” he mumbles in deep baritone, grabbing the object currently resting on his face (that he now realises to be a pillow) and throwing it in the general direction of the source of the foul noise that had disturbed his slumber.

He hears a chuckle, followed by soft footsteps and the sound of metal clinking against metal.

His vision is suddenly bathed in white.

“No,” he manages. He scowls, trying to put on the most bitter expression he can manage as he turns to face away from the window.

John lets out another loud, hearty laugh, padding over towards the foot of the bed, wrapping his fingers around Sherlock’s ankles.

Sherlock has barely any time to react before John tugs forcibly at his feet, sending his head flying off his pillow, coming to rest under the duvet somewhere towards the middle of the bed.

He pulls back the blanket, revealing what he hopes is an extremely frustrated expression as John drops his ankles, giggling uncontrollably.

“What do you want,” he pouts, but there’s little venom to it. John takes one look at his face and bursts into laughter again so Sherlock puts on a sour face and moves to crawl back up the bed.

“If you behave like this we’re going to miss the exhibition,” John grins and says.

“What exhibition?” Sherlock murmurs as his head finally makes contact with his soft pillow.

There’s a short pause before John replies.

“Wait, you mean you hadn’t figured it out?”

“Figured what out?” Sherlock replies, his voice muffled.

“I bought the tickets on Friday!” John’s voice comes again. “I thought you’d noticed.”
“Tickets?” Sherlock’s eyes spring open, suddenly feeling very much awake. “Wait what tickets?”

“The tickets to the crime exhibition at the London museum? The tickets that the most observant man in the world seems to have no knowledge of?”

Sherlock sits up in shock, blue eyes raking up and down John’s form.

He’s dressed in a blue jacket and checkered shirt, his hair neatly combed and face cleanly shaved. Which means that he’d woken up a lot earlier today. Sherlock glances at the clock. It’s 8 in the morning, so he’d probably woken up around 7? Maybe earlier?

He’d clearly planned this. How had Sherlock not figured it out? How- oh. That was why John had said that he would be back later on Friday. Stupid! How hadn’t he seen that?

John clears his throat, shifting slightly under Sherlock’s gaze. He looks extremely uncomfortable.

“I mean, we can go if you want to. If you’re not free… I mean… if you don’t want to…” John struggles, his face looking slightly downcast.

That is absolutely unacceptable.

“NO!” Sherlock all but yells, startling John for a moment. “I… I’m free. I’m definitely free to go for the… the… thing.”

Sherlock gulps, his prowess of speech absolutely failing him as the words trickle out of his mouth in unformed sentences. How does John keep surprising him? How?

John smiles warmly in response, turning to leave the room.

“I’ll go and get breakfast sorted,” he grins and says, “You just wash up and get ready in…” John glances at his watch momentarily. “…Half an hour tops. Is that okay with you?”

“I… I…” Sherlock feels absolutely ridiculous. He’s gaping like a goldfish, struggling to come up with an appropriate response but the words won’t come. John flashes a wide grin at him in response and does he… does he wink? At him? Before leaving the room?

Sherlock knows that he’s blushing right now, his pale cheeks flushed a rosy red so he buries his face in his hands, feeling extremely self-conscious even though he knows full well that there’s no one else in the room.

John had thought of him! He had actually planned this specially for Sherlock! And he had been clearly excited about it! And… and…

Sherlock is smiling, his lips being tugged upwards by some unseeable force. He desperately wishes himself to stop grinning for heaven’s sake! But composure seems to evade him even as he makes his way into the shower.

He feels like a teenager that has just received their first text from their crush. Not that he actually knows what that feels like, seeing that no one had ever actually liked him back in secondary school. But it is a wonderful feeling all the same and Sherlock finds himself humming as he flicks on the taps, watching the water race down from above.

He finishes in approximately 28 minutes, including the time required for blow drying and combing
his hair. He’s decided on a white shirt and a black suit for the occasion, admiring himself a little in the mirror as he searches for any stray curls or creases in his jacket.

He turns around twice, carefully scrutinising the back of his pants and hair until he is decidedly satisfied with his appearance. He looks decent enough for a trip to the museum. His hair doesn’t quite exactly have the volume that he wants but that’s okay.

He sighs, grabbing his phone from the nightstand before strolling out the door.

John has clearly been at work in the kitchen, the scent of bacon and eggs hitting him squarely in the face the moment he reaches the living room.

He smiles as he turns to face John, watching his friend’s face scrunch up in concentration as he flicks his wrist, sending the omelette on the frying pan soaring over in one fluid motion.

He does it one more time before switching off the flame, shifting the pan so that the omelette slips cleanly onto a plate next to the stove.

Sherlock looks on almost lovingly, watching John as he piles bacon onto both their plates.

It feels like they’ve gone back in time, like Sherlock has fallen asleep and woken up in a time where Mary has never existed, a time where he had never jumped from Barts. A time where he had forfeited love for a mission that he now struggles to forget.

*Can I keep this?* He thinks, watching John as he proceeds to pour coffee into Sherlock’s favourite mug.

*Could I have this forever?*

John turns around, smiling sheepishly at Sherlock as he carries their plates and cups over, setting them down on the table gently.

“Since we’re definitely going to do a lot of walking today,” John says, dusting his hands off on his jeans, “I’d recommend you finish your breakfast.”

“I hope it’s enough for you,” he finishes, grabbing a fork and knife, attacking the omelette with relish.

*It’s enough,* Sherlock thinks, digging into his omelette, revelling in the creamy taste and smooth texture of the egg.

He turns to John once again, meeting his friend’s gaze with a bright smile.

It’s more than enough.

----

“Don’t look at the label!”

“Oh come on Sherlock, I’m never going to be able to-”

“Just ignore the label. Look at it, what do you see?”
“I swear to god-”

“Please?”

John huffs, his brow furrowed in annoyance as he peers up at Sherlock’s ecstatic face.

It takes him approximately 5 seconds before he gives in.

“Fine,” he sighs, dropping his head as he returns his gaze to the glass casing, his nose scrunching up as he scrutinises the shoe sitting innocuously on the stand.

“Sherlock… I’ve got... absolutely… nothing.”

“Please John even you can do better than that.”

“Hmmm let's see. It's a boot... Yeah a really old boot... hmmm... I think that's it.”

John huffs, glaring at Sherlock who’s currently wearing a rather malicious looking grin.

“Yes Mr. Smarty Pants. Do you have anything else to add?” John scowls, shifting away from the glass casing.

Sherlock’s grin widens at this, his eyes sparkling as he moves to take John’s place.

“The shoe belonged to a member of a gang that typically did operations near the Thames, circa… 1950? It likely belonged to a younger member, probably one that needed the money desperately. I’m guessing the illegal activity the group dealt with was... drug dealing,” Sherlock narrows his eyes and says.

“John take a look at the label. What does it say?” he finishes, turning to John who’s already speed-reading the text on the metal plate.

“Spot-on…” he murmurs, turning to Sherlock and beaming.

Sherlock basks in the praise, visibly gloating as he turns to John who greets him with an answering grin of his own.

“So…” John folds his arms and smirks, waiting for Sherlock to finish his sentence for him.

Sherlock needs no invitation to begin, really.

“The year is obvious, anyone who has ever studied 20th century fashion would know that these type of shoes were the height of fashion back then-”

“And you have?” John replies, sounding slightly shocked.

“John, I’ve studied all sorts of things for cases. Do shut up.”

John smirks, turning to face the glass casing as he struggles to rein in giggles while Sherlock continues.

“The shoe was well preserved, the traces of mud are still visible. See how the splatter goes up to the tip of the shoe? It was something that clearly happened often, going by the many layers of residue on the cap. This rules out the likelihood of the stains being a product of wet soil after or during rain.”

“The shoe is huge, something you’d only expect an adult to wear. However, there are scuff marks
around the top edge, clear indentations on the quarter and backstay, indicating that something irregularly shaped must have been stuck into the back of the shoe frequently… judging by the state of the indentations, it was probably rocks.”

“That must have been uncomfortable,” he says, scrunching his brow and peering at the shoe once more before continuing.

“The shoe didn’t fit it’s owner. Hence, the usage of rocks to ensure the owner wasn’t swimming in it. It could have been a man with small feet or a young boy, balance of probability says young boy.”

“These shoes weren’t made for teenagers. They were typically worn by working adults, So why did this boy decide on this type of shoe?”

“He probably wished to fit in with his newfound friends, his gang, probably even tried to dress the part. Hence, the shoes. He clearly wasn’t rich, this wasn’t a supplementary pastime, as indicative of the fact that if he’d really wanted the shoes so badly he could have just had them tailor-made.”

“Therefore he needed the money, desperately. That and the mud marks on the shoe point to the fact that this boy dealt in drug dealing.”

“Why? You may ask, well let’s review the evidence once again. The mud was indicative of illicit activities near a river, most likely the Thames. How do you run a lucrative, illegal business near a river? You deal with drug shipments.”

He turns towards John, flashing him a self-assured smile as he takes in John’s shocked expression with relish.

John’s eyes are blown wide, his mouth half-hanging open in shock as he gapes at Sherlock. He recovers himself when Sherlock smirks at him though, scratching the back of his head as he beams back at his friend.

“That will never stop being incredible,” he breathes, his voice filled with wonder.

Sherlock knows that he’s blushing, his pleased smile fading as he turns to face the floor, his cheeks heating up viscerally.

“Well genius,” John says smugly, “Do you have anything else to add?”

_There has to be a way to exercise control over one’s blushing_, Sherlock thinks to himself as his cheeks once again flare with heat.

“Er, not particularly. I-er no…” he slurs, deliberately avoiding eye contact with John.

“Well then, would you like to move on to the next exhibit?” John’s voice comes again, the arrogance in his voice palpable as he shifts to Sherlock’s side.

“I… Well…” Sherlock stutters before forcing his face into a tight lipped frown, his right eyebrow twitching slightly with the effort as he barks:

“Of course we should move on John, don’t be stupid,” he can hear John sniggering but he continues anyway.

“We’ve covered all the exhibits in this area, so let’s move on to the next atrium, shall we?” he sneers, setting off at a brisk pace that seems to startle John for a moment before he follows Sherlock’s lead, the corners of his mouth upturned in a wide grin as he catches up to him, matching his friend footstep
for footstep till they’re walking in tandem.

Sherlock relaxes slightly at this, his shoulders slumping a little as he points the way to the next atrium, briefing John on the cases the next section will be dealing with as John listens on attentively, nodding and asking questions every now and then.

They spend the rest of the afternoon weaving in and out of exhibition halls, Sherlock a fastidious blur every time he spots something interesting, swooping in dramatically on any display that he deems interesting enough. He rattles off his deductions to John as he goes along, allowing John to drop in a “that’s brilliant” or an “amazing” here and there before hurriedly stalking off to ensure he doesn’t get too flustered by the praise.

John had really meant it when he had said that they’d have to do a lot of walking. The collection is expansive with exhibits flooding the rooms, spilling over from one floor to another. By the time Sherlock finishes one final comb-through of the initial exhibition hall, it’s three o’clock in the afternoon.

They decide on Pret A Manger for lunch since it’s the cheapest and most convenient option. Sherlock grabs a tuna sandwich while John grabs a watercress sandwich and some fruit cups. As they pile their purchases onto the counter, they discuss the exhibition, bantering back and forth over the ingenuity of the cases or the idiocy of their perpetrators.

They eventually pile into a cab, John clutching their shopping bags tightly while Sherlock gesticulates at thin air, his hands dancing in an elaborate tango as he runs John through some of the interesting cases. John watches on, absolutely enraptured as Sherlock postulates some of his theories regarding the more convoluted cold cases, listening carefully to Sherlock’s deductions and responding to them appropriately when Sherlock pauses for breath.

They arrive at Baker Street eventually. John tips the cabby as Sherlock exits the car, still chattering about the quality of fabric of one of the blood-stained dresses he had seen and how it’s key in figuring out whether the case had really been a murder or suicide. John listens attentively, hauling the bags out of the cab as he kicks the door closed.

Sherlock barely stops for breath as he makes his way up the stairs, keeping up a constant stream of deductions as John follows from behind, nodding every now and then even though he knows that Sherlock isn’t looking.

Mrs Hudson had obviously anticipated their return because there’s a silver tea tray on the kitchen table. It contains a plate filled with puffy crumpets, an assortment of jams and two cups of still steaming tea.

John dumps the bags on the table, licking his bottom lip as he unpacks the sandwiches, laying them out on a spare plate that Mrs Hudson has provided while Sherlock moves to sit down, still mumbling about the consistency of blood and the intensity of the colour red on brown fabric.

John lends an attentive ear to Sherlock’s musings as he takes the seat opposite him, his fingers intertwined as he listens (for the fourth time) to the reasons why Sherlock thinks the murder of Bellamy Jones was committed by an estranged lover rather than her father.

Sherlock only stops periodically to take bites out of the sandwiches on his plate, choosing to prioritise the never-ending stream of deductions that his brain seems to be churning out. He doesn’t notice that John is slowly piling more and more food onto his plate, and he most definitely doesn’t realise that’s he’s slowly devouring all of it.
He ends up finishing four sandwiches and two scones before he realises that something is wrong.

He scowls furiously at John, turning his nose up imperiously while John struggles to bite back laughter. He flashes Sherlock a comical, crooked grin, causing Sherlock’s lip to wobble as he pleads with himself not to smile, forcing his lips into a thin line.

He ends up smiling anyway.

And worse.

Giggling.

They’re an absolute mess now. John’s head is bent over in mirth, his forehead resting on the table as he wheezes into his forearm, struggling to catch his breath. Sherlock isn’t much better his eyes squeezed shut as he cups fingers over his mouth, desperately trying to prevent his laughter from escaping through his clenched hands.

“Oh come on boys it’s a Sunday afternoon, there’s no need to cause such a racket.”

Sherlock turns, his giggles subsiding as he comes face to face with a very annoyed looking Mrs Hudson.

“Sorry Mrs Hudson,” John chokes out, clearly struggling to get his giggles under control as well. “We’ll try to be more quiet next time.”

Mrs Hudson smiles in response, gathering the polished off plates and empty cups, setting them on the tray.

“It’s alright John,” she says, patting him on the shoulder before making her way towards the stairwell.

“To tell you the truth, I don’t think I really mind it all that much,” she muses.

“It’s just truly pleasant to see my boys together again,” she smiles and says before padding down the stairs.

However, she pauses mid step, the steps creaking as she turns around to face the doorway once again.

“Oh John! I almost forgot, you received a letter this morning,” she hollers up the stairs.

“It’s on the mantel if you want it,” she finishes, making her way down the stairs once again.

John frowns, still seated as he turns to face the mantel. Sherlock narrows his eyes as well, scrutinising the package from his seat.

There’s a brown package sitting next to Billy the skull. It looks innocuous enough, just a little bit on the bulky side. It doesn’t look like it contains anything dangerous…

John rises from his seat, making his way to the fireplace.

“I wasn’t expecting any mail,” he mutters as he picks up the package, holding it at an arm’s length as he carries it back to the kitchen table, setting it down gently.

Sherlock pores over the package, observing the the quality of the envelope and type of adhesive that had been used to hold the flap in place.
It takes three seconds for everything to click into place.

*No*, he thinks.

*Not today, god please.*

John seems to have come to a similar conclusion. His hands are trembling, shaking as he turns the package over.

“To: John,” it reads in neat cursive.

“To: John” in Mary’s handwriting.

“John,” Sherlock whispers as he rises from his seat, “John, do you want me to go? I-”

“No it’s okay Sherlock, just- I mean- if it’s not too much- is it okay if you help me open it?”

John’s voice is hollow, his resigned and fearful tone a husk of its former self as he hands Sherlock the package, burying his face in his hands.

Sherlock obliges, clutching the brown envelope like his life depends on it as he reaches for a penknife, cleanly severing the adhesive as he pulls out the contents of the package.

*Oh god no.*

He retrieves three sheets of paper.

Three photocopies of sonograms.

Each sheet of paper contains a grainy, black and white image of a half-formed baby.

*It’s their baby,* Sherlock thinks to himself.

*It’s John’s.*

The laminated papers nearly slip from his palms as his fingers start to tremble so he sets them down on the kitchen table instead.

John’s hands fall from his face the moment the papers touch the table. He looks just as wrecked as Sherlock feels, his eyes streaked with red as he reaches for the first sheet of paper with tentative hands.

“I-” John chokes, words failing him as he twists his face away from the monochrome image, the paper falling from his fingers as he shoves his chair away from the table.

“I’m- I’m sorry,” he mumbles before dashing towards the stairwell, hurrying up the stairs.

Sherlock listens to John’s fading footsteps, flinching a little when John’s bedroom door slams.

He sighs, shifting his gaze to the two sheets of paper that remain on the table.

*It’s a baby,* he thinks to himself again.

*It’s beautiful and healthy.*

*And it’s John’s.*
The baby in the sonograms is curled up neatly into itself, its knees bent so that they’re barely touching its torso.

No not just John’s.

Mary’s.

He picks up the envelope again, turning it over in his hands.

Something else drops out, a silver blur as it falls to the floor, emitting a resounding, metallic clinking the moment it makes contact with grey tiles.

Sherlock doesn’t have to bend down to know what it is.

He had helped John choose it after all.

It’s John’s wedding ring.

---

It’s 2a.m. and Sherlock can’t sleep.

He’s been tossing and turning for the past few hours, struggling to find some respite in light of Mary’s unexpected and unwanted return into both of their lives.

Well... It’s not like it was warranted, Sherlock thinks to himself as he turns on his side.

From Mary’s point of view, it would seem like John had been shirking his duties as a loving husband and a father. As far as Sherlock knows, John hasn’t had any contact with Mary since the altercation at the clinic and he clearly doesn’t wish to. He hasn’t been keeping tabs on her pregnancy and most definitely has not been keeping tabs on the baby.

He groans in annoyance, burying his face in his pillow.

Why is this situation so complicated? So fragile that any one move he makes could possibly ruin or fix a relationship, whether it be John and his or John and Mary’s?

It’s all his fault really, he shouldn’t have come back from the dead, shouldn’t have made his presence known to John, shouldn’t have insinuated his way back into John’s life.

If he hadn’t come back, none of this would have happened really. Mary and John would have had a peaceful, loving marriage, with one or maybe two kids in tow. John would never have found out about Mary’s past, would never have questioned Mary’s devotion to him.

He would have forgotten all about Sherlock, would have moved on proper.

Oh god, what has he done?

He’s colossally fucked up his best friend’s life simply by existing, single-handedly ruined John’s marriage and family and-

I wish we’d never met, he thinks to himself.
John would have been better off, happier even, living out the domestic dream that he’d always wished for…

But then again, is that what John had really wanted?

He had courted danger even after getting married to Mary, carrying a tyre lever with him everywhere that he’d gone. Hell, he’d even gone into a drug den ALONE and picked a fight with the first person he’d seen. That didn’t exactly scream SAFETY and SECURITY to Sherlock.

So what exactly did John want?

Or what does he want now?

The bedroom door creaks open, bathing the walls in light as someone steps into the room, padding over to the bed.

Sherlock’s breath hitches as the mattress dips, the blanket shifting as John settles into bed.

He struggles to keep his breathing even as John extends a familiar arm forward, clutching Sherlock’s shoulder as he wraps his arms around his torso.

Sherlock closes his eyes, deepening his breaths, pretending to be asleep so that John won’t feel obliged to talk to him.

John isn’t having it though. Sherlock can hear the smile in John’s musical laugh as he slackens his grip on Sherlock’s shoulder, burying his face in Sherlock’s back so that his forehead rests at the nape of Sherlock’s neck.

“Sherlock, I know you’re still awake,” he murmurs.

Well of course, John’s a doctor, he would be able to tell.

“No I’m not,” Sherlock whispers, startling a gasping laugh out of John as he presses his lips to the apex of Sherlock’s spine, leaving an imprint of a smile on Sherlock’s singlet.

“Of course you’re not,” John breathes back, his lips brushing softly against Sherlock’s bare skin as he raises his head.

Sherlock chuckles softly, the low noise seeming to reverberate around the walls of the room.

They fall silent, the only sound that Sherlock can hear being the gentle whispering inhales and exhales of a certain John Watson.

What would have happened if John hadn’t met Mary? He thinks to himself in the quiet of the room.

What if John had never married Mary? What if he had never jumped from Barts?

Would John have been happier?

Maybe… or maybe not.

“Sherlock… Sherlock there’s something I need to ask you,” John’s voice comes again.

Sherlock flinches.

Had he been thinking out loud?
He props himself up, turning over so that he’s now facing John, their faces inches from each other.

“Go ahead,” Sherlock murmurs, watching as John raises his right hand, intertwining their fingers.

“Sherlock… I know... That day… It was the Cameron case…” John stutters, his breaths coming faster. “You explained to me why you jumped-”

Sherlock freezes, his blood running cold as memories of that night, that night when they had had the Big Conversation, come flooding back to him.

John seems to notice this, wrapping a reassuring arm around Sherlock’s back as he continues.

“You told me you did it to protect me. That much I understand… But-” John’s voice cracks, his irises turning a misty teal as he dips his chin, refusing to meet Sherlock’s eyes.

“But why did you have to lie to me?” He finishes, swallowing the words as if they had burnt his tongue the moment they’d touched it.

Sherlock shakes his head, slightly bewildered.

“What aspect of the lying are you referring to?”

“The bit where you told me that you were a fake,” John bites out, gritting his teeth as his eyes meet Sherlock’s.

They’re already glistening with tears.

“You didn’t have to say that. You didn’t! So why did you? Do you know how hard it was for me after that? To defend you? Because even I wasn’t a 100% sure myself!”

Sherlock flinches as John raises his voice, backing away reflexively.

John freezes for a moment, his eyes locking with Sherlock’s as tears begin to stream down his face.

“I- I’m sorry. I just- I doubted you sometimes you know, doubted whether you were even real. I- It was just horrible. For the first time in my life I felt reality shift under my feet and I wanted something a bit more solid, a bit more safe, a bit more stable. That’s why-”

*That’s why I married Mary.*

The words are unspoken but Sherlock knows what John had been about to say all the same. He reaches for John’s face, cupping his cheek as he wipes his tears gently from his eyes.

“So wh- why did you do it?” John continues, his chest heaving as he stutters through sobs.

Now it’s Sherlock’s turn to tear, his vision going misty as he wipes away the streams of tears that are streaking across his cheek.

“The same reason I did everything else… To protect you.”

John is silent at this, gripping Sherlock’s arm tighter as he continues.

“I thought you would have been better off if you had hated me entirely,” Sherlock’s lip is wobbling, making the words come out sloppy and slow. “I thought you would have missed me less, that you’d have thought ‘good riddance’ and moved on-”
“That would never have happened Sherlock,” John is shaking his head vehemently, his eyes now a solid cerulean as he gazes back at Sherlock.

“That will never happen, that much I can promise you-”

“You say that now but-”

“No Sherlock if there’s one thing I’m certain of it’s that I’d never abandon you,” John asserts, his voice firm.

“You can’t possibly promise tha-”

“I promise,” John cuts him off. “I promise I’d never leave you.”

John is gazing at him with such sincerity, such resoluteness that Sherlock is almost wondering why they haven’t kissed yet, why he hasn’t pressed his lips to John’s, sealing John’s promise with a kiss.

*It’s because he only sees you as a friend.*

*He loves you and respects you… but not in that way.*

“Sherlock, are you alright?” John whispers, jolting Sherlock back to reality.

“I’m fine, don’t worry about me. I’m just... *horrendously in love with you and destined to pine away for you in silence for the rest of our lives* “... a bit tired.”

“Oh,” John breathes, “Oh yeah it’s a bit late isn’t it.”

“Very late,” Sherlock murmurs, tugging the blanket upwards as he relaxes back into the mattress.

“I’ll-” John starts, propping himself up on one arm, “If you want me to go I-”

“No,” Sherlock replies firmly, “No, it’s ok. You can-”

He doesn’t finish, doesn’t need to really, because John understands anyway, levering himself downwards so that he rests comfortably on the bed again.

Silence descends upon them, a staticy stillness that wraps around them as Sherlock begins to drop off to sleep.

It’s then that John inhales deeply, shifting slightly so that he edges closer to Sherlock.

“Sherlock?” John’s voice comes again, soft and slightly hoarse.

“Yes?” he breathes back sleepily.

“Do you think things could have been different?”

“Hmmm?”

“As in do you feel that things would have turned out differently, differently for us, if...”

“What do you mean?” Sherlock inclines his head sluggishly towards John’s, his brow knitted in a slight frown.

“I mean... do you think things would have turned out better for us if we’d made different choices earlier on?”
Sherlock sits up, suddenly feeling more awake as his eyes meet John’s, their gazes locking.

John’s a psychic he thinks to himself as he puzzles over John’s words, finding his own words echoing back at him.

“Maybe... Maybe not…”

“... There’s no harm in theorising but honestly... there’s no real way of knowing is there?”

John hums in response, turning to face the ceiling as he sighs, folding his hands over his chest.

He falls asleep soon after, his gentle snoring pervading the room while Sherlock lies awake, now unable to sleep.

He turns to face John, watching the flare of his nostrils and the rise and fall of his chest. He looks so peaceful in sleep, his body relaxed and his jaw slack, a distinct difference from before.

Sherlock sighs, turning over to face the wall, curling up into himself, deep in thought.

Because Sherlock asking himself that question was one thing, but John asking him the exact same question? It was a different thing altogether.

Sherlock had thought about it as he had wondered at the possibility of a lifetime with John, considered the likelihood of them being together, not just platonically but romantically, for the rest of their lives, that maybe things would have turned out better if he hadn't done the things that he had.

Or maybe if Mary hadn't existed.

But John? Why would John have had any need to ask that question?

He had had everything going for him before Sherlock had come back and yet...

"I mean… do you think things would have turned out better for us if we’d made different choices earlier on?"

He'd said "us", meaning John and Sherlock, meaning John and Not Mary. So what had that meant?

What did it mean?

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully I get the next one up next week.

Best case scenario HAHA

Btw I made all that crime shit up. I'm serious. There was 0 research done.

Contact me on tumblr
Chapter Eight

Chapter Summary

"Bright sunlight spills through the windows as Sherlock saunters over to John’s bed. He feels comfortable and relaxed, enclosed in a safe bubble of time where the horrors of his and John’s reality cannot touch him."

Chapter Notes

Conversation with my friend:
YQ: You haven't updated your fic since i last checked haha. Why not um break the chapters up into smaller chapters.
Me: nope haha. nah I prefer longer chapters. like I only break if it sounds better if I break them up
YQ: You like to prolong people’s agony haha

Well guess what! After serious deliberation... I've decided to split the chapter up! Again! HAHA you have my friend to thank for this update uwu

This chapter is basically more exposition though, more and more and more and more exposition.

Also I just realised that most people don't call USB sticks "thumb drives" but I'm too lazy to change so... yup that's what a thumb drive is basically, a USB stick

See the end of the chapter for more notes

231 hours since John has come home.

“Sherlock, I need to go over to Harry’s.”

It’s a little after 10 in the morning. They’d both awoken around 9 o’clock, choosing to laze in bed even though Sherlock had known full well that John had work that morning.

Upon waking, they’d found themselves, once again, curled around each other, Sherlock’s nose buried in John’s singlet with John’s arms encircling him.

They hadn’t spoken since then, well not until now at least, John choosing to remain silent as he carded calloused fingers through Sherlock’s hair, clearly deep in thought.

So this was what John had been thinking about.

“Why? Did something happen?” Sherlock replies. He reaches for John’s hand, squeezing it reassuringly despite being slightly puzzled and confused at John’s sudden pronouncement. He’s absolutely sure that nothing has happened to Harry in the past few days. If anything, he would definitely have known about it.
“It’s nothing serious really,” John murmurs, scratching his head, “It’s just that… I haven’t heard from her in a while and it’s getting… frankly, a bit worrying.”

Sherlock blinks, a little stunned.

John has never overtly shown any interest in Harry’s affairs. Sure, he’s responded to her calls and helped her through rehab, routinely visiting her to ensure that she had been alright. However, he’d always done so with a slight reluctance, as if only choosing to attend to her needs due to a strong sense of duty towards his younger sibling rather than mutual affection.

*Something’s wrong,* Sherlock thinks as he narrows his gaze, scrutinising John’s face.

Oddly enough… he can’t seem to get a read on him. The only thing he’s noticed is that John’s eyes are set, his irises a solid cerulean. His chin is tilted resolutely upwards as well, exuding a certain stubbornness that means that no matter what Sherlock says next, he will be going to Harry’s anyway.

“You decided this last night,” Sherlock begins, starting to put some of the pieces together, “You’re not rushing off to work which means you called in sometime yesterday to tell them you were taking leave.”

John is silent, his eyes transfixed on a spot a little above Sherlock’s head, deliberately avoiding Sherlock’s gaze.

“I just… Look Harry and I haven’t spoken for a while and I feel like I need to check on her and all that, okay?”

John moves to sit up, tugging himself out of Sherlock’s grasp as he shifts towards the edge of the bed.

Sherlock doesn’t press him, knowing that putting more pressure on John, in view of the circumstances, is not a very good idea.

“Okay,” he responds, rubbing his eyes. Propping himself up on one arm, he watches as John grabs a towel, making his way to the washroom.

“What time will you be back?” he calls, slipping groggily out of bed.

“Er…. in about one… or maybe two days?” John ventures, his voice taking on a hesitant quality.

Sherlock head shoots up, his body going ramrod straight as he peers at John, his eyebrows raised.

*Something is definitely wrong.*

John watches him out of the corner of his eye, his whole body on edge as if waiting for an imminent objection.

Sherlock grits his teeth.

“Oh, sure,” he replies, biting back a retort as he schools his face into a calmer-looking expression.

John seems stunned for a moment, as if he hadn’t actually expected Sherlock to agree with him. He flashes him a warm smile, inciting Sherlock to return a weak one of his own before he closes the washroom door.

Sherlock sighs, flopping back onto the bed. His mind is already racing, the cogs and gears in his brain turning at a breakneck speed because:
Why does John want to go over to Harry’s place?

Or more importantly, why does he want to visit her now? Today?

John is a hardworking man who has always prized his GP work, rarely calling in sick or taking leave (unless it was for a case) because he's always felt a sense of responsibility towards his colleagues and patients. So why today of all days? He could have just visited her on the weekend.

It doesn't make any sense!

Sherlock groans, stuffing his face into his pillow.

Why is John so hard to read? All the time?

Well… not all the time… Sherlock thinks to himself as he chuckles into his pillow. Best not to use grand sweeping statements that are not always necessarily true.

To be fair, John has never been particularly good at lying, in the sense of hiding facts (With the exception of the museum tickets… That was ONE TIME). John gives too much away through his body language, making his true motives transparent with the twitch of an eyelid or the clenching of a hand.

Emotions however, are a totally different ball game.

John has always given Sherlock a particularly hard time when it comes to picking out his true feelings.

John's emotions are extremely complex, fluctuating within mere seconds. He could be angry one moment and sad the other and Sherlock wouldn't be able to figure out exactly which was which.

In these cases, John had almost always been impossible to read, his stubborn gaze absolutely uninterpretable till Sherlock prodded him for more information, hoping that John's facial expression would change to reveal something new.

It has always been something that has irked Sherlock to no end, that despite his vast intellect, he'd met his match in a simple, middle-aged londoner who has a penchant for sweaters and scented baths.

Well… Honestly though, if John hadn’t been such an enigma, Sherlock might not have allowed himself to have become so infatuated with him in the first place.

And that would have been totally unacceptable.

He’d initially been entranced by the contradictory nature of John’s personality. John was a healer by nature, a stereotypically well-meaning doctor who followed the Hippocratic Oath to a T. And yet… he craved danger and excitement, an adrenaline junkie who was prepared to hurt others to prevent the ones he loved from being hurt in turn.

He remembers John being a source of endless fascination to him, initially viewing John as an interesting study as he scoured for information on him (i.e. his birth certificate), desperate to find out what made the man tick, what made him John Watson.

He hadn’t realised he had fallen in love until it was too late.

In hindsight, he’d fallen for John soon after his first meeting with him. It had been after John had shot the cabby for him, when they’d walked off towards Sherlock’s favourite Chinese restaurant, the
exhilaration of a near-death experience still thrumming through his veins.

John had turned to him just before they’d walked through the threshold, smiling as he pulled the door open, waving Sherlock in. Their eyes had met for a moment, a brief moment, but Sherlock remembers it all too well. When their eyes had connected, it had felt like a zing of electricity had passed from John’s body to his, sparking a warmth in Sherlock’s chest that he hadn’t felt in a long time.

He’d ignored it back then though, believing it to be the result of a shared camaraderie between two very new friends. He’d chosen, unknowingly, to mask his affection for John with cold-hearted detachment as he distanced himself from John, referring to him in his mind palace as “friend”, “colleague” and “flatmate”.

Never labelling him as…

“The one that I care the most about”

“The one that I can’t have”

“The one that I love”

Not like he does now.

Falling in love with John had been a scarily slow process. John had stumbled slowly yet surely into his heart, worming his way through his veins the more time he’d spent with him. Sherlock had wrapped his head around the intricacies of John’s personality, delving deeper into John’s heart and soul as he sought after an answer to the mystery that was John Watson, ignoring what his “obsession” was doing to him himself.

He hadn’t realised how important John had become to him till he’d been about to jump from the rooftop of Barts.

Because all of a sudden, he’d thought of life after that, life without John.

And it'd brought tears to his eyes just thinking about it.

John had somehow grown to become a part of him over the past two years. Sherlock hadn't helped, certainly. He'd voluntarily wrapped himself around John's fingers after all, threading himself through John's heartstrings till they’d become impossibly intertwined.

It had been a connection that he had been loath to sever.

But he'd done it anyway.

John had forgiven him though, well sort of. He'd listened to his explanations, seemingly understanding where Sherlock was coming from and his reasoning behind everything that he’d done.

But then again, he'd suddenly brought up the fake suicide again yesterday, causing Sherlock to second guess himself on whether John had really made peace with the situation.

So Sherlock still isn’t entirely sure if he's been fully forgiven, for the same reason that he's unsure of the reason now as to why John wants to go over to Harry’s place.

It's because the man is BLOODY IMPOSSIBLE TO READ.

Sherlock groans, burying his face in his hands as he racks his brain for answers.
Something must have happened last evening, something that had startled John so much that he’d decided to call the clinic to take leave… But what could-

Oh.

Mary.

What if John isn’t going to Harry’s after all? What if he’s going to Mary’s?

What if John has finally decided to leave Sherlock-

“No Sherlock if there’s one thing I’m certain of it’s that I’d never abandon you.”

Why would he have promised Sherlock that last night if he’d really intended on leaving Baker Street once and for all? John has always been a man of his word. He doesn’t go back on his promises that easily, especially one that he’d vehemently affirmed the day before.

Which means that Sherlock isn’t seeing something that he’s supposed to be seeing.

It means that John is hiding something from him.

“Sherlock, are you alright?” a voice calls.

Sherlock blinks, his vision sharpening till John’s figure swims into focus.

He’s already dressed in a dark blue T-shirt and jeans, clutching one of the bags that Sherlock had seen him carrying into Baker Street when he’d first arrived back.

It’s a small bag, one that could probably only afford to carry one or two changes of clothing on top of toiletries and general necessities.

Which means that John really only means to be gone for a few days.

Sherlock lets out a small sigh of relief. At least he isn’t leaving permanently.

Doesn’t mean that he doesn’t still feel hurt though.

He’d bared his whole soul to John, told him the truth about his scars and even why he’d faked his own suicide. It’d hurt to speak of these things aloud, to have given his nightmares a voice once again. But still he’d told the truth. John however, John is still refusing to tell him the real reason why he wishes to go to Harry’s.

“Sherlock?” John’s voice comes again, sounding slightly more anxious this time.

“I’m fine,” he replies calmly, making his way to the bedroom door.

“Are you sure?” John says, his voice tinged with worry. “You kind of blacked out there for a second.”

“I’m fine,” Sherlock insists as John follows him into the kitchen, both of them taking a seat in their respective chairs. Mrs Hudson has already laid out a breakfast spread for them so Sherlock grabs a plate from the aluminium tray, stacking a few pancakes onto it.

“Sherlock, it’ll only be a few days,” John says softly. “I’ll be fine.”

“I never said I had any issue with you leaving,” Sherlock retorts, reaching for a knife which he
plunges almost immediately into the stack of pillowy discs, slicing his pancakes in half.

“Sherlock I’m not leaving, it’s only going to be a few days. I’ll be coming back,” John stresses, his eyes focused resolutely on Sherlock.

“MmHmmmmm,” Sherlock hums, taking a vicious stab at a pancake as he stuffs it into his mouth.

John sighs, ruling that talking to Sherlock is a hopeless endeavor as he proceeds to grab a stack of pancakes for himself, drizzling a little bit of honey on the top before digging in.

They eat in silence, with the occasional clink of metal against ceramic as Sherlock devours his breakfast.

Why doesn’t John want to tell him why he’s going off to Harry’s? Seriously, he thought that they were already above keeping secrets from each other.

“Sherlock, seriously what’s bothering you,” John suddenly says, sounding exasperated.

“Nothing,” Sherlock quips, taking another sip from his teacup before setting it down on the table.

John sighs deeply at Sherlock’s response, bending his head downwards

“Look I have to do this alright. I just… I have a bad feeling,” John stammers, sounding upset.

He raises his head, looking Sherlock directly in the eye as he clasps his hands together, clearly waiting for a response,

Sherlock doesn’t reply, deliberately avoiding eye contact with John as he continues to pick at the pieces of pancake on his plate.

“I’m doing… what I think is right,” John says again, his voice sounding more unsure than it had been before.

Sherlock’s head perks up at this, listening attentively to John.

The tone in his voice has shifted, from pragmatic and decisive to raw and human.

John’s no longer talking about going to Harry’s now.

He’s talking about something else.

What is he talking about?

“I’m doing this for us, alright?” he finishes, reaching forward to grasp Sherlock’s hand.

Sherlock allows him, his lip trembling a little as John squeezes his hand firmly.

Oh god, something’s definitely wrong because John rarely breaks down like this, rarely shows himself to be vulnerable and breakable unless he truly is upset.

What is John going to do?

Where is he going?

Because judging from the shift in conversation… he sure as hell isn’t going to Harry’s.

Where are you going? Sherlock wants to press.
I can go along too you know, you don't have to go alone. I made that mistake years ago and look where we've ended up.

Please just tell me something! Anything!

“You’ll be safe, right?” Sherlock questions instead, blurring out the words in what he hopes is well disguised anguish as he searches John’s eyes for an answer, a sign… anything that will give him an inkling about what the hell John is about to do.

John chuckles nervously at Sherlock’s query, giving Sherlock’s hand a few strong squeezes before letting it go.

“I’ll be fine,” he says as he gets up from the table, pushing his chair in and grabbing his travelling bag.

“Trust me.”

He flashes Sherlock a warm smile before inclining his head towards the door, beckoning Sherlock to follow him.

Sherlock rises from his seat reluctantly, slightly disappointed that John hasn’t really clarified anything by that vague statement of his as he makes his way to the door with John by his side.

They climb down the stairs in silence, Sherlock knowing full well that each step he takes will be a step away from John.

And it hurts.

A little.

But John will be back soon. He will be coming back this time.

And he’ll be safe. Whatever it is, John’s promised him that he’ll be safe.

Sherlock has that much to hang onto at least.

John pushes the door open, the brass hinges creaking with the effort as he steps out into crisp, cold air.

Sherlock stands at the threshold, leaning against the door frame as John turns around one last time, flashing him a warm smile.

Smiling weakly in return, Sherlock watches as a black cab pulls up outside their apartment, clearly John had called for one when Sherlock had still been deep in thought.

John turns back to face the cab, his shoulders stiff and level. He huffs, taking a half-step forward before he pauses, halting mid-step. His left foot hovers over the pavement, his body trapped in limbo for a split second before he twists around swiftly, making his way back towards Sherlock.

His footsteps resound resolutely against the concrete pavement as he stretches his arms around Sherlock’s torso, locking him in a tight embrace.

He snuffles into Sherlock’s shoulder, burying his face in the crook of his neck as Sherlock struggles to hold back tears, mimicking John’s movements by extending an arm around John, clutching his jacket tightly.
He doesn’t want to let go.

Ever.

But John sniffs softly, slackening his grip on Sherlock as he takes a step back, making his way down the steps as Sherlock’s fingers slip from John’s shoulder, slinking down slowly to rest by his side.

John’s eyes fall, transfixed on the pavement for a beat before he raises his head once again. He nods his head in Sherlock’s direction, a solid, controlled movement, before taking off for the cab.

He doesn’t look back this time.

The cab’s engine revs, a loud, guttural spurt as it shifts away from the pavement, out onto the street.

Sherlock remains at the threshold of the doorway, standing there stock still as he watches the cab speeding away, off into the busy intersection.

It rounds the corner and just like that…

John is gone.

----

Sherlock is bored.

Very bored.

He has absolutely nothing to do now that John is gone.

Well, there’ve been some experiments that he’s been meaning to try, but they no longer hold any appeal now that John isn’t around.

John won’t be there at the end of a long day to scoff at him, smile at him or even ask him questions about his experiments anymore so what’s the point really.

Sherlock sighs, twisting over on the sofa so that his dressing gown twines around him like a blue, silk cocoon.

One of his arms hangs off the sofa, dangling centimetres from the ground, limp and lifeless as Sherlock stares into blank space, his eyes unconsciously fixed on John’s chair.

He’d begun the afternoon a worried mess, pacing about the apartment frantically like a madman, conjuring up, ridiculous but still possible, dangerous situations that John could have gotten himself into within the 3 hours after he had left.

He could have been kidnapped for all he’d known.

No not likely, he’d told Bill Wiggins to keep an ear out for any news regarding John…

But still possible.

He’d considered calling Mycroft up and begging him to watch over John before Mrs Hudson had
come in to tell him that if he were to continue like this for the rest of the afternoon, he was probably going to wear a hole in a carpet.

So Sherlock had since stopped thinking about it altogether.

If anything happened to John, he'd definitely be the first to know.

There's no point in worrying over something he has no control over.

Which is how he'd ended up here, sprawled over the sofa in a sulk.

He sighs again, the listless sound cutting through the stillness of the flat like a knife.

There is absolutely nothing to do, absolutely nothing at all… but OH.

Sherlock rises from the sofa, yawning loudly as he heads towards the staircase.

He hasn't been into John’s room in a while, in fact, he hasn’t been in the room since John has returned.

He used to go to John’s room every now and then, making his way upstairs every time he had a particularly hard case and John wasn't free. It'd been far easier to conjure John up in his mind palace in that room than anywhere else in the flat, surrounded by John's familiar, still lingering smell and the accumulated detritus he’d left behind from the 2 years that he’d lived there. Despite this, the John in his mind palace had only been an adequate sounding board, nothing more, nothing less. His imaginings had always paled in comparison to the real John, whose opinions or responses had always been unexpected and stimulating.

He hadn't needed the room since he'd arrived back from hospital.

After all, he had the real thing.

He knows full well that what he’s about to do is an invasion of John’s privacy, knows that what he’s about to do is NOT GOOD AT ALL, but he doesn’t care as he lifts wary eyes to the flight of stairs before him, ascending them steadily like a man on a mission.

John hasn’t been in the room for a while either, ever since he’s started sleeping in Sherlock’s room to be exact. But still, most of his belongings should probably be there, exuding a familiar, soothing quality that nothing Sherlock owns possesses. The atmosphere there will probably help to calm him down, quieten down his racing thoughts and allow him to function normally again.

Yes, going to the room is probably a good idea.

Sherlock reaches the end of the stairs, now face to face with a black, wooden door.

John won't mind… won’t he?

The hinges creak from disuse as Sherlock shoves the door open roughly, the wood from the top of the door flaking off as it brushes against the door frame.

He makes a mental note to remind John to oil the hinges as soon as possible.

He allows the door to swing shut behind him as he steps into the room.

It’s just as he’d expected it to be, really.
Before John had come back, the room had been bereft of human touch. The cupboards had been empty, the floor dusty and the windows stained with London soot. That had mostly been due to the fact that Mrs Hudson hadn’t come up here to clean since John had left, choosing to throw a plastic sheet over the bed frame and some of the drawers instead of committing to regular dusting.

But now that John is back, the room seems a lot brighter, a lot more welcoming - or maybe that’s just because the windows have been cleaned.

Bright sunlight spills through the windows as Sherlock saunters over to John’s bed. He feels comfortable and relaxed, enclosed in a safe bubble of time where the horrors of his and John’s reality cannot touch him. Smiling at the small amount of clutter that has started to accumulate on John’s bedside table, he sets himself down on the bed with a soft “floompf”, beginning to examine the items resting there.

There’s nothing much out of the ordinary to be honest. Just a small jar of sleeping pills (which seems to have gone unopened for a long period of time), a fine-toothed comb and brush (probably obtained from a hotel somewhere) and oh… there’s a picture.

Sherlock picks up the clear glass photo frame, wiping away the thin layer of dust as he peers at the photograph.

It’s a photo of John and him.

This must have been taken sometime after he’d come home to London because Sherlock looks more gaunt, more weary than he normally does. And it must have been on one of the few occasions that John had come over to Baker Street since the photo has clearly been taken in their kitchen.

Sherlock is bent over the wooden table in abject fury, staring down a petri dish full of fungus as if it had personally offended him.

John’s face fills up the bottom right corner of the photo (clearly the photo had been a selfie), trying his best to mimic Sherlock’s foul expression.

It doesn’t look remotely like him at all, Sherlock scowls as the John in the photo struggles to match Sherlock’s downturned eyebrows with his. Who does John think he’s trying to emulate? The grinch?

He doesn’t realise that he’s smiling until it’s too late.

He flips the photo frame downwards, setting it down before he bursts into giggles.

God, he knew that John treasured their friendship immensely but having a photo of them next to his bedside table? He hadn’t expected that.

He grins broadly as his eyes flick back down to the photo frame resting on his lap.

Wait… photographs aren’t usually that thick.

He frowns, lifting the photo frame up into the sunlight.

There’s a clear silhouette of another photo right behind the one of him and John.

Sherlock flips open the back of the frame, pulling out the metal stand, revealing a yellowish, flimsy sheet of print.

Strange, he’d expected it to have been a photo of John and Mary. This photo is way too old for that.
He peels the sheet of paper off the photo frame slowly before flipping it around.

Major James Sholto smiles up at him through faded print, as does John. Their faces and grins frozen in time as they beam up at Sherlock. Their arms are resting on each other’s shoulders, smiling for what seems to have been a candid military shot.

They’re both dressed in their army fatigues (hell John really looks fit in them) with an off-white concrete wall as their background of choice.

John looks so young here, the creases and folds of his face softened to round curves, his eyes bright and his hair golden and spiky. God, he looks so beautiful.

Sherlock smooths his fingers over John’s face gently, blushing slightly before moving on to examine Major Sholto.

The picture had clearly been taken before Sholto had taken the new recruits out into battle, judging from the fact that Sholto’s face is smooth and devoid of any scars.

He’s smiling in the photo, which is unexpected because the man that Sherlock is familiar with is bitter and angry…

Maybe it was because John had been there.

Sherlock had never asked John about Sholto, come to think of it. He barely knew anything about the man, aside from the research he’d done on him before the wedding. John had never mentioned Sholto to him, in fact, he’d never really talked about his army days at all. But Sherlock is certain that if Sholto had really meant that much to John, that he would have at least mentioned him once? Because they had definitely been close, the way they’d danced around each other at the wedding had convinced Sherlock that they had to at least be ex best friends.

*Or ex-lovers*, his brain helpfully supplants.

Sherlock sighs, carefully slotting the sheet of paper back into the photo frame, setting it back on the bedside table.

There are still so many things that John has not told him, so many things that they’ve never discussed and Sherlock berates himself for never bringing up the topic sooner.

Now it’d just be too awkward.

Well, then again, back then wouldn’t have been any better…

But at least Sherlock would have gotten a clear answer from John.

*What was the nature of your relationship with Major Sholto?*

*Did you love him?*

*Did he love you?*

*If you loved him then... could it be possible that you’re bisexual?*

*Does that mean that you could love me too?*

Sherlock buries his face in his palms.
John doesn’t like men. God, why does he always have to make things hard for himself.

Why is he still harping over this even though it isn’t and definitely will never be true?

In fact, he should probably stop thinking about it altogether.

The more he thinks about it the worse it will get.

He lifts his eyes to the photograph on the stand once again, John’s hilarious expression wrenching a small smile out of him as he picks up the photo frame once again.

His friendship with John is all that he has now.

And even though it may not be much, or even what Sherlock wanted...

It’s enough.

He sets the photo frame down again, giving it one last lingering grin before poring over the rest of the items on the bedside table. There’s a small stack of receipts in one corner, mostly from Tesco (John refuses to shop at Waitrose) and two medical textbooks that have been recently opened and bookmarked. Clearly, John had been doing some reading before bedtime before he’d moved down permanently to Sherlock’s room.

He pulls open the bedside drawer, revealing an extremely crinkled 50 pound note (how long has that been in there for?), a box of condoms (old, clearly very very old) and a bottle of lube (which seems to be pretty new and Sherlock DOES NOT WANT TO KNOW).

He shoves the items away, peering into the wooden drawer.

There’s not much else in it to be honest, just a bit of fluff towards the back of drawer and oh, there’s a tiny plastic box…

He picks it up, holding it in his hands before popping open the catch swiftly.

The sides of the box are covered with soft sponge, wrapped around a metal object that gleams brightly in the sunlight.

He picks apart the sponge gently, revealing a metal thumb drive.

Not just any metal thumbdrive - it’s the AGRA thumbdrive.

Sherlock hasn’t seen it since that fateful night. That night when he’d forcefully revealed Mary’s true identity to John and told John that everything that had happened up till then had been entirely his fault. And to top it off, he’d nearly suffered a stroke.

It’s probably one of the worst nights he’s ever had.

He turns the thumb drive over in his hands, peering inquisitively at the lettering drawn on in black permanent marker.

He’d forced himself not to think about the driver in the past month. It was John’s to keep, the information John’s to read and Sherlock would truly be a horrible person if he were to look through it.

He stuffs the gleaming metal object back in its casing, slamming the lid shut as he dumps the box back into the drawer.
He came up to this room to calm himself down goddammit, not rummage through John’s possessions.

He shouldn’t have come up here, he thinks to himself as he makes his way to the door. It would have been better if he hadn’t found the thumbdrive at all. God, now it’s going to drive him up the wall just thinking about it.

But Sherlock Holmes is a man of self-control, of abstinence.

He knows how to control himself when he needs to.

----

It turns out that Sherlock Holmes is indeed a horrible person.

He sighs to himself as he clutches the gleaming driver in his hand, making his way down the stairs from John’s room for the second time.

He’d tried to control himself, he really had.

It hadn’t worked though.

Which is why he’s up at 2 am in the morning, flipping open his laptop and inserting the thumb drive into the USB drive like a blithering idiot who has no sense of self-control.

He’d managed to keep himself away from John’s room for the better part of 5.64 hours, finally caving in slightly after 1.49 a.m. in the morning when he had decided that he had had enough of speculation.

He truly is a terrible person with no sense of respect for anybody else’s privacy.

He blinks sleepily as the monitor lights up, bathing his features in bright blue.

He’s using his own laptop this time, deciding that despite the fact that John’s laptop is a newer model and is probably a lot faster, that he probably wouldn’t forgive himself for being such a thick-headed arsehole. Infringing John’s privacy once tonight is already one too many times.

He opens the file explorer application, mousing over the USB drive icon before clicking on it.

He frowns as the screen lights up in bright white light.

The screen is empty.

There’s nothing on the thumb drive. Absolutely nothing whatsoever.

It hadn’t automatically reformatted itself during the setting up process had it?

Sherlock checks.

It hadn’t.

And it clearly says “0GB out of 5GB” on the driver’s “information” menu.
Had Mary given John the wrong USB stick?

Or had she deliberately given him an empty thumb drive?

Why?

Why had she lied to him again? After all that? Couldn’t she have just stopped with that one final lie about her identity? Why did she have to take it one step further?

Sherlock leans back in his seat, pulling the thumb drive out from the USB port roughly. It doesn’t matter if he “safely removes” it or not, there’s nothing on it.

Absolutely nothing.

How could Mary have done that to John again? How had she managed to pass him that driver without even batting an eyelid? Surely she must have had felt guilty at some point!

He shoves the thumb drive into his pocket, making his way up the stairs.

Maybe she’d really given him the wrong thumb drive? Maybe she had two, one a decoy and- oh god that is so implausible.

He is done making excuses for the woman who shot himself in the heart, both physically and metaphorically. He is done defending Mary, done trying to reason her actions. Just because John loves her doesn’t mean that he has to too.

He places the thumb drive back into the casing carefully before retreating from the room hurriedly.

Mary had said that she’d loved John, asserting that “fact” several times through her belief that keeping John in the dark would “keep him safe”.

But this? This is a whole new low.

Sherlock sighs as he pushes his bedroom door open wearily, stepping into his room.

He’d thought better of Mary, thought that she’d have more shame.

Well, apparently he’d been wrong.

Fuck this, he’ll be nice to her if John wants him to but otherwise… he most definitely won’t.

That’s it, he thinks to himself, that’s the end of even pretending to be remotely civil to Mary when he’s not in John’s presence. He’s done with her, done with her lies…

But is John?

That’s really the question.

Because Mary is toxic. She’s single-handedly poisoned the well between her and John, basing their whole relationship on a lie and rolling with it without any ounce of shame.

She’s even managed to fuel a lot of bad blood between Sherlock and her within the span of a few months.

Even if he weren’t to count in the gunshot and the near death experience, her day-to-day actions would have already set up a pretty decent case for Sherlock’s strong dislike of her. One of her
favourite pastimes seems to include making derogatory comments targeting him, deliberately putting him down and making him feel like he’s less capable than he really is.

“We weren’t the first you know.”

“Seriously, “Shezza” though?”

“Do you really think that this is what's best for him? Living with a flatmate who is well known for cocaine addiction and destructive tendencies?”

“If you really loved him, you would do what’s best for him.”

He is seriously so sick of her patronising attitude and frankly, his patience is starting to wear thin.

But then again… he’d made a vow.

“Mary and John, whatever it takes, whatever happens, from now on I swear I will always be there. Always.”

He can’t go back on that, he can’t.

He’s done with making unfulfilled promises, of lying to those that he loves, of always pretending. Apparently, Mary hasn’t made that decision yet but that’s okay, he isn’t Mary.

So when the time comes, he’ll just have to grit his teeth and help Mary and John through whatever circumstance that comes.

Even if it hurts him.

Even if it ruins him.

Anything for John, he thinks as he drops off to sleep.

Anything for John.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will be up very very soon

Contact me on tumblr
"It suddenly feels like there’s water in his ears, like he’s submerged underwater and hearing John’s speech in garbled, distorted form. Because John couldn’t possibly have meant that, could he?"

HEHE HI!!! Special surprise chapter for you guys uwu. Hope you guys like it. OOOHOOO things are getting hot in here

See the end of the chapter for more notes

254 hours since John has come home.

Sherlock has never been one for effusive emotion.

Everyone knows that.

