Forces of Nature
by Ewebie

Summary

Ok. I started this about 6 months ago, because Nicole asked for it (it is, in a way, a