He’s never truly let his walls down far enough to let anyone see that more emotional side of him. The side that cried an ocean when Redbeard had to be put down, the side that curled up into John’s chair and bawled the night of the wedding.

But all that pent up emotion has to go somewhere.

It goes into his music.

Dust swirls in rising columns, sparkling in the morning sunlight as he raises his violin to his chin. He lifts his bow, resting white strands of rosinied horsehair on silver strings.

He can’t take it anymore. He can’t. The past few weeks have been extremely emotionally taxing on him, draining his energy in ways that he could never have expected.

He loves John, he really does, but at some point, he wishes that he could find a way to stop caring, to stop these emotions from dictating his life… from dictating him.

But he can’t.

So in the meantime, he’ll have to numb the pain somehow, provide an outlet for these taxing emotions, find a space to express his grief, his anger… his joy.

He sighs, arching his bow upwards.

And begins to play.
His bow draws quiet notes from the strings, gentle chords that whirl through the air, pervading the room around him.

If he’s going to pour out his emotions into song, he might as well start from the beginning.

The beginning… Before he'd even known that John had existed.

He’d been so alone before he’d met John. Well, he hadn’t known really, back then. He’d only realised what he’d been missing out on when had John had come into his life.

So he translates his feelings of solitude into disjointed chords played in pianissimo, a broken and mellow chorus that slowly becomes softer and softer till he’s merely plucking at strings.

And then, a bold crescendo, an explosion of sound as Sherlock reminisces about that fateful day that he’d met John, when he’d suddenly found a beacon in the darkness, a possible colleague and even more importantly, a friend.

The notes climb higher and higher, a smooth, vibrant melody that rises to the heavens as Sherlock remembers the thrilling cases, the blood pumping through his veins as he soared beneath the London sky with John by his side.

And then… silence.

Sherlock lifts his bow with a violent flourish, holding it high in the air as he remembers how time had seemed to stop when he'd fallen from Barts, when he'd lost everything he'd ever wanted in a split second.

He feels the wind in his hair as the silence draws him in. The feeling of finality on that dreadful day envelops him as he once again takes a step off that ledge, plummeting to the ground like a bird with clipped wings.

He hits the ground. A broken man broken once again.

“One more miracle, Sherlock, for me.”

“Please don't be dead.”

And even though he's broken, a dead man in every sense of the word. There is one thing that he is - that he can be, just for John. And that's a miracle maker. He rises from the ground, a phoenix reborn from ashes.

And starts to run.

His bow draws violent, sharp pinpricks of quavers from his violin. A cutting, clear noise that shatters the silence surrounding him as he lets the pain of being far away from John, of being far away from London, bleed from his fingertips, setting his bow on fire as he waltzes through gunfights, sways through concrete buildings with only a pseudonym for a mask and dances away from death in the span of a second.

The discordant notes get louder and louder, swirling their way through the warm, sunlight stained air till…

Tragedy.

Despair.
Sherlock’s bow trembles as he begins a sombre chorus, a series of low, long-drawn out notes that seep into his skin.

He'd nearly made it. He'd nearly completed his final mission.

He had been about to go home.

But then Serbia had happened.

Sherlock’s lips wobble as he continues his melancholy tune, remembering the pain of being captured, of being tortured, of wanting everything to stop - to just stop.

But John had been waiting for him.

And so had Mycroft.

He draws now from his joy, from his elation of finally being able to go home, of being able to see John, gliding his bow smoothly across the strings in a bold crescendo.

But he had come back and found John with Mary. He'd come back and found John in the midst of a marriage proposal.

John had moved on.

He had not.

He drops his violin for a short moment, breathing heavily before raising his bow to the strings once again.

He begins again, a gentle, soothing melody filling the room as he remembers rebuilding his friendship with John once again. Starting from the rubble, making something new out of the ashes and cinders that had once belonged to a relationship he had single-handedly razed to the ground.

He loses himself in the music, remembering the thrill of once again being on a case with John, of finally getting to see him again, of getting to talk to him again. But it was different from before, John was engaged, was in love with Mary and Sherlock had to step aside. For the sake of Mary, for the sake of John… and for his own sake.

He doesn’t realise he’s playing Mary and John’s waltz till he’s a minute into the melody.

It had been a difficult piece to compose. He’d struggled to draw the music out of him, every drop of ink on each manuscript paper feeling like a drop of spilt blood. Because despite the fact that he’d successfully convinced himself that John was better off with Mary, there had still been a part of him, a small part of him that had wondered:

Why do you love her John?

What do you see in her?

What do you see in her that you do not see in me?

It had torn at him from the inside, the duties of being a best man.

Because Sherlock cannot do anything by halves.

He’d thrown himself into wedding planning, forcing himself to forget all about the wedding while
simultaneously making sure that it was all that he could think of. John had presented him with a front row seat to his own funeral, but since it was John, how could he have said no?

Every dawn had brought some form of new heartache for him. He remembers it now. The way his heart had seemed to crumble to dust every day at the sight of John and Mary’s invitations, John and Mary’s floral arrangements, John and Mary’s guests, John and Mary’s-

Because when had it become John and Mary?

When had it stopped being Sherlock and John?

But nothing had broken him more than the day itself.

“If anyone can show just cause why this couple cannot lawfully be joined together in matrimony, let them. Speak now or forever hold your peace,” the preacher had said, almost bellowing in Sherlock’s ear.

He’d wanted to raise his hand right then and there, a silent rejection of his best friend’s bid for marriage… no even worse - he’d wanted to scream.

He’d wanted to yell at Mary, to yell at John, to burst into tears because god what was he doing? Why had he agreed to this? He shouldn’t have ever come here.

He remembers wiping away tears in the bathroom later, soaking a spot in his handkerchief as he calmed himself down in a stall, desperately wishing for his heart rate to slow.

Because what did he know of love?

What did he know of John?

Mary had been there for John when he hadn’t.

He hadn't been there to soothe John through the loss of his best friend, hadn't been there to love him, to care for him.

So what did that make him?

A shit friend basically, he thinks to himself.

Of the worse kind.

He plays on, remembering how it'd felt the first time he'd played this piece in public. Of how his heart had clenched when he'd seen John's hands resting on Mary’s waist, guiding his wife in an intimate waltz.

It had been a thorn in his side, a final, resounding reminder of how John was now irrevocably Mary’s.

“Till death do us part.”

And deducing that Mary had been pregnant? That had been the worst of all.

John had his life together now, a loving wife, a future child… And Sherlock should have been happy for him, should have cheered him on like a good best friend would have, but he couldn’t… he couldn’t.
Because somewhere along the way he’d messed up. He’d lost John and everything and oh what did he have left now except for a broken heart and an empty home.

He didn’t even get to dance that day, didn’t even get to drown his sorrows in flighty, giddy footsteps that would have helped him to forget John, forget Mary, forget everything.

But he has time now.

Sherlock steps in time with the music, segueing from Mary and John’s waltz to something far more upbeat, something far more lively.

His bow flies over the strings, a vibrant melody that carries him around the room. Wisps of rosin rise from the waist of his violin as he spins around the room, managing a perfect pirouette without his bow leaving the strings.

He feels absolutely alive, his entire body set aflame as he twists and turns around the room…

Somebody gasps.

And it’s not him.

Sherlock lowers his violin at the sound, his feet halting mid-step as he turns to face the door.

It’s John.

John’s home. John’s back.

He looks none the worse for wear, his eyebags look a little darker, his hair a little ruffled but otherwise John looks to be in the pink of health.

Sherlock lays his violin down on the table, moving to meet John when he notices something…

His fingers are bleeding, just the tips… but they’re bleeding all right.

He lifts his hand up to inspect them, rotating his slender fingers as blood drips in spirals, translucent streams that trickle from the cuts in his skin.

It’s nothing much to be worried about really, the cuts are barely skin-deep.

He sees a flash of movement in his peripheral vision, turning to discover that John has dropped his bags and made his way into their- no his bedroom.

He reappears with a small medical kit, ushering Sherlock into the bathroom as he unwraps the plasters and pulls up the antiseptic cream. He reaches for Sherlock’s hand, closing his fingers around his palm gently in a slackened grip.

Directing Sherlock towards the sink, he washes Sherlock’s fingers tenderly under warm water, scrubbing the dried blood off his nails as Sherlock winces at the sting.

John shushes him with a quiet “shhh, it’s okay.” as he towels off Sherlock’s fingers, ensuring that they’re completely dry till he applies antiseptic cream attentively over the cuts. He finishes by carefully wrapping plasters around his wounds, making sure that the plasters aren’t tight enough to cut off his circulation before guiding Sherlock out to the living room, making his way to the sofa.

He waits till Sherlock is properly seated till he begins.
“Sherlock…”

Oh god, Sherlock thinks. Is he going to get reprimanded? So much for having John back.

“Sherlock, that was absolutely amazing,” John finishes, flashing a shy smile at Sherlock as he takes a seat on the sofa. In response, Sherlock stares dumbly back, his eyes wide, absolutely flabbergasted.

He hadn’t expected that.

“I didn’t know you could dance like that! I mean I knew you could waltz, that much I knew... but that! That was another thing altogether!” John gushes, his grin wider than ever as Sherlock averts his gaze, twisting away from John so that he won’t be able to see the blush that he’s certain is riding high on his cheeks.

“And also, you’re a madman really. Playing till your fingers bled? Sherlock you should have known better. I really can’t leave you for more than one day, can I?” he chuckles, raising Sherlock’s hand to inspect his fingers once again.

“I didn’t know they were bleeding,” Sherlock huffs in response, “I-”

“Wait… Sherlock how long have you been playing for exactly?” John interrupts, his voice tinged with worry as he whips his face upwards, peering anxiously at him.

Sherlock raises his head to look at John, frowning at him as he bends to inspect his watch.

It’s just after 6 in the evening.

Had he really been playing for that long?

“Have you been sleeping even? God, Sherlock you look like shit,” John exclaims as he shifts closer to Sherlock, examining his face with doctorly concern.

He reaches for Sherlock’s cheek, his fingers tracing a line down Sherlock’s eye bags as Sherlock wills his face to remain neutral.

They’ve never been this intimate out of bed, John always choosing to maintain a friendly distance from Sherlock during daytime, whether it’d been in the flat or out of it.

This is new.

John draws his fingers away from Sherlock’s face, Sherlock feeling like his skin has just been sizzled by a red-hot branding iron as John smiles warmly up at him.

“I have,” Sherlock replies indignantly, struggling to keep himself calm, “I just didn’t sleep very well is all.”

John sighs. It’s not the “oh god Sherlock why would you do such a thing” kind of sigh but rather the joking “what am I going to do with you Sherlock” kind of sigh so Sherlock smiles in response.

“And you’ve been eating?” John continues. “I hope?”

“Don’t worry about that, Mrs Hudson had me covered,” Sherlock replies, flashing John a worn out grin.

That elicits a chuckle from John. He leans back into the cushions, his elbow resting on the top of the sofa as he cradles his face in his palm, beaming at Sherlock almost adoringly.
Which is strange because John has never been this transparently affectionate since… since the stag night? That magical night when all their inhibitions had been down, when Sherlock had been so sure that something had been about to happen, would have happened if he’d just taken that small leap of faith…

But John’s senses aren’t dulled by alcohol anymore, his feelings not unknowingly put on display, not like before.

Back then he’d written it off as friendly affection, amplified by alcohol and the excitement and enthusiasm that John had for his upcoming marriage.

But this? This isn’t the same. John definitely isn’t drunk, definitely isn’t under the influence of… of anything really.

What is he doing?

Or is Sherlock reading too much into it again.

Maybe the answer could be found in the location that John had visited.

Yes, where had he gone exactly?

Sherlock scrutinises John once again, hoping to pick up some new evidence now that John is back. He narrows his gaze, almost squinting before relaxing back into the sofa, giving up completely. He’s still unable to successfully deduce anything about John’s recent trip. No location. No contacts made. Nothing. Zilch.

Or maybe that’s just because he’s tired.

“Sherlock?” John queries, examining Sherlock once again.

Sherlock jolts himself out of his thoughts, turning his focus to John.

“I’m fine,” he scoffs, rolling his eyes at John as John sniggers.

“Alright,” John replies, beaming brightly, “Alright.”

They lapse into a comfortable silence. Sherlock staring up at the ceiling while John leans back into the sofa, turning his face to watch Sherlock.

After five minutes however, John starts to fiddle with his fingers, his nails tapping incessantly against his palms as his brow furrows, his features taking on a look of intense concentration. Sherlock watches him out the corner of his eye, seeing John open his mouth for a moment before slamming it shut once again.

“You’ve got a question,” he says smoothly, straightening his back as he turns to face John, his friend’s eyes’ wide.

“It’s a bit personal thou-”

“It really doesn’t matter,” Sherlock retorts, smiling down at John.

John pauses for a moment, as if pondering how to phrase his question properly.

“When did you learn how to dance?”
Strange, Sherlock thinks. John’s asked him this before, sort of, when they’d practised for his wedding, when John had carried Sherlock in his arms and it had been easy to imagine, even if only for a second, that John was his and he was John’s.

Sherlock had given a rather vague answer back then, dismissing the question with a tight-lipped “since I was young” before moving on to stress the position of John’s hands on his dance partner’s back.

He’s ready to give a more solid answer now.

“I was 8,” he begins, his eyes flicking to John who nods in approval before continuing.

“I started with ballet. It was at the time, the only dance form I was interested in. The dancers I had seen in theatres had moved with such grace, with such poise that I sought to emulate them. It had originally been a flighty dream of mine to become a professional dancer till my father turned it into a reality.”

“He encouraged me to do start dance lessons, privately of course, I couldn’t stand other children my age-” John sniggers at this, prompting Sherlock to beam back, “- He paid for them all too, very generous of him.”

“He’d been a dancer once as well, not a professional danseur but a dancer all the same. He used to do ballet in university for recreation and he thought that I could do the same or even better.”

“I loved it truly, but it soon became apparent that even though I was improving much as a dancer, that it was something that would eventually become a mere hobby, nothing more.”

“I discontinued my lessons, they weren’t necessary any longer since I wasn’t planning on pursuing it as a career. I stuck to doing solo shows instead, mostly for charity events. Well, if I was ever asked to that is. I would still practice in private when I had the time. But eventually I became more interested in chemistry and detective work so the dancing stopped altogether.”

“I never really lost interest in it,” Sherlock continues, remembering dancing alone in the sanctity of his room during his younger years, no one watching him, no one judging him, just him with the music coursing through his veins, bringing his body to life in song. “It’s always been something I’ve enjoyed doing.”

John hums in assertion, flicking his eyes to Sherlock once again.

“So… you really love to dance? Don’t you?” he asks tentatively, his voice shaking slightly. Sherlock gazes at him, his eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

“John if there’s something you really want to ask, go ahead,” he says softly, turning himself around to face John directly.

John swallows, blinking shyly before raising his head, looking Sherlock directly in the eye.

“Why didn’t you dance with anyone at the reception… that… that night?” John struggles to say, his voice cracking a little.

Sherlock stiffens at the question, his fingers clenching rhythmically as he waits for John to finish.

“I mean, you love to dance. And you dance really well, I mean you’re gorgeous really when you’re dancing-” wait what, Sherlock thinks, “You could have danced with anyone really so why did you
leave?”

Oh, that’s what John really wants to ask.

Hedging, that’s what John’s been doing, hedging.

“I mean, did you think I didn’t notice? You left your bloody violin back on the stage. I had to pass it to you. Not to mention the fact that a few minutes after I finished dancing with Mary, I went looking for you and you were nowhere to be found!”

Sherlock’s staring at John the way a child caught in an act of wrongdoing would, cowering internally under John’s perceptive gaze.

So John had known all along.

Shit.

“John...” he begins. It feels like his brain has caught a bad case of pins and needles because it hurts to think. He doesn’t know what to say next, doesn’t know what course of action will not implicate him in his love for John.

What can he say really?

John seems to have picked up on his internal dilemma because he’s shaking his head, rising from the sofa.

God, now he’s gone and ruined it all. John knows. He knows. Maybe he’s known for a long time already and was just waiting for Sherlock to confirm it for him. He’s going to leave now an-

“Fuck this, let’s dance.”

Sherlock lifts his head, meeting John’s stern gaze. John’s face is solid as granite, his eyes a deep cobalt as he extends a hand towards Sherlock, wiggling the tips of his fingers as if to coax Sherlock into taking up his offer.

“Wait what?” Sherlock spouts, almost breathless.

Is John joking?

He doesn’t look like he’s joking.

What’s happening exactly.

“Didn’t you hear me?” John says assuredly, his voice remaining bold and resolute while carrying an undertone of affection.

“Let’s. Dance.”

It suddenly feels like there’s water in his ears, like he’s submerged underwater and hearing John’s speech in garbled, distorted form. Because John couldn’t possibly have meant that, could he?

He blinks in response, stunned to the point of silence.

Why does John want to dance even, what will that accomplish?

And come to think of it, he’s infringed on the sanctity of John and Mary’s marriage enough already,
allowing himself to partake in semi-dubious activities with John. He’s shared a bed with him, cuddled with him and even kissed his wrist once. But if they were to dance, without even “marriage preparation” as an excuse- That would be way too intimate, even for Sherlock, bordering on even coercing John into infidelity in his terms.

Sherlock has always viewed dancing with a partner as a “semi-sacred” act, only dancing with people he’d deemed “worthy” enough. Because when Sherlock dances, he bares his heart, giving his soul over to his partner in those few minutes of stage time as he synchronises his movements with theirs, anticipating their unpredictability with flawless intuition as if they’re both one single unit.

He’s never experienced that with John, never truly letting himself go during those private dance sessions. Their movements had felt mechanical and robotic, Sherlock donning a mask as he let John wrap a hand around his back, consistently instructing John on what to do instead of letting him figure it out himself, even though John was completely capable of holding his own in simple dance.

It had kept him sane, kept him from accidentally revealing anything he hadn’t wanted to. The only time he’d ever let himself go was on the night of their last practice session, when John had moved pre-emptively to grasp Sherlock’s back, keeping his chin a safe distance from Sherlock’s shoulder as he directed Sherlock around the room.

Sherlock had been glad that John hadn’t been able to see his face that time because if he had then their facade of “best friends” would have been over right then and there.

But he can’t do that again, can’t dance with John again unless he’s well and truly prepared to reveal everything he’s been hiding for the past few years. Keeping his feelings a secret has seriously taken a toll on him, wearing him down especially over the past few months. John’s wedding had only accelerated that process, supplying a strong catalyst for the ruination of his cold, detached disguise.

He’ll not be able to hide it anymore.

Not this time.

And if they dance and John’s suspicions are confirmed (because John clearly already suspects something), what will happen to their friendship? Will he be able to salvage it?

And what of his marriage? What if John finds out that all through the time that he’s been semi-intimate with him that Sherlock has been pining after him, wishing that they had been something more than friends. What of his marriage then?

Hah, maybe it won’t even matter to John.

He’ll just brush it off and go home, mention it to Mary and laugh at him with her, laugh at his flatmate’s stupidity at thinking he could ever have a shot with him.

God, Mary will be so insufferable.

Shit though whatever he says next will implicate him in some way or another. Even if he refuses to dance, John will be able to easily needle the real reason why out of him, John isn’t that stupid.

Gah! He’s running out of ideas!

John sighs deeply as Sherlock surfaces from his panicked thoughts, stalking over to the radio in the corner of the room. He plugs his phone in, the AVA chord clicking in place as a slow, soulful song begins to play. The music seems to bleed into the surrounding air, staining the room with gentle warmth as John reaches for Sherlock’s hand once again, holding his fingers merely inches from
Sherlock’s.

Sherlock fixes his eyes on John’s, his eyes flicking down to John’s extended fingers.

“But why?” he whispers, the sound as ephemeral as a wisp of smoke. “Why?”

John swallows, his eyes darting to Sherlock’s.

“You didn’t get to dance that night,” he begins sheepishly.

“This is my way of making up for it.”

His hand is still extended in invitation, his eyes dancing as he peers down at Sherlock, glimmering with the hope of acceptance.

*You know what, Sherlock* thinks, *Screw this, if John’s offering a dance he might as well take it. Who gives a shit about Mary. Who gives a shit about the fallout.*

*If this is going to be the last time he and John can maintain their status of “best friends”, he might as well go down dancing rather than keeping silent.*

His fingers clasp John’s tightly as he is pulled to stand.

*This is it then.*

*This is the end,* Sherlock thinks as John slinks an arm under his to rest on the curve of his back, raising his other arm in the air in a silent, smooth gesture. Sherlock takes his hand swiftly, closing his eyes.

1, 2, 3. 1, 2, 3.

And they’re off, soft socked feet whispering over dusty carpet as they step in time with the music, the air around them still, save for the soft music playing in the background.

He’s only taught John how to do the “male” part of the dance so he lets John take the lead once again as he directs their steps, matching John’s clumsy, unsure footing with his practiced, controlled steps as they twist and turn around the room.

“Tell me if your fingers hurt okay?” John murmurs, “If so we can stop and take a break.”

Sherlock frowns, puzzling over John’s pronouncement for a moment before remembering that his fingers are bandaged and bleeding.

Oops.

“Oh,” he breathes, flexing his fingers where they are interlaced with John’s.

John’s being extremely careful with Sherlock’s fingers, handling them so gently that one would think that they were made of glass. Normally, Sherlock would be annoyed by the gesture but for now...

“Yeah... yeah of course,” Sherlock finishes, slightly dazed as he flicks his eyes towards John’s.

John smiles up at him in response. His eyes are an iridescent blue, a gentle gradient that goes from dark blue at the tips of his irises to sparkling cerulean at the base.

He’s so beautiful, Sherlock thinks to himself, watching as John’s hair glows in the fading light, flecks
of gold shining bright against a canvas of silky grey. How is he so beautiful?

He lowers his gaze eventually, meeting John’s eyes. They peer up at Sherlock’s face, John’s expression full of unmasked affection. John seems distracted though, his pupils swirling into distant specks of dark blue before he grounds his gaze once again, tethering it to Sherlock’s as he takes a step forward, startling him a little as he moves closer into his personal space.

“You really are beautiful when you’re dancing,” John breathes, the words coming out in a rush as he draws Sherlock closer to him, his eyes filled with awe.

Sherlock blushes furiously under the attention, his footsteps stuttering for a moment before John hauls him back on his feet, grinning up at him.

Sherlock manages a smile back (thank god), squeezing John’s shoulder affectionately as John tightens his grip on his back. His fingers dig into Sherlock’s skin through his thin T-shirt, just enough pressure for it not to hurt, as they continue their way around the room, Sherlock staring at John like a lovesick teenager.

Sherlock can’t look away even if he wants to, not this time. He watches John as his features shift and morph in shadow, his chiselled chin beautifully defined as they move closer to the lamplight.

Sherlock’s chest tightens at the sight, warmth settling deep in his belly even though he knows that his face is a complete open book. Even though he knows that what he’s doing right now is erasing all the work he’s done in the past to hide his true feelings, to hide his love for John.

Every emotion that he’s experiencing right now is out there on display, his joy, his love, naked and exposed for John to see...

But he can’t be arsed to care really.

This is the time for zero inhibitions, for baring himself to John for the first and last time. Because this is the only chance he’s going to get anyway.

John smirks at him all of a sudden, almost making Sherlock halt in confusion. John gives Sherlock a split second to respond as he draws him in, tugging at his arm gently to signal that he wants to do a turn. Sherlock responds readily, twisting his arms together with John’s as he twirls into John’s space.

Their faces are now inches from each other, Sherlock’s eyes locked firmly onto John’s for a solid second before he’s twisting away from John again, their bodies turning back out to face each other, moving in time with the music as they sashay around the room. John’s hand slips lower to Sherlock’s waist, clutching the curve of his hip tightly as the music thrums in Sherlock’s ears, setting his skin ablaze.

They complete another circuit before John signals to Sherlock that he wants to try something else, his eyes gleaming as he lets go of Sherlock’s hand, Sherlock holding on for dear life (almost, well sort of) as John spins him out of his grip, drawing him back in smoothly with a gentle tug.

He smirks up at Sherlock once again, tut-tutting playfully at Sherlock’s mini mishap as Sherlock rolls his eyes, almost failing to catch that John is about to begin another spin.

He catches it in time however, his breath giddy in his chest as he twirls outwards once again, except that this time he manages to keep up on his toes. He decides to ad lib a little, letting go of John’s hand for a moment as he twirls independently, a leg bent akimbo to the other like a ballerina’s would before John catches him again.
It’s now his turn to smirk as John’s jaw drops open at Sherlock’s little improvisation. His gaze is full of abject wonder, of shock and delight and Sherlock preens under the attention, a motion similar to that of a peacock ruffling its feathers proudly in the presence of a mate. He smiles arrogantly down at John, watching as John regains his composure, his lips now upturned in a self-assured smile.

It’s then that John’s gaze turns almost predatory, his gaze zeroing in on Sherlock, causing him to falter for a moment.

What does John have in mind this time?

He knows what John’s about to do as soon as he unclasps his hand from Sherlock’s, resting it heavily on his back instead. He prepares himself for the ride, clutching John’s shoulder tightly as John bends him backwards, keeping his spine ramrod straight as Sherlock falls into John’s arms almost gracefully.

It’s a perfect dip really, Sherlock thinks, smiling up at John. John grins back, his cheeks cherry red from exhilaration...

And then Sherlock starts giggling, laughing at the absurdity of it all because how did they end up here really? Why are they even dancing too geez this is ridiculous.

Is he dreaming?

He hopes he never wakes up.

John begins to laugh too, his chest vibrating with the force of his rumbling laughter as he bends lower, his face now a mere inch from Sherlock’s.

And then as soon as it’s started, it stops. The room goes quiet as the laughter fizzles out and dies in Sherlock’s throat because holy crap John is suddenly way too close, way too close.

And when had the music stopped as well? Because the flat is now silent, save for the sound of John’s breaths, coming harsh and fast from exhaustion...

Or maybe not?

Because there’s no mistaking it now, John’s eyes are a solid black, his eyes more pupil than iris as he stares down at Sherlock. His gaze is hooded, his raw desire undisguised as it leaks through deep gold eyelashes. Sherlock stares back owlishly, his eyes widening in surprise.

If there was one thing he hadn’t been expecting, it was this.

John’s eyes flick downwards to the vee of Sherlock’s chest, raking his eyes over alabaster skin that disappears into thin T-shirt before turning his gaze to the long, pale column of Sherlock’s neck. John’s tongue darts out, licking a long stripe up his lip and Sherlock is absolutely mesmerised.

His eyes travel up to Sherlock’s lips as he rights their bodies, the moment stretching between them as John looks up almost inquisitively at Sherlock, cocking his head to the side as if asking for permission for something.

Sherlock nods vehemently, his brain turning to soup as he locks eyes with John, his focus narrowing down to him and nothing else.

John gazes up at Sherlock, his affection unconcealed as he reaches a calloused palm to Sherlock’s face, smoothing it over his sharp cheekbones. Sherlock leans into the touch, almost cat-like, purring
softly at the attention as John raises his other hand, resting it on Sherlock’s neck.

He’s leaning in before he realises it, John too in fact, bringing Sherlock forward with a gentle tug, pulling their bodies flush.

The blush on Sherlock’s cheek deepens to a dark maroon as John drags the hand on Sherlock’s neck upwards, scraping rough fingernails up pale skin into tangled curls, tugging hard.

Sherlock moans at the sensation, the sound unconcealed and unrestrained. It's unlike before, when they'd been in bed together and he'd bitten his lip to stifle any unbidden embarrassing noises, when he'd struggled to keep his desire for John a secret.

It's all on display now.

John doesn't seem to mind though.

John growls in response, a rough, animalistic noise that goes straight to Sherlock’s cock. He reaches around John’s shoulders, fingers digging into John’s shoulder blades as John leans in, licking his way up Sherlock’s neck, rough tongue prickling against smooth skin.

Sherlock is punch drunk on endorphins, his eyes glazed over as John licks his way up to his ear, nibbling the lobe gently. Sherlock sighs, relaxing back into John’s grip.

Is this really happening?

Is it?

John draws his face away from Sherlock’s slowly, coarse stubble brushing against smooth skin as he pulls away to get a good look at Sherlock’s face.

“Are you alright?” he whispers, “Is it too much-”

“No it’s okay,” Sherlock breathes back, his breaths coming out hard and fast.

“I… Sherlock I…” John begins, looking extremely perplexed, as if willing himself to say something but the words won’t come.

Sherlock watches on, his eyes wide as John steps impossibly forward, a hand caressing his cheek as John gazes up at him with imploring eyes.

“John,” he says, a statement, an answer, a promise all at once as John smiles warmly up at him.

He's bending forward before he realises it, long dark lashes brushing against pale skin as his eyes fall closed.

And John must have moved forward as well because soon Sherlock’s nose knocks against his, John's breaths coming out in puffs of warmth against his lips.

It's John who closes the final distance between them... which is not much of a surprise really. In all of Sherlock’s fantasies, John had always been the first one to make a move.

John's lips soar upwards to claim his with a violence akin to that of a drowning man desperately seeking air. He winds his fingers tighter around Sherlock’s neck, the fingers in his hair tangling further into his curls to draw him closer.
It's exquisite. It's amazing. It's everything Sherlock had expected and more. He'd always thought about it, about how kissing John would feel. Would he be gentle? Would he be rough? Or-

But John shifts his head just so, slotting his lips against Sherlock’s, short-circuiting his brain with the sensory overload.

And Sherlock stops thinking altogether.

Chapter End Notes

I don't know when the next chapter will be up... I've gotta work out some of the finer details of the story before I continue on after this... All I can say is that you can expect a shit ton of angst.

TBH I'm not very sure what song John was playing on the radio but what I listened to when writing this chapter was this

Also the inspiration for Sherlock dancing around with his violin came from Lindsey Stirling, she's amazing really.

One more fun fact: this is actually the chapter I started world building with. I began with "And they dance, soft socked feet whispering over dusty carpet. The air around them is still, save for the soft music playing in the background." which I have since incorporated into the story HAHA. Look we're 50k words in! Ah how far we've come :)

Contact me on tumblr
Chapter Ten

Chapter Summary

“And I’ve wanted you for, god for so long. Since before Barts, maybe from the first time I met you, I really don’t know. And it hurts, oh god it hurts so much to be so close to you and yet not together with you at the same time…”

Chapter Notes

:,) Buckle in guys, we've got angst incoming

See the end of the chapter for more notes

267 hours since John has come home.

Sherlock has been kissed before.

There’d been Victor Trevor in secondary school. A good friend that had tried coming onto him, testing the boundaries of their relationship with a chaste and close-lipped kiss to his lips. He hadn’t liked Victor in that way though, and had shied away from him the moment the initial shock had worn off.

The kiss had felt uncomfortable and unwelcome, as if the contact had turned his nerves to ice, extending freezing cold tendrils that had reached deep beneath his skin, chilling him to the bone.

They fell out soon after that.

And then there had been Janine.

Janine who he’d managed (somehow) to maintain a false pretence of lovers with. He’d always felt extremely uneasy whenever she’d pressed her lips to his, feeling the need to reciprocate to maintain their facade (at least until he could use her to get intoMagnussen’s office), but simultaneously feeling like energy was sapped out of him, bit by bit, every time his lips had touched hers. It’d felt terrifying and distressing but he’d done it anyway.

But this…

This is different altogether.

John’s kisses feel like fire and ice, strong and powerful in their intensity, burning into skin wherever they make contact… and yet… Sherlock doesn’t feel scared or uncomfortable, not like before.

It’s a warm, sizzling sensation that radiates from his lips to the rest of his body, rivulets of liquid gold that stream through his veins and arteries from the top of his head to the tips of his toes and it feels absolutely amazing.
Sherlock mulls over this as John continues to press chaste, quick kisses to his lips, angling his head so that their noses don’t accidentally bump into each other, whispering breathy adorations every time he shifts away for air.

Sherlock can barely make out the words, being so far gone himself, but is able to catch snippets of phrases like “You’re gorgeous”, “You’re beautiful”...

“You’re amazing.”

Sherlock’s cheeks redden with each declaration, his skin catching fire as John continues to spoil him with bold proclamations of tender affection, stroking his fingers over Sherlock’s burning cheeks.

He smoothes calloused palms over blush-streaked skin as he shifts his lips just so, his lips parting slightly as an inquisitive tongue makes its way over to Sherlock’s bottom lip, swirling circles over soft skin and Sherlock absolutely melts, surrendering himself to John.

He can feel John’s smile against his skin as John’s tongue swipes its way across the plump layer of flesh, setting off sparks in Sherlock’s brain before John moves on to lavish his attention over Sherlock’s top lip, stroking the outline of Sherlock’s cupid’s bow. Sherlock shudders at the sensation, his legs giving way as John’s tongue slips through, stroking its way down the roof of his mouth.

John manages to hold him up somehow, his arms quickly slipping under Sherlock’s armpits as he hauls him back upright, their mouths reconnecting in a burning kiss. Sherlock sinks forward against John’s chest as he slots his mouth back against John’s, holding his own as he pushes hard against John's lips, wrapping his fingers around the nape of John's neck as he drags John impossibly closer, their teeth clacking as their lips collide over and over again.

It’s everything and anything he has ever wanted, Sherlock thinks, everything and anything that he has ever dreamt of because John’s kisses taste like heaven and Sherlock simply can’t have enough.

Sherlock kisses him like a drowning man seeking air, like a dehydrated man seeking oasis, kisses him as if the world will end the moment their lips part. He only allows himself small sips of air when they separate, desperate for contact, desperate to have John’s lips back against his.

He's not very sure what to do honestly, since he's never actually properly kissed anybody before, but judging from the sounds that John is making, he seems to be doing a pretty good job.

He nips experimentally at John’s lower lip, his endorphin-addled mind somehow thinking that that is a good idea.

However, John flinches the moment Sherlock’s teeth make contact with his skin, his lips falling still as Sherlock panics, worried that it might have been too much for John to take in. But then John groans, a deep sound that seems to resonate from the depths of his chest, his lips soaring up to claim Sherlock’s once more, egging Sherlock on.

He nips at John’s lip again, sharp pinpricks of pain that elicit more moans from John before Sherlock sucks hard, pulling John’s lip in between his, preening inwardly at the knowledge that he made John make those sounds, that John is experiencing pleasure because of him.

He nips at John’s lip again, sharp pinpricks of pain that elicit more moans from John before Sherlock makes those sounds, that John is experiencing pleasure because of him.

John allows him to carry on for a bit, patiently waiting as Sherlock continues to lavish attention over his chapped lips, his tongue sliding over the dips and creases in the skin as he soothes John’s skin before nipping at it again, biting down gently on soft flesh.

But John can only control himself so much, Sherlock knows this.
He’s always been a man of action, a man who can’t sit back and relax for long. So any minute now...

He knows what’s going to happen when John growls, the sound reverberating through Sherlock’s torso as John’s fingers dig deeper into Sherlock’s skin, hard enough to leave crescent-shaped imprints and yet not hard enough to bruise.

John takes control of the kiss once again, angling Sherlock’s jaw to one side as he plunders Sherlock’s mouth with his tongue, the pink muscle stroking the walls of his mouth roughly as Sherlock shudders, his legs nearly giving way as his tongue hangs limply in his mouth, unable to reciprocate as John strokes another long line up the roof of Sherlock’s mouth, sending his brain completely offline.

“Sofa,” John breathes when their lips part, his voice husky and grainy.

“Sofa before you fall.”

Sherlock nods fervently as he presses his lips back to John’s, John chuckling a little as Sherlock makes absolutely no effort whatsoever to move.

John seems to deem that Sherlock’s going to be absolutely no help in this situation because he pulls Sherlock’s legs up to bracket his hips, half-carrying him to the front of the room. Sherlock feels the rear of his knees hit cool leather as he falls onto his back, winded and gasping for air as John’s mouth leaves his.

He whines softly at the loss of contact, saliva cooling on his reddened lips before John is there, on top of him, pressing his lips firmly to Sherlock’s again. Wrapping a hand into Sherlock’s hair, John’s fingers tighten around dark curls as he runs blunt teeth over Sherlock’s bottom lip, biting down gently, mimicking what Sherlock had done before.

Sherlock groans, the sound muffled by John’s lips as he reaches around John’s torso, fingers raking up and down his back as he arches up to meet John chest for chest.

He can feel John’s heart beating through the thin fabric of his clothing, his body singing as John tangles his tongue with his, both of them simultaneously sighing into each other’s mouths at the contact.

John takes the chance to disentangle his fingers from Sherlock’s hair, eliciting a frustrated groan from Sherlock which he quiets with another kiss. He drags his now freed fingers down Sherlock’s torso, reverently brushing whorled fingertips against milky white skin. The sensation prickles Sherlock’s skin as he arches upwards, his groin brushing against John’s and...

Wait, what is he doing?

What the fuck is he doing?

John is married to Mary.

John has a baby daughter on the way.

He shouldn’t be doing this, shouldn’t be...

His eyes open wide in horror as his brain goes back online, tethering him back to reality.

Oh my god.
What has he done?

He pushes John off him roughly, breathing heavily as he begins to gather his wits, staring up at John with terrified eyes.

“Sherlock, are you alright?” John questions, still breathing heavily as he stares up at Sherlock, his face a mess of confusion.

“I… I… “

What can he say?

What is he supposed to say?

He’s nearly ruined John’s marriage, of course he’s not alright.

“John… John, I’m sorry,” he stutters, his lips trembling as he struggles to sit up.

John tries to help him, reaching for Sherlock’s hand but Sherlock pushes him away, tugging his arm out of range as he rights himself.

He risks a quick glance up at John as he shifts over to the far end of the sofa, regretting it immediately because John’s face is awash with sorrow, his eyes blinking in uncertainty. He looks for all the world like a kicked puppy and Sherlock feels guilt and shame settling deep in his chest.

But this is for John’s good.

This is so that John can be happy.

This is the right thing to do and yet…

Tears are welling up in Sherlock’s eyes, threatening to spill over as he struggles to focus on the ground, desperately willing himself to face away from John.

“Sherlock,” John’s voice still soothing even though it sounds broken and hoarse, “Sherlock do you not want this?”

Sherlock has no idea how to answer that.

On the one hand, he’s been hoping for this for ages, hoping that John secretly wanted him and desired him, hoping that one day John would come back to him. And yet…

This is not how he’d wanted it to go.

At all.

Because John now has a family, a family that he has to cherish and take care of and Sherlock is coming in between them, coming in between John and his happiness.

And he doesn’t want that.

Not one bit.

He remains silent even as John repeats the question, his eyes a stony grey-blue as he tries to chase his feelings of love and affection for John away, struggling to replace them with a cold, hard, unfeeling facade.
But it’s not working, not this time.

“Sherlock? Sherlock did I do something wrong? Have I been reading you wrong- I. Please just tell me...” John comes again, almost pleading.

“... What do you want?”

Sherlock thinks about the question, realising that his answer could make or break his relationship with John… but that it could also make or break John’s happiness.

Even though the answer is obvious, he’s still at a loss at which one to verbalise… because he doesn’t want to lose John, not again.

“Sherlock, I’ve spent the last month trying to woo you and I thought that you were reciprocating,” John breathes, the words tumbling out in a rush, “I thought that you felt… something at least.”

The proclamation startles Sherlock, shocking him so much that it nearly shakes the very foundations of his reality.

So he hadn’t been reading too much into John’s actions after all…

His heart warms a little at the thought before going stone cold again.

What if John doesn’t actually like him in that way.

What if John’s only doing this because he wants Sherlock as a substitute for Mar-

But NO John would never do that, he would never do that.

Or would he?

Sherlock shudders as thoughts unbidden begin to race through his mind, coming up with possible scenarios for John wishing to become intimate with him even though none of them really make any sense.

He feels like he’s grasping at straws, extremely out of his depth for once as he begins to rub circles into his palm, scratching the surface of the skin as he struggles to think.

“You can’t do that,” he whispers tremulously, his voice almost inaudible.

He speaks the words softly, the sound carrying like a voice on the wind. However, it’s not quite soft enough for John not to hear.

“I can’t do what?” John questions, the confusion in his voice evident.

Sherlock gulps, wondering whether he should turn back now and spare John or if he should be honest with him.

He decides on the latter

“You can’t not be with Mary.”

John reels back the moment Sherlock mentions the word “Mary”, the disgust in his posture clear as he visibly retreats inside himself, struggling to come up with a response to Sherlock’s declaration.

Now that Sherlock thinks of it, they’ve not discussed anything concerning her since the incident at
John’s clinic. In fact, this is the first time either one of them has spoken her name aloud in days, as if simply mentioning her name would summon her somehow.

John bites his lip in trepidation, clearly at a loss for what to say. But then he stiffens, looking resolute and certain as he replies:

“Sherlock... I… I don’t love her anymore.”

Sherlock flinches at the response, willing himself desperately not to press his lips back to John’s because if John doesn’t love Mary anymore…

Oh. But Mary is still with child.

John has a baby daughter on the way.

And he can’t rob him of that, he can’t

“But there’s still the baby,” he replies, the resignation in his voice palpable as he straightens up, looking John directly in the eye.

“Sherlock,” John begins, “Do you really think that I didn’t take all this into consideration when I decided once and for all that I was finally going to pursue a relationship with you? Do you really think that I didn’t even think about the baby?”

Sherlock is silent at this so John continues.

“I’ve mulled over this for ages, thought about what I could do to fix this, fix all of this. Because look, Sherlock, I stopped loving Mary the moment she put a fucking bullet in your chest. No amount of marriage counselling is ever going to fix that!”

John’s fists clench tightly as he forces the words out, expelling them into thin air. It's as if the act of simply speaking them aloud is cathartic, purging him of the vile, pent-up anger that he has kept for way too long.

He’s clearly too overcome by emotion to continue just yet so he pauses, his chest heaving violently and Sherlock wants nothing more than to wrap himself around him and hold him tight, never letting him go.

But he can’t, not now.

He waits till John gathers his wits again, exhaling deeply before gazing up at Sherlock, his eyes filled with piercing pain and sorrow as he continues.

“And I’ve wanted you for, god for so long. Since before Barts, maybe from the first time I met you, I really don’t know. And it hurts, oh god it hurts so much to be so close to you and yet not together with you at the same time…”

John is tearing, his voice wobbling as he presses his lips into a thin line, forcing himself to continue.

“... So you really have to tell me Sherlock, what exactly is it that you want? Please, I need to know.”

John’s voice is breathy and hoarse, serrating the words till they're rough and raw, the sound cutting through Sherlock like a knife.

Sherlock’s eyes meet John’s inquisitive ones, his mouth opening for a moment before he slams it shut again.
I love you, he wants to say.

I loved you so much but I only realised after I jumped from Barts, I'm sorry.

But if it's not too late, I want to be with you, god I want to wake up next to you every day. I want to be able to kiss you all the time. I want to go to bed with you every night knowing that you're mine. I want…

I want everything.

But he doesn't say it, his voice failing him as the words crumble to dust under the force of reality.

John needs to go back to Mary. John needs to…

It's what's best for John! What will make him most happy.

But is that really what's best for him? a voice at the back of his head whispers, planting a niggling doubt in Sherlock’s head.

Why can't John be happy with you?

“Sherlock,” John repeats, his voice sure and steady, readying himself for any answer that Sherlock is about to give.

But it's too much pressure, too many thoughts jumbled in an incoherent mess inside his head and Sherlock has no idea what to do, no idea what to say.

So he does what he always does best in moments of deep distress.

He panics.

“I DON'T KNOW!” he bellows, bile rising in his throat as he bolts from the sofa, his head in his hands.

“I don't know. John, I don't know. I'm sorry. I…”

And then he's running, tearing his way out of the living room as John stares back at him, dumbfounded and in shock.

“Sherlock!” he yells one more time before the sound of his voice is muffled by hard wood as Sherlock slams the door leading to his bedroom. He bolts it in place, sinking against it as he heaves heavily.

And then he's crying, honest to god weeping as he slides to the floor, his fingers buried in his hair as tears roll hotly down his cheeks.

John's banging on the door now, begging Sherlock to open up but Sherlock ignores him in favour of burying his face in between his legs, fingers now cupping his ears tightly as he tries desperately to drown out John’s shouts of:

“Sherlock! Open the door please!”

“Sherlock please don’t do this to me!”

“Sherlock PLEASE!”
He feels a thump against his back as John presumably settles himself down in front of the door.

And then John’s crying too, sobbing loudly against the door. Sherlock can practically hear the rush of tears leaking down John’s cheeks as John bangs his fists against the door, his voice shaking as he calls for Sherlock, over and over again.

But Sherlock can’t answer, he can’t.

If he does, the last bit of restraint that he currently has might just snap, might just fall to pieces.

Because all he really wants to do right now is to fall into John’s arms and kiss him for hours. He wants to tell John that it’s been the same for him, that he’s loved him for years now too and that he never wants to be apart from him ever again.

But it’s not right, it’s not how their story is supposed to go.

John has a child now, a child that he’ll have to father and protect.

If he leaves Mary now, she will certainly take evasive manoeuvres, using the baby as leverage.

There’s no telling what she’d do when faced with an imminent rejection. She might prevent John from seeing his child, might weave a web of lies that’ll put John in the media limelight once again. They’ve been “celebrities” before, it wouldn’t be surprising if Mary uses that to her advantage.

And what will become of John? What will become of him when his whole world crashes down around him.

Come to think of it, Mary might even abscond from the country with her daughter, leaving John wracked with guilt in the wake of her absence. It seems a likely possibility, since she’s lived overseas before and Sherlock cannot afford to risk that.

And John would hate him then, hate him for existing, hate him for making him fall in love with him and for allowing him to leave Mary to be with him instead. It would just be a matter of time before he leaves...

Sherlock choking out a sob as he raises salt-drenched fingertips to his cheeks, wiping away trails of tears as he moves to stand.

He wobbles a little, his legs feeling like jelly as he makes his way slowly over to his bed.

He can still hear John sniffling, the sound pervading the stony silence as he falls onto his bed, his eyes closing as he struggles to think.

What is he going to do about this?

What should he do about this?

“John is a grown adult who can decide for himself what he wants and doesn’t want to do. I do not make his decisions for him and neither should you.”

“But we both know that grown adults make mistakes sometimes, and that sometimes they need a budge in the right direction to help them along the way.”

His and Mary’s words echo back at him as he lies there in the darkness, chasing down endless threads of thought that don’t seem to lead anywhere.
All he knows is that John cannot be allowed to leave Mary, he can’t.

And as much as Sherlock hates to admit it, Mary’s words do seem to resonate with the current situation.

Because John has made a mistake, a huge mistake and as much as Sherlock would like for them to rebuild their relationship, or even embark on something new, John cannot be allowed to continue.

He has to awake from his fantasy world at some point, has to realise that Sherlock is NOT THE ONE FOR HIM.

Well, maybe he had been, at one point. Maybe before Barts, maybe before all this mess started, Sherlock will allow himself to entertain that possibility. But now that Mary and his baby have been thrown into the mix...

And as Mary has said, sometimes even grown adults need a shove in the right direction.

Maybe it’s time Sherlock helped set his friend on the right track.

He rolls over, reaching for his handphone on the side table with shaking hands, his fingers continuing to quiver as he dials the number in.

As expected, the dialling tone is cut short in only a matter of seconds, the ringing in his ears fading to deafening silence as Sherlock takes a deep breath.

Now’s not the time for chickening out, not when his best friend’s marriage is at stake, not when the fate of his best friend’s future hangs in the balance.

He breathes in deeply one more time, his eyes falling closed as he speaks into the phone.

“Hello, Mary.”

---

Morning light seeps through the windows as Sherlock makes his way to the kitchen, his stomach growling as he tiptoes towards the fridge.

Having not eaten at all yesterday, it had soon become apparent that satiating the “transport” had to happen sooner rather than later so he’d snuck out of his room, hoping to god that John was at work and not here at Baker Street.

However, when he’d pressed an inquisitive ear to his bedroom door, the wood had reverberated with the sound of soft snores, which meant that John had fallen asleep outside his door and had made it his mission to remain there for the whole night.

Sherlock had sighed, making his way to the bathroom and escaping through the connecting door there instead, desperately hoping that John wouldn’t wake as he’d traipsed past his best friend’s still slumbering body.

He’s been lucky so far though, he thinks to himself as he pulls out a sandwich that Mrs Hudson had pre-prepared a day or two back, he would have expected John to have woken up by now, seeing that his friend possessed the instincts of an ex-military man.
Taking a bite out the sandwich, he relishes in the creamy texture of scrambled egg as he begins to ponder over his late-night conversation with Mary.

She’d been surprisingly calm about the whole thing, as if she’d predicted it and had expected this to happen at some point…

“Thanks for the offer Sherlock,” she had said, “It’s nice to know that you truly do care about John and I. Well… you already know my answer don’t you?”

Sherlock had gritted his teeth throughout the entire conversation, his nails scratching a dent into the headboard as Mary had prattled on about how lonely she’d been, how it was nice to know that someone had been looking out for her and how nice it’d be to see him and John again.

There hadn’t been an edge to her voice this time, quite unlike the previous conversation that she and Sherlock had had. She’d sounded cool and collected this time round, her voice as smooth as silk as she’d responded to Sherlock’s proposition.

But therein lay the problem, she’d sounded too self-assured, too certain for Sherlock’s comfort and it had sent shivers up his spine.

For the words though polished and clean had sounded clinical and calculating to his ears.

Something hadn’t been right, he’d felt it in his gut.

And yet… it’d been the right thing to do.

He reassures himself yet again as he stuffs the rest of the sandwich into his mouth, padding back towards his room, the sound of his footsteps muffled by soft carpet.

He turns to look at John one more time, drinking in his still sleeping form, his half-opened mouth, his cherry red lips that had been on Sherlock’s just a mere hours before, his red-rimmed eyes...

And it’s too much, too much to look at John and see the physical evidence of the hurt and pain that his best friend had experienced the night before - and under his hand no less, so Sherlock darts back into the bathroom, locking the door soundly behind him as he makes his way back to his bed.

He retrieves his handphone from the side table once more, willing tears away as he dials in another number.

There’s just one more thing he has to do to ensure that John’s happiness and he has to do it quick.

Booking a helicopter two weeks before Christmas is no easy feat.

----

iMessage
Wednesday, December 10th 2014, 9:12 a.m.

Sherlock come on, we haven’t spoken in three days.  
(Read 9:14 a.m.)
We have to talk about this at some point you know. (Read 9:20 a.m.)

Sherlock, I know you’ve been reading my messages. Please respond

**Hello John,** I’m pleased to inform you that my mother and father will be hosting a Christmas lunch on the 25th of December. They have cordially invited you and Mary to join us, your attendance would be much appreciated. - SH

Sherlock look you can’t do this alright, we have to talk about this, whatever it is at some point. You can’t just ignore it like nothing happened.

**John if you do decide to come for the Christmas party, it would please me very much if you brought the USB stick along with you and passed it back to Mary. Do make amends with her, she loves you very much.** - SH

Sherlock as I am typing out this message, either one of us is mere metres away from each other, separated by a thin ceiling of concrete. And I swear to god Sherlock if you don’t start telling me exactly what you’re going on about, I will go down there and have a word or two with you. (Read 10:20)

**It’s what I want**

(Delivered 10:30)

What do you mean what you want?

**That night you asked me what I wanted. Well, this is what I want, for you to come to Christmas lunch with me and apologise to your wife.**

Is this really what you want Sherlock? Is it?

Are you sure? (Read 10:31)

**Yes, it is.**

(Delivered 10:40)

---

“I haven’t seen you around here for quite a while,” Molly Hooper chirps as she makes her way across the lab.

She reaches down into a bowl of what seems to be mush, the mixture squelching disgustingly as she sighs, walking back to Sherlock’s side to grab a conical flask.

“I was going to use that,” Sherlock murmurs in annoyance, his nose crinkling as he glares up at Molly’s retreating figure.

“You’re not the one who’s working you know,” she rolls her eyes and replies, returning to swipe a flask of hydrochloric acid from Sherlock’s table before going back to the bowl of slush, extracting a
sample carefully with a pipette.

Sherlock grumbles in response, turning back to focus on the slides he’d brought over from Baker Street, adjusting the focus knobs so that a magnified image swims into focus.

“Well, I guess it’s nice to have some company again,” Molly prattles on, reaching across her worktop to grab a particularly nasty looking metal instrument. It whirs to life as she flicks the switch, emitting an awfully loud “squelch” as she plunges the spinning serrated edge deep into the bowl.

“You know, come to think of it I haven’t seen you since you were discharged from hospital,” she continues. “You used to come here all the time, crawling all over the corpses and specimens. It used to drive me absolutely up the wall!”

She chuckles softly to herself as Sherlock harrumphs, doing his best to ignore her as he turns back to his microscope.

“Though you’d be pleased to know that it’s been far too quiet around here without you,” she smiles and says, removing her mush-splattered visor. She sighs as Sherlock grunts in agreement, rolling her eyes as she sets her visor and mixer down gently in the sink. She throws her latex gloves into the dustbin, walking over to Sherlock and setting herself down beside him.

“Look, Sherlock. I haven’t seen you in literally a month and then you barge in and spend 6 consecutive days here. There’s clearly something bothering you,” Molly says, her eyes fixed on Sherlock as he turns away from her in favour of examining a sample on the far side of the table.

She sighs again, louder this time, the sound grating Sherlock’s ears as he sets the sample on a fresh slide, slipping it under the lens.

“I know you don’t want to talk about it, but there’s clearly something that’s making you upset. And as a … friend… that cares about your well-being as much as anyone else does, I will offer a listening ear if you do decide to tell me anything.”

Sherlock snorts in annoyance, angling himself away from Molly’s questioning eyes once again. He pretends to inspect a petri dish sitting by the side of the microscope as Molly exhales in slight frustration, rising from her seat.

“I’m not going to push anything, but I just want to let you know that whatever it is… that you can talk to me about it. Alright?” she finishes, stalking back over to her workstation.

Sherlock doesn’t reply, his eyes a stony blue as he fixes them back on his microscope.

Molly doesn’t try talking to him again after that.

----

iMessage
Tuesday, December 23rd 2014, 10:20 a.m.

Attachment sent: 65kb

---
Dear John, these are the details for the upcoming Christmas party. I will have to be there early to help my parents out so I'll be taking the morning train down. You, however, will be taking the 11 O'clock train down. Don’t worry, I’ve already bought our tickets and I've placed yours on the mantle. I do hope that you will come. - SH
(Read 10:20 a.m.)

John Watson is typing...

...

John Watson is typing...

I'll be there (Received 2:50 p.m.)

Chapter End Notes

THERE'S A HAPPY ENDING!!! DON'T FORGET!!! HAHA

I hope you guys enjoyed reading this chapter as much as I enjoyed writing it. Ok tbh I cried a little at every reread... but it was enjoyable... somewhat HAHA

Next chapter should be in 2 weeks

Hit me up on tumblr and we can cry about it together HAHA
Chapter Eleven

Chapter Summary

*I'm sorry John,* he thinks, willing John to hear the unspoken words.

*I didn’t know this would happen,* he thinks as he closes his eyes. *I’m sorry John, I’m so sorry.*

I’m sorry.

Chapter Notes

Hoboy more angst let's get into it

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

2 hours till the Christmas Party

“Sherlock, do quit moping and come down and help!”

Mummy Holmes crosses her arms, staring angrily up at the stairs.

However, she’s answered by nothing but silence, her voice falling on deaf ears.

“Come on love! I’m running out of chores to give Bill to do! Please do come down and entertain him or at least help us with the table setting!” she hollers again, her voice reverberating across whitewashed walls as she stands, her arms akimbo, glaring up at the dark space at the top of the staircase.

Once again, Sherlock refuses to reply so she puffs up her chest, preparing to give her son the scolding of a lifetime when the doorbell rings, a sonorous chime that startles her out of “angry parent” mode. She makes for the door, swinging it open in a rush.

“Oh John!” she exclaims, beaming down happily at the man standing awkwardly at her doorstep, clutching a bottle of wine close to his chest.

“Do come in dear, it’s chilly out,” she continues, holding the door open as John smiles back, slipping in past her.

“Thanks for inviting me, Mrs Holmes,” John replies, reaching out to shake her hand.

“Oh and I brought this too,” he continues, holding up the bottle of wine for Mummy Holmes to see. “Merry Christmas Mrs Holmes!”

She flashes him a wide grin, pleased as punch at her son’s best friend’s politeness while
simultaneously despairing the fact that not enough of John’s mannerisms have rubbed off on Sherlock.

“Merry Christmas to you too John! Oh it’s so nice to see you!” she says, leading him into the house.

“Sherlock has told us so much about you! When he first met you he had me on the phone for an hour, yabbering on and on about how he’d finally found someone ‘worth tolerating’. It’s so nice to finally meet the man in person!”

John stares back at her, extremely flabbergasted as he rests the wine bottle on the dining table stand.

“Did he really?” he inquires, the curiosity in his face evident as he looks up at Mummy Holmes.

“Of course he did, god that boy. If I hadn’t known better, I’d have thought he was smitten with you,” she chortles, grabbing some plates and hurriedly setting them down on the table. John flinches a little at her proclamation, the movement going unnoticed by Mummy Holmes as he follows suit, reaching for the cutlery.

“Whenever I called that boy up, it was always John this and John that. Before you came along, he barely ever spoke about his day to day activities! Just talked my ear off about Chemistry! I mean, I’d listen to him, of course I would, but Chemistry was never something I was interested in,” she smiles and says, “I was always more of a math person.”

John nods his head in thinly veiled astonishment, arranging the final set of table forks as Mummy Holmes dries the glasses, setting them down on the table.

“So… you were a mathematician?” he questions, watching as Mummy Holmes dusts her hands off on her apron, surveying her work with hawk-like precision.

“Hmmm…” she hums before snapping herself back to reality. “Oh yes, I was… at some point. I was a lecturer at Cambridge for a while and then at Oxford… And after that I got an offer to go to the US for Harvard... But, I decided that I needed to spend more time with Sherlock and Mycroft so I put my teaching career on hold. All I’ve done since then is write textbooks. Hardly anything interesting really, but it was worth it I suppose.”

John blinks in surprise before gathering his wits again, looking up at her in something akin to wonder.

“No, that’s- that’s pretty impressive, hardly uninteresting at all,” John reassures her, taking a seat as Mummy Holmes joins him, taking a seat opposite his.

“Oh! do you really think so?” she giggles. “That’s rather nice of you.”

John flashes a winning smile back, convincing Mummy Holmes once and for all that at some point she’ll have to ask her son to take lessons in social niceties from him.

“Is there anything else you need help with?” John asks, possessing a readiness of being that Mummy Holmes has never once seen in Sherlock.

“Hmmm… Let’s see,” she hums, “I don’t think… Siger’s gone out to get the firewood, Mycroft’s already put the pie into the oven… Oh yes! John darling, I do believe there’s one more thing you can help me with… Though it’s probably not going to be an easy task to carry out, I assure you.”

John frowns for a moment, his brow scrunching up in confusion.
“As long as I can be of help to you, Mrs Holmes, it’ll please me to assist you in any way I can.”

Sherlock hasn’t been to his parents’ home in ages.

He’s called home every now and then but has never actually bothered making a trip back down here. Well… Not since he’d set up shop in London at least, the constant possibility of a new case tethering him to his abode at 221B Baker Street.

But he’s back here now, back in his childhood home, surrounded by familiar scenery and smells, comforting him in a way that the atmosphere of 221B Baker Street has failed to do in the past three weeks.

He sighs as he digs through his old chest of drawers, pulling up the well-worn gilded telescope that he’d adored so long ago, the one that he used to take with him to the treehouse in the backyard when he was young and he had Redbeard.

He turns it over in his hands, admiring the way the gold lettering gleams in the sunlight before setting it down gently on his old bed, turning back towards the drawer and rummaging through its contents.

He hears his mother calling for him but he ignores her. She’s probably just asking him to set the table or something, hardly anything interesting. She’s been begging him to come down the whole morning and even came up at one point to yell at him.

He’s been stoically ignoring her though and had even fallen asleep soon after she’d knocked on the door for the third time.

He’d woken hours later only to remember that there was something that he had meant to do when he came up here at 9 in the morning, that there was something that he’d meant to bring back to Baker Street.

He finally finds what he’s looking for when he reaches the bottom of the drawer.

Sherlock smiles as he picks up the thin sheet of glossy paper, handling it gingerly as he settles the photograph on his lap.

It’s a faded photo of him and Redbeard standing in the backyard.

It’s old, ancient really. It’d been taken when Sherlock had been about 12 years of age.

He’s wearing a pirate hat in the picture, a present from his aunt from an earlier birthday. He has no idea where it is now.

*Probably down in the earth with Redbeard,* his brain unhelpfully supplants.

He cringes at the thought, turning his attention back to the photograph.

Redbeard’s still form grins up at him, his nose glistening in the sunlight.

Unlike Sherlock’s pristine, professionally-crafted black pirate hat, Redbeard has a particularly flimsy looking paper hat sitting on his head.
Sherlock chuckles a little at the sight, remembering that he’d made the hat out of a piece of Mycroft’s homework that he’d stolen. Mycroft had been spectacularly annoying that day and hence, he’d pinched the piece of paper to “put it to good use”.

He smiles at the memory, his grin mimicking the one adorning the young Sherlock’s face in the old photograph.

He’s a little surprised that he’s actually smiling in the picture, a rare occurrence in any of the early photos his mother had taken. It’s a radiant toothy grin, filled with joy and exuberance.

*Clearly it’d been taken before Redbeard had been put down.*

He lifts the photo up to the light, smoothing his fingers over Redbeard’s frozen form. He remembers the day they’d taken this photo. It’d been 2 weeks before The Incident, before Sherlock’s world had been turned upside down, before he decided that William wasn’t a suitable first name to go by.

Oh how things have changed…

“Hey. Um… Sherlock?” a voice calls, startling Sherlock for a moment. The photo nearly slides out of his hands.

“Your mum asked me to tell you to come down for lunch, said she’s been trying for the past 5 hours,” John’s voice comes again, the sound sending chills down Sherlock’s spine.

Is it 12 o’clock already? Did he really nap for so long?

“Sherlock you bastard, you said you came down early to help,” John chuckles softly, the sound coming out a little strained.

Sherlock doesn’t respond, his body going rigid as he turns towards the door, goosebumps erupting out of his skin as he sets the photo down on the bed next to the telescope.

“Come on Sherlock, I know you’re in there,” John continues wearily, knocking on the door.

Sherlock sighs, uncrossing his legs as he moves to stand, walking towards the door.

This will be the first time in two weeks that he and John will have a direct conversation and Sherlock isn’t looking forward to it.

There’s nothing for it now though. There’s literally no escape. He doesn’t feel particularly up to jumping out of the window and John is clearly not planning on leaving till he gets an answer.

He unlocks the door reluctantly, sitting back down on his bed as John comes in, his eyes alighting on Sherlock’s before he twists his gaze away, staring up at the ceiling instead.

He frowns, his brow crinkling in confusion as he turns to Sherlock with questioning eyes.

“I thought you said the solar system wasn’t important, that you’d deleted it?”

The query startles Sherlock for a moment, his eyes widening in shock before he follows John’s gaze, tilting his head up to face the ceiling.

Oh.

The pale blue ceiling is littered with bright blue star-shaped imprints, evidence of the glow-in-the-dark stars that Sherlock had stuck on when he was younger (and removed after Redbeard’s death).
There are clear outlines of all the planets as well (including Pluto). They’d been stickers that Sherlock had bought from a makeshift market that used to set up shop every Sunday.

He’d been extremely disappointed when he discovered that they hadn’t been drawn to scale with respect to each other, but he’d used them anyway.

There are also sketches of some of the more famous constellations on the ceiling, drawn on in black permanent marker, much to the chagrin of his mother. They’ve all been neatly labelled, each constellation paired with its own special name, scrawled onto the ceiling in a messy scribble.

Well there’s no use hiding it now.

“It was important to me,” Sherlock speaks, “Once.”

“What do you mean once?” John questions, turning to face Sherlock, giving Sherlock a good look of his face for the first time in three weeks.

John doesn’t look too bad honestly. His eyes seem a little more sunken than usual, framed by dark circles that hadn’t been there when Sherlock had last seen him. But other than that, he looks alright.

Sherlock smiles weakly at him, wondering whether he should tell John about Redbeard or if he should just keep mum and speed out the door.

He doesn’t want to go down and face his furious mother just yet though, the idea of remaining upstairs far out of her clutches sounding more appealing than anything else.

In addition, this is the last time Sherlock will be able to have a proper conversation with John before he reconciles with his wife. He might as well make the best of it.

“I once had a dog,” he begins, his voice trembling as John takes a seat by him on his bed, a safe distance away from him, Sherlock notes.

“His name was Redbeard. And… He was my best friend,” he can feel tears threatening to well up in his eyes, the memory of his loyal Irish Setter holding sway on his emotions as he continues.

“We used to do everything together, but the thing I enjoyed doing the most was playing pirates...” John smiles at this, his gaze filled with the warmth of a sunbeam as he looks up at Sherlock.

“Yeah, Mycroft told me,” he says, “Said that at one point you wanted to become a pirate when you grew up.”

Sherlock rolls his eyes in annoyance. “Of course Mycroft told you,” he says, shaking his head. “Can that man ever keep a secret to himself?”

“Sherlock,” John says, struggling not to laugh, “If Mycroft couldn’t keep a secret, they wouldn’t have put him in charge of the British government.”

“Hmpf,” Sherlock snorts, “I guess that explains the current state of our politics.”

John chokes at this, sniggering as Sherlock smiles back at him affectionately, a warm smile that is quickly masked by indifference when Sherlock realises that he’s looking at John like a lovesick teenager.

That probably isn’t going to help his best friend reconcile with his wife.

“There used to be a treehouse in the backyard,” he continues, abruptly changing the subject of the
conversation, “I used to take Redbeard up every night and we’d pretend to be pirates. I decided that I would play the captain, meaning that I had to use the stars for navigation.”

“Thankfully, my aunt had given me a book of constellations as a birthday present so I spent my time memorising every single one of them.”

“I tried explaining the concept of stars and constellations to Redbeard as well, but of course that didn’t go over so well,” he muses, turning towards John sheepishly who smiles back.

“We’d play in the treehouse at night when the stars were visible, but by day we’d play down by the creek, just downhill from here. You tend to be a much more believable pirate if you are near a body of water.”

“And as an added bonus, There used to be lots of newts in there so I used to catch them and bring them home and-”

“Please tell me you didn’t dissect them,” John interrupts, his eyebrows furrowed as he stares up at Sherlock.

Sherlock huffs in annoyance, rolling his eyes.

“No all of them,” he replies, fixing John with a frustrated frown.

John laughs in response, his eyes tinged with mirth as he smiles up at him, Sherlock answering with an eager smile of his own. It reminds Sherlock of the easygoing nature of their old conversations, the ones that they’d had before that fateful evening.

It’s hard to believe that that was only two weeks ago.

Sherlock shakes himself out of the memory, willing it away as he sits up straight. He clears his voice loudly before continuing his story.

“The creek was a place of solace and wonder for me as a child, mainly because the water would bring in new creatures with each day. It really made you feel like you were an explorer making new discoveries.”

“Because of this, I spent most of my time there during the day along with Redbeard, exploring the bank and wading into the water every now and then whenever I saw something interesting.”

“But one afternoon, I saw the reeds rustling by the side of the creek. Thinking that it might be a nesting bird, I went closer to check. But when I parted the reeds, there was this dog there…”

Sherlock gulps, tears threatening to spill over at the memory.

“Long story short, Redbeard saved me but he was bitten,” he continues, willing his voice to remain
calm. “The police department went down to shoot the rabid dog and Redbeard was sent to the vet. There was nothing we could do for him,”

“We buried him in the backyard under the treehouse. I never went near that tree ever again. And the stars reminded me too much of him too so those had to go as well.”

He rises from his bed, snatching the photograph and telescope up.

“Sherlock..” John breathes, moving to stand as well as Sherlock raises his head to the ceiling, his eyes filled with tears.

“But it doesn’t matter, it’s all in the past now,” Sherlock finishes, turning towards John with a forced smile.

“Let’s go down and have some lunch. I’ll bet Mary’s arrived already.”

----

“I hope you’ve prepared something to say to her,” Sherlock says, making his way down the stairs.

“Yes I have,” John replies stiffly, his voice sounding a little colder than normal. “And I’ve brought the thumb drive as well, just as you requested.”

“Good,” Sherlock answers, his lip trembling as he makes his way into the kitchen, leaving John alone in the hallway.

He hopes John will understand what he’s about to do.

....

“Did you just drug my pregnant wife?” John almost yells, his eyes fixed angrily on Sherlock who’s pottering around the room.

“Don’t worry. Wiggins is an excellent chemist,” Sherlock responds calmly, the term “pregnant wife” stinging a little as he moves to Mycroft side, lowering a hand to his brother’s nose. He’s breathing, good.

“I calculated your wife’s dose meself,” Billy reassures John. “Won’t affect the little one. I’ll keep an eye on ’er.”

“He’ll monitor their recovery,” Sherlock says, adjusting his coat. “It’s more or less his day job.“

John stares up at him with wide eyes, his gaze tinged with fear as he steps into Sherlock’s personal space.

“What the hell have you done?” he whispers, the words coming out in a rush as Sherlock looks away from him, his gaze apologetic.

“A deal with the devil.”

....
“With Magnussen! Sherlock have you gone completely mad?” John yells, his voice somehow still audible over the sound of helicopter blades whipping through the air.

Sherlock sighs, turning to face John.

“It’s the only way to protect Mary,” he says matter-of-factly, “You know that.”

John stares back at him dumbfounded, his face a mix of confusion and suppressed rage.

“Sherlock this isn’t safe!” he snarls, looking absolutely livid now as he glares up at Sherlock. Sherlock turns away, refusing to dignify John’s comments with an answer.

“Sherlock!” John shouts again above the roar of the helicopter. Sherlock shakes his head, turning to face him.

“Since when did we ever care about safe,” he replies calmly, his eyes fixed on John’s.

“Sherlock-” John starts, but Sherlock interrupts him.

“This is for Mary,” he says, his voice carrying a strong sense of finality as he gazes down at John, willing for him to understand.

John’s eyes fall, his rigid posture slackening as he slumps back into the seat.

“Alright…” he says, sounding defeated and dejected.

“Alright,”

…. 

“But look how you care about John Watson,” Magnussen sneers, a cruel gleam in his eye as he watches John make his way over to the semi-transparent screen. “Your damsel in distress.”

Sherlock cringes a little at the sight of the screen, the memory of the fear and terror he’d felt that day rushing back to him as he sees John once again buried under heaps of burning wood.

It’s then that John turns around abruptly, the shock in his eyes evident as he stalks over to the sofa.

His eyes alight on Sherlock’s for a moment, almost accusatory, as if he’s suddenly come to the realisation that the real reason why Sherlock is doing this, has been doing all of this, has been because of him and not Mary.

Sherlock cowers a little under the gaze before John turns towards Magnussen, his face livid.

“You…” John starts, his features solid as stone as he glares at Magnussen, his eyes as hard as granite. “... put me in a fire, for leverage?”

…. 

“Sherlock, what do we do?” John questions, his gaze filled with fading hope as he turns to Sherlock, expecting an answer.

But Sherlock doesn’t have a solution, not this time.
He ignores John instead, his mind racing as his body goes rigid with fear. He goes over the exchange with Magnussen again in his head with a heavy heart, his gaze falling to the floor.

*Oh god, what has he done.*

“Sherlock!” John almost yells, almost panicky now.

He twists his gaze away from Sherlock when he doesn’t answer, his posture stiff as he stalks away in a huff.

*I’m sorry John,* he thinks, willing John to hear the unspoken words.

*I didn’t know this would happen,* he thinks as he closes his eyes. *I’m sorry John, I’m so sorry.*

I’m sorry.

…. 

Helicopter blades whir through the air as Mycroft’s aircraft bears down on the lawn, sending the grass into a flurry of rippling waves.

“Sherlock Holmes and John Watson. Step away,” Mycroft’s voice booms down from the heavens, but Sherlock ignores him in favour of listening to Magnussen instead.

Magnussen smirks at him at the sound of Mycroft’s voice, his eyes narrowing down to slits as he gazes at Sherlock, a delighted smile adorning his face.

He knows that he’s beaten him.

“Oh, I’m not a villain,” Magnussen taunts, his eyes gleaming, “I have no evil plan. I’m a businessman, acquiring assets...”

Sherlock’s stomach sinks at Magnussen’s proclamation, his gaze faltering as he turns to John, his eyes brimming over with grief and anger.

“... You happen to be one of them!” the man finishes, bellowing proudly from the patio.

Something within him breaks at the pride in Magnussen’s voice.

The man truly believes himself to be on a higher plane than him or John when the truth is so far from that.

Magnussen is scum, nothing better than scum.

How dare Magnussen assume himself better than John, so much so that he felt no shame when he insulted John in such a demeaning manner, by flicking his face no less.

How dare he belittle the bravest man that Sherlock has ever known!

And how could Sherlock have been so stupid, how could he have not realised that he’d walked face first into a trap. If he hadn’t come here, none of this would have happened…
His eyebrows furrow for a moment as he turns towards John, his body winding him up tighter and tighter under the weight of his own failure…

“Sorry,” Magnussen’s voice comes again, “No chance for you to be a hero this time, Mr Holmes.”

And something inside of him snaps.

It’s like a switch has been flicked in Sherlock’s brain, as if something happened to hop in and rewire the circuits in under a split second, because suddenly... everything is crystal clear.

Because suddenly, it’s obvious that there’s only one thing he can do now.

Only one thing that he can do to save Mary.

And that’s becoming just as evil as the assassin herself.

“Oh, do your research,” he starts, his eyes ablaze. He digs into John’s pocket while the man is distracted, his fingers coming into contact with cool metal.

He grips the handle of the gun tightly, his fingers unwavering as he raises his head to the high heavens.

There’s no turning back now.

“I’m not a hero,” he says stiffly, moving forwards till he’s side by side with Magnussen.

He watches as Magnussen turns to him with a self-assured smile, his grin stoking the blazing fury within him as he glares back at Magnussen.

“I’m a high-functioning sociopath!”

*It has to be done, it’s the only way that Mary can be safe*, Sherlock thinks as he blinks back angry tears.

“Merry Christmas!” he yells as he raises the gun, the muzzle just inches from Magnussen’s head.

*I’m sorry John. I’m so sorry.*

He pulls the trigger.

Chapter End Notes

Ok I think there'll be at least one more chapter of angst after this? Possibly two? We'll see. God writing Redbeard's backstory really did a number on me. I'm gonna go cry in a corner now. :(.

Hit me up on [tumblr](http://tumblr.com)
Chapter Twelve

Chapter Summary

"Sherlock’s been locked up many times before.

Jail cells, holding cells, you name it. But this… This feels different.

Maybe it’s because the previous times he’s been imprisoned, Mycroft had always been there to help him, always been there to bail him out somehow, making excuses for his dear younger brother.

But that’s not how it’s going to go this time."

Chapter Notes

OOOOH ok drugs tw... Also... a shit ton of angst, you guys have been warned haha.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

4 hours till the plane leaves for Eastern Europe

Sherlock’s been locked up many times before.

Jail cells, holding cells, you name it. But this… This feels different.

Maybe it’s because the previous times he’s been imprisoned, Mycroft had always been there to help him, always been there to bail him out somehow, making excuses for his dear younger brother.

But that’s not how it’s going to go this time.

Mycroft had cleared it all when he visited Sherlock on the day he was imprisoned, informing him that the next time he leaves this cell, he’ll be off on a plane to Eastern Europe. Never to see him again, never to see London again…

Never to see John again.

“Sherlock, it was the best I could do under the circumstances,” his brother had said, “I do believe that you’ll make it through and I promise you that I will do all I can to ensure this mission’s success…”

“... However, this time I will not be there to help you in person. I can’t stress that enough.”

Mycroft’s voice had gone cold and stiff at this, his face devoid of emotion as it shifted swiftly into a mask of indifference.

Sherlock knew what it was.
It was the mark of his brother trying desperately to emotionally distance himself from a situation that was no longer under his control.

Mycroft only ever did this when circumstances grew dire, when there was only one way forward that he did not agree with.

He’d done the same thing when Redbeard had been put down.

“And… I hope to find you well.”

The moment Mycroft left, Sherlock had wept. Tears had streamed down his face as he sunk back down against the hard brick wall, clutching his legs tightly.

Mycroft had been sugarcoating the situation but Sherlock had picked up on enough verbal cues to know what the Mycroft had truly meant.

It’s a suicide mission.

And he isn’t expected to last more than six months.

That is all he has left, six months.

Six months away from John.

He couldn’t have possibly bestowed a worse fate upon himself.

He tears up a little at the memory as he moves to stand, walking towards the aluminium drop-down bed.

He can’t really complain though.

Even if he had a chance to go back and do it all again, he would still have shot Magnussen. There’s no doubt about it.

It might have cost him his life... but it had been the right thing to do.

If he hadn’t shot Magnussen, John would have been marked as a traitor and Mary would have been exposed. What other choice did he have.

But if it was the right decision to make, the best choice for the sake of John’s happiness… Then why isn’t he able to rest easy at all?

He should be happy that he made the correct decision for once, that John can now be happy and live a fulfilling life with Mary and their child. And yet-

Something within him feels empty.

Maybe it’s because he won’t get to see that happen? Won’t get to see John fulfil his magical fairytale ending with Mary, won’t get to see John smiling as he holds up a baby that is his flesh and blood, happy for once that his life is working out for him.

*Or maybe it’s because you’re now a murderer*, a particularly unhelpful part of his brain posits, sending chills down Sherlock’s spine.
On second thought, he really doesn’t want to think about it.

It truly just feels like someone’s carved something out of his chest, leaving the space there hollow and aching, as if he’s missing something important that he doesn’t remember.

He’d been so sure that the mission would succeed, that he’d beat Magnussen once and for all and save John and his marriage.

He’d believed wholeheartedly that the two of them would make it back from Appledore whole and well. That that would be the end of an endless cycle of unhappiness for both of them.

He remembers the photo of him and Redbeard and the telescope, hidden away behind a box in the hallway. He’d intended to retrieve then when he arrived back home, jubilant with success.

Hah, that’s not going to happen now.

In four hours time he’ll meet John at the airstrip, seeing the man that he loves for the very last time and he’s not sure how he’s going to handle that.

He bows his head, his thoughts racing even as they’re simultaneously weighed down by a horrible sense of brutal finality.

*This is the last time you’ll ever see him*, the voices in his head say.

*The very last time.*

“Tell him you love him,” some of them say, “There’s nothing for it now, you have nothing to gain or lose from either answer that he gives. You’ve been selfless enough, now it’s time to be selfish. Get it off your chest, you won’t get to see the repercussions.”

“But you can’t do that,” another set of voices in his head cry, “John loves you, he loves you so much. Can you imagine how horrible he’ll feel? How wrecked he’ll be if you tell him the truth? You don’t want that. You don’t want to go off to Eastern Europe knowing that you’ve ruined the best man that you’ve ever had the pleasure of meeting.”

“Don’t mess it up. Don’t ruin all that you’ve done for him.”

He clutches his hair in fistfulls as the voices continue to run circles around each other, chasing down threads of endless thought that Sherlock cannot bear to follow.

This has been happening for the past week of his solitary confinement and he just wants them to stop… Just wants them to-

“Sherlock Holmes,” a voice booms.

Sherlock raises his head, coming face to face with a burly looking man.

He’s never seen him before, the man is definitely not a guard… And judging from his appearance (dirty looking pants, creased shirt, dull shoes), the man doesn’t work here either.

How did he get in?

“What do you want?” Sherlock questions back, moving to stand as he walks towards the bars, his feet thudding loudly against the concrete floor.

“She told me to pass this to you,” the man replies, “Told me you’d need it.”
He pulls out a transparent ziplock case from his coat pocket, holding it up for Sherlock to see.

It contains a bottle filled with pills of shapes and sizes. The colours all belonging to drugs that Sherlock recognises.

There’s a tourniquet as well, a rather old-looking, rugged one, similar to the ones that Sherlock used to use in his uni days.

He steps forward, curiosity piqued now, peering out inquisitively to get a closer look at the bag’s contents.

An ominous looking syringe sits at the bottom of the bag, the needle gleaming brightly in the fluorescent light next to a glass vial of clear fluid.

Sherlock knows what it is when he lays eyes on it.

It’s cocaine.

He reaches out through the bars, snatching the packet away from the man almost violently.

“Thank you,” he says, stalking back to his bed as the intruder turns on his heel, shoes squeaking loudly against the tiles as he makes a quick exit.

He turns the packet over in his hands.

This is what he’s been looking for.

This is what he needs for everything to stop to just stop…

But wait… didn’t the man say something about a she?

He pulls apart the plastic lock, emptying the contents of the bag out onto his bed, sending the bottle of pills rolling off towards a corner.

He wouldn’t have said that unless Sherlock was supposed to know who it was. People like him are careful like that… which means-

He uncaps the bottle with the pills, withdrawing a large piece of paper half-hidden by the cap.

He unwraps the crumpled sheet of paper, gazing at it in shock.

“Dear Sherlock,” it reads, “This is Mary here...”

His blood runs cold as he reads her name, his fingers trembling as he holds the paper up to read. The words are written on in beautiful cursive, similar to the writing on the wedding cards Sherlock had sent out, meaning… that it is probably her.

He feels sick to the stomach, but he continues reading anyway.

“Thank you so much for all that you’ve done for John and I. It has truly been a pleasure to have counted you as one of my closest friends and I am humbled by how much you’ve done for me in the past few days…”

He’s going to throw up, he really is.

“You’ve looked out for me so much over the course of my marriage to John, arranging that meet-up
at your parent’s house, helping me to get Magnussen to get off my back. And I’ve been thinking, such kindness deserves to be repaid. So now it’s my turn to look out for you.”

*Wait what?* Sherlock thinks.

“John told me that you used to be a drug addict, told me you used to use them to take the edge off. So I thought that maybe, given the circumstances, you’d require some to calm your nerves.”

*Oh god.*

“I hope there’s enough in there to go around. Hope you appreciate it. XOXO Mary Watson”

Yup, Sherlock is definitely going to be sick.

He feels bile rising in his throat as he throws the letter away, watching it float away off into a corner of the room.

How dare she, how dare she attack him like this at his weakest. She knows full well that he has poor self control...

How could she do this to him?

He picks up the bottle of pills and cocaine from the bed, bringing them over to the squatting toilet in a corner of the room.

He’s not going to give her the satisfaction.

He uncaps the vial of cocaine, preparing to pour it down the drain where it belongs...

But something stops him in his tracks, his arm stilling as he freezes where he’s squatting, his body locked in a grotesque limbo.

He knows he shouldn’t do it, that he shouldn’t succumb to his more baser instincts…

And yet.

He pulls himself away from the edge of the bowl, cupping the top of the glass jar carefully.

He doesn’t want any to spill out in his haste.

He rests the bottles on the concrete floor, careful to ensure that neither of them will accidentally overturn as he picks up Mary’s letter, ripping it neatly in half.

He drops the top half with Mary’s writing into the toilet bowl, watching with great satisfaction as it’s flushed down into the sewer, where it belongs.

Mycroft had come in yesterday with a sheet of paper for him to sign and a pen, but he’d let him keep the pen. It had been against protocol but Mycroft had done it anyway after Sherlock had asked for it politely.

He’d spent the better half of the last afternoon drawing circles on his palms in a bid to soothe his aching nerves and boredom, eventually giving it up as a hopeless endeavour before tucking the pen safely away into his shirt pocket.

It’s a good thing he kept it, he thinks to himself as he bends over on the floor, writing out the list of drugs that Mary’s presented before him.
Amphetamine, cocaine...

The list goes on.

They used to do this, him and Mycroft. Whenever he’d taken drugs, especially when he’d meant to overdose, he would write down a list of drugs he’d taken for Mycroft to find. So that his brother would either know what killed him or what to tell the doctor to treat for, that is if his heart was still been beating by the time Mycroft got to him.

He hasn’t done this in years though. The last time this happened had been way back in his uni days, back when he had a death wish and didn’t want to live past 30.

Oh well, desperate times call for desperate measures.

He finishes the list, tucking it away into his coat pocket.

There’s no going back now.

Maybe Mycroft will find his crumpled body on the plane and extract it from his coat pocket? Maybe he won’t even make it to the airstrip. Maybe he’ll pass out in the car taking him there.

Well… Anything would be okay. Just as long as it would make the pain stop.

He isn’t going to survive long in Eastern Europe anyway, might as well preempt the terms of his death instead of having it decided for him...

He removes the sterile covering from the syringe, plunging the tip straight into the vial of cocaine.

Anything to make it stop-

But what would John think.

The thought shoots to the forefront of his mind, broadcasting itself to Sherlock’s consciousness in thick, bold lettering.

What would he think if he found Sherlock high out of his mind, too confused to even think straight?

He’d hate him then. Absolutely hate him… He’d be so disappointed-

*Let him*, the more selfish part of his brain thinks.

*Let him, you're leaving. It's all about you now. Forget about him, you've done enough already. He's not the one going on a suicide mission.*

*Just for once, go ahead and think about yourself.*

Sherlock mulls over this as he prepares the tourniquet, slotting it carefully around his left arm.

He raises the needle, clear liquid dripping from the tip as he presses the plunger down slowly.

It drops to the floor, leaving a splattered discolouration on the dark concrete.

*Go ahead.*

*Do it*, the voice in his head comes again.

And this time…
England is rarely blessed with perfect weather.

It’s often either too cold or too dry, and dark clouds tend to have a bad habit of hanging ominous curtains over what would normally be known as sunny days.

And when it rains?

Oh god, it’s the worst.

But today’s not one of these days.

The sky is a beautiful pastel blue, airbrushed with fluffy, cotton-candy clouds that stretch far off into the horizon. The air is crisp and chill, smelling sweetly of grass and wildflowers, although that could possibly be because they’re in the countryside away from the foul London air.

Sherlock smirks weakly at the thought as he makes his way out of the car.

He’s still under the influence, his mind clearer than normal and yet fuzzier at the edges, just as he used to like it. But despite this, he’s still damn well able to appreciate good weather if he wants to.

The wind picks up as Sherlock stills beside the private jet, the breeze tousling his hair gently as he turns back to face the dirt track they’d just come down.

They’ve come a long way from London, a long way from home and Sherlock feels sick to the stomach as he watches the Rolls-royce he’d arrived in do a three-point turn, revving off into the distance.

He looks on, stomach churning even as Mycroft sidles up to him, security guard in tow.

His brother flashes him a forced smile, making Sherlock feel even worse as the car turns off onto the main road, disappearing from sight.

This is it, he thinks to himself.

This is really it.

There’s no going back now.

But even though his head has said it's piece, his heart is telling him something entirely different -

That there's still hope

He continues to stare after the small opening in the road, half-expecting the car to turn back for him, that this is all just a sick joke and he’ll soon be jolted free from this nightmare.

Or maybe Mycroft has some secret plan up his sleeve that’ll save him at the last moment? Because when has his elder brother never come through for him?
But Mycroft has turned away from him, moving off towards the side of the plane to chat with his security guard and Sherlock feels his stomach plummeting like a stone, his heart now heavy laden with sorrow.

He’s glad he’s taken the drugs.

It’s taken the edge off the sadness a little, dulling the pain so that all Sherlock truly feels like doing is staring off hopelessly into the distance rather than breaking down and weeping on the tarmac.

Yeah, maybe the drugs had been a good idea.

“Sherlock,” his brother sighs, walking forwards again to stand side by side with him. When Sherlock doesn’t respond, he rests his hand on his shoulder, squeezing the socket there.

Mycroft has never been good with words and often, his actions have told stories that his words could never hope to accomplish.

Sherlock feels the “I’m sorry” in the warmth of Mycroft’s palm, the “There was nothing I could do” in the squeeze and give of Mycroft’s fingers before his brother lets his hand fall to his side, his arm slack against Sherlock’s.

Sherlock shivers, a wave of finality hitting him as he turns away from the dirt track, his eyes brimming over with tears.

He wipes them away swiftly, staining his coat sleeves a darker blue as he stalks towards the plane, his hands trembling with the clarity of the truth that’s he’s not getting a second chance… Not this time.

Mycroft fixes him with another knowing look before backing towards the nose of the plane, beckoning Sherlock to follow.

He does, reluctantly, his eyes a little glazed over as he walks over to Mycroft side, fixing his gaze on the dark, black tarmac.

“I hope you’ve figured out what you’re going to say to them,” Mycroft breathes, flashing Sherlock a forced grin, “We’ll be forced to depart soon after they arrive due to the air traffic, so I do hope that you’ll make optimal use of the short time you have left.”

Sherlock scoffs, glaring up at his brother whose false grin falters a little, his eyes slipping away from Sherlock’s gaze as Sherlock turns back to the tarmac below him, wishing that the earth would swallow him up.

He has no idea how long he stands there for, his eyes fixed on dark gravel when Mycroft’s head perks up, his posture going ramrod straight.

He raises his head, following Mycroft’s gaze to the clearing at the intersection.

A midnight black car is driving down the road, gravel crunching loudly under its wheels as it makes its way over to the airplane.

“They’re here,” Mycroft says, his eyes steely as he turns to Sherlock who quickly contorts his face into a blank mask of impassivity, resting his hands behind his back.

The car slows to a stop, the doors opening to reveal John and Mary.
Sherlock swallows, watching as Mary makes her way up to him while John oscillates near the open car door, clearly wondering whether he should come over or not.

Well… It looks like he’ll have to face Mary first, might as well get it over and done with.

“You will look after him for me, won’t you?” he says as Mary reaches out to him, wrapping him in an embrace.

He plants a kiss on her cheek as she does so in turn, his heart plummeting further when he is reminded that he’s hugging the woman who nearly killed him.

“Don’t worry...” she says, Sherlock sensing her grin through her words. She knows that he’s taken the drugs - that she’s won. But right now, Sherlock can’t be arsed to care about it.

“...I’ll keep him in trouble,” she finishes, stepping away with a broad smile.

“That’s my girl,” he replies, trying to sound as cheerful as possible as he smiles back. He watches as Mary turns around, cutting a jarring figure into the landscape as she walks over to John’s side.

He lets his smile fall the moment he’s certain that she’s no longer looking, gazing disheartenedly at the ground as Mary leans into John’s space.

She raises a hand to John’s back, holding him there possessively as John raises his gaze to Sherlock’s, their eyes meeting for a millisecond.

Sherlock can read John’s sorrow in the dips and creases of his forehead, his resignation in the reluctant slump of his shoulders. It’s too much for Sherlock to take in and the more he looks at him, the more John’s grief threatens to overpower his own.

So he looks away instead, watching out of the corner of his eye as John turns, ducking his head downwards, away from Mary.

He knows that he should call John over, that John is entitled to at least one final conversation with him, but the finality of the situation hurts too much and Sherlock’s heart aches at the thought of having to bid his best friend a final farewell.

Maybe he should just leave now.

But then he raises glazed, reddened eyes to John’s sea blue ones, seeing his sadness mirrored in his best friend’s gaze and he thinks to himself that if John deserves anything, it’s a final chance to say goodbye to him.

“Since this is likely to be the last conversation I’ll have with John Watson...” he begins, turning to Mycroft. John inhales sharply at his words, expelling a painful sigh before Sherlock continues. “...would you mind if we took a moment?”

Mycroft raises his eyebrows, looking at him with something akin to surprise before he nods his head, beckoning Mary and the two security guards to follow him.

They make their way over to the far end of the plane, gravel crunching under their feet till he’s left alone with John.

John steps forward awkwardly, flashing him a pained smile before nodding his head.

“So, here we are,” he begins, his eyes flickering around the airfield before they alight on Sherlock’s,
their gazes locking and Sherlock finds that he’s at a loss for words.

In truth, there are many things that Sherlock would like to tell him, but all avenues of conversation that he can think of are heavily emotionally charged and will probably result in him revealing more than he wishes John to know...

Well, if that’s the case then why don’t you just get it over and done with? a part of his brain yells at him.

This is the last chance you’ll get, just tell him.

He tries to stifle the voice, knowing that no good can come out of a forced confession now.

Neither of them will benefit from it, so what’s the point.

He doesn’t want John looking up at him with longing or regret. God, he’s gone over this with himself so many times in the cell already, when will this niggling thought leave him alone.

John deserves to know, the voice comes again, slightly louder this time.

But it’s selfish! he yells back, the pain in his imaginary voice palpable. It’s selfish and horrible and I don’t want to leave John with the knowledge that we could have been more if he were not better off with... with her.

He thinks that I don’t love him and that I approve of his relationship with Mary. If I destroy that facade, I might just wreck him forever.

And this time the voice is silent.

He sighs inwardly, still at a loss for what to say even after that severe session of emotional turmoil.

Well... for the time being there may be one item of information that he can relinquish to John without him becoming a puddle of emotion, and that is-

“William Sherlock Scott Holmes,” he interjects, watching as John turns to him in confusion, his brow furrowing even as he grins up at him.

“Sorry?”

”That’s the whole of it,” Sherlock continues, a warmth in his chest blossoming as he gazes down at the smile on John’s face. “If you’re looking for baby names.”

He hopes that John will laugh at the joke, the idea of naming his child after him as ludicrous a notion that Sherlock has ever come up with. However, now that Sherlock’s given these thoughts a voice, it seems like someone else has used these exact same words before...

“John Hamish Watson. If you’re looking for baby names.”

Oh god, it’d been from that conversation that they’d had with Irene Adler a long time ago, when Sherlock had been bantering back and forth with the Woman and John had butted in, sounding almost annoyed.

And come to think of it, in light of John’s confession, Sherlock’s almost certain now that John had uttered those words out of spite and jealousy.

He panics a little, wondering if John will realise that he’s using borrowed words, mistaking a simple
joke for a statement that he’s still not ready to give. Oh god, even his subconscious is trying to wrestle him into a confession.

But John either doesn’t seem to remember or ignores the connotations behind the words entirely. He chuckles softly, before replying, ”No, we’ve had a scan. We’re pretty sure it’s a girl.”

Sherlock sighs in relief, flashing John a gentle smile as he answers with an “Oh… Okay”

John turns away from him, smiling at the ground.

And just like that, the tension that used to haunt their old conversations is back again.

An awkward silence ensues, pervading the space between them as Sherlock’s eyes scan the horizon, purposefully looking anywhere but John.

“Yeah,” John murmurs, in a bid to break the quiet.

He watches as John’s gaze completes another circuit of the airfield before he finally turns towards him, his left hand visibly shaking

“Actually, I can’t think of a single thing to say,” he says, the words dripping with honesty.

“No, neither can I,” Sherlock says, his brow furrowing.

John seems to ponder over his words for a bit, his expression slightly dazed and confused before he sets his jaw, looking extremely determined, as if desperate to flesh out as much of a conversation as is possible in the short time they have left.

“The game is over,” he insists, knowing that Sherlock can’t not reply to that. It’s a false statement in every sense of the word, and one that clearly, even John himself doesn’t seem to believe in, going by the look on his face.

However, Sherlock will humour him this once.

“The game is never over, John,” he replies, his voice taking on a gentler tone, “but there may be some new players now... It’s okay. The East Wind takes us all in the end.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s a story my brother told me when we were kids,” Sherlock explains.

“The East Wind – this terrifying force that lays waste to all in its path. It seeks out the unworthy... and plucks them from the Earth…”

“... That was generally me.”

“Nice,” John replies sarcastically, trying to keep a straight face.

“He was a rubbish big brother,” Sherlock responds, flashing John a wide smile.

John smiles in answer before dropping his gaze. He grins down at the ground instead, working his jaw a little as he makes a gnashing motion with his teeth.

Sherlock knows what it is, it’s John’s “thinking look”, basically the face that he displays every time he’s trying to say something he really wishes to say but can’t bring himself to.
But then John clears his throat, his blue eyes blazing as they bore into Sherlock’s.

“So what about you, then?” he questions, his voice a little strained, "Where are you actually going now?"

The query startles Sherlock for a moment, leaving him slightly taken aback before his brain kicks into overdrive, his mind spinning as he ponders over whether he should tell John the truth about the mission or if he should lie.

He settles for the latter.

“Oh, some undercover work in Eastern Europe,” he says, forcing himself to sound as bored and nonchalant as possible.

“For how long?” John presses, clearly wanting proper answers.

Come to think of it, knowing Mycroft, he probably hasn’t bothered to brief John on the details of his trip.

Of course he’d leave Sherlock to do it for him.

Sherlock refuses to meet John’s gaze as he continues.

“Six months, my brother estimates,” he says, pausing for a moment to collect himself. “He’s never wrong.”

“And then what?” John says, pressuring him for a more detailed answer.

It’s understandable, it really is, Sherlock thinks to himself. John’s been told that his best friend is leaving him forever and he hasn’t even been told where to or why.

Sherlock forces himself to meet John’s eyes, trying to convey his deepest apologies though his gaze because he can’t tell him. He can’t.

“Who knows?” he says, shrugging his shoulders as he bites his lip.

John nods respectfully, knowing that Sherlock isn’t going to say any more on the topic.

He turns away, his breaths deepening as he fixes his eyes on the corner of the airfield.

Sherlock stares after him, his heart sinking even as he admires John’s side profile, watching the way that lines of old age have cut into his skin, the way the sunlight brings out the blond streaks in his ash-grey hair.

After all, it’s the very last chance he’ll get to do so.

Yes Sherlock, nice that you’ve caught on, the voice comes again.

It’s your last chance, the last time you’ll ever get to see him, touch him, hold him.

Are you sure you don’t want to tell him how you truly feel?

His insides are churning as John turns back to face him, the sadness in his blue eyes palpable as he peers up at him.

Last chance Sherlock.
“John,” he begins, his voice threatening to crack.

He’s not sure what has possessed him to make this split second decision, considering the fact that he’s been desperately trying to prevent himself from deciding on confessing to John for the past one week (Or maybe in retrospect, two to three years).

Maybe it’s the drugs, maybe it’s the way that John’s looking up at him with sorrow in his eyes. He doesn’t know. But it feels like his veins are thrumming with liquid courage and the words are just coming, flowing to the tip of his tongue, begging to be spoken.

“There’s something... I should say... I-I’ve meant to say always and then never have.”

He watches as John turns to him, their gazes connecting almost magnetically as John purses his lips, his eyes zeroing in on Sherlock’s.

“Since it’s unlikely we’ll ever meet again, I might as well say it now.”

He pauses, preparing himself for the words to come. He watches as John flashes him a confused look, biting his lip in anticipation of what Sherlock’s going to say next.

He takes a deep breath, the words on the tip of his tongue...

But his courage fails him, his tongue hanging limply in his mouth as he swallows the words back down, changing his tune completely.

“Sherlock is actually a girl’s name.”

John stands stock still for a moment, his eyes wide before they’re crinkled shut. He turns away, his lips opening in a silent chuckle.

It clearly had not been what he’d been expecting.

Sherlock smiles at him sadly, watching as John returns the favour with a wide grin.

It’d been the right thing to do and yet, his heart feels empty at the thought of never getting a chance to say those words out loud.

Well, he’s botched his final chance, there’s nothing for it now.

“It’s not,” John manages in between giggles, his eyes shining with mirth.

“It was worth a try,” Sherlock answers, not actually talking about baby names at all.

“We’re not naming our daughter after you,” John replies, his eyes sparkling with delight as he beams up at Sherlock.

Sherlock sighs deeply at the sight, his chest heaving a little before he replies.

"I think it could work."

John chuckles again, raising his eyes to Sherlock’s. Sherlock offers him a small smirk, staring back at him wistfully.

I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you, Sherlock thinks, wondering if John can hear him or see the emotion
conveyed through his eyes.

*I wasn’t ready.*

And it’s then that John’s laughter dies in his throat.

He blinks, his eyes crinkled shut due to the glare of the Sun but Sherlock can still make out the sadness in his gaze, the sorrow and the regret… And Sherlock’s heart breaks at the sight.

He can’t look anymore, he can’t-

He flicks his eyes downwards, away from John’s despairing gaze, struggling to reign in his tears.

He removes the glove on his right hand, holding out his hand stiffly.

“To the very best… of times, John” he manages, fixing his eyes on John’s once again.

John seems slightly taken aback by the gesture. He looks down at Sherlock’s hand, confused, before he stretches out his arm, grasping Sherlock’s hand firmly, gripping him as if he’ll vanish the moment he lets go.

He gives his hand one solid shake, his eyes focused on Sherlock’s, refusing to let go.

Sherlock stands stock still, transfixed, wondering if he should move in for a hug.

But he stops himself, knowing that if he allows himself anymore closer to John, he might just give in to the anguish and turmoil and kiss him.

*Please don’t leave me,* he seems to read in John’s eyes. *Please don’t go.*

But Sherlock gives John’s hand one last pump, loosening his grip as he steps away, their intertwined fingers sliding apart as he turns around, slipping on his glove as he makes his way to the airplane.

*I’m sorry John,* he thinks to himself, *I’m so so sorry.*

He makes his way up the metal stairs, his shoes clinking with the effort as his eyes begin to brim over with tears.

He doesn’t look back.

----

**DID YOU MISS ME?**
“Hello, little brother. How is the exile going?”

“I’ve only been gone four minutes.”

“Well, I certainly hope you’ve learned your lesson. As it turns out, you’re needed.”

“Oh, for God’s sake. Make up your mind. Who needs me this time?”

“... England.”

----

But… But he can’t be back, it’s not possible. I saw him blow his brains out. How could he still be alive?

Did you check the body? Are you sure he didn’t fake his death just as you did?

No, John. You don’t understand. I heard the gunshot. There was blood! I... I-

Sherlock, look don’t panic. It’s not like it’s your fault that he’s back... So you didn’t check then?

No I didn’t, I just assumed that Mycroft would do a thorough job... John, looking at him alone just made me sick to the stomach. I really couldn’t bear to get any closer, let alone move his body. I-

It’s alright Sherlock, I understand. What we have to focus on now isn’t really the how or why, but rather, on what his next move will be.

Why are you sounding so much like the real John all of a sudden?

You know Sherlock, technically I’m just an extension of what you believe John’s personality to be. So regardless, I will sound like the “Real John”, because the “Real John” isn’t actually John in himself, but rather what you’ve imagined John Watson to be-

No I knew that already, it’s just, you don’t normally sound this much like him...

Anyways it doesn’t matter, I need help John and I need it fast.

I told you already, we need to figure out what plans Moriarty has and-

No.

I know that’s important and all but, I need to find out how he did it.

Did what?
Bested me.

Tricked me. Fooled me. Lulled me into a false sense of complacency.

Has he been hovering at the edges of my existence, sitting there, waiting to strike?

I need answers, John. I need to know-

But Sherlock we can sort all of that out later! Focus on this first instead.

John I can’t start work on this unless I derive some sort of closure from the whole incident at Barts. I believed he was dead, legitimately believed that he’d passed on into the next world. I thought that I was safe, that you were safe… And now that bastard is back?

Does that mean that all the undercover work I did to dismantle his network has all been in vain? Does it mean that I spent valuable time away from London, away from you, chasing after a husk of a reality?

John I need to know. I need to. I’m sorry.

Okay… okay. I understand… So what do you need?

Your help.

I have no idea where to start, it’s all kind of a blur…

That’s what happens when you take drugs Sherlock.

Not helping!

Ok… Maybe… Maybe you could think through all the mysterious murders you’ve solved in the past? There might be something there, that’s similar to this one.

No John, there isn’t. I’m sure of it, or I would have figured this one out already.

Geez Mr. Smartypants I’m just trying to help…

Hey. How about the ones you haven’t solved? Any of those similar to this one?

Well… Now that you do mention it, there is this one case…

Oh good! One that you tackled before I came around, I’m assuming.

No actually, it’s one that I read about when we went to the crime exhibition just a few weeks ago.

Wha- Are you serious Sherlock. You’re going to use a 100 year old-

But it’s so similar John! It’s so similar, you wouldn’t believe how similar it is! This could be the key!

Sherlock, you don’t really have much to go on. This case is probably going to be as hard to solve as the Moriarty puzzle.
I could try it though! It might work! You never know… Although I will have to go back.

Back?

As in, back into that time period. You and I, and everyone else, all back in Victorian times to help solve the case with me. I’ll need to put my feet into the shoes of a detective living in that day and age and John, you’re going to have to follow me.

Well, I don’t really have much of a choice now do I? I am in your subconscious after all.

Although, do me one favour… I do want a moustache. I quite liked it even though you and Mary both hated it. Just humour me a little bit alright?

Pfft. Alright John, whatever floats your boat.

...

Are you ready?

As ready as I can be.

… Then into battle we go.

Chapter End Notes

Next update in three weeks? haha. I have a lot of university stuff I need to deal with first so this is going to take a while... Also, I'm working on something special too! (((You'll find out what it is soon)))

Hope you guys enjoyed this chapter!!!

Also, I used episode transcripts by the wonderful Ariane DeVere!!! Thanks!!!

In addition, thanks for all your kudos and comments! They really do keep me going ;)

Come! Talk to me on tumblr
Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Summary

“No, I wrote all that,” Watson says, interrupting Sherlock’s thoughts as he sits up a little straighter. “You’re quoting yourself from The Strand Magazine.”

“Well, exactly,” Sherlock replies, though now a little half-heartedly.

“No, those are my words, not yours!” Watson exclaims, sounding almost angry, “That is the version of you that I present to the public: the brain without a heart; the calculating machine. I write all of that, Holmes, and the readers lap it up, but I do not believe it.”

Chapter Notes

WOOHOO 10,000 words :) Probably the longest chapter I've ever published... But tbh I had to compact the whole of TAB... so 10k isn't much of a surprise.

Hope you guys like this chapter! And also in light of recent events, hey, nothing is going to stop me from writing more of this. Regardless of what TPTB says, these characters may belong to them but they are shared with us, and I'm going to do whatever the hell I want with them.

On to the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

0 hours till landing

The case of Emelia Ricoletti is probably one of the most interesting cases that Sherlock has ever dealt with.

A dead woman who has supposedly risen from the grave to wreak havoc upon her male counterparts? It’s literally Christmas come early.

And if he's lucky, he might even get a chance to see the “ghost” in action… How very interesting indeed, he thinks to himself as Watson makes an aborted grunt, rising slowly from the greenhouse floor.

They’ve been here for hours, in the greenhouse on the grounds of the Carmichael house, waiting for something interesting to happen. Of course, nothing of importance has occurred yet and Sir Eustace is still safe and sound and alive up in his bedroom. So much for bait…

“Get down, Watson, for heaven’s sake!” he hisses, startling Watson so much that the man quickly drops back down to the floor, his knees hitting the ground with a muffled ‘thump’.
“Sorry,” Watson apologises, rubbing his leg as Sherlock scoffs, rolling his eyes, “Cramp.”

This is followed by a short bout of silence, interspersed by the heavy breathing of one John Watson.

“Is the, er, lamp still burning?” Watson says after a moment, prompting Sherlock to turn to face the Carmichael house, gazing up at one of the few windows that are still lit.

“Yes,” he replies. But the lamp goes out a second later, sending the room into darkness.

“There goes Sir Eustace,” he murmurs, turning now to another lighted window on the other side of the house, watching as that window goes dark too.

“And Lady Carmichael,” he continues, turning back to Watson with rising anticipation, “The house sleeps.”

However, Watson doesn’t seem to be sharing the same burgeoning feeling of excitement that he is because the man is raising his eyes to the greenhouse ceiling, shaking his head exaggeratedly.

“mmmMM, GOOD GOD,” he exclaims, “This is the longest night of my life.”

“Have patience, Watson,” Sherlock sighs, looking on as his friend extracts his watch from his pocket, looking down at it intently.

“Only midnight,” Watson mutters in annoyance, shoving his watch back into his trousers.

He clears his throat, taking a deep breath, glancing up at Sherlock in undisguised frustration.

However, his annoyance fades quickly, his face setting itself into something more stoic as his eyes fall from Sherlock’s face. His eyebrows furrow as he stares, gaze unfocused at the ground, looking to be in deep thought.

Interestingly, Watson seems to come to a quick conclusion on… whatever it is he was thinking of because his eyes light up all of a sudden. He flashes a knowing look Sherlock’s way as he turns to face him square on once again.

“You know,” he begins, “It’s rare for us to sit together like this.”

Sherlock smiles in response, the corners of his lips upturned as he mulls over Watson’s remark. Clearly the man wishes to start a conversation to assuage his boredom… He might as well humour him.

“I should hope so,” he replies, still beaming at Watson, “It’s murder on the knees.”

Watson smiles back, his eyes widening a little as he nods his head.

So it's going to be that kind of conversation then, Sherlock thinks to himself, mindless banter back and forth between Watson and him… He can deal with that, in fact it'd probably be welcome until something interesting happens.

“How…” Watson hums. “Two old friends, just talking, chewing the fat…”

Sherlock groans inwardly. Oh god is this conversation going to be more insipid than he'd projected?

But then, Watson turns to look Sherlock directly in the eye, his voice taking on a deeper tone.

“…man to man,” he finishes, staring up at Sherlock as if demanding a response.
Sherlock frowns, his shoulders involuntarily twitching backwards as if they’ve been scalded by a red hot iron.

It's not going to be some insipid conversation.

It's going to be far far worse.

Oh god, John- no Watson’s not going to bring this up again is he?

Turning to face the house instead, Sherlock raises his head, tilting his nose upwards, hoping that Watson takes the hint and doesn’t pursue any further conversation.

However, the man either doesn’t notice Sherlock’s sudden shift in body language or ignores it entirely, because Watson barrels on, taking no heed of Sherlock’s displeasure towards the turn in their conversation.

“She’s a remarkable woman,” Watson begins, gazing up at him expectantly.

“Who?” Sherlock replies, determined to play as little a part in this conversation as possible.


“The fair sex is your department, Watson,” he replies, hoping that Watson finally takes the hint, “I’ll take your word for it-”

“No, you liked her,” Watson quips, “A woman of rare perception-”

“And admirably high arches,” Sherlock retorts. God, anyone would have noticed that Lady Carmichael was exceptionally intelligent. “I noticed them as soon as she stepped into the room.”

“Huh,” Watson hums, mulling over Sherlock’s statement for a moment before replying, “She’s far too good for him.”

“You think so?” Sherlock replies quizzically, wondering if he’s read that conversation totally wrong and Watson’s just trying to talk about Lady Carmichael’s attractiveness rather than dig into his personal life.

“No,” Watson responds, answering both of Sherlock’s questions all at once, “You think so. I could tell.”

Sherlock fights the urge to roll his eyes.

“On the contrary, I have no view on the matter,” he insists, fixing his eyes on Watson’s, willing the man to drop the matter once and for all.

But Watson stares him down once again. “Yes you have,’ he replies tersely.

Sherlock takes a deep breath. So this is how it’s going to play out, isn’t it?

“Marriage is not a subject upon which I dwell,” he utters, trying to compose himself.

“Well, why not?” Watson persists, fixing him with a steely, determined gaze.

“What’s the matter with you this evening?” Sherlock intones, glaring darkly back at him as his friend raises an accusatory finger, pointing it at Sherlock’s watch.
“That watch that you’re wearing,” he begins, “There’s a photograph inside it. I glimpsed it once… I believe it is of Irene Adler.”

“You didn’t ‘glimpse’ it. You waited ’til I had fallen asleep and looked at it!”

“Yes, I did.”

“You seriously thought I wouldn’t notice?” Sherlock says, trying to sound as calm as possible.

“Irene Adler,” Watson repeats, shaking his head stiffly.

“A formidable opponent,” Sherlock replies, very much on edge now, “A remarkable adventure.”

“A very nice photograph,” Watson sneers, seemingly determined to annoy Sherlock further.

“Why are you talking like this?” Sherlock spits, simultaneously frustrated and a little fearful of the sudden change in conversation.

Because this is what you wish John had said, what John had asked you on the tarmac, so that you would have been forced into a confession rather than prompted into one by your own conscience.

Sherlock shakes his head, a little alarmed.

Where had that come from?

“Why are you so determined to be alone?”

Sherlock fixes his eyes on Joh- Watson, hoping that for all the world that he doesn’t look like a kicked puppy.

Did you really love Irene Adler that much? As in… yesterday… when you were interrogating Cameron…

No this can’t be happening, he’d planned everything out so well. How could his subconscious have breached a gap in his mind palace? And why now, of all times-

It's just then that realisation hits Sherlock, filling his stomach with sickly dread.

Oh god this, this whole conversation… he thinks, This narrative would have been perfectly fine without this talk in the greenhouse. And yet, somehow this conversation is happening. His subconscious must have wormed its way through the parameters of his clearly defined event timeline, creating a situation that he hadn’t anticipated.

In short, he's basically walked into a trap that his subconscious has set for him. And knowing his subconscious, he's probably not going to get out of this one till his brain is satisfied with a sacrifice of emotional upheaval.

“Are you quite well, Watson?” Sherlock replies stiffly, his lip trembling a little.

"Is it such a curious question?” Watson interrogates, his voice taking on a deliberately innocent tone.

“From a Viennese alienist, no, from a retired Army surgeon, most certainly.”

“Holmes,” Watson sighs, “Against absolutely no opposition whatsoever, I am your closest friend.”

“I concede it,” Sherlock interrupts, hoping to end the conversation once and for all before his
subconscious decides to deal him another blow.

Watson pauses at this, seemingly gathering his wits before continuing.

“I am currently attempting to have a perfectly normal conversation with you...”

“Please don’t.”

“...Why do you need to be alone?” John finishes, blurring out the words as if he’d mulled over the question many times before but had just never been brave enough to ask.

Sherlock opens his mouth to answer, a rebuttal on the tip of his tongue before a voice speaks, barely audible even in the silence of the room.

_Sherlock, Sherlock do you not want this?_

Oh god no, please no, Sherlock thinks as memories of that horrible night come flooding back to him. It’s as if Watso-Joh-Watson’s? question has opened up a floodgate in his mind, bringing John’s desperate pleas for closure back to the forefront of his consciousness.

“If you are referring to romantic entanglement,” he continues stoically, fearing that his voice might be wavering slightly, “Watson-”

_Sherlock? Sherlock did I do something wrong? Have I been reading you wrong- I. Please just tell me... What do you want?_

“-which I rather fear you are,” he continues, swallowing deeply.

_Sherlock, I’ve spent the last month trying to woo you and I thought that you were reciprocating. I thought that you felt... something at least._

“-as I have often explained before, all emotion is abhorrent to me.”

_And I’ve wanted you for, god for so long. Since before Barts, maybe from the first time I met you, I really don’t know. And it hurts, oh god it hurts so much to be so close to you and yet not together with you at the same time..._

Sherlock shuts his eyes at the memory, a single tear falling from the corner of his eye as he ploughs on.

“It is the grit in a sensitive instrument-”

_Why does he need to be alone, John asks? It's because John is married will be happier with Mary than with him. And to keep John happy and well, he has to pretend to be okay with the whole marriage thing and that is best done if he keeps away from him altogether. That's precisely why._

“-the crack in the lens,” he finishes as Watson echoes his sentiments, their voices meeting in a shared harmony.

“Yes,” Watson says, looking accusingly up at him.

“Well, there you are, you see?” Sherlock spits, his voice cracking a little. If Watson had known this all already, then why has he been pressing him? “I’ve said it all before.”

_I am a high-functioning sociopath, a voice echoes in the stillness of the room, startling Sherlock for a moment._
John, another starts, *I think you should know that I consider myself married to my work.*

*Alone is what I have, alone protects me,* a third voice chimes in, its voice cold and calculating, even to Sherlock’s ears.

It’s all things that Sherlock has said before and yet hearing them repeated… once again for his ears only, surprises Sherlock a little. He knows none of these statements to be close to the truth, even from the point of utterance and yet he'd never truly figured the extent of his fake facade...

The words sound stale and hollow now, shocking Sherlock with the extent of their coldness… Was that truly the picture he'd painted of himself before the fall?

But no, it had been necessary at the time, to hide himself away from the world, way before John Watson had come into his life and shone a bright light on him, encouraging him to express himself as the shadow of a human being he used to be before Redbeard had passed away.

It had been necessary-

“No, I wrote all that,” Watson says, interrupting Sherlock’s thoughts as he sits up a little straighter. “You’re quoting yourself from The Strand Magazine.”

“Well, exactly,” Sherlock replies, though now a little half-heartedly.

“No, those are my words, not yours!” Watson exclaims, sounding almost angry, “That is the version of you that I present to the public: the brain without a heart; the calculating machine. I write all of that, Holmes, and the readers lap it up, but I do not believe it.”

*Sherlock is actually a girl’s name,* a voice whispers in Sherlock’s ear. But it's too much, it's just too much to process right now so he ignores it, ploughing on sullenly.

“Well, I’ve a good mind to write to your editor.”

Watson pauses at this, staring up at Sherlock almost incredulously before his brow furrows, his face taking on a look of abject frustration.

“You are a living, breathing man,” Watson says, enunciating each word carefully, “You’ve lived a life. You have a past—”

“A what!?” Sherlock exclaims, wondering what exactly Watson is trying to get at now, or taking into consideration the wider picture, what new blow his subconscious wishes to deal him.

“Well, you must have had…”

“Had what?” Sherlock questions, hoping that Watson will put him out of his misery and spell it out for him.

“You know,” Watson says again, shifting awkwardly and pointing at Sherlock.

“No,” Sherlock responds, hoping that Watson isn’t trying to get at what he thinks he’s trying to get at. God, the fictional, Victorian version of John Watson is seriously a menace.

Watson swallows at Sherlock’s reply, grimacing as if physically pained by it.

“Experiences,” he finishes, staring up self-assuredly at Sherlock.

Sherlock glares down at Watson, stunned by his friend’s audacity to ask such a ridiculous question.
“Pass me your revolver,” he hisses, “I have a sudden need to use it.”

“Damn it, Holmes,” Watson says angrily, possibly annoyed at Sherlock’s evasion, “You are flesh and blood. You have feelings. You have... you must have…”

“... impulses.”

*There’s a dark figure seated above him, running its fingers over dips and crevices, drowning him in satin stained kisses, cradling him in their arms so gently, as if he’s something precious.*

“No. NO.

Sherlock closes his eyes, gritting his teeth in exasperation.

John is married to Mary. John is married to Mary. John is married to Mary...

He is not- His mind is not- He WILL NOT-

“Dear Lord,” he mutters, even as Watson continues to stare at him intently “I have never been so impatient to be attacked by a murderous ghost!”

He flashes an accusatory gaze at Watson, hoping that the man will finally take a hint and stop pressing him with ridiculous questions.

But Watson continues, ignoring Sherlock’s distress as his voice takes on a stern tone.

“As your friend,” he begins, “as someone who... worries about you...”

“... What made you like this?”

Sherlock’s eyes widen at the question.

Finally, something that he can answer.

“Oh, Watson,” he says almost patronisingly, “Nothing made me…”

However, just before he completes the sentence, he’s interrupted by a series of noises from his left.

He turns, listening carefully, trying to pinpoint the source of the noise.

“I made me,” he finishes.

The noises are getting clearer now, sharpening into something akin to the sound of a yelping dog. Quite like how Redbeard had sounded after he’d been bitte-

“Redbeard?” Sherlock breathes, looking out into the darkness, wondering for a moment if the happy-go-lucky Irish Setter is out there right now, wounded and alone.

He almost makes to rise from his seat before he remembers.

None of this is real.

It’s just his subconscious, barging in and bombarding him in his drug-addled, weakened state. Nothing more-
“Good God!” Watson yells, making to rise from his seat as Sherlock flinches, Watson’s voice shaking him abruptly out of his thoughts. He turns to face Watson, watching as his friend’s face begins to pale, his eyes widening in unbridled terror.

Sherlock frowns, turning his head to follow Watson’s gaze… And that’s when he sees it.

There’s a lady dressed all in white, her clothing slightly tattered and torn. Her body is glowing, incandescent in the twilight as she turns to face them.

“What are we to do?” Watson breathes, the two of them still watching with rapt attention as The Bride lifts her right hand, extending it towards them.

*Finally, something interesting!* Sherlock thinks to himself. As long as it’s something that’ll rid him of his sub-conscious’ incessant meddling, Sherlock will take it.

Sherlock moves to stand, rising from his seat as he lifts his gaze to The Bride, schooling his face into an impassive mask of indifference.

“Why don’t we have a chat?” he says, leaping up from his chair and racing towards The Bride as Watson follows.

*At long last!* He thinks, his coat billowing out behind him as he makes a mad dash for the archway.

Something’s going right for once!

----

It’s all going horribly, horribly wrong

He’s somehow managed to botch the case of Eustace Carmichael, essentially killing the one man that he was supposed to have protected and to top it off, he still isn’t any closer to solving the case than when he first started

To make matters worse, there’s a madman in his living room, striding up and down the dusty carpet, acting as if he owns the place.

Mycroft had warned him about this, technically… In his imaginary study, just that Sherlock hadn’t taken him seriously.

“You didn’t expect me to turn up at the scene of the crime, did you?” Moriarty drones, smiling up at the ceiling.

“Poor old Sir Eustace,” he tuts, making his way over to the far end of the living room. “He got what was coming to him.”

Sherlock has next to no clue as to how Moriarty got here since the man has literally nothing to do with the case at hand. In fact, he’s pretty sure that in designing this world, he hadn’t created a Victorian Moriarty.

Unless…

No.
“But you couldn’t have killed him,” he mutters, a little unsure, the lines of reality and fantasy blurring as Moriarty turns back to face him, a smug look on his face.

“Oh, so what? Does it matter?” he drawls, shaking his head.

Sherlock’s gaze narrows, staring down at Moriarty in curiosity.

If Moriarty definitely had nothing to do with the case... Then, there’s only one reason for his sudden appearance.

His subconsciousness hasn’t meddled with his mind palace since the incident at the greenhouse in the Carmichael house... Meaning that it would only have been a matter of time before it brought back something else to haunt him.

And this time, it’s taken the shape and form of his worst nightmare.

How delightful.

“Stop it. Stop this,” Moriarty continues, fixing a deadened gaze on Sherlock, “You don’t care about Sir Eustace, or the Bride or any of it.”

“There’s only one thing in this whole business that you find interesting.”

And that’s how I died, a voice in his head helpfully supplants.

Sherlock mentally reels back in horror, his eyes widening as he realises the true reason why his subconscious has brought Moriarty back.

It may be to torture him, to scare him a little bit.

But the moment Moriarty enters into the narrative, one that he definitely doesn’t belong in, it means that Sherlock’s fantasy world will start to crumble.

His subconscious isn’t really trying to frighten him, it’s trying to wake him up, to stop him from solving the case.

And Sherlock cannot let that happen.

He has to call John, he’s got to call John. John has to know-

But wait... Does he really need John’s help. The man might be somewhere in the next room but isn’t it better if he deals with Moriarty on his own?

Wouldn’t that be better for both of them? For Sherlock to deal with his demons on his own instead of burdening John with them?

If Moriarty intends to have a go at waking him up, Sherlock should probably face him on his own.

It’s only right.

“I know what you’re doing,” he says under his breath, looking Moriarty dead in the eye as the room begins to shake, the shelves and the floorboards rattling.

He closes his eyes, willing himself to sleep on, to stop himself from waking.

All he has to do is immerse himself back in the Victorian world. Yes, that’s it, that’s all he has to do.
Think of the Bride, don’t think about Moriarty, he whispers to himself, hoping to hell that it’ll work. *Think of the Bride, don’t think about Moriarty. Think of the Bride, don’t think about Moriar...*

Thankfully, the rattling and shaking slows to an eventual stop, the room returning to its previous pristine condition as Sherlock opens his eyes… only to find Moriarty holding a pistol right next to his chin.

“The Bride put a gun in her mouth and shot the back of her head off and then she came back,” he starts, refusing to break eye contact with him.

“Impossible…” he mutters, pausing for dramatic effect. “But she did it, and you need to know how.”

“How ...?”

The room begins to rock once again, startling Sherlock as the intensity of the shaking seems to have increased substantially from the last time.

*Think of the Bride, don’t think about Moriarty. Don’t think about how scared you are… Don’t think about how much you hate him...*

“... don’t you?” Moriarty finishes as the room continues to shake. “It’s tearing your world apart not knowing.”

“You’re trying to stop me...” Sherlock mutters angrily. He’s not letting Moriarty get the best of him, not this time. He inhales deeply, closing his eyes. This will all go away if he tries hard enough… If he tries-

*Think of the Bride, don’t think about Moriarty. Think of the Bride, don’t think about Moriarty. Think of the Bride, don’t think about Moriarty.*

But it’s not working this time.

*You’ve got to call John,* his subconscious tells him, *You can’t do this on your own, you have to ask him for his help. You can’t fight this man on your own.*

However, Sherlock shakes his head, disagreeing firmly with his subconscious.

*Think of the Bride, don’t think about Moriarty. Think of the Bride, don’t think about Moriarty...* he thinks once again, sure that it will work this time. But when he opens his eyes once again, he finds that not only is the room still shaking but that Moriarty is still there.

“...to distract me, derail me,” he mutters with heightening fear and ferocity.

*If John were here,* a voice in his head yells again, *he could help you, you know. It’s not too much to call for him, he’s probably IN THE NEXT ROOM!*

And just like that, the room stops shaking.

Sherlock heaves a silent sigh of relief, but it may be too early to celebrate. Because Moriarty doesn’t look like he’s done just yet.

Moriarty peers up at him quizzically, as if preparing to deal the final blow.

“Because doesn’t this remind you of another case?” he says, his face deadpan.

Oh no, Sherlock thinks, *This isn’t good.*
He closes his eyes as Moriarty continues.

“Hasn’t this all happened before?” the man drawls. “There’s nothing new under the sun.”

Sherlock grimaces at his voice, keeping his eyes firmly shut.

“What was it? What was it? What was that case? Huh? D’you remember?” Moriarty slurs as Sherlock lifts his hands to his face, cupping them over his cheeks.

*Think of the Bride, don’t think about Moriarty.*

“It’s on the tip of my tongue,” Moriarty continues as Sherlock screws his eyes tightly shut. The floor begins to tremble again, swaying back and forth under his feet even as Moriarty keeps up a litany of “It’s on the tip of my tongue.”

*Please make it stop, please make it stop,* Sherlock thinks to himself, *PLEASE.*

He opens his eyes, hoping that he’s succeeded and Moriarty is gone. However, the man is still there, except that he’s now bent forward, knees on the ground with the pistol in his mouth.

“It’s on the tip of my tongue,” he repeats, one last time, sending alarm bells ringing in Sherlock’s head.

Oh god, he can’t have Moriarty shoot himself, especially not in the way that he did on that rooftop on Barts, that would bring about too many coincidences in his fantasy, mind palace world and the real one… And then he’d DEFINITELY wake up...

*JUST CALL JOHN,* a voice in his head bellows at him, *WHY AREN’T YOU CALLING FOR HIM. HE IS SO CLOSE BY-

Because I can fix this on my own, he shoots back, *I can and I will and I’ll succeed. And John will not have to be BURDENED BY ME.*

“For the sake of Mrs Hudson’s wallpaper,” Sherlock starts, ignoring his subconscious, schooling his face into a cool expression, “I must remind you that one false move with your finger and you will be dead.”

That should work? Shouldn’t it? It’s not like Moriarty truly wanted to die anyway.

Moriarty whispers something incomprehensible, prompting Sherlock to whisper a confused “I’m sorry?” as Moriarty drags the gun out of his mouth.

“Dead…” Moriarty says, “... Is the new sexy.”

Sherlock’s eyes widen at this, staring at Moriarty in shock as the room begins to rock back and forth once again, even more violently this time.

He wouldn’t. No he wouldn’t.

*John!* He thinks panickedly.

However… it’s too late. Moriarty, or to put things into perspective, his subconsciousness has no interest in listening to him now, especially on the edge of such an important, imposing moment because the man lifts the gun to his lips again, opening his mouth wide.

He pulls the trigger.
Sherlock sees the man fall in slow motion, just like on that fateful day on the top of Barts. He watches as Moriarty tumbles, hitting the ground with a thump as blood spurts into the air…

But then the shaking stops and Moriarty stands back up almost instantly, his hair a little mussed.

“Well, I’ll tell you what,” he says, “That rather blows the cobwebs away.”

And now Sherlock is most definitely not focusing on keeping his mind palace fantasy alive any longer, his eyes wide and fearful as he stares back at Moriarty’s face, completely in shock.

“How can you be alive?” he whispers.

Moriarty either doesn’t hear the remark or is unfazed by it because the man gazes back at him with dead eyes, dark circles framing the base of his eyes.

“How do I look, huh?” he says, turning around to give Sherlock a good look at the back of his head. There’s a blackened hole where his brain should have been, the ridges of the wound rough and puckered.

“You can be honest,” Moriarty continues, turning back to face him. “Is it noticeable?”

But Sherlock isn’t focusing on the wound.

“You blew your own brains out,” he says in a stage whisper, his eyes filled with terror. “How could you survive?”

No- he thinks, suddenly remembering himself. *Don’t think about that, don’t think about Moriarty. Think of the Bride, don’t think about Moriarty.*

*No! John… ! John Where is John.*

“Well, maybe I could back-comb,” Moriarty says nonchalantly.

*JOHN.*

“I saw you die,” Sherlock cannot help but say, any semblance of self-control vanishing rapidly in the wake of his heightened state of fear, “Why aren’t you dead?”

Moriarty chooses this moment to step closer.

“Because it’s not the fall that kills you, Sherlock,” he says, “Of all people, you should know that.”

“It’s not the fall. It’s never the fall.”

Canisters and vials topple to the floor as the room begins to shake violently again, smashing to the ground as Moriarty raises his arms, spreading them wide as he fixes Sherlock with a maniacal look.

“It’s the landing,” he sneers.

And that’s when the room really begins to shake in earnest, sending books and ceramics tumbling to the floor with simply the force of it.

The floor gives one more strong jerk, causing Sherlock to lurch backwards… And he’s falling… falling…
The first thing that he notices is that his surroundings are a lot brighter than they had been before.

A LOT brighter.

White light spills through the lids of his eyes as he sits up, lifting his forehead off of his hand.

There’s a warm pressure on his shoulder, a hand shaking him awake.

“We’ve landed, sir,” someone says.

He listens out for the retreating footfalls of the flight attendant as he opens his eyes.

He’s back inside the airplane cabin, except that now, the plane seems to have stopped moving.

“No, no, no, not now,” he mutters to himself, “Not now.”

He’s awake. He shouldn’t be awake. Why is he awake?

A lady (who for some reason looks like Lady Carmichael?) walks down the aisle, probably the captain. She flashes a broad grin at him, uttering a “I trust you had a pleasant flight, sir” before nodding at him and walking away.

“Well, a somewhat shorter exile than we’d imagined, brother mine, although adequate given your levels of OCD,” a voice drones from the entrance of the plane.

Sherlock turns to face the source of the noise, watching, glassy-eyed as Mycroft, John and Mary walk down the aisle.

No he can’t be awake. He can-

“I have to go back!” he breathes, his voice a little hoarse.

“What?” Mycroft questions, a concerned look on his face.

“I was... I was nearly there!” Sherlock continues, desperation clouding the edges of his thoughts, “I nearly had it!”

“What on earth are you talking about?”

“Go back where?” John butts in, crossing his arms, clearly a little on edge, “You didn’t get very far.”

“Ricoletti and his abominable wife!” Sherlock all but yells, “Don’t you understand?”

“No, of course we don’t,” Mary chides in a patronising tone, her words stinging a little. “You’re not making any sense, Sherlock.”

Trust his best friend’s wife to make him feel like the most idiotic person on earth.

“It was a case,” he explains, “a famous one from a hundred years ago, lodged in my hard drive. She seemed to be dead but then she came back.”
John’s eyes seem to sparkle in recognition at this, clearly remembering Sherlock mentioning the case before. Well after all, John was the one who had taken him to the crime museum, the man’s memory isn’t that bad.

“What, like Moriarty?” he says, shifting closer to him.

“Shot herself in the head,” he replies, “Exactly like Moriarty.”

“But you’ve only just been told,” Mary interjects, taking the seat opposite his, “We’ve only just found out. He’s on every TV screen in the country.”

“Yes? So?” Sherlock spits back, unclipping his seatbelt. The last thing he wants to deal with is Mary’s condescending attitude, “It’s been five minutes since Mycroft called. What progress have you made? What have you been doing?”

“More to the point,” John interrupts, deliberately changing the subject of the conversation, “What have you been doing?”

“I’ve been in my Mind Palace, of course…” he answers without hesitation.

“Of course.”

“…running an experiment: how would I have solved the crime if I’d been there in 1895?”

“Oh, Sherlock.”

Mycroft’s brow furrows as he speaks, his eyes darkening as he turns his gaze from Sherlock’s, looking extremely disappointed.

His expression puzzles Sherlock for a moment before he remembers - the drugs.

Fuck, his brother had probably taken a good look at his face when he wasn’t looking, observing his bloodshot, reddened eyes, his dilated pupils. God, he shouldn’t have made his mind palace sequence sound so unrealistic and hallucinatory, that’s probably how Mycroft guessed it, since he didn’t seem to be too averse towards him before he boarded the plane.

Hopefully, if Sherlock plays this right, Mycroft might not call any attention to it.

“I had all the details perfect,” he says, trying to ignore the dark look that Mycroft currently has adorning his face as the man takes a seat next to his, glaring down at the ground as if it has personally offended him. “I was there, all of it, everything! I was immersed.”

“Of course you were,” Mycroft utters in reply, sounding extremely upset.

But before Sherlock can retort, he notices that Mary is holding his phone in her hands (How did he not see her taking it?), idly thumbing through its contents.

He should have password protected it when he had the chance.

“You’ve been reading John’s blog” she says, her eyes refusing to leave the screen for even one second, “The story of how you met.”

At this, she raises her head, her eyes zeroing in on Sherlock’s, flashing a cruel grin at him.

Fuck. He’d opened that blog post just after he’d taken off, hoping to find some solace in John’s old writing. It had worked, for a while. Well… until Mycroft had called him at least.
He doesn’t need to look at John now to know what kind of expression is currently adorning the man’s face. He has to diffuse the situation, make the whole thing seem more or less platonic… And he’s got to do it fast.

“It helps me if I see myself through his eyes sometimes,” he says, technically lying even though there’s a shred of truth in his words. “I’m so much cleverer.”

He watches as John purses his lips, nodding his head slightly.

Phew, crisis averted.

“You really think anyone’s believing you?”

Sherlock turns to face Mycroft, his brother flashing him a sullen, angry look as he shakes his head. However, John comes to his rescue.

“No, he can do this,” he fills in for him, “I’ve seen it – the Mind Palace. It’s like a whole world in his head.”

“Yes,” Sherlock says, thankful that John is still on his side, “And I need to get back there-”

“The Mind Palace is a memory technique,” Mycroft mutters, interrupting him, “I know what it can do... and I know what it most certainly cannot.”

Oh god it’s bad enough that his brother knows that he’s taken the drugs, but the fact that he seems to be gunning for a reveal in front of everyone else is ten times worse.

“Maybe there are one or two things that I know that you don’t,” Sherlock says frustratedly, looking at Mycroft, silently pleading his brother not to pursue this course of conversation any further.

However, Mycroft doesn’t look like he’s in a very accommodating mood today.

“Oh, there are,” he says rather pointedly, his gaze narrowing. “Did you make a list?”

Fuck.

“You’ve put on weight. That waistcoat is clearly newer than the jacket…”

“Stop this. Just stop it,” Mycroft yells, his voice taking on an angrier tone, “Did you make a list?”

No, John cannot know. John can’t know. He’ll have to play dumb.

“No, it’s not that,” John says, still trying to cover for him, “He goes into a sort of trance. I’ve seen him do it.”

After all this time, John still believes in the best of him… Which makes this betrayal feel even worse.

Sherlock sighs. He probably shouldn’t lie to John any longer than he needs to.

Reaching into his coat pocket, he extracts the sheet of paper that he’d written on back in the cell. He
extends his arm, releasing his fingers so that the paper flutters to the floor.

He watches as John bends down, retrieving the sheet of paper. He pores over the contents in earnest before turning to Sherlock, fixing him with one of the most heartbroken expressions Sherlock has ever seen.

I’m sorry John. I’m so sorry.

“We have an agreement, my brother and I, ever since that day,” Mycroft says, Sherlock bites his lip at the memory, “Wherever I find him, whatever back alley or doss house... There will always be a list.”

The weight of this newfound knowledge seems to be too much for John to bear because the man has sat himself down next to Mycroft, looking extremely lost.

“He couldn’t have taken all of that in the last five minutes,” John breathes.

Why is John still trying to make excuses for him?

“He was high before he got on the plane,” Mycroft intones, turning to face Sherlock as John’s face falls, “Nobody deceives like an addict.”

“I’m not an addict. I’m a user,” Sherlock explains, hoping to hedge the situation a little by avoiding the main topic of conversation, “I alleviate boredom and occasionally heighten my thought processes—”

“FOR GOD’S SAKE!” John shouts, his face furious, “This could kill you!”

“You could die!”

Sherlock flinches a little at that last statement.

“Controlled usage is not usually fatal, and abstinence is not immortality,” he says, although his voice sounds a little softer than before.

How could he have disappointed John again? How? After all that trouble he’d gone through to ensure John’s happiness… How could he have hurt him again?

He closes his eyes, sighing deeply, feeling positively miserable.

“...Emelia Ricoletti,” Mary says, staring down at her phone, jerking Sherlock out of his thoughts, “Unsolved... Like he says.”

Dammit, why is he focusing on his own misery? His mind palace imprint is fast-fading and he has to get back there if he wants to solve the case, pronto. In addition, he doesn’t need Mary’s affirmation to prove that he’s a genius to the others. All he needs to do is solve the case.

“Could you all just shut up for five minutes?” he interjects, his voice laced with annoyance, “I have to go back. I was nearly there before you stepped on and starting yapping away.”

“Yapping?” John spouts, his brow furrowing in poorly disguised anger, “Sorry, did we interrupt your session?”

Shit, he hadn’t meant to direct that last bit at John.

“Sherlock, listen to me,” Mycroft starts, his voice a lot softer than before.
He probably wants to talk about something *deep* and *serious* but Sherlock is impatient and is most definitely not in the mood for that right now.

“No. It only encourages you,” he answers pointedly.

“I’m not angry with you…”

“Oh, that’s a relief, I was really worried… No, hold on. I really wasn’t.”

He locks eyes with Mycroft, his brother holding his gaze as his face morphs into something softer, something a lot more... human.

“I was there for you before,” Mycroft says, softer this time, “I’ll be there for you again.”

“I’ll always be there for you.”

Sherlock stares back at Mycroft, his eyes wide. Well… since his brother has been so open, he should probably respond appropriately.

“This was my fault,” Mycroft mutters as his gaze falls from Sherlock’s.

Sherlock shakes his head in response.

It’s not true, it really isn’t. He had taken the drugs of his own volition. And even though Mary had passed him the drugs and Mycroft had locked him up, it was still he who had made the final decision.

“It was nothing to do with you,” he speaks gently as Mycroft fixes his eyes on the floor.

“A week in a prison cell... I should have realised…”

“Realised what?"

“That in your case, solitary confinement is locking you up with your worst enemy.”

*Did you miss me?* A voice in his head croons.

Sherlock lets out a deep sigh, willing thoughts of Moriarty as he shakes his head, turning back towards the windows.

“Oh, for God’s sake…”

“Morphine or cocaine?”

Sherlock opens his eyes, turning abruptly back to face John. That voice had definitely been John’s. Definitely. But John already knew the contents of the cocktail of drugs that he had taken... so why would he be asking that question?

“What did you say?” he questions, his brow furrowing.

John frowns, turning to face him.

“I didn’t say anything,” he says, his voice a little concerned

“No, you did. You said… “

“Which is it today – morphine or cocaine?”
He’s not sure why but at the last sentence John flashes a panicked look at Mycroft, his eyes widening in shock.

“Holmes?” Joh-no Watson says.

And all of a sudden, everything turns black.

---

It’s dark… far too dark… far too cold too.

And what is that noise?

Sherlock’s eyes fly open, his heart thundering loudly in his chest as he wakes with a start. The sound of rushing water assaults his ears as he clutches his hands close to himself, hurriedly surveying the scene around him.

It’s nighttime here, wherever he is, the moon shining brightly in the sky amidst foggy wisps of clouds. There aren’t any stars visible, at least not any stars that Sherlock can make out through the thick spray of mist-like water.

He lets his hands fall from his chest, peering down at the rocky ground he appears to be lying on. A jagged, rough-edged series of rocks swims into vision as he makes to sit up, puzzling him further.

Where is he exactly?

But then his brain comes back online, his eyes widening as he realises where exactly he is.

That ridge of rocks - it’s really just a ledge.

A ledge belonging to a steep cliff.

And judging from the sound of the falling water, it probably leads down into a deep plunge pool, carved out from the force of the pounding waterfall flowing directly behind him.

This isn’t good.

“Oh, I see,” he says in exasperation, “Still not awake, am I?”

He lifts his body up, giving him a good look of the ledge.
“Too deep, Sherlock. Way too deep,” a cold voice rings out from his right.

Oh god, Sherlock sighs, not him again. He’s already figured out how the man came back to life why is he here to bother him AGAIN.

He rises up off the ground, stumbling to his feet. He turns away from the source of the noise, walking towards the waterfall instead.

“Congratulations,” Moriarty’s voice rings out through the sound of thundering water, “You’ll be the first man in history to be buried in his own Mind Palace.”

Sherlock sighs deeply.

“The setting is a shade melodramatic,” Sherlock quips, ignoring Moriarty as he gesticulates at the waterfall, “Don’t you think?”

“For you and me?” Moriarty intones.

“Not at all.”

An electrical current seems to zing down Sherlock’s spine at those words, his skin stiffening as he turns to Moriarty, his face fearful.

Why must Moriarty always imply, in all of his nightmares, that the two of them were made for each other, that it’s always “Sherlock and Moriarty” when Sherlock thinks nothing well of the man, that he thinks he’s a GODDAMN CREEP.

“What are you?” he asks, his voice trembling slightly.

“You know what I am,” Moriarty drawls, “I’m Moriarty. The Napoleon of crime.”

“Moriarty’s dead,” Sherlock responds, his voice firm, certain at least of this one fact.

Moriarty shakes his head.

“Not in your mind,” Moriarty answers, fixing him with a deadened gaze, “I’ll never be dead there.”

“You once called your brain a hard drive,” he continues, stepping forward. It takes all of Sherlock’s self-control to not reel back in horror, “Well, say hello to the virus.”

“This is how we end, you and I... Always here, always together.”

Why does his mind palace keep calling Moriarty back into existence? He doesn’t need to be here, why does he keep invading his personal space?

In the previous instance, Sherlock had been sure and certain that Moriarty had been put there by his subconscious to wake him up... and well he hadn't exactly been wrong.

But why have the man show up again? Why have him haunt the edges of Sherlock’s mind even now when he wants to wake up? It doesn’t make any sense.

Sherlock glances up at Moriarty, taking a deep breath before proceeding to stalk towards him, determined to figure out exactly what he has to do to rid his brain of Moriarty forever.
If he has to fight him this time, he is well prepared to do so.

“You have a magnificent brain, Moriarty,” he says, watching as Moriarty flashes him a rather sinister grin, “I admire it... I concede it may even be the equal of my own.”

Moriarty’s smile widens at the last sentence.

“I’m touched. I’m honoured,” he says, still smiling rather creepily at him as Sherlock steps forward once again.

“But when it comes to the matter of unarmed combat on the edge of a precipice...” he starts again. And this time, Moriarty’s smile falls, earning Sherlock a silent moment of glee, “... you’re going in the water... short-arse.”

He flashes Moriarty a wide grin as the man stares back at him dumbfounded.

That moment is short-lived though because all of a sudden Moriarty hisses, baring his teeth as he raises his arm, jabbing his fingers harshly into the crease of Sherlock’s throat, taking him by surprise.

Sherlock wheezes, stumbling back, his deerstalker slipping off as he raises a hand to his throat, clutching it securely, preventing Moriarty from doing any further damage there. However, Moriarty seems to have anticipated this and seeing Sherlock’s hands occupied, he rushes forward, grabbing Sherlock’s ears, twisting them roughly before shoving him into the wall.

Sherlock has to act fast.

He raises his hands, lifting them swiftly to Moriarty’s chest. He gives one hard push, causing Moriarty to stumble away from him, falling to the ground. He waits for Moriarty to shake his head, straightening up for another assault before he lets his fists fly, punching the man right in the face-

And... OW

Oh god, his hands hurt.

This isn’t normal.

He’s well trained in martial arts, this has NEVER happened before.

What is going on?

He clutches his bruised hand firmly, staring down at it in shock.

“Oh, you think you’re so big and strong, Sherlock!” Moriarty yells as Sherlock breathes heavily, his hand still smarting from the pain, “Not with me!”

Oh yes, Sherlock thinks to himself.

This is a battle in his mind palace, in his head.

This isn’t a battle of fists... but rather a battle of emotional strength.

And that is where he is going to lose.

He watches in slow motion as Moriarty raises a fist to his face, punching him with all his might. The force causes him to reel back and he ends up tripping and stumbling onto the ground.
Think positively, he says to himself, his hands cut and bruised, his face throbbing with pain. Even though Moriarty has the upper hand… he can still beat him.

He has to.

Sherlock rises boldly from the ground, swinging another fist at Moriarty. He waits for the connection of bone on bone… but it doesn’t come.

Moriarty manages to block it somehow, grabbing Sherlock’s arm and giving a strong shove, sending him crashing to the ground, his body draped precariously over the ledge.

Oh fuck.

The sound of rushing water rings in his ears as he forces himself onto his back, trying to get himself up off the floor and as far away from the precipice as possible.

However, he isn’t fast enough because Moriarty moves to stand over him, his dark presence casting a large, looming shadow over Sherlock’s prone form.

“I am your WEAKNESS!” he yells, kicking Sherlock straight in the head, the impact causing Sherlock to cry out in pain.

“I keep you DOWN!” he yells once again, aiming for Sherlock’s side this time. Sherlock grunts the moment Moriarty’s foot makes contact, groaning in pain as Moriarty falls to his knees, leaning into Sherlock’s personal space.

“Every time you STUMBLE…”

“Every time you FAIL…”

“When you’re WEAK…”

He can’t take this anymore. He really can’t.

Sherlock grimaces at Moriarty’s words, his eyes screwed shut as Moriarty strikes him in the chest with a powerful blow. He forces himself not to scream from the sheer force of it as Moriarty moves to stand up.

“I... AM... THERE!” he finishes, proclaiming it to the heavens.

No, Sherlock thinks, he must get up. He must. There has to be a way to beat him, a way to fix this forever.

He tries to sit up, his hands stinging the moment they make contact with the slippery ground.

However, Moriarty catches him, bending down and seizing Sherlock’s coat.

“No. Don’t try to fight it,” he yells as Sherlock flails in his grip, struggling to get up off the ground.

“LIE BACK AND LOSE!” he yells one final time before rising up, hauling Sherlock to his feet, clearly trying to catch him off balance and push him off the cliff.

Sherlock’s eyes widen in panic as he raises rough, dirty hands to Moriarty’s shoulders, making an attempt at wrenching himself free.

But Moriarty is stronger, far stronger. The man gives a strong shove, forcing Sherlock back down
onto the ground, and this time, Sherlock ends up a lot closer to the edge of the cliff than he had been before.

Moriarty clings onto him, his body weight crushing Sherlock as he locks arms with him, bending him over the ledge.

“Shall we go over together?” Moriarty yells, “It has to be together, doesn’t it? At the end, it’s always just you…”

“... AND ME!”

Sherlock flinches at the sound of Moriarty’s voice, his heart palpitating.

So this is the end he thinks, this is the end of it all.

He scrunches his eyes up, preparing himself mentally for the shove and fall that is about to come…

But wait.

All of a sudden it makes sense.

The mind palace hallucinations of John in the greenhouse… of Moriarty in his darkest moments.

His subconscious has been there since the beginning, trying to convince him that John was the one for him, the one who he needed. Heck, it’d even somehow managed to force him to give an aborted confession of love.

In the case of the greenhouse, it had been forcing him to confront the possibility of not being alone, that he should give John the opportunity to come back into his life, helping him to heal… That’s why Eustace Carmichael had died, because he hadn’t stuck with John!

And in the case of the deadly Baker Street living room, it’d been the fear, the overwhelming fear of facing Moriarty alone, when all he really needed was John to stand by his side. That’s why he’d woken up, because he hadn’t been brave enough to call upon his dearest friend, relying instead on his own strength.

And now… now at the edge of the waterfall and in the deepest, darkest part of Sherlock’s mind. His subconscious is trying to tell him that he might not be emotionally strong enough on his own to deal with his own problems and that of John’s, but that together - they are stronger. That they are better together and can face any obstacle that life throws their way.

Moriarty may be Sherlock’s weakness… But John is Sherlock’s strength.

So this is what his subconscious has been doing all this time, stopping him, startling him, forcing him to face the fact that John was really all he needed…

And that’s who he needs right now.

“Ahem.”

A foreign voice clears its throat loudly, startling Sherlock for a moment before he realises exactly who it belongs to.

Moriarty seems to stiffen as well, his body going rigid before he turns around, coming face to face with John Watson.
A very confident looking John Watson to be exact.

Watson flashes Moriarty a wide smile, lifting his revolver up into the air, cocking it with a resounding “click” before aiming it at him.

“Professor, if you wouldn’t mind stepping away from my friend,” Watson says firmly, “I do believe he finds your attention a shade annoying.”

Oh thank god, Sherlock thinks, THANK GOD.

He stares back at Watson in disbelief, wondering if the man is really there or if this is just another fever dream. He drags his arms out of Moriarty’s grip, untangling himself from Moriarty who huffs, releasing him reluctantly.

“That’s not fair,” he spouts, “There’s two of you!”

Watson smirks at this.

“There’s always two of us,” Watson answers, his voice crisp and clear, loud and confident. “Don’t you read The Strand?”

At this, he raises up Sherlock’s deerstalker, tossing it towards him. Sherlock catches it easily, slipping it on with a smile on his face, a warm, fuzzy feeling settling in his chest at Watson’s declaration.

*There’s always two of us*, a perfect rebuttal to Moriarty’s “At the end, it’s always just you and me.” Because if Watson’s arrival has proved anything, it’s that at the end, it’s not just Sherlock and Moriarty, or even Sherlock and his demons… No.

It’s Sherlock and John. And that is how it is supposed to be, how it is meant to be.

“On your knees, Professor,” Watson orders, staring Moriarty down who flashes him a dumbfounded, annoyed look. However, the man does comply, falling to his knees.

“Hands behind your head,” Watson instructs, gazing over at Sherlock with a smug grin.

Sherlock can’t help but chuckle softly, amazed by how much power John Watson commands with just that voice. And at that height too, god.

Moriarty shakes his head in response, raising his hands up behind his head.

“Thank you, John,” Sherlock says, beaming at Watson who fixes him with a puzzled look.

“Since when do you call me John?”

Sherlock smile widens at this.

“You’d be surprised,” he says, watching as Watson smiles back at him, his gaze softening.

“No I wouldn’t.”

They beam at each other for a moment, their eyes sparkling with mirth as their gazes connect and it feels as if Sherlock has been struck by lightning because for the love of god, he can’t turn his face away.

And that is when Sherlock is sure, that if he had the chance to pick a moment to prolong in this hallucinatory, drug-induced dream of his, it would be this one-
“Time you woke up, Sherlock,” Watson says simply, startling Sherlock out of his thoughts.

What? Sherlock thinks to himself. How did Watson kno-

“I’m a storyteller,” Watson says simply, “I know when I’m in one.”

Sherlock smiles in response

“Of course,” he says, still grinning, “Of course you do, John.”

There’s a short pause as Watson mulls over his words before continuing.

“So what’s he like?” Watson questions, “The other me, in the other place?”

Sherlock doesn’t need to think too hard to come up with a response.

“Smarter than he looks,” he confesses, honest in every sense of the word.

“Pretty damned smart, then,” Watson chimes in, looking rather pleased with himself.

Yes, Sherlock thinks, smiling at Watson. “Pretty damned smart,” he professes, blushing slightly as Watson flashes him a knowing smirk.

Sherlock nearly steps forward, making his way into Watson’s arms before someone groans in disgust, uttering a loud “Ugh.”

Oh yes, he’d forgotten that Moriarty was still there.

“Ugh,” Moriarty groans again, rolling his eyes, “Why don’t you two just elope, for God’s sake?”

Sherlock fights the urge to shove him off the cliff then and there.

“Impertinent!” Watson says, his voice loud and authoritative.

“Offensive,” Sherlock joins in, watching as Moriarty shakes his head in annoyance.

“Actually,” Watson starts, lowering his revolver, “Would you mind?”

Sherlock knows what he’s referring to almost immediately.

“Not at all,” he answers, watching with unabashed glee as Watson steps forward, raising a booted foot. He aims a swift kick at Moriarty’s back, his boot colliding with the man’s body with such a force that Moriarty stumbles and flails and finally… topples over the edge of the precipice, down into the pool below.

Moriarty screams as he falls, a loud, high-pitched sound that resonates in the night air. Sherlock steps forward towards the edge, gazing down at the chasm below them, watching as the dark abyss swallows Moriarty up.

“Well,” Watson says, straightening up when Moriarty disappears from sight, “It was my turn.”

“Quite so,” Sherlock replies succinctly.

“So…” Watson starts, “How do you plan to wake up?”

“Ohhh…” Sherlock murmurs, gazing at the surrounding area, “I should think like this.”
He steps forward, over to the edge of the cliff, his footsteps sure and certain. Going by the thread of his subconscious, which is taking risks and facing his fears… This seems like the best and only option.

And it’s rather metaphorical isn’t it? Falling. He’s ready to do it now, accept that John is as much a part of him as he is his. When he’d fallen for John, he hadn’t been prepared. But this time, he’s going to get the chance to do it right, and what better way to seal this than with a “fall” itself. He’s always been one for dramatics.

“Are you sure?” Watson questions, his eyes clouded with worry as Sherlock turns back to look at him, fixing him with a reassuring look.

And this time, it’s not really Watson standing there, even though the man is in the garb to prove it, but rather it’s John, John Watson from the real world and Sherlock plans to address him as such.

Will you survive this fall? John’s eyes seem to say, I’ve seen you jump off a building, Sherlock. Will you really be fine?

John, he thinks, John, I’ve done much worse than that… And I’ve come out fine.

Not true, John shakes his head.

You fell for me…

And let’s be honest, you did not come out fine. That must have caused you a lot of heartache, seeing me with Mary, seeing me getting married to Mary…

Sherlock shakes his head.

Falling in love with you was probably one of the best things I’ve ever done. It may have hurt a lot. It might have caused me a lot of pain. But I do not regret it in any sense of the word.

John smiles at this, taking a step forward till he’s chest to chest with Sherlock.

You do know that I exist in your subconscious right, John smiles, I’ve seen you frustrated, annoyed, angry even at your love for me. I’ve seen you hurt so much, go through so much to make me happy… Can you truly say that you do not regret it?

Sherlock doesn’t need to think very hard to answer.

No. No, I may have despaired my affection for you on occasion but never once have I wished that it could have gone any other way.

You still want to be alone though. That’s what you said, back in the greenhouse-

Well, maybe… I’ve changed my mind. Can’t you tell? You’re here now because I wanted you to be.

And why is that?

Because, well you put it best, there’s always two of us… there’s always two of us and I will be DAMNED if I give this up.

So… Finally accepted the fact that I’ve stopped loving Mary?

More like I’ve accepted the fact that Mary isn’t good enough for you.
Ooooh. Getting feisty now aren’t we, John smiles.

Oh please, Sherlock shrugs, I think if anything I’ve finally seen sense. She shot me, your self-proclaimed best friend in the chest, expecting me to die and lied to you entirely about her past. How could I possible relinquish you to her?

Finally being honest with ourselves aren’t we?

Yup, Sherlock grins, Yes, I am. I need you... And you need me, there is no other fact of the matter except for this. We need each other. And in this uncertain time of Moriarty’s return, we will need each other more than ever.

And if I am to be truly honest, Sherlock blushes, I will go ahead and prove your point. Falling in love with you is probably one of the hardest things I’ve ever done. But...

“Between you and me, John,” he says, his voice ringing loud and clear, “I always survive a fall.”

John smirks up at him, a playful grin alighting on his face.

“But how?” John asks cheekily, even though he clearly knows the answer.

Sherlock faces forward, smiling down at the precipice before him.

“Elementary, my dear Watson,“ is all he says before he pulls off his deerstalker, flinging it down into the rushing water below.

He takes one last look at John, flashing the man one last grin before bending his knees, launching himself off of the cliff.

He spreads his arms wide as he falls, his heart soaring, giggling a little with delight at finally getting all of that off of his chest. He laughs, chortles even as the darkness swallows him up.

I’m in love with John Watson, he thinks as he plummets downwards.

And he loves me.

----

Sherlock’s eyes open in a flash, his shoulders tensing as he shifts in his seat.

He frowns, flashing a confused look at Moriarty and Mary as their concerned faces swim into view.

Where is he? What was he doing before his?

His eyes make another circuit of the room before he turns to his side, his eyes settling on a familiar, wan face

“Miss me?” he says sheepishly, smiling at John who happens to be leaning over his seat, peering down at him with great concern.

“Sherlock? You all right?” John questions, worry palpable in his eyes as Sherlock frowns.
“Yes, of course I am,” he says, “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“’Cause you probably just OD’d,” Mary’s patronising voice comes, “You should be in hospital.”

Oh yes, that’s right. The drugs.

“No time,” he answers firmly, rising from his seat, “I have to go to Baker Street now. Moriarty’s back.”

He steps towards the aisle, fumbling slightly. He’s still a little disoriented but that can be fixed. He shakes his head, standing up straight and regaining his balance.

“I almost hope he is,” Mycroft responds, sighing, “if it’ll save you from this.”

He raises the sheet of paper containing Sherlock’s list up in the air, waggling it in front of his face. Sherlock flashes Mycroft an exasperated look, snatching the piece of paper from him quickly, ripping it into quarters.

“No need for that now,” he says, allowing the sheets of paper to fall to the floor, “Got the real thing. I have work to do.”

He makes to step forward but Mycroft clears his throat, preparing to speak.

“Sherlock,” he says softly, prompting Sherlock to raise his eyes to Mycroft’s.

“Promise me?”

What?

What does he mean “promise him”?

That can mean any number of things.

Sherlock looks around the cabin, thinking of a way to dodge the question somehow.

“What are you still doing here?” he intones, squinting his eyes at Mycroft, “Shouldn’t you be off getting me a pardon or something, like a proper big brother?”

He shoves his way forward, pushing Mycroft’s shoulder out of the way as he stalks to the exit, the sound of hurried footfalls joining him as Mary and John begin to make for the door, John stopping in the doorway for a moment before rejoining them.

Making his way towards the car, Sherlock feels the December chill eating its way into his bones so he flips his coat open, slipping it on dramatically.

Gravel crunches loudly under his feet, his senses amplified by the drugs and Sherlock sighs.

God, he is going to have such a horrible withdrawal after this.

“Sherlock, hang on. Explain,” John calls out to him, rushing forward and slipping into stride with him, “Moriarity’s alive, then?”

“I never said he was alive,” Sherlock answers, stopping in his tracks. He turns towards John, slipping his gloves on. “I said he was back.”
“So he’s dead,” Mary interjects.

Sherlock fights the urge to roll his eyes.

“Of course he’s dead,” he says, trying to sound as polite as possible, “He blew his own brains out. No-one survives that. I just went to the trouble of an overdose to prove it-”

Oops. Touchy subject. Probably shouldn’t have mentioned that.

He flashes John a guilty look before continuing.

“Moriarty is dead, no question. But more importantly…”

“... I know exactly what he’s going to do next.”

He flashes a smile at Mary and John before making his way towards the car, shaking his head as John runs ahead, taking the driver’s seat.

“Mary,” he says, “I’ll have to follow Sherlock to Baker Street. Make sure he’s okay and everything. Is that alright with you?”

“Sure,” Mary answers, flashing John a wide grin, “It’s okay, I understand… So you’d like to drop me off at home first?”

John seems to puzzle over this for a moment, his brow furrowing as he comes to a conclusion.

“Yeah,” he says, “I guess that’s the best course of action.”

He gestures to the backseat, opening and shutting the door for Mary as Sherlock makes his way to the front seat, tucking himself in and strapping himself up.

“All right,” John says, settling into the driver’s seat, flashing Sherlock a worried yet pleased smile. “Let’s go.”

Chapter End Notes

FINALLY WE’VE CROSSED THE CANON BARRIER OOOOOH I've been waiting for this!!! Prepare yourselves guys! We're only two-thirds of the way through... WHOOP WHOOP.

Hit me up on tumblr !!!

I can't promise when the next update will be heh. It's gonna start getting vv busy for me soon so idk really... Expect 3-4 weeks
Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Summary

“And what, talking about it makes things all better now doesn’t it?” Sherlock snaps, fixing John with a haughty look, “Talking about it brings Magnussen back to life, helps me to erase the worst mistake I’ve ever made in my life? Is that it?”

Chapter Notes

I was actually planning on posting this next week so that I could give myself more time to finish the next chapter... BUT SOMETHING VERY SPECIAL HAPPENED YESTERDAY. JOSEPH SCHOOLING GOT A GOLD OLYMPIC MEDAL FOR SWIMMING, SINGAPORE’S FIRST AND LIKE HE BEAT MICHAEL PHELPS!!!!??? THIS LITTLE BOY WHO USED TO PRACTISE IN THE POOL NEXT TO ME????

I'M IN SUCH A GOOD MOOD SO HERE HAVE THIS CHAPTER. GO TEAM SINGAPORE!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1 hour since the plane has landed

“You’ll be home by tomorrow, won’t you?”

“I’ll try to, Mary. No promises though, if Sherlock’s condition worsens I will have to extend my stay at Baker Street.”

“That’s- that’s alright I guess, just try to come home soon as possible ok, darling?”

“Yes. Yes, I will.”

Sherlock cringes a little at the pet name, his heart sinking like a stone as John smiles at Mary, giving her a quick peck on the cheek. He nods at her one last time before traipsing back towards the car, leaving her alone on the sidewalk.

“See you soon,” she calls one last time as John shuts the door, strapping himself back into the driver’s seat, his expression morphing into something stonier as he turns the ignition.

Sherlock lets out a soft sigh, turning to face the window instead. He watches as Mary beams and waves at them as the car trundles away, her smile unwavering even as they turn into the intersection.

He keeps his face tilted towards the window, reading John’s suppressed anger in his harsh grip on the steering wheel, his frustration in the furrows of his brow. John is a volcano about to erupt and Sherlock doesn’t feel up to dealing with him when he does.
Although to be honest, it really is all his fault.

He did take Mary’s drugs, in spite of that horrific incident back at the drug den when John had found him high and half lucid. He remembers John going easy on him after that, asking him why he hadn’t called him or texted him, a stark contrast to Molly who’d slapped him without much preamble.

John had thought better of him, had believed that Sherlock had the capacity to change. And now Sherlock’s gone and ruined it all.

He wallows in self-pity for a moment, his eyes downturned as he gazes forlornly out the window, watching the houses pass by-

Wait.

“John,” he ventures, his voice a little hoarse, “This isn’t the way to Baker Street.”

John’s grip on the steering wheel tightens.

“No,” he replies stiffly. “No, it isn’t.”

What the hell?

“John, where are we going?” Sherlock manages, turning now to face John square on.

“Not Baker Street,” he answers, his eyes fixed straight ahead on the road, his gaze steely.

“John,” Sherlock starts, “We’d better not be going to a hospital.”

“No, we’re not,” John interjects, still refusing to look at him.

Sherlock peers back at John, flashing him a puzzled look before turning to look out the window, scrutinising their surroundings.

They’re on a highway of some sort and judging the flow of the traffic, they’re not going towards London, but rather away from it, the scenery rapidly morphing from that of a concrete urban area to that of a vast countryside…

They’re definitely not going to a hospital.

But that doesn’t make any sense, where els-

Oh no. NO. John wouldn’t-

“You can’t possibly be serious,” Sherlock all but yells, his face livid as he glares at John, searching the man’s eyes for an answer.

“Sorry Sherlock, brother’s orders,” John answers, steering the car off into an exit as Sherlock groans, sliding back sullenly into his seat.

He watches as black tarmac turns into dusty dirt track, trees sprouting up on both sides of the car as they make their way down a surprisingly well-kept one-way road.

Sherlock sighs as the car slows to a halt, refusing to so much as look at John as he unbuckles his seatbelt, getting out of the car.

“We just met the man a few hours ago,” he mutters, knowing that John can hear him even though he
isn’t facing him, “I can’t believe—”

“Sherlock,” John starts, his voice carrying an undertone of anger, “You really aren’t in a good position to argue right now.”

Sherlock rolls his eyes in annoyance, a bit miffed as he overtakes John, making his way towards the brick mansion in long strides.

Mycroft’s house is just as he’d remembered it, which is strange, considering his last visit must have been at least 4 to 5 years ago.

It’s a typical countryside home, quite similar to that of his parents’. It’s possible that Mycroft had chosen this property out of sentiment… But that’s quite unlikely knowing him, Sherlock thinks to himself.

The house is at least a century old, but for such a relic it’s surprisingly well kept. The brick exterior of his house still a spongy red, unaffected by moss or mildew or even wandering ivy. The garden has clearly been well cared for too, even though Mycroft has no interest in gardening.

The bushes are adorned with sweet-smelling roses and carnations, attracting their fair share of bees and butterflies. It prompts Sherlock to stop and stare, marvelling at how such beauty can be found by the doorstep of possibly the coldest man alive.

He sighs, knocking on the door without much preamble as John catches up with him, his heels digging firmly into grey gravel as he makes his way to Sherlock’s side, his hands in his pockets.

The door swings open.

“He Hello Sherlock,” Mycroft smiles, “I’ve been expecting you.”

“We just saw each other a little over an hour ago,” Sherlock protests, fixing his brother with a dark glare.

“Well, thank god for that because without that time difference, I wouldn’t have been able to have gotten everything sorted out,” his brother answers self-assuredly.

“What?” Sherlock breathes, his nose scrunching up in confusion. “What the hell is going on, why am I here?”

“Urine test first, Sherlock,” his brother replies, “So that we can decide on the best course of action to get most of the drugs out of your system. Only then, shall we talk.”

“Doctor Watson,” he says, fixing his gaze now on John.

John nods his head affirmatively, reaching around Sherlock to place a firm hand on his shoulder, guiding him into the house.

“John,” Sherlock starts, watching as Mycroft stalks off, leaving him and John alone in the foyer, “John, why the hell am I here.”

“Can’t explain right now,” John answers, his tone clipped as he steers Sherlock towards the stairs, “It’s a long story and I think you’ll want to have a full presence of mind when you hear it.”

He swings a door wide open, guiding Sherlock into Mycroft’s spare bedroom.

Sherlock’s been here before, he’d taken up a semi-permanent residence here when he’d gone
through rehabilitation. Mycroft had refused to check him into a centre and had instead brought a team of doctors and psychologists on site to deal with him.

“There’s a bottle in the ensuite toilet,” John continues, “Pass it to me when you’re done so that we can do a urine test ASAP.”

“But you already know what I’ve taken,” Sherlock retorts.

“Doesn’t matter,” John replies, “Mycroft’s orders. Oh and when you’re done, go and nap for a bit. Mycroft and I will get some things sorted out in the meantime.”

Sherlock frowns, opening his mouth to protest but John silences him.

“I promise we’ll tell you everything when you wake up,” he says earnestly, reaching down to grasp Sherlock’s hand tightly. “Just get some rest alright? Trust me, you’ll need it.”

Sherlock sighs, allowing John’s fingers to slip from his as he shifts away.

“Alright,” he rasps, resigned, “Alright.”

John flashes him a gentle, crinkled smile.

“I’d stay to make sure you’re alright but… There are some things that I need to do quite urgently… So a doctor will come in after I leave to monitor you,” John explains.

“Don’t worry about it,” Sherlock responds, stepping towards the bathroom as John flashes him one last soft grin before shutting the door.

*What the hell is going on,* he thinks to himself, trying to process everything that’s happened in the last hour.

Because for some reason, John and Mycroft decided to bring him here rather than Baker Street. It’s curious, considering the fact that Mycroft could have just assigned his personal doctors to take care of him at Baker Street. He’s done that before, on danger nights. So why the hell is he here at Mycroft’s house?

Well… whatever it is, it seems like this was an arrangement decided on by a hurried agreement made by both Mycroft and John in the last hour or so, judging from the rushed manner of their preparations… which is quite worrying considering that the only factor that has changed in the past hour is Moriarty’s return.

Has something happened back at Baker Street? Or will something bad happen if they go back?

Sherlock has absolutely no idea.

He’ll probably just have to wait and find out.

----

“Sherlock.”

“Mmmmm?”
“Sherlock, wake up.”

“Mmmmm yeah?”

“It’s time.”

Sherlock raises groggy eyelids, blinking awake as the room swims into view.

It’s dark now, probably a little past six. The light from the doorway illuminates John’s figure, casting the man’s face into shadow. He’s seated in the chair next to his bed, a hand gently resting on Sherlock’s shoulder.

In this lighting he looks a lot more worn than usual, the dips and creases in his face emphasised… Or maybe it’s not the lighting and something’s happened in the time that Sherlock’s been sleeping to give him more cause for worry than normal.

“Has something happened?” Sherlock questions, rubbing his eyes as he moves to sit, his vision slowly adjusting to the darkness of the room.

“During the time that you’ve been sleeping?” John says, extending a hand. Sherlock reaches for it, holding it tightly as John hauls him to his feet. “Not much… I don’t think.”

Sherlock hums at John’s response, following him out of the room and into the hallway.

“What are we going to be doing now?”

“We’ll be having dinner first,” John replies, frowning as he mulls over the itinerary in his head, “And then we’ll be going over some things with Mycroft.”

“Hopefully, if we’re lucky, we’ll be able to go back to Baker Street after all this is done,” he finishes, steering Sherlock down the stairs.

Sherlock nods sleepily, following John into the dining room. He doesn’t really feel hungry but he’s got barely enough energy to protest right now.

They eat in silence, silverware clinking loudly against porcelain plates as Sherlock scoops bits of steak into his mouth. He watches John out of the corner of his eye, seeing the man play with his food for a bit before reluctantly swallowing it.

John doesn’t look up from his plate for the whole duration of the meal.

So when Mycroft’s housekeeper calls for them both to rise and meet his brother in his study, Sherlock heaves a sigh of relief, happy to leave the stifling silence behind as he rises from his seat, making his way out of the door hurriedly.

Hopefully, Mycroft as a third party will be sufficient to ease the tension between them.

“Sherlock! Nice to see you finally awake,” Mycroft calls from his seat as Sherlock enters the room, John following closely behind him.

Sherlock can practically feel John’s eyes boring into his back.

“Oh,” he returns sarcastically, hoping to lighten up the mood in the room a bit, “The pleasure’s all mine Mycroft.”

Mycroft however, doesn’t seem very amused.
“Take a seat won’t you,” he says, eyeing Sherlock as he pulls out a chair, moving to sit. John follows suit.

“So Sherlock, dear brother,” Mycroft starts, pivoting himself on his elbows and leaning forward, “Do you know why you’re here today?”

Ugh, there are two likely answers - Moriarty and the drugs that he took. And since he’s not particularly in favour of discussing the latter...

“Well, it’s clearly something to do with Moriarty,” Sherlock says, trying to steer the conversation away from dangerous waters, “That much is obvious.”

Mycroft flashes him a grin.

“Right and wrong,” Mycroft sneers, picking up a sheet of paper from the table, “We’ll get to that eventually but first, your drug test results.”

Sherlock groans, shaking his head. God, he took the drugs so what. There’s not much else they can talk about. He’ll probably be put in rehab for a while if Mycroft had his way, his brain rotting away from disuse. There’ll once again be countless doctors attending to his every whim and fancy - doctors that aren’t John and Sherlock isn’t looking forward to it...

Wait doctors?

Sherlock whips his head around, doing a full 360 of the room before turning back to Mycroft, a puzzled look on his face.

“Why aren’t there any doctors fluttering about?” he questions, curiosity piqued, “I assumed that you would have kept them on standby.”

Mycroft gifts him with another grin.

“That’s because there’s no need for any, brother mine.”

Sherlock’s brow furrows in confusion, his eyes narrowing as he does a full sweep of Mycroft’s face, trying to figure out whether the man is joking or not.

He’s just about to say something when John pipes up.

“What? How is that possible???

*He definitely took them all. His last memory of the bottles was that they were all empty-*

Wait.

He remembers now.

He’d injected the cocaine into his bloodstream, his veins singing with the high. However, after that first shot, guilt had overcome him, prompting him to chuck the rest of the pills into the drain, flushing them down.
“Oh.”

“Oh indeed, brother mine,” Mycroft sighs, shaking his head as he crumples up the sheet of paper that Sherlock now believes to be his drug results slip, chucking it into the bin, “You really did scare us there for a second. Thankfully you didn’t take them, otherwise Doctor Watson here would have more cause for worry.”

At this, John’s left hand gives a rather violent twitch, startling Sherlock a little before he turns his attention to Mycroft once again.

“Well now, on to the elephant in the room - Moriarty,” Mycroft says, seemingly not having noticed John’s knee-jerk reaction to his mention of Sherlock’s drug use.

“You said you knew what Moriarty was going to do next,” he continues, “What exact conclusion did you come to?”

Sherlock cocks his head to one side, scrutinising Mycroft’s face. His brother isn’t usually this accommodating and he certainly wouldn’t ask him for his opinion on things such as this. He should have spelt it out for Sherlock already… Something’s up.

“Well,” Sherlock begins, setting him arms down on the wooden table, “What I did deduce was that James Moriarty is dead, definitely dead, or at least the man is. Moriarty however? That isn’t.”

He pauses for a moment, wondering if Mycroft will finish this deduction for him. However, Mycroft remains silent so Sherlock continues.

“Moriarty isn’t a name, it’s a title. A title that can be passed down or shared with its assigned inheritors,” he turns to John now, wondering what the man thinks of this development. However, John's face is stiff, his expression neutral.

“James Moriarty isn’t back in the form of a man, but rather someone or a few others have taken over the title, operating as if they’re Moriarty.”

Silence still.

“As to what Moriarty will be doing, that’s easy,” Sherlock continues, growing uneasy, “His parting shot to me when we first met was ‘I’ll burn the heart out of you’ and yet, that still hasn’t come to fruition. It’s likely his first move will be an attempt to destroy me in some way or another, because only then can he reclaim the authenticity of his operation. Only then will he be able to rebuild his network and regain power over the splinter groups he lost through my involvement.”

When he finishes, he fixes Mycroft with a withering look, waiting for his brother to correct him. Obviously something is up because his brother hadn’t interrupted him once throughout his one-person diatribe.

“Very well done Sherlock, very well done,” Mycroft says after a moment, lifting his hands of the table and settling them on his lap instead.

“Although… I hope you realise that John and I here were aware of this a month ago.”

And there’s the punchline.

Sherlock stares back at his brother, mouth agape, absolutely stunned.

“What?” he blurts out incredulously.
How on earth did Mycroft know? Did his intelligence agencies inform him of something that Sherlock wasn’t privy to?

And how couldn’t he have told Sherlock? He’s the one that Moriarty is after dammit. He deserves to know, even more than-

“Wait John?” Sherlock splutters, whipping his head immediately to face him, “But how-”

John cuts him off swiftly.

“Sherlock, remember that time I told you I was going to Harry’s house…” he starts, looking a bit sheepish now, “I had actually initiated a meeting with Mycroft.”

Sherlock blinks back in shock.

“Whatever for!”

“I went to him to seek help over the Mary situation,” John explains, exhaling in exasperation, “Look, Sherlock, I really don’t love her anymore and if I could’ve I would have divorced her the day I found out that she shot you.”

“However, there were other factors to take into consideration, like our baby, her terrifying past, her impeccable assassin skills and I was at a loss, so I decided to turn to the British government for help.”

Sherlock definitely hadn’t anticipated this.

“All because she shot me?” he starts, voice cracking, “John-”

“Yeah, it was because of that and… a few other reasons,” John cuts him off once again, except that his cheeks are now flushed a little pink. It doesn’t take a genius to figure out what one of the other ‘reasons’ was and Sherlock dips his head in embarrassment, “One of them being the fact that she gave me a dud thumb drive. That really tested my patience.”

“You… You checked it?” Sherlock sputters, his eyes widening in shock.

“Yes, of course I checked it Sherlock,” John answers, his eyes darkening as he fixes Sherlock with frustrated glare, “After all that she did to you do you really think I wouldn’t have?”

Oh god, what the hell? So John had known all along? That Mary had played him for a fool?

“Carrying on from there,” John continues, interrupting Sherlock’s thoughts, “I came to Mycroft to seek help over the Mary situation. However, I clearly got more than I bargained for.”

Sherlock turns to Mycroft, at a loss for words.

“Why did you tell him all this,” he manages, “It has absolutely nothing to do with Mary.”

Mycroft lets out a deep, heavy sigh, the weight of it settling uneasily in Sherlock’s belly.

“Sherlock,” Mycroft exhales, “It’s got absolutely everything to do with Mary.”

Sherlock frowns.

“What do you mean?” he breathes.

“Mary did a lot of freelance work back in the day,” Mycroft explains, “But several years ago, her
trail went cold, her status inactive. We knew of her of course, our intelligence agencies were all
aware of her… unscrupulous work, so this did puzzle us.”

“She didn’t seem like the sort who would quit at the peak of their career,” he continues, “Obviously,
something had happened to make her change her mind over freelancing…”

Sherlock can practically feel the weight in his chest increasing, his breaths coming shorter as he
realises what Mycroft is trying to get at.

“No, no that isn’t possible-”

“Yes Sherlock, you’d better believe it,” John responds, his voice laced with cynicism, “My wife
was working for Moriarty all along.”

Sherlock feels like his heart is going to explode out of his chest.

“How… How?”

“Moriarty must’ve given her an offer she couldn’t refuse,” John continues, sighing deeply, “Who
knows really. Whatever it is, she started working for him, playing an active part in his criminal
web… Well until he died of course.”

“When he died, she lost her protection,” Mycroft segues in, “And to make matters worse, there was a
business conglomerate who knew all her secrets… so she went into hiding.”

He’s going to faint, he really is.

“She probably didn’t think you were dead,” John explains, “That’s why she stuck with me. After all,
I was probably going to be the first person to receive news of your return.”

A chill goes down Sherlock’s spine at John’s words.

“I- I-” he stutters.

“Kind of shit isn’t it?” John laughs bitterly, “Knowing that your own wife didn’t really plan on
marrying you for love but rather as a strategic advantage?”

“John,” he breathes, “John, I’m so sorry.”

“You have nothing to be sorry about,” John spits, cutting him off.

Sherlock’s slumps back into his seat, his body shaking.

This can’t be true. It can’t be. If so he’s colossally fucked up because-

“However… by killing Magnussen, you’ve wholly wiped out Mary’s main reason for keeping a low
profile,” Mycroft interjects, shifting his hand to pillow his cheek as he gazes at Sherlock forlornly,
“Now, she can return to Moriarty’s network and considering the fact that she was quite high up in
the ranks, it’s possible that she will be able to jump start the whole operation on her own again. She’s
clearly started some groundwork, taking into account that nationwide broadcast of the now deceased
Moriarty’s face.”

Sherlock buries his face in his hands, slumping further back into his chair.

“Fuck,” he utters, tears threatening to spill over as he struggles to compose himself.
He fails.

“FUCK!” he yells, his eyes smarting as he stands up abruptly, taking a swipe at the object nearest to him (which just so happens to be Mycroft’s metal pencil holder). It clatters to the floor, spilling its contents out in a messy spiral. Mycroft flinches, John does not. “WHY DIDN’T EITHER OF YOU TELL ME THIS BEFORE.”

“Sherlock I did tell you to ‘watch out for Mary Morstan’ when I visited-,” Mycroft says, obviously trying to placate him.

It doesn't work, Sherlock’s starting to succumb to his mounting hysteria, his whole body shaking violently now.

“IF YOU HAD TOLD ME I WOULDN’T HAVE KILLED MAGNUSEN,” he cries, bending over the table to glare at Mycroft, gesticulating vigorously, “THIS COULD HAVE ALL BEEN AVOIDED.”

“We couldn’t tell you because doing so would have jeopardised the whole mission,” John butts in, letting out a resigned sigh, “Sounds familiar… Doesn’t it?”

Sherlock pauses, fist half-raised in the air as he turns to John.

“What mission?” he whispers, his hands falling to his side as he stares back at John, confused.

“John had become self-aware Sherlock,” Mycroft answers, drawing Sherlock’s focus back to him, “Any hostile signs towards Mary would have put a great strain on their relationship and could have possibly resulted in an… outburst of sorts. That was extremely undesirable so I told John to keep him safe, so that he’d wait till Mary gave birth before showing any overt hatred towards her.”

“Who knows what she could have done to you if she found out that you knew who she was Sherlock, of course I couldn’t tell you,” John continues, giving Sherlock’s arm a reassuring squeeze as he moves to sit, burying his face in his hands once again, “You might be a very good liar but it wasn’t safe and we didn’t want to risk it,”

“Sherlock, this is precisely why I encouraged you to persuade John to return to Mary,” Mycroft sighs, “It wasn’t just for your own safety, brother, it was for his too.”

Sherlock is silent at this, his body trembling under the weight of this new information as John reaches a tentative arm around his shoulders, grounding him there.

“So what’s the plan now?” he bleats, his voice cracking.

“Same as before,” Mycroft responds, nodding at John who nods back, “We’ll wait till Mary gives birth to plot our best course of action… Except that now, she’s ten times more dangerous with Magnussen dead. But until then, John will have to keep close tabs on her and try to maintain their relationship.”

So basically, he’s useless until then. Well, better to be useless than a hindrance.

“Ok… Alright…” Sherlock mutters, resignation enveloping him as he pushes back into John’s arm, feeling the muscle there tensing up.

They’re silent for a moment, each one of them staring resolutely at the ground refusing to make eye contact.
Sherlock’s mind is whirring away, the past few weeks flashing across his eyes as he lets out a bone-deep sigh.

He could have done so much better, could have realised that there was something off about Mary before he jumped off a metaphorical cliff in his mind palace. In fact, he probably should have had his guard up ever since she shot him… NO further back than that, when he deduced that she was a liar.

He’s the king of deductions and yet he didn’t manage to figure out this one important thing that was staring at him right in the face.

He’s such a failure.

How could she have tricked him like this? How could she-

“Oh god, I can’t take it anymore fuck her, oh god,” Sherlock croaks, on the precipice of a meltdown.

“Why, what’s wrong?” John whispers, his arm tightening around him.

Sherlock takes a deep breath.

“She’s the one who passed me the drugs in the cell, that’s how I got them-”

“She did WHAT,” John all but yells, his hackles raised as he turns to Mycroft, his brother’s mouth agape.

“-said she knew me to be an addict,” Sherlock continues, smirking sadly, “that she was doing it to help me lessen the pain. God, I’ve been so stupid I should have known by then that something was off.”

John looks like murder, his face clouding over as he grips Sherlock tighter.

“I will kill her, I will I-” John growls before stopping himself, deliberately switching the tone of his voice to something far calmer, probably to soothe him, “Sherlock she fooled both of us. There’s no need to beat yourself up about it. You’re not the one who married her.”

It’s not working and Sherlock still wants to hit something.

“God it’s not just that it’s, it’s…”

It’s the fact that I gave up everything for this woman, my life, my love - sacrificed to ensure that she was safe, that you were happy. But now I understand that it was all unnecessary, that I’ve given up so many things that have mattered for someone who isn’t worth it at all. I feel cheated, betrayed and played by a woman I thought was right for you but who is, in truth, completely unworthy of your presence.

“It’s what Sherlock?” John presses and Sherlock comes back to himself.

“Nothing… Nothing,” he shrugs, shifting John’s hand off his shoulder, the absence of John’s warmth burning into his skin, “It’s alright. I- Is there anything else, can we leave now?”

“I do believe there isn’t much else we can discuss as of now,” Mycroft answers, “That’s all the intel that we’ve gotten so far. We’ll be sure to update the two of you if anything important crops up.”

John stands up steadily, nodding at Mycroft.

“Thank you Mycroft,” he says stiffly before turning to Sherlock, “Sherlock?”
Sherlock rises from his seat hurriedly, desperate to return to the comforting familiarity of Baker Street.

“Thanks…” he mutters, his brother raising an eyebrow at the pleasantry as John walks towards the doorway, holding the door open for Sherlock.

Sherlock follows John through, refusing to look back even as the door clangs shut.

“You okay?” John murmurs as he guides Sherlock to the car, helping him in.

“I’m fine,” Sherlock mutters, even though he’s not fine at all.

They drive off in silence, tyres squealing against rough gravel as they set off, back on the dirt road in the direction of the highway.

Sherlock keeps his head turned towards the window, watching as the sky grows darker. The trees cast looming shadows as their car trundles along the dirt road, its high beam switched on due to the lack of lighting in the area.

It’s oddly calming and Sherlock can feel his heartbeat slowing, his body swaying in time with the unpredictable bumps and dips in the road. His mind is finally clearing, allowing him to think with clarity again.

So… He’s messed up, messed up badly.

Well… There’s nothing he can do about that now.

The only way is forward and hopefully, he’ll be able to fix this, fix all of this and have his and John’s lives back in one piece. However, righting his wrongs seems like an impossible venture right now and Sherlock isn’t sure if he’ll ever be able to completely reverse the effects of his actions.

He might be able to fix some things, but at what cost?

Well, he’ll probably be fine with whatever happens if John is safe and happy.

He sighs deeply, a stray tear darting across his cheek.

“Sherlock,” John murmurs after a few minutes of driving, “I-I need to ask you something,”

Sherlock raises a questioning eyebrow. What does John want to discuss now?

“Go ahead John…” he murmurs, continuing to stare out of the window, “After everything today, nothing can faze me.”

John is silent at this, as if musing over what to say. Sherlock sees him out of the corner of his eye, his jaw moving up and down steadily, his eyes still turned firmly towards the road and wonders whether John is actually going to say something or not.

However, after a moment, John takes a deep gulp of air, breaking the silence.

“I know you said that me going back to Mary was what you wanted-”

Sherlock’s whole body immediately tenses up.

“But I never really understood why.”
Sherlock turns away from the window, his elbow resting on the armrest as he pivots himself to face John.

“What do you mean?”

John sighs deeply, shaking his head.

“Just… Come on Sherlock,” he says almost exasperatedly. He’d clearly hoped for a straightforward answer, “It was as plain as a nose on your face that you didn’t really like her all that much.”

John finishes the sentence resolutely, as if expecting Sherlock to reply even though he hadn’t actually asked him a question. Sherlock refuses to answer so John takes another deep breath before trying again.

“Well… as much as I can figure,” he starts, his brow furrowed, “You definitely weren’t doing it because you wanted to or because you wanted to help her-”

“John-”

God, will the man stop probing when he clearly doesn’t want to engage in conversation.

“So I just need an answer now, what were you doing all of this for?”

Sherlock fixes John with a stern look, his gaze darkening.

“Sorry, I can’t answer that,” he says, turning back to face the window.

“No! I mean, what were you doing all of this for?”

The moment those words are out of his mouth, Sherlock instantly regrets them. He sees John’s face harden, his knuckles a deathly white as they grip the steering wheel tighter. Clearly, he’s touched a raw nerve.

“Like hell it doesn’t,” John grits out, the barely suppressed rage in his voice evident, “Sherlock she’s my wife and you’re my friend. Clearly something about her is bothering you and you’re refusing to talk about it.”

Why is the man continuing to press the issue? No good is going to come of it and the only purpose it’s serving is pissing Sherlock off.

“And what, talking about it makes things all better now doesn’t it?” Sherlock snaps, fixing John with a haughty look, “Talking about it brings Magnussen back to life, helps me to erase the worst mistake I’ve ever made in my life? Is that it?”

John sighs, some of the tension going out of him as his eyes flick to Sherlock’s.

“It might not fix everything… But at least it’ll help ease the pain a little,” he says sternly before turning his eyes back to the road. Sherlock huffs, deciding to do the same, a cold silence descending upon them as Sherlock relentlessly keeps mum.

However, after a few minutes, John speaks up again.

“I’m your friend Sherlock, friends talk about these things,” he starts.

Oh god.
“No, we’re not doing this, John,” Sherlock groans in annoyance, shaking his head. When will this man let up?

“Look, Sherlock, all I’m asking you is why you cared about my wife so much, or at least appeared to-”

“Why do you CARE?” Sherlock bellows, his patience snapping. He’s already had a rather emotionally draining day and this is not helping in the slightest. He probably shouldn’t have done that though, because it looks like John is about to snap as well-

“BECAUSE I NEED TO KNOW,” John snarls, his face livid as he fixes his eyes on Sherlock, slowing the car down to a crawl to address him properly.

“Sherlock, I can’t shake the feeling that this is somehow my fault or other and it’d be great if I got some FUCKING CLOSUR-”

Sherlock can’t take it anymore, something’s going to give and he’s not sure what it is but John is pushing him right to the brink of his emotional limits here and at this point anything is possible-

“WELL WHAT DO YOU THINK JOHN?” he yells with great vitriol, his face burning up with rage, “DO YOU WANT THE TRUTH?”

“BECAUSE IF YOU REALLY MUST KNOW, IT’S BECAUSE I WANTED YOU TO BE HAPPY!” he cries, tears filling his eyes before he reels back, cupping his lips in horror.

He hadn’t meant to say that.

There’s a moment of stunned silence as John stares at him, flabbergasted. But the man seems to regain his composure quickly, his face schooling itself into something more resolute as he applies liberal strength to the brake pedal, forcing the car to screech to a halt.

It’s absolutely silent now the car has stopped, John’s heavy breaths coming all the more sharply in the thickening static between them.

“What did you say?” he breathes after a moment, his chest heaving as he turns to Sherlock, his gaze questioning. John’s eyes seem to have misted over, filling up with something that Sherlock can’t quite describe.

Sherlock’s hair is standing on end, goosebumps erupting out of his skin. How the fuck is he going to cover this one up?

“I-I wanted you to be-” Sherlock manages, his voice cracking as his eyes brim over with tears.

But he doesn’t get to finish his sentence because John unbuckles his seatbelt in one smooth motion and before Sherlock registers it, makes a lunge at him.

He flinches, afraid that John has finally lost it, that maybe he’s pushed the man too far. He waits for the blow to fall, his eyes scrunching up tightly as John’s body collides with his.

However, instead of a harsh blow, Sherlock is instead greeted by warm, wet lips, pressed firmly against his as John’s body falls onto his, pinning him down. He draws a sharp intake of breath, the wind knocked out of him as John wraps a hand in his hair, pulling his face up to meet his.

Sherlock finds himself instinctively wrapping an arm around John’s shoulder, clinging desperately onto the nape of John’s neck as he meets John for kiss after kiss, their lips slotting together perfectly.
over and over again.

He’s slightly confused and dazed as to how they arrived at this juncture but he doesn’t care, not really - as long as John does that amazing thing with his tongue again.

“Oh Sherlock,” John breathes when they part for air, Sherlock still desperately clinging onto John like a lifeline, as if he’ll fade away if he lets go.

“Fuck…” His breaths come sharply against Sherlock’s lips, “You… You… I...”

“I’m so-so-sorry,” Sherlock stutters, tears streaming liberally down his face as he arches his neck upwards, his forehead bumping against John’s gently, “I’m so-sorry-”

“I love you so much, you have no idea-” John chokes out, his tears dampening Sherlock’s cheeks as he presses his forehead even more firmly against Sherlock’s.

“I love you John Watson,” is all that Sherlock can manage right now, the words pouring out of his mouth in a hazy litany, “I love you I love you I love you-”

John cuts him off again with another brush of his lips, his tongue diving downwards to meet his once again and Sherlock rises to the challenge, his tongue tangling tightly around John’s as he lifts his other arm, brushing a hand roughly down John’s back.

John shifts off with a wet “pop” in response, Sherlock gasping for air as John takes his top lip in between his own, worrying it before tugging on it gently with his teeth.

He must be dead, yeah that must be it, Sherlock thinks as he moans loudly, his nostrils flaring. Because how the hell did they end up here? It just doesn’t make any logical sense! John was angry, livid even and-

“Oh god,” Sherlock moans as John begins to draw deep circles with his fingers on his scalp, his brain short-circuiting immediately with the sensory overload.

“I can hear you thinking,” John mutters as he shifts his lips away from Sherlock’s, puckered skin glancing across his cheek as John moves to rest his face against the juncture of his neck and collarbone, “Stop thinking.”

“For god’s sake, I’m not thinkin- FUCK.”

Sherlock forgets any desire for a protest as John’s lips latch onto his neck, suckling harshly on pale skin and it takes all of Sherlock’s self-control not to scream.

He whimperes instead, his body shaking as John bites down gently, pulling the skin taut with his teeth before letting go and repeating the process again and again and this time Sherlock does scream.

“Didn’t know you’d be so vocal,” John chuckles, raising a hand to brush away Sherlock’s sweat slicked curls from his forehead as he sits up, surveying his work.

Sherlock wonders what he must look like right now, curls tousled, clothing rumpled and lips slick with saliva. Does John find that attractive? It only makes sense since it does appeal to the carnal nature of sex, but Sherlock’s never had an emotional entanglement of any sort before so it’s not like he’d know first-hand.

He glances up at John, his eyes widening as he takes in the man’s appearance. His clothing is crinkled as well, his hair mussed but the best part out of all of it has to be his eyes. John’s eyes,
normally a deep sea blue, are now clouded over with black, his pupils so large that Sherlock is certain that if one tried hard enough, one could possibly fit a galaxy inside of them.

It’s not a huge leap anyways, the man already has stars in his eyes as he gazes at him, clearly, absolutely, utterly besotted.

“Do you know how gorgeous you look right now?” John slurs, bending down to nuzzle into Sherlock’s neck, sending a shiver down his spine.

“Absolutely debauched, absolutely desperate, absolutely mine?” he whispers yet again into Sherlock’s neck, his hands reaching down to untuck Sherlock’s shirt, rucking it up so that they slip under. His fingertips skirt roughly across his torso, dragging harshly against his pectorals and nipples and Sherlock cries out loudly, his fingers digging harder into John’s back.

Is this how John talks to his lovers? Is this how it feels like to be loved by John Watson? With the exception of the night when they danced, he’s only ever seen the stoic, emotionally controlled side of John. This lust-addled, carnal-driven version of him though, is something he’s never come across.

“I’m yours,” is all Sherlock says as he cups John’s cheek gently, shifting it so that he’s facing him. “I’m yours, I promise you.”

John seems at a loss for words, his jaw going slack as his eyes begin to return to a deeper blue and Sherlock starts to wonder whether he’s said something wrong.

He doesn’t have to wonder for very long though because in a split second, John’s retracted his arms from under Sherlock’s shirt, reaching up to draw Sherlock’s lips back to his, capturing them in a searing kiss.

It’s filled with everything, everything that John can’t say and Sherlock can feel the weight of words unsaid with every press and give of John’s lips, with every caress of his cheek, with every stroke of his tongue. John has never been good with words, only able to express his emotions through his actions and in some ways, that is better, better for Sherlock who suffers from the same affliction.

He’s never been good with words either and he hopes that John can similarly feel the pain, sorrow, hope and love in his kiss that he’s feeling from every press of John’s lips to his.

And gradually, their kisses start to become far more desperate, teeth clacking together as John once again tangles a hand in Sherlock’s hair, pulling him roughly upwards as Sherlock does the same, raking fingers harshly up and down John’s cheeks, dragging him down to meet him for bruising kiss after bruising kiss.

It’s visceral and slightly painful but Sherlock needs this, and John does too. He needs to know that John is there, that John won’t leave, not this time and he imagines that John feels the same way.

John shifts his thigh all of a sudden, moving his body upwards to gain more leverage on him, his groin brushing against Sherlock’s navel and that’s when Sherlock realises that John is rock hard, the bulge in his pants pressing firmly down onto his stomach.

Sherlock can’t help but moan in response, a shiver going down his spine as he shifts his thigh to slot John’s legs with his, fixing John with a wide-eyed look before he realises that by shifting his legs, John’s thigh is now pressing harshly against his groin… and that he’s in a similar state himself.

He thrusts upwards involuntarily, his hips rolling, mindlessly desperate for more pressure against his cock before John growls, pinning his hips down firmly with his hands.
“Not yet, Sherlock, not yet,” he breathes, his eyes now so dark that you can now barely see the blue in them at all.

Sherlock whines in response.

“I don’t see why not,” he pouts, moving a hand to pry John’s fingers off his hips before John swats it away.

“Because I want to do this properly,” John says sincerely, bending down to plant another firm kiss on Sherlock’s lips, “I don’t want our first time to be a goddamn quickie in your brother’s hired car.”

Sherlock blushing.

“I’ve wanted this so much and for so long and I’m pretty sure it’s the same way for you too,” he bends to press a quick kiss to Sherlock’s forehead, “I want to do this, back at Baker Street, the right way.”

There’s so much desperation in his voice, so much sheer vulnerability that even if Sherlock had wanted to say no, he wouldn’t have been able to.

“Okay,” he murmurs, his heartbeat slowing as he lifts his face to meet John’s, pressing his lips gently against his. “Okay.”

John smiles at him, his face practically glowing as he rights himself, Sherlock whining reluctantly at the loss of contact as he sits up in his seat once again, watching as John straps on his seatbelt.

“We might have to talk through some things first though,” John mutters as he starts the engine again, “And boy, I do believe there’s quite a lot to get through.”

“Can’t we save that for later?” Sherlock sighs as John hits the accelerator, sending their car moving once again.

“I think it’s best to sort things out first,” John chuckles, turning knowingly to Sherlock before fixing his eyes back on the road, “Hell knows if we don’t address it soon, we might never address it at all.”

Sherlock giggles in response.

“You know me too well,” he mumbles softly, his cheeks reddening as he buries his face in his jacket, extremely embarrassed.

“Of course I do love,” John smiles, Sherlock’s cheeks growing redder with the endearment.

“Of course I do.”

Chapter End Notes

Starting university on monday so... updates henceforth will be very very sporadic and we’ll just have to see how much time law school takes away from me I want to scream.

Hope you guys enjoyed this chapter! At least the UST was finally resolved after like... 90k words. Also funny thing, I promised myself when I started this that I wouldn’t go over 100k words... WELL
Hit me up on tumblr
Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Summary

"The warmth of John’s fingers, however, are a stark contrast to the cool of his skin. So when John begins to draw patterns once again onto the scars, the dips and creases of mangled tissue on his back, Sherlock feels them all the more strongly, as if John’s fingers have left fiery trails across his body."

Chapter Notes

Don't judge me please. This is just 6k words of NSFW shit I hope you guys enjoy my trash HAHA

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2 hours from Mycroft’s place

It turns out that John’s plan to discuss things is too idealistic.

The rest of the car ride is charged, electricity zipping through the static air as Sherlock casts John furtive glances every now and then, John doing the same. And every time they hit a red light, both of them tense up involuntarily at the delay.

The tension only mounts as they pull up to Baker Street, Sherlock’s veins singing every time he turns to look at John.

Something’s going to give and fast.

The moment John puts the car in ‘park’, Sherlock dashes out, zipping his way to the front door.

He extracts his keys from his pocket, furiously fumbling till he finds the one that he wants, listening as John locks the car door, stalking up to him with firm footsteps. However, no matter how hard he tries, he can’t seem to fit the key in the keyhole.

His hands are trembling, with anticipation or with sheer want or need Sherlock doesn’t know, but he gives it up as a lost endeavour and hands the keys to John.

Unlike him, the man manages to unlock the door swiftly, his hands steady even though Sherlock catches a mild tremor in them.

The moment the door closes behind them, John is on him in an instant, pinning him to the landing wall in one swift motion. Thank god Mrs Hudson isn’t around, otherwise, the sound of that ‘thud’ alone would have woken her up.

Sherlock gasps for air, adrenaline surging through his veins as John’s lips descend on his, pulling,
tugging, sucking and Sherlock tries to give back as good as he can, his hands coming up to rest on John’s shoulders as he meets John kiss for kiss.

He finds himself keening the moment that John’s tongue makes a reappearance. It’s like a pavlovian response really, because his brain seems to short-circuit from the anticipation alone before the man even licks a broad stripe up the roof of his mouth.

It’s getting hard to stand, it really is.

Sherlock’s knees start to buckle, his calves turning to jelly, but John somehow manages to hold him up, an arm coming to wrap surely around his back to keep him standing.

“Sherlock,” John breathes when they separate, their breaths mingling as they gasp for as much air as possible, “Sherlock, upstairs. Bedroom. Now.”

Sherlock flashes John a dazed look, still punch drunk on endorphins, but manages to nod slowly all the same. He entangles himself reluctantly from John, charging up the stairs with John following closely behind him.

He has just enough time to hook his coat on the rack before John is on him again, kissing him as if the world is going to end.

“Your room?” John murmurs against Sherlock’s skin when they part for air, his face now buried in Sherlock’s neck, “Do you have-”

“I’m clean,” Sherlock mutters, his eyes hooded, “Had to do a test when I got admitted to the hospital. You did too, before you married Mary and you haven’t had a separate sexual partner since.”

“Hmmmm,” John chuckles, his hands now roaming freely over Sherlock’s chest, “You’ve really thought this through haven’t you?”

“Kind of,” Sherlock gasps as John shifts his attention to his shirt, unbuttoning it swiftly.

It doesn’t take him very long, something tells him that John is rather experienced in this area, and soon, his whole shirt is off. John flings it in the direction of the laundry basket. Sherlock’s not sure if he manages to get it in or not.

The flat is cold, especially since neither of them had the presence of mind to turn the heating on. And now that Sherlock's chest is exposed, it’s even more noticeable.

The warmth of John's fingers, however, are a stark contrast to the cool of his skin. So when John begins to draw patterns once again onto the scars, the dips and creases of mangled tissue on his back, Sherlock feels them all the more strongly, as if John’s fingers have left fiery trails across his body.

“I will never let something like this happen to you again,” John murmurs as Sherlock buries his face in the juncture of John’s neck and shoulder, “Never.”

Sherlock hums in response, breathing harshly against John’s skin as John’s shifts his attentions to his front instead, stroking now over the still-fading bullet wound.

His hands dart lower eventually, taking their time as they swirl circles into Sherlock’s abdomen and Sherlock tries his hardest not to make any embarrassing noises.

He moans involuntarily, however, when John tugs at the waistband of his trousers, clinging onto him for dear life as John cups his still-clothed erection, stroking it slowly.
“John,” he mouths against John’s skin, finding it hard to talk, “Oh god-”

“How does that feel?” John smirks, Sherlock feeling the man’s smile in the shifting of his jaw. He seems utterly pleased with himself.

“Just don’t stop,” Sherlock breathes as John starts to unbutton his trousers, pulling them down swiftly so that they pool in a crumpled mess on the floor.

“Hmmmm,” John hums against the shell of Sherlock’s ear, continuing to palm him slowly as Sherlock’s grip on John’s back tightens, digging crescent moon shaped nails deep into the fabric of John’s shirt. Sherlock personally hopes that they don’t leave a mark.

However, the man stops after a moment, Sherlock whining in response as John pulls away from him, their bodies still connected through John’s hand on his back.

“You’re wearing too many clothes,” Sherlock breathes, watching as John smirks, his eyes darkening.

“Well,” John mutters, stepping back into Sherlock’s personal space, leaning in deliberately, “What are you going to do about it?”

Sherlock doesn’t need to think twice, his fingers shaking as he hastily unbuttons John’s shirt, button after button popping till John is left in nothing but a singlet.

“Are you kidding me-” he complains and John laughs, raising his hands above his head as Sherlock drags the fabric up John’s skin swiftly, revealing more and more of the man’s bronzed skin with every pull and tug of John’s singlet.

He surveys his work once he manages to pull it off, his eyes roving over John’s skin swiftly and carefully, trying to catalogue as much of it as he can.

He’s never seen John shirtless before, the man is normally too self-conscious. And because of that, this is the first time he’s ever gotten to see John’s scar.

He roves his palm over the puckered mess of tissue as John takes a deep breath, his fingers dancing over the crisscrossing lines of scar tissue as he maps it out, putting it to memory.

“I know,” John huffs, a worn smile on his face, “Disgusting isn’t it?”

Sherlock shakes his head.

“No,” he murmurs, lifting his lips to John’s shoulder, pressing a firm kiss to the skin there, “No it isn’t.”

John’s breathing hitches in response, his whole body going still before he springs to life once again, his hands digging into Sherlock’s hair and pulling Sherlock’s face back to his, their lips meeting in a fiery kiss as John leads him forwards into the bedroom.

Sherlock stumbles blindly in John’s direction, doing anything he can to prevent the separation of their lips. However, his efforts go to waste the moment his knees hit the edge of the bed, his eyes widening in surprise as he falls onto the mattress, John tumbling on after him.

Sherlock scoots up the bed, propping himself up on a pillow as John tosses his pants off, flashing him a predatory smile as he crawls up the bed, Sherlock’s heart beating loudly in his chest as John’s lips once again meet his, curling upwards in a grin.
“You’re fucking gorgeous,” John breathes, his lips leaving Sherlock’s in favour of licking a long stripe up the shell of his ear. Sherlock shudders in response. “Absolutely beautiful-”

“And yours,” Sherlock finds himself babbling, “I’m yours.”

“As I am yours, love,” John smiles, burying his face in Sherlock’s neck and mouthing at the skin there once again, “Yours.”

At this, John’s hands reach southwards once again, his fingers tugging on the waistband of Sherlock’s boxers as if asking for permission.

Sherlock nods vigorously in response and John pulls them up and off, shifting downwards to drag them off his legs. His cock springs free the moment John gets the piece of fabric out of the way, the tip flushed pink and coming to rest near his navel.

Sherlock’s cheeks redden as John peers down at him, his eyes zeroing in on his groin and he has to fight the urge to turn around and shift it out of view. He’s more self-conscious than he thought he would be.

John continues to stare at him, his tongue licking a long stripe up his lips and Sherlock shudders, watching as John removes his own briefs in turn, freeing his cock so that it hangs heavy in between his legs as he crawls back up Sherlock’s body, dipping his lips downwards for a gentle kiss.

John’s dick is bigger than he thought it would be but that’s okay.

Sherlock takes John’s lips in between his own, tugging on his upper lip gently as John takes their erections in hand, smearing the precome over their shafts as he moves his hand slowly up and down.

Sherlock’s brain is going to shortcircuit.

“Sherlock,” John murmurs after a moment, “I might need some lube.”

Sherlock’s eyes fly wide open as he reaches for the bedside drawer, pulling out a bottle of lubricant. He uncaps the bottle, squeezing its contents liberally onto John’s open palms as the man goes back to work. And this time, Sherlock’s hips buck wildly off the bed, rolling upwards towards the pressure of John’s hand.

It’s probably one of the most exquisite things he’s ever experienced, another dick against his own. He’s only ever done this on his own so this sensation, this feeling is novel and Sherlock finds that he’s wholly unprepared for it.

The fact that it’s John’s cock makes it better to be honest.

John presses Sherlock’s hips down with his other hand in response, his fingers digging into his hip as he turns to Sherlock, smirking.

“Excited, now aren’t we?” he teases as he gives Sherlock’s cock another vigorous pump. Sherlock throws his head back in response, his cheek digging into the pillow as he lets out a loud moan.

John chuckles in answer, nuzzling up against Sherlock’s jaw as he aligns his mouth with Sherlock’s right nipple, closing his mouth around it and sucking hard.

Sherlock whimpers, his eyes tightly shut as he digs his face further into the pillow, his teeth gritted.

“You’re really sensitive,” John mouths against Sherlock’s chest. He licks another broad stripe up the
patch of skin there while continuing to pump their cocks with his fist and Sherlock groans loudly, his hips rolling into John’s grip before biting his pillow, trying to stifle as many embarrassing noises as he can.

“No, love,” John tuts when he notices what Sherlock is doing, “Mrs Hudson isn’t home. It’s alright.”

“Let me hear you scream.”

And this time, John bites down sharply on Sherlock’s nipple and Sherlock cries out, his heart beating fast as his cock engorges swiftly. Clearly, John’s found one of his g spots.

His head is swimming, his vision starting to fade as pleasure begins to mount. He’s losing himself in a haze of endorphins and for some reason… He doesn’t seem to mind. Maybe it’s because John is there… Maybe...

Sherlock’s mouth gapes open as John returns to lavish attention on his lips, kissing him as Sherlock’s tongue lolls in his mouth, his lips moving slowly as if stuck in treacle, unable to properly reciprocate.

“Is this real?” he murmurs all of a sudden, remembering something… similar… from another place and time. Although, right now he’s not exactly sure what that is.

But then, John picks up his pace, his hand moving even more vigorously as he brushes his finger over the crown of Sherlock’s cock, swirling it firmly over the tip and it’s far too much. Far too much and Sherlock shouts, pleasure overtaking him as his cock pulses, his body shaking as he clings onto John, riding out his orgasm.

He’s orgasmed at his own hand before of course, but this? This is so very different. It’s as if fireworks have exploded behind his very eyes, his chest set aflame with tongues of fire and Sherlock is wholly taken aback by it, his body still shaking as he comes down from the high, his eyes still screwed shut.

He listens as John gives a loud grunt, spilling over his chest in warm strips of come before collapsing onto him, his face coming to rest near Sherlock’s.

Is this real? He thinks once again as he breathes in John’s scent, his nose buried in John’s hair.

His eyes are starting to close, fatigue starting to overtake him and before long Sherlock finds himself floating off to sleep.

Is this real?

“Yes, yes it is,” he hears John murmur as sleep finally overtakes him.

----

Sherlock wakes to the sound of soft snoring.

He grunts, rubbing his eyes gently as he stirs, burrowing deeper into the mattress- and into someone’s arm.

Sherlock’s eyes fly open, blinking wildly for a moment before he remembers where he is and how he got there.
He’s nestled comfortably in John’s arms, tanned skin meeting pale white as John’s arms stretch around his torso, holding him close.

They’re both still very much naked, Sherlock’s face being pressed up against John’s chest. And if he looks very carefully where the blanket rides up over their sleeping forms, he can see the dark blonde thatch of hair that leads down to where John’s cock is pressed up against his thigh.

He sighs happily, his eyes sliding shut as he presses his forehead up against John’s chest, threading his fingers through the hand that’s currently resting possessively on his hip.

He can’t believe his luck, he really can’t.

After all that he’s done… all that they’ve been through, John still loves him. John still cares for him. John is amazing, wonderful…

And… all of that. The kiss… the mind-blowing sex. God, Sherlock’s never experienced anything like that before, never wanted to experience anything like that before. But now that John’s introduced him to it… Sherlock wants more.

If this had happened a few years before, he knows he would have been horrified, appalled even at the fact that he had stooped to such a pedestrian level. But it’s different now, so many things have changed and instead of being reviled at his need for human affection, he finds himself revelling in it.

Only if it’s John though. That must be made clear. Only if it’s John.

The possibilities are endless, now that they’ve finally come clean with each other. He wants to be touched by John, held by him for hours on end, if that is possible. And if he could, he would like to be cradled in John’s arms forever, till everything else in the world fades away and it’s just the two of them, together.

And the sex. Yes, more of the sex. He can’t believe he’d fallen asleep right after they’d finished. God!

He wants it more than anything, wants breathy exaltations whispered into the shell of his ear, wants to lose himself in sweet, gentle caresses and soft moans, wants to feel the searing pain of being marked and loved and taken and oh god he wants it all, all of it.

It’s so close… And yet…

Mary.

“Hey beautiful.”

Sherlock raises his eyes to John’s face, slightly startled, the endearment catching him off guard. He hadn’t noticed the man stirring.

“H-hi…” he breathes, the ocean blue of John’s eyes captivating him once again and Sherlock wants nothing more than to drown in them.

“You okay?” John murmurs, squeezing Sherlock’s hand where their entwined fingers rest up against Sherlock’s thigh. “You looked quite deep in thought there.”

“I’m fine…” Sherlock mutters, his eyes falling closed as he buries his face further into John’s chest. If he looks at John one more time, his heart might just explode. “Just… sorry for falling asleep so fast-”
“It’s okay Sherlock, I understand,” John cuts him off, the other arm that’s curled around his neck shifting so that a hand rests in his hair, “You must have been quite tired after-”

Finding out about Mary.

The words hang heavy in the air for a moment, like a blade of a guillotine that can come crashing down at any moment but John sighs, breaking the tension as he strokes Sherlock’s curls gently, bending down to plant a kiss on his forehead.

“Yeah…” he murmurs awkwardly, as if expecting Sherlock to pick up the thread of conversation.

“Err…” Sherlock mumbles, mind wading through the thick, syrupy vestiges of sleep, “Did you- Were you- Was it… ok?”

“What do you mean?” John mumbles, bending to place another kiss in Sherlock’s hair.

“I wasn’t really doing much… I kind of blanked out,” Sherlock explains sheepishly, “You were doing most of the work. I should’ve probably-”

“Sherlock,” John sighs, nuzzling into his curls and Sherlock’s breath hitches, “It’s fine, totally fine.”

“Honestly… the whole losing yourself thing? I found that kind of… hot.”

“Really?” Sherlock breathes, his cheeks reddening.

“Yeah…” John replies, flashing Sherlock a shy smile, “You did nothing wrong sweetheart- sorry, that just kind of slipped out-”

John flashes Sherlock an apologetic look, seemingly upset with himself and that is simply unacceptable.

“John…” Sherlock shakes his head and peers up into John’s questioning eyes, “John, you have nothing to apologise for. I actually quite like them.”

The moment those words leave Sherlock’s lips, John’s face does some major acrobatics, looking simultaneously surprised, shocked and joyous at the same time.

“I- erm I-” he mutters, still blinking down at Sherlock before he recovers himself, “It was okay for you wasn’t it? On your end?”

Sherlock smiles.

“It was phenomenal,” he purrs, his grin widening as John’s breath hitches, “Quite possibly the most amazing thing I’ve ever experienced.”

“Better than Janine?”

Sherlock’s eyes fly wide open in shock.

“God JOHN! I never slept with her!” he sighs in dismay, “How many times must I get it into your head that I absolutely DO NOT swing that way,”

“But she said-”

“She lied, we never had sex, or to put it more succinctly, I’ve never had sex with anybody else EVER,” Sherlock huffs. He rolls his eyes, watching as the pieces of the puzzle start to slot together
slowly in John’s head.

“Wait what?” John breathes after a moment, his brow furrowed.

“Hmmm?” Sherlock hums, waiting for a response.

“Wait so that was your first time?”

“Yep, why?”

“Was it? Really?”

“Yes?” Sherlock frowns.

What the hell is John trying to get at?

“Sherlock, I would have probably gone a bit slower!” John shakes his head, sighing deeply, “First times are supposed to be special and I wouldn’t have pushed you so fast-”

Oh.

“John, we both needed it…” he murmurs, raising a hand to John’s cheek, cupping it gently, bringing John’s eyes down to meet his, “After all those years… We needed… that.”

“It was absolutely perfect,” he finishes, planting a soft kiss on John’s lips, “Don’t worry your head about it.”

John smiles for a moment before his look morphs into one of great surprise.

“Wait… All those years?” he sputters, “When did you-”

“Realise I was in love with you or fell in love with you?”

“Both.”

Sherlock flashes John another smile, scooting further up the bed till their faces are side by side. He presses his lips to John’s once again as John’s hands come to wrap around his cheeks, cradling his face gently.

“I fell in love with you…” Sherlock murmurs against John’s lips, “Probably shortly after we met. It was after we came running back to Baker Street, before you got your cane back.”

John nods in response, his eyelashes fluttering against Sherlock’s cheek, sending Sherlock’s heart pounding.

“When I realised it though?” Sherlock smiles, feeling an answering smile on John’s lips, “That’s a lot trickier… I’d repressed the thought of loving you for quite some time, refusing to deal with it and keeping in denial… However, when I left for… you know… It was quite emotionally taxing and the only thing that kept me going was coming back to Baker Street, and eventually that morphed into coming back to you.”

“It was only then that I allowed myself to dwell on the thought of you without any reservation and that’s when I realised that I was quite… hopelessly in love with you.”

John seems to freeze up at this, his eyes shooting wide open before he relaxes, nuzzling his forehead against Sherlock’s as the tips of their noses meet.
“Oh… oh…” he breathes, gazing at Sherlock besottedly, his eyes soft and open.

“What about you?” Sherlock murmurs, hooking a leg over John’s thigh to draw him closer.

John chuckles in response, his chest rumbling happily up against Sherlock’s bare skin.

“The moment you said ‘Afghanistan or Iraq?’ if we’re going to be honest,” he smiles, surveying Sherlock’s shocked face with glee.

“When you said that, I knew almost immediately that I was done for.”

*Done for,* the words send a shiver down Sherlock’s spine.

“Really?” he breathes, not daring to believe it.

“Yeah,” John laughs, albeit now a bit sadly, “That’s why I tried to chat you up over dinner,”

“I’ve always wondered about that…” Sherlock murmurs, his face falling in turn, “That if I’d said yes, all the way back then…”

“To be honest, Sherlock, I’ve made my own fair share of horrible choices,” John cuts him off, stopping his train of thought right there and then, “There’s no point harping on them.”

“But the last time, when you asked me-”

“That was a moment of weakness,” John responds, shaking his head, “That was the night before I left for Har- I mean Mycroft’s. I was really regretting having married Mary at the time, because god I had you back and all of a sudden, I realised that you had legitimately all I could have ever asked for in a partner and I’d let you slip through my fingers.”

John’s face darkens as he says this, prompting Sherlock to raise a reassuring hand to John’s cheek, caressing the skin there gently.

“I never truly loved her you know…” John chokes out, trembling a little, “Just the idea of her.”

“What do you mean?” Sherlock murmurs, curious and yet at the same time slightly worried. John looks so fragile, so breakable and he doesn’t want to hurt him further by prodding too far.

“After your.. Death…” John starts, his chest heaving, “I was quite shaken and felt I needed something far safer in my life and… Mary was waiting.”

Sherlock doesn’t answer to that so John keeps going.

“I thought Mary would be enough, I was content with our relationship… Not madly in love with her as you’d have expected me to be. So when you came back, I was torn Sherlock. I was- Really. I loved you so much but I had her, a stable point in my already unsteady universe and I was terrified of what would happen if I left her and went back to you instead. Would you leave me again? Would you completely ruin me again? If I went back to you?”

Sherlock can tell that John is struggling to hold back tears so he threads his fingers through one of John’s hands, holding it close to his thumping heart. John seems to sober a little in response, the “lub-dub” of Sherlock’s chest tethering and grounding him back to reality.

“So I chose Mary… I chose her,” he continues, soldiering on bravely, “Because she was the ‘better option’ but now I see how wrong I was… It started… At the wedding, before we went off to dance. Because I took one look at you and realised that god, I wished it had been you who I’d been married
He hangs his head low, blinking furiously and Sherlock now finds that he too has tears in his eyes.

“Fact is, we’ve all made mistakes, some worse than others,” John carries on, once again lifting his eyes to Sherlock’s. “I asked you back then what you think would have happened if we’d made different choices back then… And well, now I think I finally have my answer.”

“We needed these things to happen for us to get to this point,” he states matter-of-factly, shrugging as Sherlock pulls him closer, nuzzling up against him. “I also needed time to put to bed my denial of my bisexuality. Even though I knew that I loved you, at the time I was still scared of what that meant. What it would entail. I had had crushes on men here and there before—

*Like Sholto?* Sherlock thinks.

“But you?” John shakes his head, flashing Sherlock a broad grin, “You were something else entirely. It took me a while to sort all of that out.”

Sherlock’s cheeks flush a deep red.

“Same for me I guess…” Sherlock replies, coming back to himself, “You were such a force of nature and I… I’d repressed too much of myself for so long so when you came along… frankly, I was terrified, about how willing I was to be so open with you, of how willing I was to let you in.”

He sighs, smiling sadly at John who flashes him an answering grin.

“Well, we’re here now,” he breathes, both arms coming to wrap round Sherlock’s torso, “We made it, Sherlock. That’s really all that matters.”

“But there's still M—”

“Let's not talk about that now,” John murmurs harshly before his face softens, looking slightly apologetic, “Sorry about that but… We'll deal with her in due time alright?”

Sherlock nods in answer, pressing himself up against John’s chest.

“Just for tonight I want to forget all about everything else except for you,” he murmurs, pulling Sherlock closer, his arms tightening their hold around him, “Would you let me do that Sherlock? Let me—”

“Yes,” Sherlock breathes, his heart beating faster in anticipation as John’s fingers begin to once again draw circles into the dips and creases on his back, “Yes yes yes.”

“I love you so much,” John murmurs, flipping them over so that he’s once again on top of Sherlock. “I love you—”

“I love you too—”

“William Sherlock Scott Holmes,” John chuckles, nuzzling into Sherlock’s neck and inhaling deeply, “Can’t believe I didn’t know that until recently.”

“Another story for another day,” Sherlock smiles, raising a hand to stroke a long line down John’s back. “For now…”

He lets the question hang open-ended in the air, feeling John’s answering smirk against his skin as the man bends down to kiss him.
John starts the ball rolling without much preamble, his tongue licking a slow line up and down Sherlock’s parted lips before slipping through. Tangling their tongues together, John buries calloused fingers in Sherlock’s hair, the pads of his fingers rubbing circles into his scalp.

Sherlock keens in response, mewling into the shared space between their lips as his hips roll lazily upwards, his cock already twitching in anticipation.

John’s lips taste sour and bitter (Sherlock’s quite sure that he pretty much tastes the same) but he doesn’t care, his tongue continuously diving back in for more whenever they part for air, their kisses laced with desperation as Sherlock begins to rake his hands up and down John’s chest.

John isn’t as sensitive as he is it seems, but circling his nipples does seem to get a minute gasp out of him and Sherlock revels in it.

It’s then that John pulls off Sherlock’s lips with a wet “pop”, his eyes opening wide and Sherlock watches on, doe-eyed as they seem to darken.

He whines in response, his lips automatically following John’s, seeking contact once again but John shifts away, flashing Sherlock a predatory grin before scooting down the bed, an answering hardness brushing past Sherlock’s calf as John’s face coming to rest near his groin.

“You might want to hold onto something,” John grins, flashing Sherlock a downright filthy smile before taking the head of his cock into his mouth.

Sherlock holds back a half-formed yell, his teeth gritted as he watches John with hooded eyes, looking on as the man’s tongue toys with the edges of the smooth skin there, licking circles around the glans before holding onto the base of Sherlock cock and sinking his lips down onto it.

Sherlock can’t help but spasm off the bed, a sheen of sweat forming on his brow as he fists his fingers into the sheets, writhing before John holds his hips down with his elbows, continuing to torture him with his tongue.

“John,” he whines breathlessly, “John, I-”

“Yes love?” John responds cheekily, pulling off with a soft “pop”, “How do you feel?”

“John,” Sherlock moans, unsure of what else to say, his mind already swimming in endorphins, “John, oh god-”

“I’ll take that as a good sign,” John chuckles before licking a long stripe up Sherlock’s shaft, Sherlock’s body twisting sharply in response as John sucks him down once again.

He’s not going to last very long.

He can practically feel the blood thumping through his ears as John pulls off, licking the slit gently and he can’t take it anymore. He can’t-

“John,” he murmurs with far greater urgency, “John, I’m going to-”

“Yes love,” John murmurs, shifting off Sherlock’s cock in favour of talking to him. He nuzzles into the thatch of brown hair there, inhaling deeply and Sherlock’s breath hitches at the sound.

“Don’t worry,” he continues, licking a long line up the base of the shaft again, “Go ahead.”

“Come for me.”
And with that, John’s lips sink back down onto his cock, raking his teeth gently down the shaft as he takes Sherlock’s balls into his hand, tugging hard.

Sherlock all but yells in response, his body hanging taut like a string on a bow before he all but explodes, sparks going off behind his eyelids as his hips rise up off the bed, his cock pulsing into John’s mouth as he moans breathlessly, his chest heaving.

“Fuck,” he breathes, his cock softening in John’s mouth as the man pulls off, smiling triumphantly up at Sherlock as he scoots back up the bed, his lips meeting Sherlock’s once again.

“Fuck,” he murmurs once again when he tastes himself on John’s lips, bitter and tangy and oh god, it feels absolutely filthy-

Wait. John hasn’t come yet.

“John,” he murmurs, running a hand down John’s chest to where John’s hand is already furiously pumping away at his cock, “John, let me.”

The man groans in response, the sound echoing across Sherlock’s lips as Sherlock takes John’s cock in hand. It’s already slick with lube and Sherlock is not quite sure when he missed that happening.

“John Watson,” he rumbles, shifting off John’s lips in favour of burying his lips against John’s ear.

John shudders in response, his hips stuttering forward as he continues to thrust into the circle of Sherlock’s rapidly shifting fingers. He knows that John likes it when he uses his deeper voice to talk to him - so he might as well use that to his advantage.

“John Watson,” he murmurs once again and this time, John actually groans in response.

“You like this? Don’t you” he mutters, trying to come up with suitable dirty talk when he doesn’t actually have any knowledge of the proper procedure, “My hand on your cock?”

John nods, moaning in answer, his fingers tightening around the headboard as he continues to thrust into Sherlock’s fist.

Shit, what else can he say, what else???

“Uhm…” Sherlock stutters for a moment before remembering an earlier exchange that they’d had.

“You said you wanted me to be yours didn’t you?” he starts off tentatively, “Wanted me to belong to you.”

John moans in answer, his thrusts speeding up as Sherlock gulps, a little unsure of whether he’s going in the right direction.

“I already do you know, I’ve belonged to you from the start but-”

“I can tell you still want to mark me, make me yours, show the whole world that I belong to you and you alone-”

John draws a harsh breath at this, his pupils expanding as Sherlock lifts a hand to John’s side, stroking the curve of his torso gently.

“I want it too,” he murmurs, “I want it so badly - to let everyone know that you belong to me and I belong to you.”
“You’d take such good care of me, you always do. Handle me slowly and carefully, holding me so gently… You’d run your fingers over every inch of my body, nails brushing against my bare skin as you lean into me.”

John moans softly in response, inclining himself further into Sherlock’s lips.

“And then I’d say something… something so simple and honest and your self-control would burst. You’d handle me roughly then, biting, scratching, pulling, tugging, leaving my skin red and puckered and bruised and throbbing.”

“I’d let you, you know, let you rip into me, tear me up, make me yours, let you do whatever you want to me. I’d let you, I would. I trust you so much that I’d let you do anything to me-”

“Fuck, Sherlock, god-”

“You’d fuck me then and there, I know you would.” Sherlock purrs, John’s expletive causing an idea to pop into his head. He licks the shell of John’s ear and John practically shivers, “You’d hold me so close to you, my body bent nearly in half as you thrust in and out of my body and I’d cling onto you like a lifeline, letting you absolutely ruin me-”

“Fuck, Sherlock don’t stop.”

“You want that don’t you? To consume me? Well… then do it John.”

“Fuck me. Come. In. Me. Make me yours.”

“Shit,” John groans before he shudders, “Bloody, FUCK.”

Sherlock watches on greedily as John’s hips stutter before his cock pulses, spilling all over Sherlock’s chest. He continues to pump John through it, milking the man till his thighs begin to tremble.

Sherlock lets go then, lifting his hands to John’s shoulders, easing him down slowly. Sighing deeply in response, John lowers himself onto Sherlock’s body, his body still trembling from the aftershocks of his orgasm.

“God Sherlock”, he murmurs as Sherlock continues to stroke his back, massaging his shoulders gently, “Where did all of that come from?”

Sherlock chuckles softly.

“I’m not entirely sure myself,” he answers. John giggles in response as his eyes flutter open, hauling his body up the bed to plant a soft kiss on Sherlock’s lips.

“Did you really mean it though?” John murmurs, reaching around Sherlock to grab a towel. He’d probably brought it over after Sherlock had fallen asleep the first time, “All of it?”

“Of course I did,” Sherlock huffs, smiling, “I really do trust you with my life, you know? I hope you know that.”

John freezes, his breaths stuttering before he sighs happily, nuzzling into Sherlock’s neck.

“You’re extraordinary,” John grins, wiping up the mess in between them, “You really are something else.”

“As are you John Watson,” Sherlock mumbles sleepily, his eyes starting to fall close from
exhaustion, “As are you.”

John chuckles, chucking the towel away as he captures Sherlock’s lips with his own once again, tugging gently before shifting off and rolling Sherlock over so that they’re now both resting on their sides.

Slipping an arm under Sherlock’s, John tugs him closer, his fingers skimming across his sweat-slicked back.

“You really do love me that much, don’t you?” he murmurs, his eyes half-closed already. He looks happy and sated and Sherlock wants nothing more than for John to be like this forever, satisfied and smiling.

“Yes,” Sherlock answers, planting a kiss on John’s cheek as he in turn, wraps an arm around John’s torso. He burrows into John’s chest, curling up contentedly in John’s arms as he entwines their legs, slipping a thigh under John’s.

He plants a kiss on John’s chest, smiling groggily as John starts to snore, the soft snuffling pervading the silent room.

“Yes, I do.”

Chapter End Notes

idk when I'll be able to update next since school has really really picked up but I hope to get another chapter up during recess week (4 weeks from now). See you guys then I guess. Hope you guys enjoyed this update!!! I'll admit though, I took longer on this one because I was writing the other teenlock fic.

Hit me up on tumblr !!!
Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Summary

“Sherlock… Sherlock wake up.”

“Mmmmmm…”

“Sherlock it’s time-”

“Mmmm… John?”

Chapter Notes

WELLLLLL... school is a bitch (so is my brain that has forced me to write other stuff that is not this fic)

Here's the latest chapter!!! We're finally nearing the end YAY. I think like 5 more chapters and we'll be done? OMG. I hope you guys enjoy this update... Even though it's shorter than normal due to time constraint.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1 hour to dawn

“Sherlock… Sherlock wake up.”

“Mmmmmm…”

“Sherlock it’s time-”

“Mmmm… John?”

Sherlock lifts sleepy eyelids, blinking groggily as he peers up in confusion at the face hovering above his.

“John… John? Whadya mean?” he murmurs, wiping his eyes once more as John chuckles softly, almost sadly, pressing a chaste kiss to his lips.

The room is still dark, Sherlock notices, as his eyelids flutter open. Lamplight filters in through the curtains, as does the low rumble of traffic, meaning that it's not even dawn yet.

Why is John trying to wake him up so early?

He fixes a questioning gaze on his lover, eyebrows furrowed as he finds sadness mingled with regret in John’s sea blue eyes...
“Sherlock… Sherlock, it’s time for me to go.”

Sherlock’s eyes shoot wide open in response, his breaths picking up as John gulps, turning his eyes away from Sherlock’s.

*Oh… oh no…*

*Of course, John would have to go… Mary…*

He’d forgotten about it, wrapped up in the euphoria of the previous night’s activities, forgotten that John still had a wife… had a baby...

And now John has to leave…

And Sherlock will not know when he’ll be able to see him again.

“Sherlock hey… sweetheart,” John whispers, pressing another firm kiss to his lips, “I’ll call. I’ll text. I’ll do anything in my power to get back here, to get back to Baker Street. I promise-”

Sherlock cuts him off by wrapping an arm around the nape of John’s neck, pulling the man’s face down towards his as he mashes their lips together in a bruising kiss.

He probably only has a few more minutes with the man, a few more minutes to touch and taste and by god, is he going to savour them.

John hums in response, his fingers creeping into Sherlock’s hair as he widens his jaw, his tongue slipping out to meet Sherlock’s. They moan in tandem as their tongues tangle, Sherlock sighing as he arches up into John’s lips, his eyes screwed shut as John’s tugs at his hair.

He’s hard, has been hard since he woke up to be fair. Morning wood and all. And as John thrusts upwards, his hips aligned with Sherlock’s, it seems that the man is in a similar state.

Nudging his cock up against John’s thigh, Sherlock grabs onto John’s hand, drawing their shared grips downwards towards the heated space between their bodies, taking their erections in hand.

There’s no time for lubricant, no time to go slowly so John swirls a thumb around their leaking heads, using whatever precome that’s there to pump them both over the edge.

Sherlock comes first, followed by John, the two of them groaning into the shared space of their mouths before John crumples, tumbling forwards onto Sherlock’s body.

He manages to catch John in time, thankfully, his arms reaching out to grab the man as he draws him down onto his side.

Their bodies are slick and sweaty and covered in come as their chests heave, coming down from their shared high.

His chest is a mess, streaked with their mingling come, the area around his navel a sticky white.

But he doesn’t mind, because it’s John’s… and his… and oh god it’s a mix of-

He sighs, reaching an inquisitive finger to a small puddle of come, swirling the sticky fluid in something akin to awe before bringing it to his lips.

It tastes like them, bitter and… but it’s them, mixed together.
John groans in answer, his chest seizing as he reaches for Sherlock, pressing a firm kiss to his chapped lips as he licks the remaining come off of them.

He wants John to stay, wants to get a chance to do this just one more time, wants to feel John’s throbbing erection in his palm as he jerks him off. He wants-

“I love you,” John whispers, tears in his eyes as he pulls away from Sherlock’s face, his lips now resting at the juncture of collarbone and shoulder. “I love you so much.”

“John,” Sherlock murmurs, his eyes brimming with wetness as he reaches a hand to swipe away the tears accumulating below John’s weary eyelids, “John, I wish you didn’t have to go-”

“I’ll be back, Sherlock. I promise,” John chokes out, his gaze firm as he takes Sherlock’s hand into his, grasping it tightly, “I will always come back for you.”

Sherlock shudders in response, his eyes closing as he presses one more kiss to John’s lips before the man rolls out of his grip, sliding up and off the bed.

He watches on as John gazes at him forlornly, his eyes filled with sorrow before he shuffles his way to the bathroom, the door clicking softly behind him.

Sighing deeply, Sherlock sits up, listening to the click of the shower and the sound of rushing water as he reaches for his dressing gown, slipping it onto his naked body.

He’ll clean off the drying mess on his stomach later.

Yawning loudly, he makes his way into the kitchen, filling the kettle with water.

John will probably have to leave right after he finishes showering, but not before Sherlock can provide him with a cup of tea and a warm sandwich to carry him on his way.

He reaches into the fridge, listening as the shower clicks off as he dumps a ready-made sandwich into the oven.

It’s better than nothing.

The shower door swings open just as the oven dings, Sherlock sighing heavily as John walks into view.

“I made you breakfast,” he murmurs, trying his best not to tear as he drops a teabag into John’s RAMC mug, steam filling the air as he pours boiling water into the cup.

“It’s just a plain ham sandwich and some tea,” he continues, stirring the tea fitfully before reaching for the oven and drawing out the sandwich, “It’s not much but I hope-”

He feels a sturdy warmth against his back, hearing a choked off sniffle and sigh as John’s arms wrap around his torso, the man burying his face into his shoulder.

He remembers them doing this… quite some time ago. When Sherlock had made an omelette for John the day after he’d returned.

At that time, it’d felt like butterflies had filled his stomach, his body filling with a golden warmth. But now… it just feels hollow and empty, an embrace filled with sorrow and loss.

“I’m sorry,” is all John says as Sherlock’s breath stutters.
Sherlock shakes his head, turning around to face the man and pressing a gentle kiss to his nose.

“Don’t be,” he murmurs as he hands John the mug and the sandwich, the man gazing up at him with a deep sadness before reaching for both items, chugging down the tea (even though it’s probably still hot) as his other hand clenches around the steaming sandwich.

He sets the mug down on the table when he’s done, shifting to lean against the countertop as he starts on his sandwich, his head pillowed on Sherlock’s shoulder.

Sherlock feels the man’s jaw shifting over the fabric of his dressing gown, feels the steady thrumming of John’s spoken promise in the press of John’s torso against his and instantly feels a little bit better.

At least John will be coming back this time.

He sighs as John finishes the last of his sandwich, his body leaving his as John makes his way to the sink, washing his hands.

*I wish there was some way to keep you,* he thinks to himself, staring sadly after John’s lone figure,

*I wish there was some way to keep you with me even when you’re gone…*

“What was that you said?” John questions, his brow furrowing as he turns his head to face him.

Fuck, was he talking aloud again?

“It’s nothing John, really-” he starts, his cheeks going red as John stalks towards him, shaking his head.

“Darling, it’s alright… I understand,” John breathes, pressing a kiss to both of Sherlock’s steaming cheeks, “It’s fine… I feel the same way.”

Sherlock stares down at John’s chest, refusing to make eye contact as his eyes threaten to brim over with tears.

“But luckily for you,” John husks, brushing a curl away from Sherlock’s forehead, “I’ve got just the thing.”

Sherlock watches as the man grins, turning away from him as he pads his way towards the landing, up the stairs to his old bedroom.

He listens to the sound of cupboards opening and being shut before the man trundles back downstairs, gripping something silver and shiny in his hand.

“This is… this is for you,” John says firmly, thrusting the dangling chain into Sherlock’s palm.

“It’s yours now,” he continues as he shifts his fingers away, revealing the glimmering metal plating of his old army dog tags, “It’s yours to keep for as long as you wan-”

Sherlock bends forward instantly, hands wrapping around John’s cheeks as he brings the man’s face up to meet his, their lips connecting as he starts to cry, hot tears rolling down his cheeks.

He can’t believe that John would… that he would’ve… how?

“Hey,” John chuckles softly when they part for air, reaching a palm up to Sherlock’s cheek and using his thumb to gently wipe away the tears accumulating there, “None of that okay.”
“I’ll be back,” he breathes, tears similarly starting to form in his eyes as Sherlock coughs, his eyes still wet from the gravity of John’s gift. “I promise you. I’ll come back. I always will come back.”

“I believe you,” Sherlock answers, fumbling slightly with the words as he trembles with the force of the love and trust that he has for the man standing in front of him. “I believe you, John.”

John grins in answer, his blue eyes lightening for a moment before he turns away to face the window, Sherlock doing so in turn.

Sunlight is starting to seep in through the curtains, pooling itself in golden puddles on the carpeted floor.

Sherlock gulps, turning his face away.

It’s time.

John sighs, bringing Sherlock towards him, just one last time as he wraps his arms around his torso. John holds him tightly, inhaling deeply, breathing him in before he lets go. He steps away, his body shaking as if it’s a feat in itself to separate himself from him.

“Goodbye,” he whispers, pressing a kiss to Sherlock’s lips just one last time as he turns around, making his way to the door.

A stray tear escapes from the corner of Sherlock’s eye as he hears the door click shut.

He stumbles towards the window now, his heart beating in his throat as he grips John’s dog tags tightly, watching as the door to 221B opens. He looks on as the man gets into the car, taking one last look at the facade of Baker Street before starting the ignition, the car rumbling to life.

He stands and stares as the car trundles away, watching as it turns the corner, disappearing from sight.

When will he next see John?

He sure as hell doesn’t know.

All he knows is that it probably isn’t going to be soon.

He sighs, his hands falling to his sides as he turns away from the window, turning his back on the growing brightness of day as he makes his way into the bathroom.

He sheds his dressing gown as he steps through the threshold, walking up to the mirror and preparing himself for a shave-

Turns out that John has left him with more than just his dog tags to remember him by.

The juncture of his neck and shoulder is red, tiny indents still visible where John’s teeth have been. The sides of it are already starting to purple.

Sherlock’s breath hitches, his eyes going glassy as he steps back, getting a better view of himself.

His chest is crusty, covered in drying, white come, his thighs too, surprisingly. It seems John didn’t do as a good a job of wiping him up as he thought.

He angles his body sideways, getting a good look at the finger marks on his hip, half-moon shaped crescents still visible as he strokes the skin there, feeling the indents under his skin…
Oh, John.

He unravels the dog tags, the metal chain unfurling in his grip as he pulls it over his head, the chain sweeping over his dark curls till it rests, cold and unyielding on his breastbone.

The chain glimmers in the fluorescent light as Sherlock turns the metal pieces over in his hands, feeling the coolness of the steel against warm fingers.

“John H. Watson” they read, and Sherlock clutches them tightly as he threatens to bubble over with joy.

He’s mine, he thinks to himself as he lets the tags go, watching as they clink up against the milky white of his chest, And I am his.

He smiles at his reflection, at the halo of messy dark curls, at the bite mark on his shoulder, at the tiny red marks all over his chest…

Nothing can separate them now. Nothing.

All he has to do is wait.

Wait, and John Watson will come back to him, come home to him.

He’s still smiling as he steps into the shower, turning the tap and letting the hot water beat down against his skin.

He’s so lucky, so fucking lucky.

John loves him, John still loves him after all that he’s done and Sherlock is the luckiest man on Earth.

He grins as he runs his fingers over his shoulder, feeling the dips and indents of John’s teeth marks there.

It’s not a dream, it wasn’t a dream… It was real, they had actually had sexual intercourse and…

He lifts his fingers now to the dog tags against his chest, feeling them hot against his skin as he turns off the water, slipping out of the shower and reaching for a towel.

The engraving is rough against his skin, the surface of the metal scratched and uneven as Sherlock lets it fall back against his chest.

He’s never going to take it off.

Stepping into a T-shirt and a pair of loose bottoms, Sherlock tucks the chain underneath the collar of his T-shirt, allowing the metal to rest against his skin, an ever-present reminder of the promise that John Watson has made to him.

He listens as his mobile dings, three loud clear rings that signify a text. Shuffling over towards the side table, he scoops his handphone up, swiping the glossy screen as it lights up.

Stuck in traffic, it reads, Missing you already.

Sherlock smiles to himself, typing out a quick response.

I miss you too.
God, that took forever. Well at least I’m home safe now, and all the happier for it.

That’s good John. Hope you enjoyed your visit.

Psh, Sherlock you don’t need to do that schtick, Mycroft made sure that all the messages I send and receive with respect to you are encrypted and deleted one minute after I send or receive them. Nothing to worry about.

Oh, oh thank god. John fuck I miss you already, I wish you were back here with me. I know you can’t be here but dear god do I wish you were.

Same on my front love, same on my front.

When do I get to see you again?

Sorry Sherlock but I… don’t know… Maybe ask your brother? He’s the one orchestrating this whole thing after all.

Will do.

…

John, I did what you asked but Mycroft was an ass and didn’t answer me properly. He just gave me a stack of Mary’s documents to read.

The same ones that he made me look through?

The very same.

Are you finished?

I’m afraid so.

Dear god, John I didn’t know she was at the pool with us, all those years ago. I can’t believe she’s been following us for all this time.

It’s ok, when I first found out I was a bit shocked too. Sherlock, don’t panic okay I’m fine.

No, it’s not okay. John, you’re living with the woman who nearly shot both of us in cold blood. I don’t feel safe. John, please come home.

Sherlock, you know it’s more dangerous for me to be back there. I’m sorry, I wish things could’ve been better too.

I know it and yet I wish it weren’t so. God, I’m not even thinking straight anymore. John
Watson what have you done to me.

I love you so much.

I love you too.

...

Another baby puked on me today. It was disgusting.

I’m sure it was John.

God, I can’t imagine having a child Sherlock... an actual CHILD. I don’t even like children.

But you’ll be a good father John. You know you will. You’ll make up for her ass of a mother.

But Sherlock, I never wanted this, this simplified domesticity - everything. All I wanted was stability and even then I realised that what I really wanted was stability in you. What have I gotten myself into? I feel awful.

John, I’m here for you. John, listen.

Sent: For_John.mp3

Sherlock, that’s a lovely piece. Did you just improvise that or?

Improvised it.

You’re amazing love. God, I love you, oh how do I love you.

I love you too.

...

Mary’s making me go out to buy croissants. Her cravings are really starting to annoy me.

But it’s 11p.m.

Well bully for me, I’m supposed to be the good, loving, caring husband. Remember?

I suppose...

John do you think you could spare some time for a visit I need to see you.

Oh Sherlock, fuck I really considered getting out of the train carriage and turning around to go back to you. But I can’t. You know I can’t. I’m sorry.

I know. God, why did I even type that I must’ve been delirious.
It’s okay Sherlock, I feel the same way. Don’t be upset with yourself, it’s only normal.

John, I’m so sorry. I’m not used to this.

I know Sherlock, and it’s fine. Really. Honestly, I find it a little adorable too ;)

What’s with the winky face.

It means that I’m flirting with you ;)

John, I am not adorable.

Of course you are, William Sherlock Scott Holmes.

;) ;) ;)

...

Saw two old men in the park today and thought of us.

How so?

They were wrinkled and grey, old as the year is young. And yet, they looked so happy. They were smiling at each other, laughing as they kissed each other’s cheeks.

I want to have that John, want to have that infinity, have that forever with you. I want us to grow old together and live together till we die, old and in love. I want it so much.

I want that too Sherlock, god. I want to watch you grow old and love you all the more for it. I want to be with you forever, I want to have that chance to fall in love with you every single day for the rest of my life. I want to have that promise of a happy ending, so badly.

We will. We will get that happy ending after all of this is over. I promise John, I will ensure it.

I will do as much as I can in my power to ensure it too, love. I will. I promise.

I love you.

I love you too.

...

Sherlock, what are you wearing right now.

What do you mean?

Just tell me.
Just pyjama bottoms and a t-shirt, why?

Oh, fuck.

**John? John, are you okay?**

Is it the low collared T-shirt? The one that I can see your collarbone jutting out of?

**John... are you trying to initiate phone sex?**

Mary’s out for the night. I have time.

**John... would you rather call?**

Can’t Sherlock, Mycroft’s encryption work doesn’t go that far.

**Oh, I see... on purpose. Making it seem less suspicious hmmm...**

Sherlock fuck I want to touch you. God do I want to.

**What can I do?**

Just type whatever feels right, sweetheart.

**Okay.**

Sherlock, you have no idea how much I wish you were lying right next to me right now. In my bed, here with me. I want to undress you, want to pull that ridiculously loose T-shirt off of you and lick every inch of your skin.

**John, oh god.**

I would play with your nipples, suck them into my mouth, lave them with my tongue, nibble at them with my teeth till you’re a crying, screaming mess.

**John.**

I’d pull down your pyjama bottoms, your cock springing free as I take it in hand, pumping it up and down.

**But then I’d stop you, putting a hand on your fingers so that you slow and look at me, our gazes meeting as I dump a bottle of lube into your hands.**

Oh, fuck.

I’d pull off your clothes, licking your scar as I do so before you press your fingers into me, circling my... skin... there - just right before sinking them in.

Sherlock, don’t stop.

**You’d be so careful, so gentle, opening me up as I moan in pleasure, screaming as you rub up against my prostrate.**

Sherlock.
I want you to know, so badly. I want you to fuck me, I want your dick inside of me, want to feel it filling me up, sliding in and out, pumping me full of your come, owning me. I want to feel it softening as you pull out, as come leaks out of me and you push it back in, trying to ensure that every bit of you remains inside of me.

FCK

I want everything John, I want everything so much.

Are you touching yourself now?

Yes.

Good. Because Sherlock, you know I’d have you any way I liked. On your knees, begging as I hold tight to your chest, thrusting up into you. You sitting on my lap as I bounce you up and down on my cock. You on your front as I push myself into you, stroking your cock and feeling the bit of your chest shift and undulate every time I press into you.

You like that huh? Well, best of all would be taking you when you’re on your back, your arse high in the air as I wrap your legs around my back, teasing you as I push slowly into you, refusing to give you reprieve as you thrust downwards, trying desperately to slide down further onto my cock.

But I won’t let you.

I’ll thrust forward slowly, pushing merely the head in until your cries become too much and I push all the way in, holding onto you as I slap my hips up against yours, fucking you like an animal till you come.

That’s good Sherlock, that’s good.

... 

Are you touching yourself now?

Yes, of course.

I want all of that, all of what you’ve said and more.

And do you know John, I’ve not taken off the dog tags since you’ve given them to me? They’re still around my neck, and if I press them a little against my chest, against my palm, your name will be imprinted there.

Oh, fuck.

I’m yours, all yours. Anyone who looks will know. The mark you left on my shoulder is fading but if you look closely enough you can tell that it’s still there. After you left that day, I had marks, all over my body, red indents, purple bruises, everywhere.

You made me yours, John, and I want so much more.
You’ve utterly ruined me, utterly consumed me, burned me to the ground and remade me in the fiery depths of your love. It felt like being born again, the first time we had sex. I love that feeling. I haven’t felt it ever before. I want it. I want it John. Give it to me.

SHERLOCK

…

John?

Still here love, that was just a bit much haha.

Oh, so was it good?

Better than good honey, better than good.

Oh fuck you made me make a mess of my pyjamas.

Good ;)

…

John I need to see you again. I need to touch you, I’m dying without you, I need you.

I want you too darling, I want you so badly. Every time I pass by the Baker Street station on the Tube I have half a mind to get out of the carriage and run straight back into your arms.

John, the next time we have sex, can we… do that?

Of course sweetheart, anything for you, really.

I love you John.

I love you too, Sherlock.

...

Sherlock, Mary’s been throwing up a lot recently. I think it’s nearly time.

When’s the last time you had a scan?

Just 2 weeks ago. I think this means that the time is coming soon.

John when it happens, text me okay?

Sure thing.

…
Sherlock, Mary’s water has just broken. I’m taking her to the hospital now.

*I’m on my way.*

Chapter End Notes

I am like dying and drowning in schoolwork. I basically had to rush this all out in one day so sorry for the crappy quality asdfghjkl.

When will the next update be? Who knows? Not me. sigh... I don't have much time now with school. But I promise you this, that I'll definitely try to get the whole fic up by the time S4 airs. Confirm. I will try my best. And if I don't make it, it'll probably only be the epilogue chapter. Wow, when I started writing this thing I really didn't expect for it to turn into such a monster.

If you're ever wondering how I'm doing, hit me up on tumblr yo. I'd love to hear from you guys.

Also your kudos and comments have really spurred me on to write this chapter. Thanks so much for them. They really mean a lot to me.
Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Summary

"Before they’d admitted anything to each other, before Sherlock had confessed, the separation had been easy to handle. There hadn’t been any spoken promises, whispered assurances, nothing tethering them wholly to the other.

But now the ache is palpable, a throbbing force in his chest that Sherlock can’t even begin to comprehend as he pushes his way through the hospital doors, charging towards the lift."

Chapter Notes

HEY GUYS ITS BEEN 3 WEEKS BUT YAY I MANAGED TO UPDATE JUST AS IT HIT 21 DAYS HAHAHAHA.

Hope you enjoy this chapter!!! I had a lot of fun writing it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

0 hours till a reunion with John

He’s not seen John in three weeks.

Before they’d admitted anything to each other, before Sherlock had confessed, the separation had been easy to handle. There hadn’t been any spoken promises, whispered assurances, nothing tethering them wholly to the other.

But now the ache is palpable, a throbbing force in his chest that Sherlock can’t even begin to comprehend as he pushes his way through the hospital doors, charging towards the lift.

The possibility of seeing Mary, of even being near Mary has been reduced to a mere blip in his mind, an afterthought hidden away at the edges of his consciousness.

All he wants now is John.

“I’m here,” he texts as the lift doors close.

*I'm here, I'm coming.*

He only needs to wait 5 seconds for a reply.

“Good,” reads the text he receives as he walks briskly out of the lift, turning the corner to the waiting room.
He needs to see John, needs to be in his presence again, needs to touch him and hold him and know that he is real-

“Sherlock?”

He hears John before he sees him. His gaze rakes over the man’s face, taking in tired eyes ringed with dark circles, a furrowed forehead that rests sunken over sandy eyebrows… but as John turns to face him, their gazes locking, his eyes immediately widen, the creases on his forehead vanishing.

Sherlock has barely any time to react before John comes barrelling into him, his eyes wild and hair mussed, squeaky shoes skating across linoleum floor as he collides with Sherlock’s chest, wrapping his arms around his body and pulling him close.

Reacting instinctively, Sherlock does the same, his hands reaching to grab onto John’s shoulders, tugging him tighter into his embrace, keeping him there.

Thankfully, there’s no one else in the corridor right now. It’s way past 2am and most of the people left are all on night shift. Visiting hours have long since ended but he managed to get into the ward with some help from Mycroft. Having the British government as your brother thankfully does have some perks.

“I missed you,” John chokes into his chest, holding him closer, “I missed you so… much-”

“I missed you too John,” Sherlock breathes, “Missed you so much.”

And then they’re crying, tearing into each other’s shoulders as Sherlock bends forwards, burying his face into John’s neck. They stand there for a few more minutes, wrapped up in each other before John gives one more gasping sigh, his shoulders slackening, signalling that it’s time for them to pull apart.

Sherlock does so reluctantly, as does John clearly, seeing as how his fingertips linger on Sherlock’s jacket even as he steps back.

It hurts. It hurts horribly to be separated from John, to not be TOUCHING him... But he understands, they’re in a hospital, a ward full of cameras. For all he knows, Mary might make a move to retrieve the footage later if she suspects that anything is wrong. Although… Mycroft has probably already thought of that eventuality. But, it doesn’t hurt to be careful.

“What’s happened?” Sherlock breathes, tearing his gaze away from John as he turns his face towards the wooden door nearest to them.

Mary’s right there. The woman who tried to murder him, poison him...

“She’s still in the early stages of labour,” John mutters, huffing softly, “Nothing terribly serious yet.”

Sherlock narrows his gaze.

“Why aren’t you inside with her?” he questions.

John shrugs.

“Well, she apparently doesn’t want me in the room for most of it, asked me to leave so that I wouldn’t have to see her in pain,” John rolls his eyes, “Not sure if she’s trying to be accommodating or if she really doesn’t want me in the room.”
“Hmmm…” Sherlock hums, turning to face John for a moment before turning back towards the door.

“So… What are you going to do now?”

“Well,” John starts, digging into his pocket, “I’m tired out of my mind and I kind of want to sleep. So I checked into a hotel across the road.”

He retrieves a key card, holding it up for Sherlock to see.

“You’ll be notified once her contractions start?” Sherlock queries as John lowers his hand, clutching the card tightly to his side.

His trigger finger twitches.

“Yep,” he replies, putting a bit of an emphasis on the p, “I’ll have my phone on ringer. I’ll know when it happens.”

“Oh,” Sherlock nods, lifting a hand to scratch his head, “That’s good.”

They stand there, both of them, for a short, awkward moment before John breaks the silence.

“Do you want to come to the hotel with me-”

John doesn’t even have time to finish his sentence before he replies.

“God yes,” he splutters as John chuckles, smiling up at him as they make their way to the lift, the sides of their bodies brushing with every step and Sherlock has never felt happier.

The hotel, it seems, is just down the block. It’s a little bit run-down and from the exterior, it’s already apparent that the rooms aren’t large… which means the two of them will probably be making do on a double bed.

They step in tandem, making their way into the lift and up to the room.

Sherlock can read John’s weariness in the slant of his shoulders, in his slow, shuffling steps, in the deliberate manner that he swipes the keycard down the slot, opening the door for both of them to enter.

The room is tiny, as expected, with a double bed and a small ensuite toilet fitted with a tiny bathtub.

He turns to face John, watching as the man rubs his eyes, blinking furiously.

He looks like he hasn’t slept properly in weeks.

“John,” he murmurs, hanging up his coat as John does the same, “What say you have a bath?”

John pauses for a moment, stopping in his tracks, as if considering Sherlock's proposition. He raises tired eyelids, giving Sherlock a once over before closing the space in between them, planting a quick kiss on Sherlock’s lips.

It’s not rushed, or filled with passion, as all their earlier kisses have been. This time, it’s more solemn, more certain and Sherlock sighs as he kisses back, his lips undulating under John’s.

He’s been waiting for this, itching for them to kiss again - but John had seemed so tired, he didn’t know if he would have been-
“A bath sounds nice,” John smiles as he pulls away, his breaths leaving lovely, puffy warm patches on his lips. “Why? What do you have in mind?”

“Something that I hope you’ll enjoy,” Sherlock smiles, pressing one more kiss to John’s forehead, his chest swelling with the love he has for the man.

“Go ahead and take a seat in the armchair while I set things up,” he finishes, stepping towards the bathroom as John smiles wearily, making his way towards the window.

“Anything you say love,” is the last that Sherlock hears as he steps across the threshold of the bathroom, surveying the tiny space before him.

The bathtub is big enough for one person to lie in, possibly two if called for. And thankfully, this hotel provides bath salts. That’s always a plus.

Sherlock smiles as he plugs the drain, running the taps as he gets to work, slitting open the bath salt packets and pouring them into the swirling water below.

He draws up a stool from beneath the sink, watching the tub fill for a few seconds to determine when exactly he’ll have to be back to turn off the taps (6 minutes) before getting up and walking out.

Soft snores emanate from the corner of the bedroom, Sherlock’s heart doing a little leap when he turns to face John. The man has completely passed out, his arms spread out over the armchair rests, his mouth wide open.

It’s absolutely adorable.

He smiles, padding softly over to the man, tapping him gently on the shoulder.

John stirs, his eyes fluttering open and fixing themselves on Sherlock’s face. He grins sleepily, instinctively reaching tired hands to Sherlock’s face, rubbing his cheekbones gently.

“Hello beautiful,” he murmurs and Sherlock has never been more in love.

He blushes, his breaths stuttering for a moment under the openness of John’s gaze before he affixes himself back to reality, reaching for John’s shoulder and gently tugging him forward.

“You have to have a bath,” he murmurs, helping the man stand, holding him as they trudge their way to the bathroom, “You stink.”

John chuckles in response.

“As do you, you bastard,” he smiles as Sherlock steadies him against the wall, unbuttoning John’s cardigan and tugging it off of him. He lets the fabric pool onto the floor before moving onto his shirt, signalling to John to raise his arms up above his head so that he can pull it off him.

John’s breathing heavily now, his chest heaving as Sherlock presses a kiss to his navel before starting work on his jeans. He tugs the button off and the zipper down, pulling the blue denim down far enough for John to step out of it.

Now for the underwear.

John’s cock is flaccid, sort of. Sherlock can tell that the simple act of removing his clothes has made the man aroused. But John is tired, and probably isn’t up for sex at the moment so he’ll probably have to be careful. He doesn’t want to accidentally make John feel obligated to have sex with him.
Pulling at the sides of his underwear, Sherlock tugs it down towards the floor, revealing John’s cock.

It’s even beautiful flaccid.

John smiles down at Sherlock as he moves to stand, tugging John’s face in for another kiss before guiding the man towards the bathtub, settling him inside the warm water.

He waits till John’s body is fully engulfed before switching off the taps, swirling the water a bit so that the remaining bath salt residue dissolves.

He remembers ages ago, their positions reversed, when it had been John who was soothing his nightmares away, tethering him to reality.

He hopes to repay the favour.

Rolling up his sleeves, Sherlock draws up the stool, seating himself right by John’s head resting up against the back of the tub. John’s eyes are closed, revelling in the warmth of the water, a soft smile plastered on his face and Sherlock sighs.

He starts by pouring some of the hotel-provided shampoo into his lover’s hair, taking great care to work it deep into his scalp as John hums, his chest vibrating in answer to Sherlock's ministrations. Scooping up handfuls of water, he lets it run down John’s hair, trickling towards his neck, before lathering again.

When he’s satisfied, he uncaps the shower gel, working his way down the man’s neck and shoulders, massaging the tensed muscles he finds there.

After those harrowing three weeks with Mary, John deserves some reprieve, some pampering even. Sherlock hopes that Mary hasn’t been too hard on him for all those weeks that he’s missed over at Baker Street, hopes that she hasn’t seen through the front that John has been struggling to uphold.

These three weeks have been terribly hard on them both.

When Sherlock is finished, he wipes his hands on the towel next to him, smiling down softly at the pleased look on John’s face.

He looks ten years younger, the lines of his forehead stripped away of any stress or hurt... or pain. It’s John as he should be, John happy and safe and peaceful.

He admires the scene for a moment more before he stands up, beginning to unbutton his shirt.

After all, he can’t give the man a proper bath without getting a little wet.

The moment John hears the sound of rustling fabric, his eyes shoot wide open, his gaze taking on a hungry quality as Sherlock blushes, tugging his shirt and pants off.

Well, he hadn’t expected that.

He watches as John directs his gaze to the dog tags around his neck, his eyes darkening with unbridled want as Sherlock blushes.

He hadn't taken them off since he'd first gotten them.

He watches as John's eyes slide further southwards to his crotch, drinking his fill before turning to look up at Sherlock expectantly, as if waiting for something. Feeling a little self-conscious, Sherlock blushes again in response, refusing to meet the man’s gaze as he tugs his underwear down and off of
his body.

John smiles lasciviously in answer, his chin tilted upwards in a sly grin as Sherlock steps into the bathtub, settling himself at the foot of John’s body.

Is the man just horny all the time or…

“Nope, I’m only horny when it’s you,” John chuckles, eliciting another blush out of the detective.

Shit, he’s got to stop thinking out loud.

“I- I- erm. I’m going to bathe you now,” he mutters awkwardly, heat filling his cheeks as John chuckles, reaching a hand to draw him forward.

“Sounds good darling,” he whispers into his ear and Sherlock is certain that he might’ve just spontaneously combusted right there and then.

He gulps, shaking a little as John releases him.

They might end up having sex after all.

He starts with the top of John’s body, lathering some soap into his palm as he smoothes his fingers over the mangled scar tissue on John’s shoulder. John hums in answer, locking eyes with him as he continues to swirl the pads of his fingertips over the patch of skin there, taking great care not to miss a spot, before moving on to John’s chest.

John's chest has always been compact, solid and hard with a hint of pudginess. Massaging the pectorals there, Sherlock feels hard muscle beneath the thin layer of fat. Clearly, the man has been working out... maybe he did so to spend time away from Mary?

_Yep, probably_, Sherlock thinks as he gives his chest one last final squeeze, feeling an answering firmness below his fingertips.

His fingers gloss over John’s chest one last time, shivering at the thought of the muscle below the layer of skin, before shifting down to John’s belly, smoothing his fingers over the soft surface and caressing the tubbiness there.

God, does he love John’s body.

He smiles, turning to face John who smirks at him, obviously interested to see what he does next.

They’re stepping foot into dangerous territory.

Sherlock’s not entirely sure how appropriate it is to be having sex in a bathtub while one’s wife is going through labour. He feels bad about it for a moment before remembering what Mary has done to the both of them, how unrepentant she had been about hurting either of them and he goes back to not caring.

He brushes the thought to the back of his mind, huffing in annoyance as he moves his fingers down to John’s thighs, stroking the muscled surface there lovingly as John whines softly, his eyes going dark as he relaxes further into the bath, his chin now just above the surface of the water.

“Sherlock,” he murmurs, gesturing for him and Sherlock pauses for a moment, his hands going still as John groans, thrusting his hips upwards-

Oh god, John’s already half-hard.
“C’mere,” the man murmurs and Sherlock obliges, sliding up the tub so that he’s resting up against John’s body.

He surrenders himself over to John’s lips the moment the man presses them against his, allowing John to guide him as he worries his bottom lip, fisting a hand in his curls.

John's steel dog tags clink and chime as their faces move in tandem, their lips undulating languidly as Sherlock moans softly into John's mouth.

“Missed you a lot, love,” John whispers when they part for air, “I’m sorry I probably can’t do what we talked about over text but—”

“No John,” Sherlock answers, breathing heavily, his heart rate already starting to pick up. “This… This is enough.”

He sighs as John turns instead to nibble at his ear, massaging his scalp gently before slipping his hand further, stroking roughly down his neck, his back, his buttocks...

He cries out involuntarily as John gives an experimental squeeze, his body trembling as his cock begins to fill out.

Sex in a bathtub... This is going to be interesting.

He thanks his lucky stars that he hadn’t filled it too full. He wouldn’t want to explain a flooded floor to an irate hotel manager.

He groans further as John slips a finger in between his cheeks, stroking the furled skin there, gently.

“Someday,” John murmurs, licking the shell of his ear, “Someday I’ll have my cock inside that lovely arse of yours.”

Sherlock shudders in answer, his eyes squeezing themselves shut involuntarily at the visual.

“But for now, you’ll just have to wait,” John murmurs again and Sherlock moans, shuddering as John slips the tip of his finger through the sphincter before drawing it out slowly again.

“You’ll have to be patient love. However… there might be something I can do...”

Sherlock watches with hooded eyes as John takes both of their cocks in hand, stroking them languidly as his other hand continues to stroke up and down his perineum.

Oh, fuck.

Sherlock whines in answer, desperate for friction as he brings his free hand down to the space between their bodies, joining John’s hand, stroking their burgeoning erections in tandem.

With every downstroke, his arm knocks against the chain of John's dog tags, each metallic clink reminding him of their presence, of how John loves him, of how he's so irrevocably John's...

It seems to be having an effect on John too because his grunts seem to be getting far louder as well.

Sherlock absolutely loves it.

He groans further as John once again teases the rim of his sphincter, swirling and swirling the hole there before dipping in and out and in and-
“John,” he breathes, his cock hardening further in response, as does John’s.

“Yes baby?” John answers, his hips beginning to thrust upwards into the ring of their fists, “How does it feel?”

“It feels-”

John chooses that moment to slip in his finger up to the hilt of his knuckle, the rest of his fingers continuing to stroke the rim of Sherlock’s entrance and Sherlock very nearly screams, his cock filling out to full hardness.

“John,” he whispers again and this time his hips begin to stutter forwards and back, simultaneously seeking pressure on his cock and on his arsehole as the dog tags around his neck continue to knock together. The sound of metallic clinking filling the room as he proceeds to rut feverishly back and forth on John’s finger.

"John please," he moans.

(A bit of water sloshes over the rim of the bathtub but that’s easily cleanable.)

John obliges, timing the thrusts of his index finger with that of Sherlock’s, each round sinking his finger deeper and deeper into Sherlock’s arse.

“Mmmmmm,” John murmurs, kissing Sherlock’s cheek as Sherlock’s hips begin to stutter, signalling that he’s close.

“Let me try something,” he mutters silkily as he crooks his finger upwards-

And onto his prostrate.

“JOHN!” Sherlock all but yells, his hips bucking forward into John’s fist as he spills onto his lover’s chest, his eyes squeezed shut as he collapses onto John, completely spent as water sloshes about him.

He revels in the warmth of the water as John’s chest rumbles. He feels the man extract his finger from his entrance, his other hand picking up speed on his own cock. John’s thrusts are now more rapid, more certain and sure, as if he’d previously paid more attention to Sherlock than himself (which is probably true).

Sherlock sighs as the man lets out a loud groan, his hand stilling against him as his cock pulses up against Sherlock’s chest, spending itself against his skin.

Sherlock purrs at the sensation, holding John close as his cock spurts a few more times before slackening against his body.

He can’t believe that they just had sex in a bathtub and that John is here, right here with him… Never in a million years could Sherlock have anticipated this.

He smiles, a hand reaching up to stroke John’s chest. He thinks about their come mingling in the water surrounding them, bits and pieces of their DNA sticking to each other’s skin, the tiny bit of come he’s currently rubbing onto John’s body-

Wait.

“John, we’re going to need to shower,” Sherlock blurs out all of a sudden, fixing his eyes on the man in question.
John stares back at him, as if shocked for a moment, before bursting into a fit of giggles, his chest rumbling below Sherlock.

“Sure darling, of course,” he says, smiling as Sherlock nuzzles into John’s neck, sighing happily, smelling the tang of sex there mixed with the fragrance of lavender bath salts.

Yeah they really need another bath.

Sherlock pulls away reluctantly, pulling the plug up and off the drain as he turns to John, holding a hand out to the man as they both move to stand.

He checks the clock on the wall - It’s 4 a.m. It’s high time they both went to bed.

The shower that follows is a lot more quick and perfunctory than the bath before.

They take turns to use the shower head, John finishing faster since it’s his second wash while Sherlock takes 5 minutes longer. His curls require more thorough cleaning than John’s hair after all.

And because of this, John steps out of the shower first, wiping himself down with a towel, waiting till Sherlock finishes before handing it to him. Sherlock takes it gladly, wrapping himself in it and stepping out of the shower. (There’s unfortunately only one towel and it seems that the hotel had only set up the room for a one person stay)

He stalks into the bedroom, following John who reaches into his tiny suitcase, pulling out a pair of pyjamas.

“I’m not sure if I have anything that fits you Sherlock,” he blushes as he answers, stepping into his pyjama pants. “I didn’t exactly… anticipate this. But I do have a jumper you can wear. It’s quite cold-”

“Just the jumper?” Sherlock murmurs, chucking the towel towards the armchair.

John’s face goes red in response and Sherlock smiles. He hadn’t intended that innuendo.

“And only the jumper”, he finishes as John gulps, locking dark eyes with him for a moment before turning back to his suitcase, grabbing a beige jumper and handing it to Sherlock.

Chuckling at John’s sudden show of embarrassment, Sherlock grins, slipping the piece of fabric over his head.

It’s large and doesn’t exactly fit… But it’s comfy and it’s John’s so that makes everything all better.

The base of the jumper comes up to his thighs, just enough to hide his crotch, leaving it a little suggestive.

He bets John likes that... And he’s not wrong because the moment he turns to face the man, John’s already giving him a heady gaze, his eyes raking up and down his thighs and Sherlock has to stifle a giggle.

God, John is so adorable.

He stalks towards the man, fixing him with a sly smile as he guides John towards the bed, the two of them collapsing onto the soft surface almost immediately.

“Well, I’m exhausted,” John mutters, his face plastered against the bed sheet as he crawls his way up to the head of the bed, resting down on the pillow there.
Sherlock hums in answer, following suit, bringing a pillow down to John’s chest. Situating himself beneath John’s chin, he wraps his arms around the man’s torso, tugging him close, rearranging his limbs so that they slot perfectly against John’s.

“I love you, John Watson,” he murmurs, into the vee below the man’s neck, nuzzling gently into the warm skin there.

John chuckles in answer, reaching a hand out to smooth his fingers over Sherlock’s still damp hair before sliding them further downwards, following the trail of the train of his dog tags down to where they rest up against Sherlock’s heart.

“And I love you too, Sherlock,” he answers.

“I’ll love you… Always.”

----

Sherlock’s not entirely sure when he fell asleep.

All he knows is that it’s now 9 a.m. in the morning and John is no longer here.

He stirs sleepily, tired eyes adjusting to the light streaming into the room.

Where is Joh-

“SHERLOCK!”

Sherlock’s eyes shoot open at the sound, his brain immediately going back online as he turns towards the source of the noise.

“IT’S A GIRL! IF YOU WERE WONDERING,” John shouts again, his voice a bit muffled by the door.

Sherlock scrambles out of bed in an instant, dashing towards the door.

He’s huffing when he opens the door, his chest heaving from the sudden exertion as John bounds into his arms, wrapping his arms around him.

“I excused myself to come back and pack my stuff,” he smiles, chuckling happily, “I’m so happy that you’re still here.”

Sherlock chuckles, clutching the man tighter. John seems absolutely exhilarated.

“That’s great John,” Sherlock smiles, hugging back as the man in question chuckles, shaking his head as he steps away from him, his deep blue eyes sparkling.

“I don’t quite understand it honestly,” John sighs, his joyful tone tinged with a bit of sadness, “Like… I mean when I was younger I always wanted to be a father, but now…”

Sherlock frowns.

“Do you not want to be a fath-”
“No, that’s not the issue,” John blurts out, sighing deeply, “I’m fine with the prospect of being a father now. It’s not something I’m uncomfortable with but it’s just something I don’t quite… want anymore, especially with Mary.”

“But still, I’m happy, overjoyed even. I can’t explain the feeling really,” John shrugs his shoulders, pressing a giddy kiss to Sherlock’s cheek, “I feel like I shouldn’t be but-”

“That’s because the child is yours,” Sherlock smiles, grinning as John digs into his pockets, “It’s you, your DNA. You made her.”

“Maybe,” John chuckles, thumbing through his phone till he finds what he’s looking for.

He holds the screen up for Sherlock to see, smiling widely as Sherlock squints, his eyes adjusting to the bright light.

The baby in the picture is tiny… and so very pink. Sherlock smiles, taking the phone from John to examine the picture a little closer.

She looks like John and Mary combined, she really does. Her nose is most definitely John’s, her face shape Mary’s and her eyes… Mary or John, Sherlock isn’t sure. The only thing that he’s certain of is that John's child is absolutely adorable.

He grins, handing the phone back to John.

“She’s gorgeous,” is all he says before John is on him again, hugging him tightly.

“Thank you for coming Sherlock,” he smiles, planting a soft kiss on his neck. “Thanks for being here with me.”

Sherlock can only smile.

“You’re welcome,” he grins, tugging John towards him.

“You’re welcome.”

----

So, how’s things John?

Okay I guess. Mary’s been sleeping it off. But she seems fine.

How long will you be at the hospital for?

Maybe… a few more hours? I’ll have to go home after that to catch a few winks.

I wish I didn’t have work tomorrow.

Can’t you just call in sick? Or use your paternity leave?

I’m saving that for later. Mycroft agreed. I need as much time to watch her as I possibly can.

Well, she can’t possibly be dangerous during her recovery period.
It’s not so much dangerous as realising that something is wrong and using Lily as leverage and possibly hurting her in the process.

Ah.

Sorry Sherlock, I’m just a bit worried at the moment.

No, it’s fine. It’s understandable.

Don’t worry John, you’ll be a great father.

I hope so too.

-----

Lily keeps burping.

That’s sweet… I suppose?

Yeah it’s cute Sherlock, decidedly cute.

You sound really happy today.

Yep, that’s because we’re taking her home.

Oh, that’s great John!

No more commuting to hospitals on the other side of the city.

Have you gotten everything set up?

Yes! We have a cot and everything in our master bedroom. The only thing I’m worried I’m worried about is how much she’ll cry. I’m pretty sure Mary will guilt-trip me into taking care of her at night.

That’s awful.

She’s my kid though, I’ll have to make a concession for her.

I guess.

Alright it’s getting late, night love.

Night John.

-----

Fuck babies seriously.
Having a rough night?
Yes! This girl just won’t SHUT UP.

Pick her up and hold her at a 45 degree angle.
I’ve done that. It’s just not working.

What a stubborn baby… Just like her father.
Oi haha.

Would you like me to send you a piece I’ve been working on? That might soothe her a little.
Sounds good.

LaLuna.mp3 file sent

…

That was beautiful Sherlock. And yeah, she’s asleep now.

Go ahead and get some rest John, god knows that you need it.
Sure love, night.

Night.

----

The next text comes in the middle of the following day.
Sherlock’s in the midst of an experiment when it happens.

Three chirrupy pings… ...John, he thinks as he shuts off his bunsen burner, striding over to the dining table to pick his phone up.

Sherlock, the first message reads.

There’s something really important that I have to tell you.

I’m really not feeling too good right now.

Sherlock frowns, thumbing through the texts one more time.

He hadn’t misread them, had he? John had been so full of euphoria over Lily the past few days. What could have possibly happened?

“What do you mean?” he texts back, “John what’s wrong?”

He pauses, scrolling rapidly through the rest of their conversations, checking for any possible reasons for John’s sudden texts.
There isn’t anything discernibly wrong at all.

It’s then that he feels his phone vibrate one more time. His chest constricts with dread, his fingers trembling as he scrolls down swiftly to read the text below.

_Sherlock, I might’ve gotten ahead and myself and asked Mycroft to help me do a paternity test_, it reads.

_Oh no_, Sherlock thinks, his body freezing up, his scalp prickling.

Oh god.

His phone pings one more time.

He doesn’t even need to look at the text to know what is coming next.

_Sherlock, Lily isn’t mine._

Chapter End Notes

And again school is a bitch and idk when I'll have time... but hey we're nearing the end, that's a plus ;)

Thanks for all your kudos and comments, they keep me interested in the writing when nothing else does uwu

Hit me up on _tumblr_!!!
He kisses back as good as he can, his lips worrying a spot on John’s top lip as John’s hands scrabble for purchase in his curls, tightening their hold for a moment before releasing and moving on to another patch of hair. It’s as if John can’t believe that he’s really there, as if he’s trying to constantly prove to himself that Sherlock isn’t going away.

“I’m here,” he whispers when they part for air, John sobbing loudly now as he gives in fully to his sorrow, hiding his face in the crook of Sherlock’s neck as he begins to howl, his voice raised to the heavens as tears begin to roll hotly down Sherlock’s cheek.

“I’m here,” he repeats, slowly guiding the two of them down onto the ground, John clinging onto him like a lifeline as they slide slowly onto the carpeted floor.

“I’m here,” he says as John lets out a loud sob, fisting his hands in the front of Sherlock’s shirt. “I’m here. I’m here. I’m here.”

“I’m not going anywhere.”

Chapter Notes

Yay!!! I’m done with exams but BOOO I HAVE TO FINISH THIS FIC BEFORE SEASON 4 AIRS AHHHHHHHHHH. I hope I can finish man. I’m rushing it out as best as I can HAHAHA. Hope you enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In which time seems to stop

“Sherlock, Lily isn’t mine.”

No… no…

This can’t be right… It can’t possibly be!

Sherlock’s fingers are trembling, his hands shaking as he dials in John’s number.

The phone only rings once before John picks up.

“Sher- Sherlock,” John’s nearly breathless voice rings out amidst crumbling static, the abject fear in his voice practically bleeding through the telephone lines.

Oh god no.
“John,” he answers, his voice tremulous, “John, deep breaths. John-”

“Sherlock.”

“John take a deep breath, for me, please, John,” he breathes, struggling to keep his voice calm as John’s voice trembles on the other end of the line.

He listens as John huffs, his breaths gentling as he inhales, holding his breath for a moment before exhaling slowly.

“I’m here,” he speaks calmly as John continues to inhale and exhale, his breaths slowing fractionally with each cycle, “I’m here. I’m here. I’m here.”

He keeps it up till John sounds far more calm than he had been before, his breaths coming more naturally.

“I’m here,” he whispers one final time as John lets out a broken sigh, sending shuddering static across the receiver.

Where is John right now?

If he’s at his apartment-

If he’s still at his apartment with Mary...

“John, I’m assuming you’ve contacted Mycroft,” he says quickly, his heart thumping in his chest as John lets out a loud exhale.

“Yeah… yeah I have,” he answers, his voice still shaking.

“He said that I’ll have to leave my apartment by the evening, that I probably can’t keep this facade up for much longer. I’ll be at Baker Street by 8 today.”

So John will be back home, back here in Sherlock’s arms by nighttime.

He hasn’t seen the man in 6 weeks, since Lily has been born. In fact, he hasn’t ever met Lily in person, out of fear that Mary might have felt threatened by his presence.

Well, that doesn’t matter now, does it?

Sherlock sighs, his grip on his handphone tightening.

If only their meetings could occur under happier circumstances.

“And Lily?” he questions.

John might hate Mary but Sherlock is certain of at least one thing, that John loves Lily with all he has and even if she isn’t his daughter, that he’d still swear to protect her with every fibre of his beating heart.

“They’ll be extracting Lily soon after,” John answers, “Mary has her daily nap at around 7 after dinner so they’ll take her when she’s sleeping. We always put Lily in the cot so it shouldn’t be hard.”

So Lily will be safe. Thank god.

“They’ll be watching over Mary,” John continues, “Mycroft hadn’t wanted to act too early for the
sake of Lily, just in case it sped up Mary’s plans. But it seems like there’s no getting around this now.”

Sherlock sighs, wiping off the sweat accumulating on his brow as he moves to sit, flopping down on the sofa.

“Why did Mycroft tell you this?” he breathes, his voice crumbling, “Why did he tell you-”

“Mycroft wasn’t supposed to tell me,” John interrupts, his voice instantly hardening, “I’d asked for a paternity test soon after Lily had been born, but it had been six weeks and I’d suspected that something was up. That’s why I called and basically threatened the information out of him.”

Sherlock sighs.

Of course John would’ve.

“So who’s the father?” he questions.

It could be anyone honestly, knowing Mary. But there is one likely candidate...

“David,” John replies pointedly, his voice certain and steady and yet tinged with resignation.

“Ah…”

Of course.

“No surprise there huh?” John chuckles sadly, “I had always wondered, honestly. She seemed too close to him at the wedding for my liking.”

“I sort of suspected too…” Sherlock adds, “Before the wedding even. I warned him when we talked about his duties-”

John lets out a surprised snort.

“You warned him?” he snickers, “Oh god what did you say?”

Shit, John was never meant to find out about that.

Sherlock’s certain his entire face has gone red.

“Nothing… nothing much,” he sputters, goosebumps erupting out of his skin.

Will John be angry at him for not telling him about this earlier?

“Oh god,” John breathes.

There’s a short pause before the man on the other end of the line bursts into giggles, his laughter echoing across the static between them and Sherlock heaves a heavy sigh of relief.

“Oh god that explains why he was so terrified of you at the wedding,” John laughs, “I had been wondering-”

Sherlock answers with a soft chuckle, shaking his head.

At least he made John laugh.

He waits till John stops giggling before continuing. As much as he hates for John to be jolted back to
reality, time is of the essence here.

“So what now?” he breathes, taking a deep breath, “What’s the plan exactly?”

John lets out one final chuckle before sobering up.

“I’ll be coming to you in the evening,” he answers, his voice heavy, “Lily will be going elsewhere.”

“All you have to do is wait. Maybe Mycroft will contact you I don’t know.”

All you have to do is wait.

Ah well, it doesn’t seem like he can do much under the circumstances anyway.

“Please stay safe John,” is all he can say, wishing for the best and dreading the worst as he clutches the plastic covering of his handphone tightly, “Please don’t do anything stupid.”

John lets out a soft laugh in response.

“You too Sherlock, you too,” he replies, and Sherlock can hear the answering smile in his voice.

A pregnant pause follows, fuzzy silence filling Sherlock’s ear as neither of them can bring themselves to hang up, neither wishing to return to reality...

It’s John who draws the moment to a close in the end.

“I’ve got to go,” he says almost sadly, his voice weeping through the receiver and Sherlock sighs in answer.

“I love you,” he says, his voice clear and certain.

“I love you too,” Sherlock answers, closing his eyes and listening to the final strains of John’s whispering breaths, magnified by speaker of his handphone, “I love you so much.”

----

Sherlock sighs as John ends the call, the audible tap on the other side of the line ringing in his ears as he sets his phone down on the sofa.

He takes a deep breath, struggling to compose himself in light of this newfound information.

So Mary had lied.

Not just about her past, not just about her attempts at killing him…

But also about the parentage of her child.

He’d never thought her to be so cruel.

Clearly he’d underestimated her.

Sherlock shakes his head, sighing as he rises from his seat.
He’ll have to ditch the experiment. It was time-sensitive anyways. He should’ve known better than to have started a mould culture experiment at such a time as this.

He dumps the petri dishes into the basin in the sink, filling it with water as he begins to scrub the bases clean.

The bedroom will probably be next he thinks. He hasn’t changed the sheets in three weeks and they’re starting to smell a bit foul. Yeah, he should probably get on that-

But wait, what if John wants some space? What if he prefers to sleep in his old room upstairs? He should probably prepare for that eventuality too.

So new sheets for the bed downstairs, new sheets for the bed upstairs…

Sherlock shakes his head.

Will John have eaten by then? He should probably get some food ready too. That thai place that they’d eaten from the first night John had come back does takeaway. He’ll give them a ring too.

He finishes with the petri dishes, scrubbing his hands clean before getting to work on the kitchen table, clearing the remaining detritus before doing one final wipe.

That should leave enough space for dinner.

He sighs deeply as he makes his way into the bedroom, hurling the pillows into the corner chair as he removes the sheets, dragging them off the bed roughly and dumping them onto a pile on the ground.

He wants the room to look as inviting as possible. After all that John’s been through, after that whole ordeal-

That lying wife.

MARY.

How could she?

She’d promised him that she’d give John her whole world and now… What exactly had she provided him with?

Maybe just temporary respite from reality and-

Oh.

She’d been there when he hadn’t been. When he’d been dead and gone and John had felt lost and alone and terrified.

He can give her credit for that at least.

He exhales sadly, shaking his head as he lays a new set of sheets down on the bed, tucking in the corners neatly (as John would’ve done) before arranging the pillows neatly.

Having Mary in John’s life has been such a blessing… and yet such a terrible curse.

But would it be right for him to have wished for her to have never existed?

It’s all because of that stupid FALL.
If he hadn’t jumped from St. Barts that day, or if he’d told John that he was alive - he could saved them all this heartache, saved them all this pain…

*But what if John had slipped up and alerted Moriarty’s remaining forces? What if they’d killed him?* Another voice in his head chimes in.

Sherlock groans, settling the duvet neatly onto the bed before shuffling his way out of the room.

Fine.

Maybe there just wasn’t a way around it.

Maybe this… just had to happen.

They can’t change their past. In fact, even if Sherlock had had the chance to go back in time… he’s certain he wouldn’t have changed a thing.

*I’ll have to leave all of that behind*, he thinks to himself as retrieves his phone from the sofa.

There’s nothing they can do about what has past.

All they can do now is fix their future.

-----

The next text he gets is from Mycroft.

He’s fixing up the takeaway when his phone vibrates, the device buzzing as he makes a dive for it, desperate for news.

*I trust that John has informed you of the current situation. As such, we have successfully extracted John Watson from his apartment. He will be arriving shortly.*

Sherlock heaves a sigh of relief, collapsing onto the sofa.

Thank god.

*Thank god that John is safe*, he thinks as he continues to gaze at the message, assuring himself that John is safe and sound and is on his way here.

He stares till his eyes begin to adjust to the bright white letters on the screen, his vision seeming to mould around the words as he waits for Mycroft to send another text promising the safety of Lily.

When will the next text come?

*This is taking awfully long. It’s been 20 minute-*

And oh.

*Lily has been extracted successfully as well. Will be bringing her to a safe-house. We’ve selected a suitable wet nurse to take care of her.*
Sherlock sighs in relief, his phone tight around his fingers.

**Oh, and we have Mary Watson on house arrest.**

Sherlock manages a weak smile.

Good, at least that will delay her plans for a while.

Might not be able to hold her off forever though.

He sighs, rising from the sofa and stalking back into the kitchen.

John should be here any moment…

And that’s when he hears footsteps on the stairs, steady and sure and getting louder by the second as someone begins to charge up the last remaining flight of steps.

He doesn’t know when his heart started beating so fast but right now it feels like the mass of muscle is preparing to explode out of his chest.

The door swings open, revealing a rather dishevelled and rather out of breath John Watson. His eyes are ringed with dark circles, the furrows and creases there deeper than before (probably due to the time spent staying up taking care of Lily).

He reads John’s weariness in his gait, his repressed sorrow in the clenching and unclenching of his fists, the pain of today’s revelation deep-set in his eyes…

*Oh my dear John. What has she done to you?*

The moment they make eye contact, the world seems to fall away, the space in between them suddenly feeling far too large and Sherlock cannot help but race forward, skidding on the carpet and into John’s open arms.

They collide roughly, Sherlock’s chin on John’s shoulder and John’s cheekbone against Sherlock’s forehead, but none of them seem to care as they wrap desperate arms around each other, their bodies entwining as John gasps into Sherlock’s shoulder, burying his face in the crook there.

“Fuck I missed you,” John murmurs, his voice tremulous, “I missed you so much. I-”

“I missed you too,” Sherlock answers, “I- I… Six weeks was too much.”

John chuckles sadly in response.

“Any time spent away from you is too much,” he responds, his fingers digging into Sherlock’s sides, holding him there as if Sherlock would vanish into thin air if he let go.

“I’m here,” Sherlock breathes, nodding into John’s shoulder, “I’m here. I’m here. I’m here.”

John sighs sadly.

“I know,” he answers, his voice continuing to wobble, “I know. I just- It’s just-”

Sherlock releases him slowly then, his arms unfurling as John continues to hold on, pressing his face up against his chest, inhaling deeply.

He knows John’s physical cues like the back of his hand, knows this man’s body far more intimately
than any other person he’s ever known.

And that knowledge tells him that John is about to break.

The man is already starting to whimper into his shoulder, his fingers clenching and unclenching around his waist.

He’s scared.

He’s frightened, he’s afraid.

But what of? That he’ll lose Sherlock too? Just like the way he lost Lily? The way he lost his family all in one day?

Regardless, Sherlock will be there when the man shatters. This time he will be there to hold him through it. Not like before, not like how it’d gone after jumping off the roof of Barts.

This time, he’ll be there for him, heart and soul... and he’ll be there later to help put him back together.

He caresses John’s face gently, playing with the short strands that stray over his forehead, rubbing soothing circles into his cheekbones.

“It’ll be okay John, it’ll be okay,” he says, as John begins to choke, his voice cracking under the weight of the stress of the past week.

“I’m there for you John,” he continues as John starts to sob, his voice loud and pained, tears staining the front of his shirt as Sherlock continues to hold him, “I’ll always be there for you.”

“Sher- er- lock,” John manages, his reddened eyes glazing over his as he leans forward, pressing his lips to Sherlock’s as tears begin to roll down his face.

They kiss through it, Sherlock’s mouth undulating under John’s as the man continues to cry, John’s tears mingling and racing down Sherlock’s skin.

And Sherlock holds him.

Holds him like he should’ve years ago.

Because that is what people who love each other do.

He’s not sure when it starts but he’s beginning to tear a little as well, his eyes brimming when they part for air, John gasping into the space in between them like a drowning man before their lips surge forward again, colliding in a bruising kiss.

It hurts a little.

But this is what John needs right now, he needs to feel.

And by god is Sherlock going to give it to him.

He kisses back as good as he can, his lips worrying a spot on John’s top lip as John’s hands scrabble for purchase in his curls, tightening their hold for a moment before releasing and moving on to another patch of hair. It’s as if John can’t believe that he’s really there, as if he’s trying to constantly prove to himself that Sherlock isn’t going away.
“I’m here,” he whispers when they part for air, John sobbing loudly now as he gives in fully to his sorrow, hiding his face in the crook of Sherlock’s neck as he begins to howl, his voice raised to the heavens as tears begin to roll hotly down Sherlock’s cheek.

“I’m here,” he repeats, slowly guiding the two of them down onto the ground, John clinging onto him like a lifeline as they slide slowly onto the carpeted floor.

“I’m here,” he says as John lets out a loud sob, fisting his hands in the front of Sherlock’s shirt. “I’m here. I’m here. I’m here.”

“I’m not going anywhere.”

----

John calms down after an hour.

It took a lot of work, most of which involved Sherlock pressing soft kisses to the man’s forehead, his cheeks, his lips as he stroked John’s back slowly, reminding him of his presence, reminding him that he was there, that he wasn’t going to leave.

The man’s chest eventually stops shuddering, his sobs reduced to wheezes, his previously tear-soaked eyes now red-rimmed as his face falls onto Sherlock’s chest, tired and defeated.

Good, sometimes all John has to do is let it out.

He watches as John stills, his grip on his shirt relaxing as he attempts to right himself, raising himself up on one knee.

Sherlock takes the cue and moves him to stand, holding John carefully as he carries him to the kitchen table, seating the man down as he apportions the rice and soup, settling the bowl of pad thai in front of John.

The man smiles weakly at him in answer, gingerly picking up his spoon before proceeding to toy with his food, rearranging the rice before scooping a sample into his mouth.

However, John seems to pause for a moment, as if the food were foreign to his tongue, causing Sherlock to panic a little. But the man eventually begins to chew, swallowing slowly before spooning another lump of rice into his mouth.

It doesn’t take long till the man is heartily devouring his meal, John readily scooping spoonfuls of rice into his mouth as if he had been starved for ages. After all, food has never failed to cheer John up.

Sherlock smiles as he finishes the last of his tom yam soup, watching as John grabs his own bowl, slurping the soup up contentedly before placing the bowl back on the table with a loud rattle, as if still hungry for more.

Chuckling in reply, Sherlock ladles the remaining spoonful of broth into the man’s bowl, John grinning in answer as he reaches for the bowl, finishing the soup within in one gulp.

At least John seems much happier now.

Taking the bowl from John, he gives the man a reassuring grin as John tries to manage one of his own in return.
“I’ll probably go and have a shower right now,” John says, his voice still rough from crying, “I might take a while so… I’ll see you in the bedroom? I suppose?”

So John does want to sleep together with him after all.

Sherlock smiles warmly, fixing John with the brightest smile he can muster before nodding his head, stepping forward and planting a kiss on John’s forehead.

“Yes of course,” he grins as John sighs softly, the wrinkles on his brow relaxing as he does so.

John smiles up at him, giving him a thankful nod before retrieving his suitcase, hauling it into the room with him and out of sight.

Shooting one final glance in the direction of the room, Sherlock smiles, turning his attention back to the plates.

He listens as the shower starts up, the sound of running water coursing through the rattling pipes a soft background melody as he continues to scrub the plates clean.

He finishes in a few minutes, stacking the plates neatly before wiping down the kitchen table one final time.

The water is still running, which would normally have given Sherlock some cause for concern, but the splatters from the spray alternate between soft and loud, suggesting that John is at least moving in the bath.

Stepping into the bedroom, Sherlock immediately dims the lights, shrugging off his still-damp shirt and changing into his pyjamas.

He'd showered earlier so he takes the liberty of sliding into bed, dragging the covers over himself as the water in the bath continues to run.

John’s truly been through so much these past few weeks. He's gained and lost, suffered and survived… Sherlock turns his head to face the frosted glass door as he snuggles down into a comfortable position, sighing deeply as he listens to the pitter patter of trickling shower water.

At least he's there to comfort John this time, there to carry him and hold him.

He hopes that he'll be able to provide the love and care that John needs.

Turning on his side, Sherlock reaches for the lamp switch, flicking it on in one smooth motion.

He digs into his T-shirt, raising the two metal plates hanging around his neck to his eye-level, gazing at John's engraved name fondly in the soft lamplight before letting the chain fall from his fingertips, clattering onto the duvet below.

Stroking the scratches and indents there carefully, Sherlock sighs, smiling ruefully as he tucks them back into his shirt.

At least he'll be there for John this time.

No matter what John's going through, at least he'll be there.

He’ll be there.

“Hey darling.”
John’s voice jerks him out of his thoughts, his eyes widening as the spot on the bed behind him dips gently, warm arms wrapping around his torso as John slips under the covers.

“Hey,” Sherlock manages, curving his head to face John as the man nuzzles into his neck, humming softly before pressing a quick kiss to his cheek.

John’s voice is still raspy, a bit worn and tired and yet, he sounds much more light-hearted, his voice having lost the sad, sorrowful weightiness of before.

“Sherlock,” John murmurs, pressing one final kiss to the nape of his neck before curling around Sherlock snugly.

Sherlock smiles weakly, detaching one of John’s hands from his hip, raising it to his lips and planting a gentle kiss on the knuckles there.

“John,” he says in answer, the word weighty on his tongue.

The words may have gone unspoken (John I promise you I’ll always be right beside you. John I promise you that I’ll never leave again. John I love you so much.) but Sherlock knows that John understands them all the same because the man leans in, his forehead bumping into his shoulder.

John smells of him, of his shampoo, of his body soap (he probably hadn’t had time to pack his toiletries) and it’s absolutely wonderful.

Sherlock inhales deeply, pressing one more kiss to John’s hand before entwining his fingers with his, letting their interweaved hands fall to the bed with a muffled “thump”.

Giggling softly in reply, John flexes his fingers in Sherlock’s grip, shaking his head as he buries his nose in Sherlock’s hair, nuzzling into the nest of curls there.

“Did you know,” he starts, his voice a bit muffled by Sherlock’s hair, “That Mary didn’t even give me the chance to name her?”

Sherlock stills, wondering if he’s supposed to answer or if John just wants him to listen.

He’s just about to say something as John continues.

“I can’t believe she played me like that,” he chuckles sadly, “Played me like a fucking fiddle. She tells me that she loves me, that she cares for me more than anyone else in the entire world and runs off and has a baby with someone else.”

John’s voice has started to wobble so Sherlock renews his grip on the man’s hand, tugging at his fingers gently to tether John back to reality.

Mary isn’t here. He thinks to him.

She can’t hurt you anymore.

“And after all that, she didn’t even possess enough shame to let me name her child,” John carries on, sighing ruefully “Who the fuck did I choose to marry?”

Sherlock hums softly, pressing another kiss to John’s knuckles.

“And Lily didn’t even suit her. I personally felt she was more of a Felicia myself but Mary didn’t listen to me,” John shakes his head in annoyance, “Talk about shitty baby names.”
“Would’ve been nicer if we’d called her Sherlock even, as per your request,” he chuckles as Sherlock’s face grows red, “Sherlock Felicia Watson. That sounds cute.”

“It would’ve been William,” Sherlock replies, shaking his head, “Remember, that is my first name. A curious choice of name for a female baby, taking into consideration society-imposed gender norms.”

John chortles in answer.

“Yes, you never did tell me why you decided to go with that name,” John says inquisitively, “I’m still curious as to why you never went with William.”

Sherlock’s lip trembles.

“Well, you technically already know half of the story,” Sherlock answers, struggling to keep his composure.

Merely thinking about Redbeard is enough to make him tear sometimes.

Sherlock can’t see it but he can hear the frown in John’s voice as the man speaks.

“What do you mean?”

*Well, time to tell the man the full story.*

*It might even prove a useful distraction.*

“I actually grew up as Billy,” Sherlock begins, his voice surprisingly calm, “That’s what everyone called me. Billy.”

He takes a deep breath before continuing.

“People used to call me Billy the pirate when I was younger, knowing that I loved the thought of piracy more than anything else in the world. That was the beginning of my pirate ‘alter ego’ of sorts.”

“But after Redbeard passed away… I just couldn’t bear the thought of ‘Billy the pirate’ anymore. How could a pirate be a pirate without his trusty first mate?” Sherlock intones in dismay, his voice growing melancholic, “The name was so inextricably tied to him so rather than sorting my issues out with that at the time, I decided to go with Sherlock instead.”

“It had the bonus of being a particularly unique name, which I suppose attracted me to it a little more. It sounded far more mysterious than a simple ‘Billy’. And at that time, I was trying to suppress my sadness from the loss of Redbeard, so the name ‘Sherlock’ provided a perfect replacement.”

John nods in answer so Sherlock continues.

“With my new name, I was able to put my past behind me, giving me greater control over my emotions. It helped a lot… but I suppose it made me far colder than I had been before.”

“That was the trade-off,” he finishes, smiling sadly as John wraps his arms around him tightly, squeezing his torso.

John relaxes his arms after a moment, pressing a quick kiss to Sherlock’s spine before speaking.

“I’m so sorry Sherlock,” he says, planting another kiss on his spine, “I’m so so sorry you had to go through all of that-”
“It’s okay,” Sherlock cuts him off, “It was a long time ago. Don’t worry about it.”

There’s silence for a moment, the room still but Sherlock can tell that John is thinking, thinking hard. He can practically hear the imaginary cogs in the man’s brain clunking and creaking.

What on earth is he thinking of?

He doesn’t have to wait long for John to answer that question for him.

“Do you know why I hate my middle name?” he says.

John’s voice is much softer than before, making him sound far younger than Sherlock has ever heard.

“Why?” is all he can say as John sighs, tightening his grip on his torso.

“James used to call me Hamish when we were alone together,” he begins, his voice neutral as a chill goes down Sherlock’s spine.

So they had been together.

“I’m certain you noticed it, or at least guessed something,” John chuckles sadly, pressing a kiss to the shell of Sherlock’s ear. “We were sort of on and off during our time in Afghanistan. We became friends after a particularly dangerous mission got us talking.”

“I’ve never been able to reassociate that name with anything else,” he continues, Sherlock nodding sympathetically as he struggles to process this new information, “It’s like a black mark on my birth certificate that just won’t go away. I considered changing it to remove it but… I felt it was too much trouble and just never bothered.”

It feels like his brain is swimming in soup, as if he’s lost all sense of coherent thought.

He knows he shouldn’t be upset that John had been together with Sholto. After all, he’s had so many girlfriends, all of which Sherlock has met. But something about this revelation just… makes him feel uncomfortable.

“He used it only when you two were alone?” is all he can manage as his head hangs low, crestfallen, his thoughts fuzzy.

The thought of another man… doing the same things that he’s done with John is just a bit disconcerting. He’s not entirely sure why.

“When we were talking in his bunk, yes,” John answers, snuggling up to Sherlock, his voice softening. Evidently, he hadn’t managed to hide his discomfort all that well. “Sherlock, we were together in the sense that… we both acknowledged that we had feelings for each other.”

“But it never culminated in anything… We never… did anything.”

“But you wish you had,” Sherlock bites back, feeling a little sore. He knows he’s supposed to be the one comforting John, not the other way around but he just can’t stop himself. “You still wish you had, don’t you?”

He finishes with a huff, waiting for John to respond, silently seething even though he knows he’s responding irrationally.

He’s letting his emotions getting the better of himself but he just can’t…
John appears to be in a state of confusion, his jaw working up and down against Sherlock’s shoulder, as if wondering where he’s gone wrong.

He seems to have a lightbulb moment a few moments later, though letting out a soft “oh” as he proceeds to draw his arms away from Sherlock’s body, tugging at his shirt gently to force him to turn over.

Sherlock does so reluctantly, wondering how obvious he’s being, whether John will be able to read the lines of hurt and sorrow on his face.

He’s obviously not hiding is very well because John sighs softly as their eyes meet, his blue eyes mellow as he bends to press a pregnant kiss to Sherlock’s forehead.

“Oh Sherlock,” he says, entwining his fingers with Sherlock’s once again, “That was then… But you, you’re my whole world now.”

“To tell you the truth, I’ve been over Sholto ever since I met you. I saw so much more in you than I did in him. You were both cold on the exterior, both unwilling to share your personal fears and doubts. But you, you were so much more open.”

Sherlock snorts in answer but John continues on anyway.

“I saw you laugh easily, saw your happiness as plain as a nose on your face that very first day we met. James never smiled unless I tried extremely hard to say something humorous. But you, I could see you shining through the cracks and I thought to myself… I have to keep this one.”

He reaches around Sherlock’s body, dragging Sherlock’s head down to rest beneath his chin, up against his chest.

“Also, you’re you and James was James. He doesn’t hold a candle to you, your acerbic wit, your intelligence, your… you-ness.”

“You are not replaceable, you know Sherlock?” John breathes, stroking Sherlock’s cheek fondly, “You’re you, the only one in the world. You said so yourself. Consulting Detective, the only one in the world, remember?”

“And you weren’t lying,” he smiles, brushing the back of his hand down Sherlock’s neck, reaching for the chain hanging limply there, “You’re the most unique, most… intriguing person I’ve ever met. And I could never ever love someone more than I do you.”

Sherlock blushes in answer, his cheeks reddening as John giggles, pressing a soft kiss to the skin there.

“I’ll never stop saying that until you stop having that reaction,” he says, toying with the chain of the dog tags, “You’re adorable, you are.”

Blushing further, Sherlock raises his eyes to John’s, his heart thumping wildly as he looks up at the man underneath fluttering lashes.

“In that case, I never want to stop,” he breathes.

It’s probably the cheesiest thing that he’s ever said but that doesn’t matter. It’s perfect for the moment.

John’s cheeks flush in turn, his eyes sparkling as he tugs on the chain of dog tags, drawing Sherlock
closer as he bends his head forwards. He allows their foreheads to rest together for a moment, the two of them simply breathing into the same small space in between them before he aligns their lips, pressing them together.

Sherlock sighs into the kiss, surrendering himself to John’s lips as the man proceeds to kiss the corner of his lips, then the middle… then the top lip… followed by a prolonged suck on the bottom lip.

Sherlock kisses back in tiny sips, drinking his fill of the man’s lips as his fingers wind their way into John’s hair, tangling in the short strands there as he drags John’s face closer.

“I love you, Sherlock,” John breathes when they part for air, Sherlock’s heart racing as John fixes him with a reassuring gaze, his eyes open and sincere, “I love you so much and nothing on Earth is going to change that.”

“I love you too,” Sherlock whispers, his voice deep and brimming over with affection.

“I love you… so much.”

They kiss for a bit longer, their lips coming together in a slow, elaborate tango as they meet each over and over again eagerly.

But it eventually tapers off, their lips slowing as the two of them begin to tire, John from the stress of the day and Sherlock from the shock of the revelation of Sholto.

And before long, they’re asleep, their limbs tangled with John’s arms wrapped around Sherlock’s torso and Sherlock’s legs entwined with John’s, the happiest either has been in the past six weeks.

----

Sherlock wakes groggily to several staccato beeps.

They’re most definitely emanating from his phone. Not John’s, John’s messaging tone sounds different.

Which is strange since it’s not even light yet.

He groans, shaking his head to clear the fuzz there as he opens his eyes.

John’s chest swims into view, the man stirring as his phone continues to beep.

Couldn’t whoever is calling just give them at least one night of proper rest?

“Sherlock…” John murmurs, warm morning breath caressing Sherlock’s ear, “Could you please get that.”

He doesn’t want to get up.

He really doesn’t.

Can he just stay here with John forever?

Why does he have to deal with the real world when his whole world is right here?

Groaning in annoyance, Sherlock slowly entangles his limbs from John’s, prompting a huff out of
John as he lifts the blanket to get out of bed, causing some of the warm air to escape.

“Come back quickly will you?” the man murmurs up against his pillow as Sherlock rolls his eyes, searching for his phone on the dresser.

He blunders about for his phone, the bright screen flooding his vision in the darkness of the room as Sherlock sighs, waiting till his eyes get used to the change in lighting.

However, when they do, Sherlock wishes that they hadn’t.

_Mycroft Holmes. 37 Missed Calls. 1 Message._

Oh shit.

Sherlock’s eyes shoot wide open, his heart beginning to race as his drowsy fingers fumble with the phone. It clatters onto the dresser, startling him as much as it probably did John.

When he picks up his phone the next time, he can see John’s face reflected in the dark screen, his eyes widening as he sits up, staring after him.

With great trepidation, Sherlock unlocks his phone, opening up the message from Mycroft.

_Sherlock, bad news._ The front part of the message reads, causing Sherlock’s heart rate to accelerate.

Oh no.

_Mary has escaped._

Chapter End Notes

I've planned it so that there should be three more chapters and an epilogue after this. So in total 4 chapters. I will try to finish the three chapters by 1st Jan but if I can't oh well haha. We'll see how it goes!

Does this sound rushed? It does doesn't it?

Hit me up on [tumblr]!!!
John gives a sad chuckle, shaking his head before lifting it from its perch on Sherlock’s collarbone.

“I wish I could believe you,” is all he says as he rolls over, back to his spot on the sofa beside Sherlock.

“You don’t have to,” Sherlock answers, “All you have to do is trust me.”

4 hours since Mary has escaped

“What do you mean escaped?”

“She had backup, called some of her men over to help her get out of the house. We managed to incapacitate two of them… But unfortunately, Mary Morstan managed to slip through our fingers.”

“Mycroft, I don’t care for your excuses, just FIND HER. Make sure she doesn’t go anywhere near John ever again.”

“I’ll do my best little brother.”

Sherlock fixes his brother with a dirty glare as he rises from his seat, maintaining eye contact till Mycroft turns his back to him, affording Sherlock one last grave nod before stalking down the hallway.

Apparently, Mary had somehow managed to contact some old helpmates, imploring them to help her...
escape, probably in exchange for some higher status in Moriarty’s rebirthed web.

The woman never ceases to surprise.

Six weeks since she’s given birth and she’s already fit enough to outrun a whole pack of MI6 agents. Truly impressive.

Sherlock sighs as he makes his way to the lift, solemnly punching the down button as his mind continues to whirr away.

Mary is probably seeking to rebuild Moriarty’s network as soon as possible, especially since she’s now been appointed as the head. Her first course of action will definitely be to burn him, to make a show out of him. The great Sherlock Holmes, the man who attempted to disentangle the spider’s web, trapped and ripe for destruction.

He’ll probably have to be careful... John too. Who knows, she might gun for him first.

Mycroft did offer them a place at a safe-house down in the country but Sherlock would rather wait for John’s input on the proposition before getting ahead of himself.

He knows that John craves danger, that the man desires to be at the heart of any peril that the two of them might face. But this is different, this time more than just their lives might be at stake.

John might decide to hold back just this once. And regardless of Sherlock’s feelings on the matter, he will probably accept whatever choice John makes.

The lift door dings as it opens, the steel doors revealing a rather worn out looking John Watson, startling Sherlock for a moment.

Wow, that was quick.

John had been sent upstairs to review the paternity test results one final time. Mycroft had been a little adamant on that front but John had insisted and Mycroft had relented. After all, he had let his murderous wife slip through his grip.

John’s eyes widen when they make eye contact, his eyelids fluttering as they flick down Sherlock’s body and back up to his face, clearly surprised to see him finished so soon.

“What did Mycroft say?” he questions as Sherlock steps into the lift, the doors closing behind him swiftly. “Anything helpful?”

Sherlock sighs, shaking his head.

“Basically reiterated the same thing the agent told us in the car,” he answers, “Mary managed to slip through their grasp. They have no idea where she is right now. And it’s likely she’ll only be able to be found when she wants to be.”

John blinks in reply, lowering his gaze as he fixes his eyes on the floor below.

“No leads?” he says softly when they reach the ground floor, the two of them stepping out of the lift in tandem.

“Nope,” Sherlock answers, his lips popping the “p” with great vitriol, “No leads, no recent sightings, nothing. It’s possible that with Mary’s expertise she’s learnt how to hide from the cameras but who knows really.”
John shakes his head, reaching down to take Sherlock’s shaking palm into his own.

“We’ll be fine Sherlock,” he says firmly, giving his hand one firm pump.

*Wait… Something’s wrong with this picture. Isn’t he supposed to be the one comforting John?* Sherlock thinks as they stride out into the sunshine, leaving the MI6 HQ behind.

“Also, John,” he starts, suddenly remembering something, “Mycroft has a safe-house ready for us. He says that we can go anytime we see fit. He’ll provide transport for us.”

He allows the words to hang in the air, listening as silence descends between the two of them, the only sound that he can hear being the soft rumble of morning traffic and the crunch of gravel beneath his feet.

John gives a prolonged sigh, raising his head to the sky, blinking several times before turning to face Sherlock.

“Well?” he says, sounding defeated, “What do you think we should do?”

Sherlock scrunches his nose in answer.

“I was hoping you’d provide me with some insight into the matter.”

John smirks in answer, rolling his eyes as he drags Sherlock into the idling car by the kerb.

“Letting me make all the decisions now eh?” he says, sighing as he shuts the door behind them.

“More like I’d rather there be a more balanced resolution to this joint decision we’re about to embark on together,” Sherlock replies, tilting his chin upwards as John sighs, the driver starting the engine with a soft rumble.

John works his jaw for a moment, his lips pursing in thought before he relaxes back into his seat. He reaches a hand to Sherlock’s, gripping it tightly as Sherlock winds his fingers around his.

“Well…” John starts, licking his lips, “I’d say…”

Sherlock holds his breath.

“We should probably accept the offer. I don’t want anything horrible happening to you. We all know she’ll go after you first,” John says, “If you got hurt… I’d… I’d never forgive myself.”

Sherlock squeezes John’s fist reassuringly.

“Are you sure about this John?”

“Positive,” the man quips, nodding his head, “We’ve been playing Moriarty's game for far too long, the two of us, I think it's time we end this once and for all.”

*Fair enough.*

Sherlock gifts him with an answering smile.

“I'll tell Mycroft when we get home,” he says, “End this, end all of this. I believe that the safe house is in Sussex somewhere. It'll be nice.”

“Sounds wonderful,” John chirps, the muscles in his face relaxing visibly as he reaches a hand
forwards to gently ruffle Sherlock’s hair. “I can’t wait.”

The house in question is situated just on the fringe of the downs. It’s a two-storey cottage complete with a small stable in the backyard. Apparently, the previous owner used to keep ponies. However, Sherlock has been informed that it’s now more a storage shed than anything else. Mycroft has also promised him Wi-Fi.

It’ll be a nice break, relaxing even-

“So all we have left to do now is to go to David’s house.”

Sherlock nearly chokes, John’s sudden proclamation hurtling him back to reality.

“What!?” he coughs, “Why?”

John flashes him a sheepish look.

“I talked to Mycroft for a bit, told him that I should be the one to break the news to David,” John shrugs, “Partially for closure purposes and partially because I want to remember what the bastard’s face looks like so that I can give him an imaginary slap.”

Sherlock rolls his eyes, shaking his head.

*John will always be John after all.*

“Fine, we do that and then we go home and pack,” he intones, turning back to face the car front, “Sounds like a plan.”

“So when are we paying David a visit?”

John grits his teeth.

“Now as a matter of fact,” he says, just as the car slows to a smooth stop.

His eyes widening in shock, Sherlock huffs, rolling his eyes once again.

*Oh well.*

He glances past John, turning his gaze to the block of flats towering over them just outside the car window.

They’re fairly new-ish. The paint on the lobby door is peeling a bit but it’s nothing a quick touch-up can’t fix. The facade implies something mid-range price-wise, basically flats with generously-sized rooms. Seems decent… perfect for a bachelor really.

He follows John out of the car, nodding at the driver as he passes.

“David lives on the fifth storey,” John says stiffly, “And he should be home because I had Mycroft check for me.”

There’s a taut, uncomfortable quality to John’s gait, as if the man is filled with crackling energy he’s been repressing for a long time.

Sherlock gulps.

“Perks of dating the British government’s little brother?” Sherlock jokes, trying to diffuse the tension.
John pauses for a moment, turning to face him as they step into the lift.

“More like perks of being the person wronged by the British government on no short number of occasions, but I'll take your suggestion if need be,” he grins, some of the tension in his body dissipating.

Sherlock sighs in relief.

If John punched David the moment he saw him, that would have ended very badly for the two of them.

He hasn't forgotten the incident with Cameron all those months ago.

He watches as John steps out of the lift, his fingers clenching before unclenching again swiftly as he follows in his wake.

The door to David’s house appears to have received a fresh coat of paint quite recently, the surface smooth and glossy. He’s lived here for a while, definitely… so when was it painted? It seems to have been an act for appearance's sake so maybe before Mary came over? Who knows.

Interestingly though, the man seems to have a genuine liking for plants, inferred from the row of cacti and succulents on the shoe rack (completely devoid of shoes) outside his front step.

Sherlock sighs as John knocks on the door, three hollow raps that rattle the loose hinges tethering it to the wall before a lock clicks soundly, the door swinging open to reveal a very frightened looking David.

He must know what they're here for, Sherlock thinks as John greets the man, asking him whether they can both come in.

Well, David has the right to be scared after all. Even Sherlock wouldn't dare face a furious John Watson. Not in a million years.

“Sure, sure,” the man answers, wiping his brow as he draws the door open further, welcoming them in.

David appears to be extremely uneasy. He's practically sweating like a leaf. His brow is dotted with tiny beads of sweat, his hands shaking as he shuts the door behind them.

Wait… Sherlock thinks to himself. As terrifying as John is angry… why would that warrant such an extreme response from someone who's barely known him? This doesn’t make any sense. Since when was David this afraid of John?

“Nice to see you David,” John intones politely, waiting till David gestures to the sofa before taking a seat, “How've you been?”

David's left eyebrow gives an uneasy twitch.

“Fine… Fine…” he says calmly as he takes a seat opposite John, Sherlock moving to stand by him. “I've been uh... good.”

“That's nice to hear,” John answers, leaning forward, like a predator leaning for the kill and Sherlock has to rest a hand on his shoulder to prevent him from doing anything stupid.

“So… David… We're here today because of… Mary.”
David’s smile falls.

“Ah,” he says, his eyes darting from Sherlock to John. “What about her?”

“David…” John starts, glancing at Sherlock once before turning to face David once again, “There's something we have to tell you.”

David’s eyes widen immediately, his jaw working uneasily as Sherlock’s eyes narrow.

Something’s wrong.

“David, you know what we’re here for-” Sherlock starts calmly, leaning forward to appear more sincere. Something is up and he’s not quite sure what it is-

Oh.

Extra cup left lying on the sink rack in the kitchen, two bath towels hanging from the rack in David’s room…

“-But would you prefer to admit to it yourself?” he finishes, leaving it vague.

If what he thinks has happened has really happened… then David should admit to it in no time.

He watches as David stiffens, his hand freezing in mid air as he reaches for the tissue box in front of him. He seems to hang there for a moment, his body trapped in some cruel limbo… And then in the blink of an eye, he breaks, his facade crumbling as his eyes begin to well with tears.

“She told me not to tell anyone,” David breathes, his lip wobbling as he lifts a shaky hand to wipe his brow, “How… How did you find out? She said no one would come looking.”

Theory confirmed.

Sherlock grits his teeth uncomfortably as confusion coats John’s face, his eyes darting between him and David, a silent request for an explanation.

“Well”, Sherlock smirks sadly, “Surprise!”

John frowns, his brows furrowing as he opens his mouth, as if about to say something but Sherlock hurries on, cutting him off.

“So tell me, David, did you know that you’ve been harbouring and by extension possibly abetting a dangerous serial killer?”

John’s face has gone as white as a sheet.

“She… She told me to do it,” David whimpers, burying his face in his palms, “I had to let her in. 2 hours she said, just to wash up and have some food.”

“I asked her what was wrong… She refused to answer, just bustled in with these two other burly guys and told me to not ask any questions-”

“She was HERE?” John all but yells, 5.5 feet of pure rage towering over David’s shaking form as he moves swiftly to stand. “And you didn’t TELL ANYONE?”

“She told me not to,” David is sobbing now, his head shaking as he rocks back and forth on his heels, “Said bad things would happen to me if I did… I didn’t know what to do. I’m sorry.”
“John”, Sherlock intervenes, resting a firm hand on the man’s arm, “Take a seat, let me talk to him. It’ll be fine-”

“NO IT WON’T BE SHERLOCK!” John cries, whipping his head around to glare at him, Sherlock fixing him with a stern look in turn, an eyebrow quirked upwards in a silent challenge.

*Do you really want to do this now John?*

They maintain eye contact for a few seconds, the ferocity in John’s gaze melting as Sherlock continues to stare at him in willful silence.

The man eventually crumbles, sighing deeply as he swings a hand forward in David’s direction.

“Your go,” is all he says as he slumps back onto the sofa, defeated.

Sherlock gifts him with an apologetic smile before his attention back to David.

“David this is extremely important,” he begins, intoning the words calmly as David lifts his head out of his palms.

Good, he’s gotten his attention.

“I need you to remember, which rooms did Mary go into when she was last here?”

David frowns sadly, his eyes still brimming with tears.

“Why?”

“David, Mary has been known to get close to those people she wishes to use,” Sherlock explains, keeping his voice level, “To put this frankly, there must be a reason why she came here.”

“What do you mean?” John pipes up, confused, “David’s already explained it all, she just needed to shower and rest-”

“Facilities she could have easily obtained elsewhere and more covertly with a smaller risk of attracting trouble,” Sherlock rebuts, “There’s a reason why she came here. A specific reason.”

“So David… Where has she been in this house?”

David sniffs dejectedly, grabbing a tissue from the coffee table and blowing into it.

“She slept on the sofa… the one that you’re sitting on right now-”

John makes a disgusted face.

“She used the bathroom… and entered my room to talk to me for a bit before leaving-”

“David… do you clean often?” Sherlock butts in, “This is extremely important.”

He has a theory...

David gifts him with a confused look but answers anyway.

“Only when people come over,” he shrugs, “Just like any normal person.”

John huffs in response.
“When was the last time someone was over?” Sherlock queries, certain that he’s hit the nail on its head.

“Mary was the last person to be here,” David answers, “Before she came… I mean… She was also the last person to be here.”

Oh.

Genius.

Single bachelor with next to no friends, easily manipulated, doesn’t clean often.

Mary really had an eagle eye for victims.

“John, the bathroom!” he calls as he hurdles over the sofa, racing towards the open door with John on his tail, though the man is less successful in his attempt at jumping over the sofa.

“Why the bathroom?” John questions, following him without question, leaving David behind.

“That’s the guest bathroom,” Sherlock explains as he rushes in through the door, inspecting the tiled floor carefully, “David would hardly have any reason to use it. There isn’t even a proper towel rack in this one.

“Which means?”

“Mary was using our friend, David’s, place as a hiding place.”

John blinks in confusion as Sherlock begins to make his way across the tiled floor, wiggling his feet across every tile he steps on.

“Sorry Sherlock, lost you for a bit there-”

“Don’t you see?” Sherlock shakes his head in exasperation.

“No,” John turns his head, watching as Sherlock continues his weird tango across the tiles.

“David doesn’t clean and he definitely would have no reason to even clean this bathroom unless someone came over. And almost no one comes over. In brevi, it would have been extremely easy for Mary to hide something here if she wished.”

John nods his head in understanding, following Sherlock’s lead, covering the tiles he hasn’t managed to check. None of them seem to be loose enough to lift.

“So what are we looking for?” John questions as Sherlock gives up and moves onto the cupboards instead.

“What you mean is, what are we not looking for,” Sherlock answers as he opens a sizeable heater cupboard.

*Found it."

“Look at this,” he starts, drawing John’s attention back to him, “Layer of dust, coating the base of the entire cupboard except for these huge patches over here.”

John peers over his shoulder, his eyes widening in surprise.
“Why’s the silhouette shaped in such a curious manner?” John queries, peering into the dark cupboard, “Looks like…”

“Wires,” Sherlock finishes, his eyes widening in shock as he recoils from the cupboard as if he’s been burned. “John we have to talk to Mycroft, pronto.”

Bolting from the bathroom, Sherlock swings into the living room, calling out to David one final time.

“David, before this visit, when was the last time Mary was here?”

David’s brow furrows as he swipes at his eyes.

“I believe a week after New Years?”

And that’s the final nail on the coffin.

“Hurry John!” he calls as John stumbles out of the bathroom after him, “I think Mary might be about to try something!”

“Coming!” John answers, smoothing down his coat one more time before turning to David, “Also David, congratulations, you have a daughter.”

David’s eyes widen in shock, his jaw hanging open almost comically.

“Someone will probably get in contact with you to explain further,” John quips, shrugging as he chases Sherlock out the doorway, its hinges rattling as the door slams shut.

Tapping his feet fitfully, Sherlock watches the elevator numbers tick slowly to five.

_Time is of the essence now more than ever._

“Sherlock, mind explaining what’s going on?”

Sherlock sighs, his feet doing little impatient leaps on the spot as the lift doors open.

He rushes in immediately, pressing the ground floor button with such a ferocity that John gifts him with a frightened gaze, one which is quickly masked by confusion.

“Sherlock,” he breathes, watching as Sherlock begins to pace the lift.

_That woman, if she’s truly thinking of pulling that little stunt again._

“John, what was in that bathroom… It could possibly have been bits and pieces of broadcast equipment,” Sherlock explains, “The wires… She would have needed to hide the more incriminating equipment somewhere.”

“David’s house was the perfect hideaway. No one would suspect anything. And clearly, even my brother didn’t,” John’s eyes widen perceptibly, “The last time she was here was a few weeks after New Years - when she remotely orchestrated that fake Moriarty broadcast.”

John’s face floods with sudden understanding, his eyebrows raised in surprise.

“So she’s going to try it again?” he posits, his head tilted slightly, “Whatever for?”

“I don’t know,” Sherlock shrugs in answer, extracting his mobile phone from his pocket to send a quick text to Mycroft, “And I personally, I don’t like not knowing.”
Mary might be planning another broadcast. Will explain further later at MI6 HQ. Be ready to intercept any foreign signal. - SH, he types, pressing the “send” button with a flourish as he bundles John out of the lift, charging towards the waiting car.

“Change of plans!” he yells to the driver as they near, “Take us back to MI6 HQ, it’s urgent.”

The driver answers with a silent nod, starting the ignition as Sherlock swoops into the car, John following closely behind.

Whatever Mary has planned this time, they now at least have the upper hand. Mary won’t see the interception coming, the element of surprise will help them with that much.

He just hopes that Mycroft can get everything ready in time.

----

The car ride back is almost unbearable.

There’s no update or return text from Mycroft, even though it’s clear that the man has read the message. The little stamp next to the message tells him that much.

Most of the ride is spent scowling and moping as John tries to offer him with some comfort despite being equally tense, resting a reassuring hand on his thigh as Sherlock continues to stare out of the window.

It’s absolute agony.

They thankfully manage some semblance of small talk towards the end of the journey. Sherlock’s impatience subsiding slightly as John attempts to calm his nerves (and by extension his own), trying to direct the flow of the conversation to less stressful things like dinner plans and the safe house they are going to be sent to.

Conversation ceases almost immediately, however, when they pull into the drop-off point at headquarters, Sherlock leaping out of the car as John thanks the driver and rushes out to join him.

Mycroft is actually on his feet for once when they arrive at his office, the man puttering around fitfully as they step through the door.

“So?” Sherlock barks, stopping his brother in his tracks as he stalks to the front of his desk, “Anything?”

“Nothing so far,” Mycroft answers, “We’re currently doing a sweep, my agents will notify me immediately if they find anything.”

“Why are you so certain of this impending hijack anyway?”

Sherlock sighs, laying out the entirety of their visit to David’s place for Mycroft, finishing off his explanation with a huff and an “Interesting how you never thought to check the place yourself dearest brother.”

He’s allowed a short moment of satisfaction before Mycroft licks his lips in preparation for a rebuttal.

“Well brother mine,” Mycroft quips in turn, “It’s not like you did either.”
That shuts him up.

“If you wish to be closer to the action, the console room for comms is just one floor below,” he continues, fixing Sherlock with a wry smile, “I’ll alert the attendant for you, all you two have to do will be to tell them that I sent you.”

Sherlock shoots his brother one final glare before nodding his head, turning to John and strolling out of the office, John following after him after uttering a particularly polite ‘thank you’ in Mycroft’s direction.

The comms room is flooded with bustling agents when they arrive, people in black and white scurrying around frantically as Sherlock and John try their best to avoid them, making their way to the centre of the room.

There’s a huge LED screen in the front, the pixels lit up in a bright blue map of London with a blinking red dot somewhere in the south.

Seems like they’ve already picked up on a frequency somewhere.

“Another one incoming,” one of them shouts into his microphone as another flurry of agents scrambles to a corner of the room, typing away almost viciously on the computers there.

It’s absolute madness.

Sherlock frowns as he approaches one of the female agents in the centre, one of the few people in the room actually appearing to be calm and collected.

“What’s going on?” he questions, frowning as the lady in question turns to face him, fixing him with a disgustingly insincere smile.

“Not to worry Mr Holmes, we have the entire situation under control,” she smiles, turning back to face the console with barely controlled disdain.

She clearly doesn’t want to speak to them.

“So you’ve figured where the signals are being transmitted from?” John pipes up, materialising by Sherlock’s side.

The woman manages to stifle a sigh

“Somewhere in the South of London. We’ve managed to affirm that much,” she answers in a clipped manner, pursing her lips in annoyance.

“And may I ask, what on earth is being transmitted?” Sherlock adds on, fixing the lady with a stern glare.

This involves them dammit.

They deserve to have proper answers

“Sorry Mr Holmes, that is classified information,” she huffs, the ‘I’m not your brother who allows you to do whatever you like’ unspoken as she fixes him with another fake smile “I cannot allow you access-”

“MISS!”
The screen before them floods with white, blinding Sherlock’s eyes as he attempts to shade them from the sudden glare.

He squints, his eyes narrowing as dark patches on the screen begin to appear, resolving themselves into a string of block letters-

“Oh god,” he breathes as John’s eyes widen with terror, his face going as white as a sheet.

“DID THIS TRANSMISSION GO THROUGH ANYWHERE ELSE?” the female agent hollers, clearly having lost her cool.

“No Miss, they somehow managed to bypass the firewall here. We weren’t-”

“FIX IT,” she bellows, charging off to the left side of the room, leaving Sherlock gaping where he stands, rooted to the ground in shock.

The words on the screen are in bold, all caps.

**JOHN WATSON MURDERED CHARLES AUGUSTUS MAGNUSSEN**, it reads before cycling to a mess of images, many of them taken from a helicopter hovering some distance above Magnussen’s house the day Sherlock had shot him.

They’re of John holding his hands up with Sherlock kneeling before him.

Fuck, without any context whatsoever-

“Sherlock… How did your brother explain away Magnussen’s death to prevent your incarceration?” John gulps, staring up wide-eyed at the screen, blinking fitfully as his sturdy hands begin to tremble.

“Murdered. In his own home,” Sherlock intones, watching as the images eventually cycle back to the huge block letters, “Killer unknown.”

John’s voice cracks.

“Fuck,” is all he says as he wobbles on his feet before collapsing to the ground, his head hanging low, clearly trying his best to process the information.

And Sherlock has no idea how to help this time.

Fuck, indeed.

----

“We’re to leave for Sussex tonight,” Sherlock says as he rests his phone down on the kitchen table of 221B, “Will that be okay with you?”

John glances up at him once, shrugging in silence before turning back to the window, clearly deep in thought.

Or possibly still in shock.

Never in a million years would Sherlock have thought that Mary would have dared to have pulled this stunt.
He’d always been certain that Mary had an underlying affection for John somewhere, that she had loved him to a certain extent. But this? This is brutal, cold-hearted slander.

What the hell is she doing?

Sherlock sighs sadly, taking his seat beside John on the sofa as he wraps a warm arm around the man’s shoulder.

“It’ll be okay John,” he begins, “The transmission was not broadcasted anywhere else. Mycroft’s agents managed to intercept all the other broadcasts-”

“No it won’t,” John shudders, shaking his head as he burrows further into Sherlock’s arm, “Sherlock she had images of us, on that fucking day. I thought that this was over the moment that demon lady left our house. Well, apparently it wasn’t.”

Sherlock gulps, unsure of how to proceed.

“It won’t be okay,” John babbles, (yeah definitely still in shock, Sherlock thinks to himself), “Till she’s out of the picture forever.”

“I just want her gone Sherlock,” he breathes sorrowfully, wiping a tear from his eye, “She’s tormented us long enough.”

He turns to face him, Sherlock taking in the slump in John’s shoulders, the broken look in his eyes before John buries his face in his neck.

Wrapping his arms around John in answer, Sherlock begins to stroke the man’s back slowly, trying his best to soothe the man.

John had been shaking like a leaf all the way back to Baker Street, his eyes set and steely even as his body betrayed him, telling a completely different story. It had worried Sherlock to no end, John bottling up his emotions was never a good sign.

And to make matters worse, whenever Sherlock had attempted to initiate a conversation to get John to open up, John had refused to respond, remaining silent all the way home.

Mary betraying him might not have been so bad, after all, she’s done so before… but attempting to frame him? That may have been a bit too much for John to handle.

At least he’s letting off some steam now.

“John,” Sherlock hums softly, pressing a quick kiss to John’s forehead, “I think you should go have a nap. It might help a bit.”

John answers with a muffled sigh.

“I don’t want to miss anything,” he says, “Sherlock, I honestly do not give a shit about my reputation. I don’t fucking care if Mary attempts to incriminate me.”

What? Sherlock’s brow furrows in confusion.

“What I worry about, though- was that if this transmission had gone through, the police would have done an inquiry into Magnussen’s death… and guess who the overwhelming evidence would have pointed to.”

Oh.
“It would have been you, not me and fuck Sherlock I can’t have you stolen from me again,” John rasps as he wraps his arms around him, hot tears coating his cheeks as he begins to tremble, “I will not lose you.”

So that was the issue.

“And you won’t,” Sherlock reassures him, “Look, Mycroft’s agents managed to prevent it from happening-”

“This ONCE,” John mumbles ruefully, “What if she tries it again?”

“Then we’ll be ready,” Sherlock answers firmly, squeezing John’s shoulder, “I promise you, John, nothing will ever keep us apart.”

John gives a sad chuckle, shaking his head before lifting it from its perch on Sherlock’s collarbone.

“I wish I could believe you,” is all he says as he rolls over, back to his spot on the sofa beside Sherlock.

“You don’t have to,” Sherlock answers, “All you have to do is trust me.”

John rolls his eyes, wiping a stray tear from his eye.

“Whatver you say…” he mutters.

Sherlock’s lips curve into a soft smile.

Mission accomplished… somewhat.

“Nap,” he says firmly after a moment of silence, “Nap and then we’ll talk.”

John shrugs, nodding his head.

“Sounds good,” he sighs as he rises from the sofa, “Care to join me?”

Sherlock gifts him with an apologetic smile.

“I would love to but…”

“Oh yeah, Mycroft did say he’d get in touch soon didn’t he?”

“Yeah,” Sherlock answers sheepishly, “I’ll join you after he calls.”

John smiles in understanding.

“See you then, love,” he says, pressing a kiss to Sherlock’s cheek as he rises from his seat, stretching his back as he makes his way into the bedroom.

Nodding his head in reply, Sherlock turns his attention back to his phone, watching as John does an exaggerated yawn out of the corner of his eye, collapsing onto their bed with a loud ‘thump’.

John’s naps usually last about an hour or so. Mycroft might very well call before he wakes up but that’ll be better for the both of them, probably. Seeing John, calm and sturdy John jittery will most definitely worsen his nerves.

He fiddles with his phone for the better part of half an hour, scrolling through news feeds and old
messages from John.

There’s nothing, absolutely nothing of interest.

He’s about to give up and get himself a glass of water when his phone vibrates.

Thank GOD.

However, when he thumbs to the notification, it’s not a text from Mycroft at all but rather a text from an unknown number.

What the hell?

He presses the notification, his screen lighting up as the text expands.

Dear Sherlock, nice to know that you’ve managed to intercept my signal. Good job.

Sherlock can practically feel the blood draining from his face.

There still, however, remains the issue of the incriminating evidence currently in my possession. You wouldn’t want the Mail to get ahold of these, would you?

Fuck.

If you want to ensure John Watson’s safety, here is a set of coordinates. Meet me there, 6 p.m. sharp, alone, or I’ll sell these photos to the highest bidder.

He copies the coordinates frantically, keying them into google maps.

It’s a warehouse somewhere in East London.

All the best Sherlock, I trust that you’ll make the right decision. If you contact your brother I will know. XOXO AGRA.

Oh god.

Sherlock slumps back into his seat in horror, goosebumps erupting out of his skin as he breaks into a cold sweat.

Of course, she would’ve...

That was what it was all for, a trap. A trap to lure him into her grip once again.

After all, he is the person she probably wants revenge on the most, rather than John.

He sighs, his hands trembling as his phone vibrates once again.

It’s Mycroft this time, calling him.

He has no choice but to swipe the “hang up” button.

He can’t have any contact with his brother, otherwise, Mary might go back on her word, given the delicate situation she’s currently in.

What will she do when he arrives?
Try to kill him?
Possibly.
There is a slim chance at a possible rescue though, Mycroft might sense that something is wrong since he terminated his call so swiftly. If so, he’ll probably send his men in to help him.
He hopes that that will be the case.
Pocketing his phone, aware that Mycroft might very well have his phone tracked via GPS, Sherlock rises from his seat, padding slowly over to the bedroom.
John is already fast asleep, his mouth gaping as his chest rises and falls, his eyelids shut in sweet slumber. Sherlock allows his eyes to rove over the man’s sleeping form for a few more precious seconds before turning his back, dipping his head to force himself not to look back as he makes his way out of the room.
After all, given the situation, if he’s unlucky this might be the last time he’ll ever see him. 
*I’m sorry John,* he thinks into the space between them before shutting the bedroom door with a soft ‘click’.
*But I have to do this.*
He gazes down at his watch.
It’s 5 o’clock already. There’s not much time left.
He sighs, wiping the sweat from his brow as he slips his gloves and coat on.
He knows that he promised John he wouldn’t keep secrets from him anymore but… He did make a promise first and foremost, at the wedding, to always protect John Watson and keep him safe.
And this is for John.
Because either way, John is going to suffer. He might end up being proven guilty or incarcerated and done in for abetment if Sherlock is proven guilty. Both outcomes aren’t exactly pretty and Sherlock wants to avoid them both as best as he can.
By doing this, he at least has a shot at reclaiming those pictures. He knows Mary might just end up releasing them anyway once he reaches and attempt to kill him but… how could he just sit there and do nothing?
*Into battle,* he thinks as he walks out the door to 221B.

He takes one last look at the flat, memorising the shape of it as best as he can, locking the memories of post-case bliss, John and him swinging into the living room on an adrenaline high, laughing loudly. John and him watching telly together, their shoulders brushing as Sherlock says something that he knows will make John laugh. The two of them dancing by lamplight as John dips him and kisses him.

He closes his eyes, breathing in the scent of the flat one last time before shutting the door, each clunk of his boots on the wooden steps sounding far more ominous than usual as he traipses down the stairs.
It’ll be fine, he tells himself.
It'll be okay.

He hopes Mycroft will notice something’s wrong in time to save him.

Chapter End Notes

btw idk how broadcast hijacking works I just used whatever meagre knowledge I've gleaned from spy movies lmao. It's definitely more dramatic than it is accurate. I'm certain you actually have to be at the respective broadcasting station to intercept a signal but ah who cares I was pressed for time and we don't really care about accuracy do we? (I hope)

I hope this doesn't sound too rushed again.

Hit me up on tumblr!!!
Chapter Twenty

Chapter Summary

“Together?” he asks, his question a promise and an answer at once.

Sherlock doesn’t need to think twice to answer.

Solving crimes together, bickering over dinner together, making sweet love together, chasing after murderers and cheats together, falling in love over and over again.

“Together,” he says, as if it’s the most obvious thing in the world.

“Together.”

Chapter Notes

WELP remember when I said I would update between episodes HAHAHA what a joke. Okay tbh I was a bit disappointed with season 4, which made it really hard for me to come back to this fic. But recently, schoolwork has eased up and I've started to make my peace with this season so voila! New chapter HAHA. I was completely wrong about anything and everything that would happen in season 4 but ah well. What can you do?

Hope you enjoy this chapter you guys! You've earned it. Happy 221B day!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

0 hours to 6 p.m.

The warehouse the coordinates point to is a rundown brick building covered in sprawling ivy.

It’s literally in the middle of nowhere and Sherlock has next to no idea why anyone would have built a warehouse all the way out here.

He had managed to hail a cab, its arrival timed perfectly with his exit from Baker Street. Thankfully, it’d reached the decided spot with time to spare and as a result, he had requested the driver to stop him a kilometre from where the warehouse was. It’s better not to give Mary any extra cause to question whether he’d been tracked or not.

She should know, though, that Mycroft has cameras all over Britain and would probably be able to find where he’d disappeared off to extremely easily.

Which means that when he enters the building he doesn’t have long till Mary pulls a gun on him.

She’ll, of course, want to be gone before Mycroft realises something is wrong.
He kicks at the rough gravel adorning the unkempt road with the toes of his boots, sighing as his breaths materialise in puffs of white.

He’ll be fine.

Deep breaths…

Deep breaths.

The door to the warehouse opens with a rattle and creak, the rusted hinges squealing in protest as Sherlock steps onto the dusty wooden floor, his eyes roaming around the building before coming to rest on a door, ajar, on the second floor.

Shafts of light stream through the rotting wooden roof, colouring the ground in fading pools of deep amber as Sherlock makes his way up the stairs, his footsteps measured and slow as the sun continues to set.

The warehouse must’ve been part of some larger structure, Sherlock muses. The design seems to be quite mid 20th century. Maybe there had been a house or factory nearby but it had been torn down or sold, leaving the warehouse all on its own.

Stepping onto the crisscrossing steel grating of the second-floor platform, Sherlock gulps as he tests the rusted floor before him. It should hold, hopefully, otherwise gravity will do Mary’s job for her.

Making his way to the door, Sherlock holds his breath, gingerly sidestepping a particularly dangerous looking section of steel before slowly exhaling when he reaches the safer wooden platform.

If Mary had made it up here, it should probably be safe enough for him.

Drawing one final deep breath, Sherlock sighs softly, his voice barely a whisper in the dusty air.

He has next to no idea what to expect when he goes through that door. What happens afterwards could very possibly result in his death and oh… that’s not the best outcome now, is it?

But he has no choice.

It’s John or him and by god, will he always choose John over himself.

With that final thought, Sherlock closes his eyes, placing a firm palm on the steel door, pushing it open slowly.

The room is dark, devoid of any natural light whatsoever, save for the little bit of light streaming in through the grimy windows in the far corner of the room. As his eyes adjust to the darkness, he squints, doing a quick sweep of the room.

The floor is coated with a thick layer of dust, stretching wide and far off to the corners of the room. The ceiling is covered with a sprawling mass of cobwebs, spanning the area from the front of the door to the windows in front of him.

How long has this place been in disuse for? He thinks as he steps into the room, the steel door slamming ominously shut behind him.

Scrutinising the floor, Sherlock scans the layer of dust for footprints of any kind, trying hard to figure out where Mary could have gone when all of a sudden, the door behind him creaks open once again.
He twists his face sharply around, his eyes widening as a manicured hand thrusts a long metal cylinder into the room.

He stares, stunned for a moment before realising exactly what that cylinder is.

Oh shit.

He watches, helpless, as green gas erupts from the nozzle of the tank, the substance fizzling as it escapes and fills the air around him.

And that’s when his world is promptly engulfed in black.

----

When he comes to, he’s already been tied up.

His hands and legs have been roped swiftly into a solid, steel chair, clearly, one that Mary had brought along with her. There’s no way one could have found such a nice piece of furniture in this decrepit building.

And to make matters worse, he’s gagged.

This day simply couldn’t get any worse.

He shakes his head, desperately trying to get the residual static from the gas out of his head, forcing himself to concentrate.

Is there any way he can get out of his bonds?

Nope, he realises as he gives a futile tug. Mary knows what she’s doing. These are far too tight for him to wrangle out of.

Sighing forlornly, Sherlock gazes around the room once more, sussing out possible exit routes on the off chance that he does manage to escape.

Judging by the layout of the level, his only safe way out would probably through the door he came through. The window seems promising but it’s a three-storey drop and he’s not prepared to deal with such theatrics just yet.

“Hello Sherlock,” a silky voice calls from the door, the metal hinges creaking jaggedly as Mary steps into the room, her eyes gleaming, “Nice for you to finally join us.”

Sherlock tries to muster the most sinister grin he can at the moment - which doesn’t quite make the cut since he’s still pretty drowsy so it probably comes out more annoyed than angry.

If only Mary would remove the gag, that would help a damn bunch.

As if on cue, Mary tuts at him, saying, “Oh, don’t give me that look Sherlock. We both know why I had to shut you up. Quit looking at me like that.”

Furrowing his brows, Sherlock angles his head sideways, trying to go for a more menacing effect as his gaze turns to steel, boring into Mary’s eyes.
However, Mary appears to be unfazed as she draws up a chair, the feet of the metal furniture squeaking against the rotting floor as she manoeuvres her way to Sherlock’s front, her face now a hand’s breadth away from his.

“We both know why we’re here Sherlock,” she grins, looking almost happy, her eyes roaming over Sherlock’s face as he tries to make out a growl, “I’m certain the moment you took up my offer, you knew you had chosen death?”

Sherlock rolls his eyes in answer.

Mary smiles.

“Granted, that may have sounded a… bit more cliche than I had wanted it to but… ah well. What can I say?” she smirks, “I have a predisposition to theatrics-”

“Just- Like- You,” she finishes, punctuating each word with a short press to Sherlock’s nose, causing Sherlock’s hands to ball up into fists.

This isn’t power play, he thinks to himself, not like how it normally goes in these type of situations. Rather this is a prey at the mercy of its predator, the latter toying with its food before it gets eaten alive.

How charming.

He just wants Mary to get on with it.

She has to be going somewhere with this.

“How you must love my husband,” she coos, her face sweet and open as her eyes burst with vitriol, “to actually sacrifice your life for him ah… how cute-”

“-And stupid of you,” she finishes, slapping him across the face as she moves to stand, circling Sherlock’s chair.

His cheekbone stings but that’s the least of his worries right now.

“You should’ve known Sherlock, the moment I set my eyes on him, that you would die trying to have him. You know me, you knew who I was.”

Sherlock glares at her and Mary reels back, her eyes widening as her face breaks out into a grin, her eyes filled with mirth as she chortles.

“Oh dear god,” she cries, her eyes tearing slightly as she bends back into Sherlock’s personal space, “You didn’t know? Since the beginning? I thought you knew HAH!”

She screams happily, Sherlock’s stomach sinking as Mary bares her teeth at him.

“You didn’t know who I was?” Mary tuts, shaking her head, “My my Mr Holmes, you’ve been getting slow.”

Sherlock averts his gaze from her, choosing to stare off into a far corner of the room instead of meeting Mary face on.
The woman is the devil incarnate, he’s sure of it.

“Oh gosh, I had planned to have you killed as soon as you woke up from that sleep of yours but my, my… I think a change of plans is in order? Don’t you think?”

She grins sinistfully at him, Sherlock jutting out his chin in defiance as Mary reaches for the gag, the cloth unspooling in her hand as it falls from his lips. He coughs, once, twice as Mary continues to cackle.

“Oh Sherlock, Jim really was right about you… you’re so… predictable,” she chimes in, reaching for his cheeks and cupping them tightly before letting go.

“He told me you’d been blinded by love… I didn’t believe him. Guess I was wrong hmm?” she smiles and says. Sherlock has never wanted to throw up more in his life.

“Fuck. You,” he spits, his voice gravelly and hoarse as Mary shakes her head, taking a seat once again in the chair before him.

“You just don’t know when to quit, do you,” she grins, leaning forward, her breaths putrid and foul on Sherlock’s face before she sways backwards once again, falling back into her chair.

“I thought you would’ve quit when you realised that I was to be engaged to him,” she sneers, shaking her head, “And yet you still went on your merry way, doing all those… wedding preparations and whatnot. I thought you’d given up already. I guess I was wrong.”

Sherlock growls.

“John’s worth it,” he spits, a bit of saliva landing on Mary’s face, which she wipes off with a scowl.

“Of course he is,” she laughs, mocking him, “I used to think the same too. Did you know that I started dating him to keep tabs on you? Well, it ended up being a win-win situation.”

Sherlock can literally feel his insides shrivel up.

“Don’t look so surprised, of course we all knew you weren’t dead,” Mary rolls her eyes, waving her hand as if shooing the thought away, “I was, however, the one tasked with following up on you. I mean… I was supposed to succeed James if that’s what you’re wondering.”

“So Moriarty really is the title then?” Sherlock croaks, “James Moriarty… Mary Moriarty?”

Mary smiles at him as if he’s a pet that has just done something particularly clever.

“Right you are,” she says, “Looks like there’s still some brains in you yet.”

“Funny thing is,” she continues, “Even though I was the chosen one… Magnussen was still standing in my way. He had unbearably large heaps of dirt on me that could have easily exposed me as the successor to the Moriarty title. And that could not have been allowed to happen.”

“So I laid low and decided to keep tabs on you by keeping tabs on John. I knew you’d contact him first if anything. And boy, did I have fun.”

Mary sneers, rocking forward into Sherlock’s space.

“He’s as good a lover as they come, Sherlock,” she croons, “Hope you managed to sample the goods at least once before you ended up here.”
Sherlock practically recoils as Mary chuckles, reaching into Sherlock’s collar to withdraw John’s silver dog tags, the twin pieces of metal glinting in the moonlight before Mary lets them go, the tags clinking as they fall back onto Sherlock’s chest.

“Oh, so you did, didn’t you?” Mary sighs, shaking her head, “Hope you enjoyed it while it lasted. Those happy memories should be enough to keep you sane before I kill you.”

“I would love for nothing more than to see the light leave your eyes.”

Sherlock glares at her, his eyes fiery as he meets her gaze head on.

Something isn’t adding up here. The goading, the jibes… Something is up. There’s something he’s not seeing. Mary couldn’t possibly be making such personal comments unless she had a direct vendetta with him? Which he is certain hasn’t happene-

Oh.

“You fell in love with him too?” Sherlock starts, “Didn’t you?”

Mary seems stunned for a moment, her eyes clouding over with confusion as Sherlock continues.

It’s the only explanation for everything that has happened so far.

“That’s why you hate me so much, not just because I was the one standing in the way of you rebuilding your network… but because you thought that I’d stolen him from you.”

He waits, the words hanging in the air between them before Mary makes her move.

“He was mine, Sherlock,” she snarls, “We were engaged.”

“No, he wasn’t,” Sherlock responds simply.

And that only serves to infuriate Mary further.

“HE HATED YOU,” she all but yells, “He hated your drug habit, hated the way you always seemed to care less about him, he hated you, Sherlock. He fucking. Hated. You.”

“And that explains why you tried to give me the drugs that day, why you goaded at me when I was at the wedding. It also explains why you sent out that mass broadcast - to bring me back to London. You weren’t done with me were you?” Sherlock deduces, ignoring her calmly, “You just wanted to get a rise out of me, to see me crack so that John would hate me.”

“Well, it didn’t work,” he finishes, glaring triumphantly at Mary who has now risen from her seat, her legs trembling with rage as she towers over him.

He might be about to die, but at least he’s going to die having the upper hand.

Mary growls, drawing a gun from the pocket of her jacket. She thrusts the barrel up against Sherlock’s heart, cold metal up against Sherlock’s convulsing chest as his heart rate speeds up.

“I should’ve killed you the moment you stepped into this room,” she utters simply, flicking the safety off and setting her finger on the trigger.

“Bye bye, Sherlock,” she sighs, Sherlock’s heart pounding out of his chest, “No one’s going to miss you.”
“Not even-”

“STOP RIGHT FUCKING THERE.”

Sherlock’s eyes widen in surprise as Mary drops the gun, the two of them turning to face the door.

John’s there, the edges of his silhouette bright against the dull darkness of the doorway, the glint of his gun barely perceptible in the moonlight.

It’s trained on Mary.

“What are you doing here?” Mary barks, now turning to point the gun at John, “There’s no way you could’ve tracked him without Mycroft’s help.”

John smirks in answer, stepping into the room, the floorboards creaking beneath his feet.

“Tracker, in his shoes,” he smiles and says as Sherlock heaves a sigh of relief, “Mycroft will be here soon enough. I simply… decided to go ahead and make sure my partner was doing fine.”

Mary’s face seems to do a little flip, her eyes open and surprised for a moment before she clams back up, the light in her eyes fading once again. It’s as if she’d instinctively thought that John was referring to her when he used the word “partner” but quickly realised otherwise.

“This isn’t the way you’re supposed to treat the person who saved you from certain death,” she frowns, moving to stand behind Sherlock.

John gives a sad chuckle, moving to stand right by a pillar.

“You didn’t save me, Mary,” he shakes his head, “If shooting my best friend is what you call saving me, you seem to have a very warped conception of what sacrifice means.”

The corner of Mary’s lip twitches.

“I kept you alive,” she says simply, staring him down, “Those months when Sherlock was away. Who fed you when you were too depressed to feed yourself? Who gave you shelter in her home when you couldn’t bear being alon-”

“I think you’ll find that trying to repeat that whole process by killing my friend negates that,” John says, his shoulders tense.

“Plus, the cheating didn’t really help either now did it?”

Mary doesn’t seem to like that.

“I didn’t cheat on you,” she says, her left hand balled up into a fist.

“David would like to say otherwise,” is all John answers.

She’s silent as John’s gaze continues to flick between Sherlock and her, John’s eyes dark and dangerous, as if waiting for Mary to make her move.

Sherlock gulps as Mary snakes an arm around his neck, bending to rest her chin on his head before recoiling and stalking away from him, making her way to John.

John sidesteps her, however, remaining a safe distance away as he rounds the room, coming to rest by Sherlock’s side as Mary glares at him.
“You okay?” John whispers furtively and Sherlock nods.

Trust John to always be there for him.

This seems to infuriate Mary further because the woman grunts, her shoes squeaking across the dusty floor as she holds her gun up, pointing it at Sherlock.

“I’ve had fucking enough!” she cries, her fingers shaking with barely suppressed rage as she sets her finger on the trigger.

And presses down hard.

----

Sherlock’s not entirely sure what happens next.

There’s a loud bang.

Following which, his chair topples over and onto the floor.

And then Mary is screaming.

John is beside him somewhere… but it seems like he… isn’t moving?

Oh fuck.

“JOHN,” he calls, still tied to the chair as he tries his best to angle his body towards him, “JOHN ARE YOU ALRIGHT?”

John’s body is slumped forward, his head on the ground with his fingers still curled around his gun.

Fuck, is he wounded, is he-

No, he can’t be.

He scrutinises John closely, trying to dampen the terror that’s slowly threatening to drown him. And that’s when he notices, the barely perceptible rise and fall of John’s chest. Good, he’s still alive, for now.

Mary’s wailing is soon drowned out by the sound of police sirens, Sherlock watching as Mary buries her face in her hands, tears streaming down her face as the gun in her hand falls to the floor.

She must’ve loved him, Sherlock muses, in some terrifying and fucked up way.

He watches as the officers spill into the room, handcuffing Mary swiftly and leading her away, even as she stares forlornly after John, as if wishing to reach out and hold him. That’s the last thing Sherlock would ever allow her to do.

It’s then that John groans, sitting up from his spot on the ground, his body in a cocoon of dust as he shakes his blonde hair, turning to gaze at Sherlock.

“Please tell me you’re not hurt,” is all that Sherlock says as John smiles, scooting over to his side.
“I’m fine,” John sighs, holding on tightly to the handles of Sherlock’s chair, tugging forcefully to right it, “I think the question should be. Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Sherlock huffs, “I’m not the one who jumped in the way of a fucking bullet!”

“That has missed the both of us and lodged its way in the wall behind us,” John rolls his eyes as an officer walks up to them with a knife, sawing Sherlock’s restraints away.

He hands John one as well and John gets to work on the ropes binding his ankles to the feet of the chair.

“I’m fine Sherlock, don’t worry about me,” John says as he finally manages to cut through the bindings, moving onto his arm, “We’re both fine, aren’t we?”

Sherlock heaves a deep sigh as the rope finally comes free, his wrists and ankles sore and an angry red as he pushes himself away from the chair, falling into John’s open arms.

He’s immediately engulfed in John’s scent, the shampoo that he uses mingling with the sweet musk of sweat as he buries his nose in John’s neck, inhaling deeply as John tightens his grip on him.

John could’ve died, he could’ve very well died. The fact that they’re both alive right now is nothing short of a miracle and Sherlock is determined to treasure it.

"Just promise me one thing, Sherlock," John chuckles, "Please don't do that again."

"M' sorry," Sherlock mumbles in answer.

"I saw the text," John continues, "the one Mary sent you. I can't really fault you though, I probably would've done the same thing."

"You hypocrite," Sherlock smiles, trying to make light of the situation as John sniggers, pressing his nose firmly into the curl of hair at the nape of Sherlock's neck.

"You love me anyway," John responds and Sherlock has to bite back a grin.

They stay there for a moment, wrapped up in each other's arms till Sherlock's knees begin to ache.

“Let’s go home,” he murmurs into the crook of John’s neck, the intimacy of the situation dampened somewhat by the various police officers milling around the room. But John smiles anyway, his lips pressed up against Sherlock’s neck as he affords the skin there a quick kiss.

“Yes, let’s.”

----

Sherlock goes to shower first.

His hair is dusty, disgusting and greasy and the first thing he wants to do is wash any residue remaining in it out.

He towels himself off, stepping into the bedroom as John walks past him, shutting the bathroom door gently.
They’d both thought of showering together, the latent fear of either of them losing the other hovering around the edges of their consciousness even as they’d stepped into Mycroft’s car. But, they had decided against it, preferring to actually get clean.

Before that, though. John had refused to let go of him. His fingers had stubbornly curled around Sherlock’s shoulders, his other hand gripping Sherlock’s tightly as Mycroft informed them of Mary’s probable permanent incarceration in a facility far away from England and the fact that David had decided to take his baby as his own, raising her as a single father.

It had been a bad time for a debrief, the information going over their heads in favour of reaffirming the fact that each other were there… really there and alive. Sherlock had clutched John’s hand tightly, memorising the lines on his face once again as his gaze coursed down John’s taut torso.

They would be fine, they’d be okay.

Sherlock doesn’t bother putting on a set of clothes as he slips under the covers, throwing the towel in the direction of the armchair in the corner of the room. He’s got nothing on but John’s dog tags.

He’s not entirely sure what John wants to do now that it’s really just them, alone and together all at once.

Sleep or sex? He’d be fine with either honestly, just so long as John is there with him.

He’d prepared himself in the bathroom nonetheless.

Just in case.

He closes his eyes, breathing in the soft, downy scent of the covers as the bathroom door opens, revealing a similarly naked John Watson who towels off, actually bothering to hang his towel on the rack before padding over, still naked, to their bed.

John climbs under the covers, sighing softly as Sherlock reaches for him, entwining their fingers. Snuffling gently, John reaches around his back, tugging Sherlock closer into the warmth of his body as Sherlock relaxes, his breaths deepening.

“Hey you,” John mumbles, burying his nose in Sherlock’s hair and inhaling deeply, a hand coming to wrap around the chain of dog tags circling his collarbone.

“Hey yourself,” Sherlock rumbles, pressing a quick kiss to John’s neck, nuzzling into the crook there gently.

They lie there for a moment, simply enjoying the warmth of each other’s bodies, their fingers tracing paths down each other’s backs, John’s following the dips and creases of Sherlock’s scars while Sherlock pays special attention to John’s bullet wound.

He tries to convey what he can’t in words to the man in front of him through his caresses, of how he loves him, how he cherishes him, how he’s so very glad that the two of them have survived despite all the odds against them.

John seems to be trying the same, his fingers increasing in pressure along certain lines of his back and Sherlock is certain that John feels the same way he does.

It doesn’t take long before their lips are drawn forward, melding into each other in one simple movement as John moves to cup Sherlock’s face in his hands.
Groaning in answer, Sherlock relegates his fingers to John’s hip, stroking the skin there slowly, as if asking for permission.

Looks like they’re not going to be getting any sleep tonight.

In answer, John hums into his mouth, slipping his tongue in through the seam of their lips as Sherlock’s fingers begin to caress the inner part of John’s thigh, stroking smoothly over rough skin.

When they part for breath, they’re both already half-hard.

“I love you,” John says simply, his eyes ablaze as he focuses his attention on Sherlock’s neck instead, lapping at the skin there before sucking gently, easing a sigh out of him, “I love you so much.”

“I love you too,” Sherlock answers, tilting his head to give John further purchase, enjoying the feeling of soft pillow beneath his curls and warm, wetness on his skin.

He lets himself hang in that moment for a while, dazed in bliss as John continues to kiss and lick his skin before he slides out of John’s grip, reaching slowly for the drawer in the bedside table.

The drawer rattles as it opens, John’s eyes going wide as Sherlock retrieves a tiny, cylindrical bottle, handing it over to him.

John stares at it as if he’s not sure what to do with it.

“We don’t have to do that, you know,” John says when he’s finally regained his ability to speak, “We can do all the stuff we’ve done before.”

Sherlock huffs, pressing the bottle of lube firmly into John’s hands.

“I want to,” is all he says as John’s pupils expand, eclipsing his light blue irises, “I want you to-”

He lets John complete the sentence for himself, his face flaring in embarrassment, refusing to complete it for him.

John gets the idea nonetheless, flashing him a cheeky smile as he bends to press a firm kiss to Sherlock’s lips once more.

“How do you want to do this?” he murmurs, uncapping the bottle and squeezing some onto his palm, “On your front or? Also, do you have condoms in your drawer that I can use?”

Sherlock rolls his eyes.

“As said before, I’m clean, you’re clean. We’re both clean. And adding to that pile of information, I cleaned myself in the shower just now in case of this eventuality so no we don’t need condoms.”

He watches John’s face, the admission that he’d prepared himself seemingly doing it for the older man as John’s grin has turned downright filthy.

“And… I suppose for the first time… Maybe on my back?” he blushes and says, feeling the full force of John’s gaze on him, “I’d like to see you.”

John smiles at him, cocking his head sideways cheekily before pressing his lips back to Sherlock’s, kissing him languidly as the hand not covered in lube begins to stroke Sherlock’s inner thigh, sending a shockwave of sensations up his body.
“Sounds like a good idea,” John purrs, latching onto a nipple and sucking gently.

“Fuck,” Sherlock curses as goosebumps erupt over the patch of skin there, John smiling against his chest as he brings his other hand down, nudging at Sherlock’s other thigh gently.

“Open for me, will you?” he mutters and Sherlock obliges, drawing his knees upwards and spreading his thighs as John’s hand slips down to his perineum, fondling his balls for a moment before continuing its steady track to his furled hole.

Sherlock wraps his arms around John’s back, shivering as John brings a hand up to the crook of his knee, bending his leg further backwards.

He waits with bated breath, the man on top of him circling his entrance torturously as if to draw out the moment. Why can’t John just get on with it?

He must’ve said it out loud because John chuckles just then, drawing his lips away from Sherlock’s as he dips his index finger into the furled skin, putting a bit of pressure there.

“Tell me if it hurts, okay?” John mutters, and before he knows it, the first finger has already breached his sphincter.

The last time they’d done this had been in the bathtub of a hotel room... which hadn’t been too long ago, so Sherlock should have totally been prepared for the sensations that he’s experiencing right now.

He really isn’t.

He clutches John’s shoulders, fingers wrapped around the curve of the bone there as John’s finger plunges deeper into his body, shifting a little and stretching him there.

“That okay?” John asks after a moment, waiting till Sherlock has nodded his head before adding a second finger - this time Sherlock has gotten over the novelty of the feeling and is instead starting to feel a greater stirring in his abdomen.

It feels exquisite.

“More,” he breathes, shuddering and John obliges, withdrawing the two digits only to replace them with three, pushing them in slowly.

He trembles, willing his muscles to relax as John’s fingers stutter to a stop, seated as far as they can go.

“Is this okay?” John breathes, his breaths laboured as Sherlock forces his head off the pillow, meeting John’s gaze dead on.

“Please,” he moans, the words sounding foreign to him as John continues to gaze at him, enraptured, “Please just move.”

John gifts him with a chaste nod, beginning to piston his fingers in and out, sliding them out slowly before pushing them back in again gently.

Sherlock shudders in John’s arms, his back arching off the bed as John unwittingly strikes the bundle of nerves within him, setting off sparks behind his eyelids.

“Look at you,” John murmurs gravelly, Sherlock moaning in answer, “All spread out for me, your
body mine to devour.”

“You look absolutely divine.”

Sherlock is certain he’s on the verge of losing his mind.

“God,” Sherlock manages as John strokes the same spot again, Sherlock moaning loudly this time as his thighs tremble, “Fuck.”

He lies back, enjoying the jolt of pleasure that courses through his body every time John hits that spot inside of him, until John gives a particularly well-aimed thrust which nearly ends everything then and there.

He doesn’t want to come yet.

“John, please stop or I’ll—” he starts, a hand covering his eyes, desperately willing himself to not give himself over to the precipice of pleasure.

John thankfully relents, withdrawing his fingers slowly as Sherlock hisses, feeling the loss viscerally.

“That okay?” he says and Sherlock nods.

The man sits up on his knees, hiking Sherlock’s legs up above his shoulders as he leans in to kiss him, slow and languid, their tongues tangling as John’s cock brushes against Sherlock’s slender thighs.

“John,” Sherlock murmurs when they part for air, gasping as he grips onto John’s shoulders, digging his nails into the skin there to get the point across, “John, please just—”

He’s still too embarrassed to finish that sentence.

John gives him a cheeky grin.

“Fuck me?” he helpfully finishes, a lilt in his voice as he lifts himself off Sherlock’s chest, stroking the dog tags that have been trapped between them.

Sherlock scowls.

If John wants him to beg, he’ll gladly beg.

“Are you going to get on with it or not?” he whines in annoyance, John still smirking down at him till Sherlock angles his hips, thrusting upwards, his reddened cock dragging against John’s tanned skin.

And that seems to be enough for John.

The man practically growls, taking his cock in hand, positioning it at Sherlock’s entrance, nudging the crown inside.

John’s mouth opens in a perfectly shaped O.

It feels absolutely heavenly.

“Last chance to back out Sherlock,” he says, his eyes dark as Sherlock licks his lips.

“Stop talking and start doing,” he purrs, stroking the right side of John’s face and pressing his lips to
John's once more.

And that’s when John’s restraint seems to snap completely.

He bends Sherlock’s knees impossibly backwards, thrusting home as Sherlock groans in pleasure, his head falling backwards as John seats himself deep inside him.

It’s different from the fingers, much much different.

John buries his face in Sherlock’s neck, grunting as his hips give tiny, aborted thrusts, as if he’s struggling to control himself.

“You feeling alright?” John murmurs into Sherlock’s clavicle, licking a long stripe up his neck.

“Good,” Sherlock answers as John’s lips close around his Adam’s apple, “Better than good- Fuck.”

John is thrusting forwards in earnest now, his hips rolling against Sherlock’s body, each thrust seating him deeper and deeper inside him.

“You’re so tight,” John moans, pistoning his cock in and out of Sherlock’s body, “So fucking good, god-”

“Yesss,” is all Sherlock can manage as John’s hands migrate to his buttocks, squeezing the cheeks there as John continues to pound into him.

“You like that huh?” John breathes, licking a line up Sherlock’s earlobe, “Like how I use you? How I take you? Hmmm?”

“Fuck yes,” Sherlock groans, his voice reaching a high-pitch as John finally gets the angle right, hitting the sweet spot he’d been laving attention on just now, “FUCK.”

John smirks in answer, driving his cock into Sherlock’s body much faster than before, getting the angle right every single time.

Oh god.

“John, John please,” Sherlock is trembling now, his body writhing as his hips make aborted thrusts upwards, his cock seeking friction, “John please I’m-”

John meets his eyes, understanding him completely as he snakes a hand down to Sherlock’s cock.

“Fuck you’re leaking,” John gasps when he reaches his target, pumping the engorged flesh there quickly, “You’re actually leaking-”

“John PLEASE,” Sherlock cries out, the twin sensations of a hand on his cock and a cock in his arsehole far too much for him to take. It feels amazing, fantastic, like his body is bursting at the seams.

And John obliges.

He pumps his fist up and down far faster than before, timing the movement of his fist with his thrusts as Sherlock groans and cries, feeling the pleasure within him uncoiling and spiking.

“Fill me up,” he mutters, almost in a daze, as John continues to plunge into him, “Make me yours. I want to be yours. Make me-”
And John does a spectacular twist with his thumb on the crown of Sherlock’s cock and Sherlock is coming, come spurting in between their bodies as Sherlock cries out in relief, his body convulsing and dragging John under.

John gives one, two, three more thrusts and he’s coming as well, Sherlock sighing as he feels John’s warm spunk spurt into his arsehole, feeling owned, loved and cherished.

Fuck, he’s truly gone on John, isn’t he?

John collapses onto him, his body shaking as Sherlock cards his fingers through John’s silky blond hair.

The man recovers quickly, his body stilling as he turns his head, gazing up and smiling at Sherlock and Sherlock returns the favour.

John then turns his attention to where they’re still joined, pulling out with a soft squelch, shifting back so that Sherlock’s legs fall to the bed, limp from overuse. He zeroes in on Sherlock arsehole, as if trying to see if any damage has been done. However, all that ends up happening is his softening cock twitching a little at the sight of come spilling out of his lover’s entrance.

Sherlock has never seen such a delighted look on his beloved’s face.

“Fuck,” is all John can muster as he pulls Sherlock into an embrace, a finger dancing along the rim of Sherlock’s sphincter, meeting sticky warmth there, “Fuck-”

“I love you,” Sherlock mumbles, pressing his lips to John’s as John does the same, suckling sweetly on his bottom lip, “I love you so much.”

“I love you too,” John answers, “I love you like I’ve loved no one else, you have no idea-”

And they’re kissing again, lips and tongues meeting in an elaborate dance as they sink deeper into each other, drunk on the sounds and feel of each other bodies.

Sherlock could never have envisioned a scene more perfect than this.

After all they’ve been through, hell and high water, the fact that they’ve survived, the fact that they’ve lived to tell the tale, to love each other as they should have done years ago… Who gets a second chance at love like that?

Who gets so lucky?

We did, Sherlock thinks to himself as John rolls them over onto their sides, his hands carding through Sherlock’s hair as the other jostles the chain on his neck, the chain marking him as John’s.

We made it, he thinks as John’s kisses taper off, his lover moving off to lave attention over his neck instead.

We made it.

---

Sherlock wakes in the middle of the night to an empty bed.
John’s side is warm, meaning that the man couldn’t have left the bed that long ago.

Groaning in frustration, Sherlock forces himself out of bed, grimacing as his arsehole twinges from their activities a few hours ago.

The pain is still definitely worth it though.

“John?” he murmurs sleepily, slipping on his dressing gown as he makes his way to the sitting room, finding John dressed in a comfy jumper and boxer shorts, staring out the window with a steaming cup of tea, looking out onto the dark street below.

That seems to jolt his lover back to reality, John’s head giving a little twitch as he fixes his eyes on Sherlock. He shifts towards the corner of the sill, patting the open spot next to him.

Sherlock obliges, taking a seat.

_Something’s wrong_, he instinctively thinks as John takes one final sip from his mug before setting it on the coffee table, _Something’s definitely off._

“John?” he whispers, his sleep-soaked voice gravelly and rough, “Are you alright?”

John meets his gaze, nodding his head.

“I’m fine,” he answers, an arm instinctively wrapping around Sherlock and drawing him closer, “It’s just…”

Sherlock holds his breath.

“Doesn’t this all feel too good to be true?” he mumbles, half-laughing, “It seems too easy, as if this is all just a cruel dream and soon someone going to tell me that I have to wake up.”

Sherlock sighs in relief, nodding his head. So that’s what John has been struggling with. He understands what John means completely.

“Well,” he sighs, “Trust that you are not the only one.”

They sit there for a moment, revelling in each other’s body warmth, holding each other close as a comfortable silence descends upon them.

“Remember when I came back to you?” John murmurs, raising an arm, his hand pointing to the door. Sherlock smiles in answer, he remembers all right. “I thought that I’d only end up staying here for a little while. Maybe a week or so… But then dinner happened and I realised… I just couldn’t lose you. I had to stay.”

“And we nearly lost each other, several times, over the course of a year. Can you believe that Sherlock? It’s nearly been a fucking year.”

Sherlock reaches a hand up to card through John’s hair, his fingertips gently massaging his scalp.

“To be fair, neither can I,” he mumbles in answer, “I was so sure I’d have to watch you leave as well, watch you go, watch you traipse back into Mary’s arms, back into her life and away from mine.”

“But Mary’s gone now though, out of our lives, far far away from the two of us,” Sherlock continues, “She can’t hurt us anymore.”
John draws a deep breath.

“What about Moriarty?” he says simply, “Don’t you think after what we’ve done, we’ll have a huge price hanging over our heads?”

Sherlock smiles.

“A body cannot function without its head,” he says, “There was no other elected leader following Mary, meaning that there’s probably chaos in the network right now - or what remains of it. I assure you, John, it will soon dissolve.”

John nods in understanding, “That is true.”

They descend into comfortable silence once again, the warmth of the flat wrapping around them as they lean into each other, their inhales and exhales in step.

Sherlock could stay here forever if he wanted to.

“So what do we do now?” John murmurs, breaking the quiet between them, “No madman after us, no crazy murderous ex-wife left to haunt us.”

Sherlock chuckles.

“As if our lives weren’t any less interesting before either of them came into the picture,” he says, nuzzling into John’s shoulder.

“We’ll solve crimes, have fights over body parts in the fridge, chase each other down dark alleyways, things probably won’t change all that much,” Sherlock shrugs, “We’ll be fine as long as we’re together.”

That seems to draw a smile out of John, the corner of his lip quirking as he sighs, ruffling Sherlock’s curls playfully.

“I suppose,” he laughs, “Except that this time, we’ll actually be together, in a proper relationship.”

“Sounds like a change I’m willing to accept,” Sherlock smirks, ducking his head down for a chaste kiss.

John chuckles in answer.

“Together?” he asks, his question a promise and an answer at once.

Sherlock doesn’t need to think twice to answer.

Solving crimes together, bickering over dinner together, making sweet love together, chasing after murderers and cheats together, falling in love over and over again

“Together,” he says, as if it’s the most obvious thing in the world.

"Together."

Chapter End Notes
There will be one short epilogue following this. IDK when on earth it will come out... but it will... eventually HAHA. I might end up writing more stories in this verse though. Maybe one where John acts out all the naughty things he suggested to Sherlock and vice versa when they were texting each other. Who knows?

Thanks for sticking with me guys. I hope you've enjoyed the ride. Love you lots.

Again, no research done. I have no time. School is a bitch haha.

Hit me up on tumblr
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

"They’ve changed so much as people… more so as a unit. There’s a tether of trust tangling the two of them together, a shared love that had always existed now brought to the light of day."

Chapter Notes

OH MY GOD Y’ALL. I’M SO SORRY. I had school up till about May and got stuck with a bad writer's block :<. But here we are! At the end. Finally. I hope I gave our boys the ending that they deserved. Enjoy!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**14016 hours since John has returned**

John wakes to the smell of sizzling meat.

He turns over in bed, eyes blinking slowly open as his nostrils flare, seeking out the source of the delicious aroma.

*Mrs Hudson’s cooking*, John thinks to himself as he rubs his eyes, brushing away the sleep dust before rising groggily, glancing at the clock on their bedside table.

5.53 p.m. the electronic surface glares at him.

John groans, shaking his head as he trudges towards the bathroom to brush his teeth.

They’d been on a case till 3 a.m. the night before… or technically that morning to be more precise. Sherlock had been amazing as always, firing off brilliant deductions as they scoured London’s back alleys, all of which had been answered with John’s admiring stares and praise.

They’d caught the thief at around 3 in the morning and crashed at about 4, the two of them shucking their shirts and trousers just in time before falling soundly asleep.

John’s no stranger to waking up this late, his nightly jaunts with Sherlock once again commonplace now that Mary is out of the picture. It’s just that Sherlock always wakes up far earlier than him… and tends to get into some sort of trouble every time.

The last time he’d nearly burnt their kitchen down.

Sherlock hasn’t changed much since they’ve gotten together, John muses as he splashes his face with water. He’s been as insufferable as ever, leaving things in a mess around the house, consistently endangering himself on a monthly basis and on occasion, been frustratingly emotionally obtuse
(though he’s definitely been making a concerted effort to improve in this area).

It no longer matters to John though. Gone are the early days where John might’ve yelled at the man or stormed off in a huff to clear his head. Sherlock is who Sherlock is and John doesn’t want that to change, ever. Truth be told, they do still fight and John still corrects Sherlock every time the man messes up, but there’s now an underlying understanding that “no matter how much you screw up, I will still accept you for who you are.” And that makes all the difference.

John smiles wistfully, gazing into the mirror before him.

He looks happier than he has in ages, definitely much happier than when he had been married to Mary. So much has changed since the day that Mary was finally out of their lives forever. David had taken in baby Lily, caring for her as a single father (Mycroft had helped make some financial arrangements for him to ensure that Lily was well looked after) and John had moved back into Baker Street… permanently. And this time, he had moved all his stuff into Sherlock’s room.

They had had to put in extra cabinets to fit in all of John’s clothing and clutter, the bedroom now strewn with signs of a shared life. Sherlock had converted John’s old room into a laboratory, fitting it with a mini sink along with the old fridge from their kitchen (they’d bought a new “untouched” one), finally giving John the clean blood and bacteria-free kitchen he’d always dreamed of.

That hadn’t been the only improvement to John’s life though. Before, Sherlock had been closed off, a solitary brooding figure who appeared to disdain any human contact. Now, however, John has access to the man at all hours of the day - not just physically but emotionally. Sherlock is so much more open now, sharing things with John that he’d never allowed himself to before, hugging John when he least expects it, even granting him good night kisses when John decides to go to bed early.

He still can’t believe that he’s actually allowed to touch the man now. A year ago, that had seemed like such a foreign concept. But now, John wakes up daily in their shared bed with his arms curled around the man of his dreams, slips fingers around his hips as they go about their daily routine and even gets to kiss him whenever he feels the need to.

Not to mention the sex.

John blushes at the thought, remembering their most recent escapade just a few days before.

He remembers the way that Sherlock had looked that night, his chest flushed with red and his brow shining with sweat, lowering himself down onto his cock. Sherlock’s thighs had tensed, quaking before he bottomed out fully, panting a litany of curse words as John stroked his thighs, urging him on…

Okay enough of that, John thinks, urging his burgeoning erection to calm down.

The post-case sex can happen after dinner, since they’d missed out on it the night before, coming back as late as they had.

Speaking of which, where is Sherlock anyway?

John sighs, slipping on a dressing gown and stumbling sleepily out of the door. Where could the madman have gotten to this tim-

Oh.

So the smell hadn’t been from Mrs Hudson’s cooking at all.
Sherlock is standing by the stove, his brow furrowed in concentration as he flips a layer of rosti over and over again, leaving it to sizzle before sliding it out onto a plate next to him.

Oh, Sherlock.

John makes his way forward, winding his arms tightly around his madman, smiling as Sherlock stills. He can feel Sherlock’s heartbeat through his ribs, a steady lub-dub that quickens just as the man has the presence of mind to shut off the stove.

John had done this before, a long time ago. When he’d just arrived back and Sherlock had cooked him breakfast. How times have changed.

“Morning John,” Sherlock sighs happily, a hand curling around his shoulder to rest in John’s hair, “Or should I say, good evening.”

John chuckles, slapping the man playfully.

“Good morning to you too you git,” he smiles, unwinding himself from Sherlock reluctantly, “I wouldn’t have woken up so late if you hadn’t tampered with my alarm clock.”

Sherlock shrugs.

“You didn’t have work today and you needed the sleep, I did no harm,” he says matter-of-factly as he turns back to the stove, setting another piece of rosti onto the pan.

John mock sighs in answer, turning his attention to the chicken in the oven.

“And what’s the occasion for this lovely meal?” he says playfully, bending down to examine the oven, “The chicken smells heavenly. Is that paprika?”

“Yes John, it is,” he can practically hear the smile in Sherlock’s voice, “My mother used to make it for me when I was little. It’s an old recipe.”

“Sounds delicious,” John answers, turning reluctantly away from the oven, his stomach gurgling as Sherlock laughs.

“Oh John,” he giggles, “Thinking with your stomach again?”

John can’t help but smile, the sound of Sherlock’s laughter always music to his ears.

“Ah yes, my voracious appetite,” John chuckles, slipping a hand down to cup Sherlock’s hip as he presses a kiss to the man’s cheek.

“You of all people have had first-hand experience,” he says before pressing a kiss to the shell of Sherlock’s ear, deliberately dropping his voice an octave, “I’m known to be insatiable.”

He hears Sherlock squeak in answer, his whole face going a cherry red as John smirks, stroking his boyfriend’s hip gently.

John 1, Sherlock 0.

Unclasping his hand from Sherlock’s waist, John turns to the cupboard, seeking out their collection of client-given wine. He picks the oldest bottle of them all, giving it a good look at before drawing out the wine glasses and setting them on the kitchen table.

Just then, the timer for the chicken dings, Sherlock rushing to retrieve the chicken with a tell-tale
He’s adorable, John thinks to himself.

He pours out the wine as Sherlock sets the plates of rosti down, placing the roast chicken on a trivet between them.

John had no idea that chicken could smell this good.

“Seriously though, what’s the special occasion?” John licks his lips and says, “I thought you’d be out here doing one of your experiments.”

Sherlock huffs in answer, dropping a kiss to John’s forehead.

“Can’t I just cook because I feel like it?” he shrugs. John chuckles in answer.

“There’s no such thing as ‘I felt like it’ with you love. So out with it,” John smiles, digging into the chicken before he suddenly remembers something, his face falling, “Did I forget something? It’s not our anniversary is it?”

John gazes up at his partner, finding the man looking a little stricken at John’s blue expression, shaking his head vehemently in answer.

“No, John,” Sherlock mumbles, reaching to grasp one of John’s hands, “It’s not our anniversary. In fact, it’s not a date I… would have expected you to remember.”

John frowns at this, confusion adorning his face as he curls his fingers around Sherlock’s proffered hand, “Then what day is it?”

Sherlock pinkens almost immediately, his face going a cherry red.

“It’s… it’s…,” Sherlock stutters, “The day you returned.”

John freezes, letting the gravity of the situation settle. There’s absolute silence between the two of them, Sherlock staring at him, stock still and unmoving as John blinks… once… twice…

Oh, Sherlock.

The sound of a wooden chair scraping against ceramic tiles fills the air as John rises from his seat, making his way over to Sherlock.

“Sherlock, god,” is all John says before wrapping his arms around the man, burying his face in the crook of Sherlock’s neck as Sherlock’s stiff body relaxes into the embrace, melding with John’s.

“Is it really today?” he murmurs, warm hands caressing Sherlock’s back, “God…”

Sherlock sniffs a little, nuzzling into John’s neck in answer.

“Sorry for not remembering Sher-”

“It’s fine,” Sherlock mumbles, John can feel a warm patch on his shoulder where Sherlock’s tears have fallen, “I didn’t expect you to remember. After all, that hadn’t exactly been the best of days for you. Leaving your wife-”

“Sherlock,” John chuckles, pulling away from Sherlock’s neck, cupping his love’s cheeks, “That was the best day of my life. Honestly, seeing you again… coming back to you was the best decision
He gazes into Sherlock’s eyes, admiring the ever-shifting cerulean orbs there as he strokes Sherlock’s lip. Sherlock’s closes his eyes in response, awash in sensation as he seeks out the pressure from John’s thumb.

“I love you,” John murmurs, bending to press a kiss to Sherlock’s lips, “God, do I love you.”

“I…” Sherlock chokes, pressing his lips to John’s once more, “I love you too.”

They kiss for a few more moments, John smiling into Sherlock’s lips as his lover nips and sucks at his upper lip. Their tongues glide against each other smoothly, their shared breaths mingling as Sherlock wraps a hand in John’s hair, tugging gently.

The kiss eventually tapers off before it can become anything more, John’s back a little sore from the weird position he’s been in as he reluctantly pulls away from Sherlock, smiling happily.

Sherlock answers in kind, giggling a little as John presses one more kiss to his nose before walking over to his side of the table, sitting down once again.

They spend most of dinner reminiscing about the past year, John piping up between mouthfuls of chicken and rosti as Sherlock recounts the case with Cameron Campbell (the man now behind bars thanks to their teamwork), of how they’d shared Sherlock’s bed that night for the very first time and of how he’d felt when John had held him in his arms the morning after.

John talks more of the time he spent wooing Sherlock, remembering the time that he brought Sherlock out to the museum, of how they danced together in the darkness of 221B, of how Sherlock had pushed him away till that fateful car ride back from Mycroft’s place.

They talk and talk, Sherlock unaflraid and unshy of detailing his emotions and feelings throughout the course of the one year, John on the other hand, open and willing to talk more about the hurt that they’d both been through, of how they’d survived and conquered.

It’s a stark contrast to how they had been the year before, awkward silences trailing them wherever they went, the two of them terrified of sharing what they really felt, afraid what the other would think of them.

There’s an openness there now that has never been there before, John thinks to himself as he takes Sherlock’s hand, leading him to the living room.

They’ve changed so much as people… more so as a unit. There’s a tether of trust tangling the two of them together, a shared love that had always existed now brought to the light of day.

John grins stupidly up at Sherlock as the music starts, twirling the man round and round as Sherlock giggles, falling back into John’s arms dizzy and happy.

They kiss their way around the living room, taking in small sips of each other as they waltz around the furniture, John stopping every now and then to brush wisps of hair from his lover’s forehead.

Sherlock is finally getting the dance that he wanted, John thinks to himself as he dips Sherlock at the end, like they’d done so before when Mary had still been around. Except that this time, when John lifts Sherlock back into his arms, Sherlock kisses him - without fear, without hesitation, without restraint.

They fall onto the sofa eventually, their legs tangling as John nips playfully at Sherlock’s upper lip,
their kisses becoming messy and uncoordinated till the two of them are flat out laughing, chuckling into the small space between their lips before Sherlock’s draws him in again, drinking his fill before his head falls back, his eyes closed in sated bliss.

John can’t help but smile, peppering his love’s eyelids with butterfly kisses as he strokes Sherlock’s face gently, rubbing his fingers along Sherlock’s cheekbones.

*I could’ve lost this*, he thinks to himself, *I could’ve lost all of this*.

Sherlock, seemingly sensing a disturbance in the force, opens his eyes. He frowns at John for a moment before pressing a kiss to his lips once again.

“I love you, John Watson,” he murmurs against his lips when he’s done, “I love you and nothing will ever be able to take me away from you.”

John smiles, nuzzling into Sherlock’s neck as he wriggles his way into the space in between Sherlock and the back of the sofa.

“We’ll grow old together, retire together,” Sherlock rambles, “The Downs in Sussex maybe. Whatever it is John, I promise I’ll never leave your side.”

John’s heart swells in response, tears threatening to spill over his cheeks as he kisses Sherlock’s cheek one more time.

“I love you Sherlock,” he murmurs, “I love you so much.”

Sherlock turns on his side, sighing happily as he presses a kiss to John’s nose.

“And I love you too,” Sherlock smiles, “John Watson.”

John couldn’t be happier if he tried.

THE END

Chapter End Notes

... And that's all folks! Honestly, I had so much trouble penning this chapter because I was still feeling bummed about season 4. But writing this chapter has really given me the chance to heal, to remember what I enjoyed about the series and the characters that I had come to love. And nothing can take that away from me.

Also, not sure if you noticed. But the chicken that Sherlock cooks John in this chapter is the same chicken he wants to cook John way back in the beginning of this fic.

The plan now is to finish up "Until You're Gone" and then move onto a new fic that I've already written 3 chapters of LOL (pssst it's a little mermaid crossover). Subscribe to my account if you want updates on my fics I suppose haha.
Thank you all for reading! It's been a pleasure writing for you :>

Hit me up on tumblr

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!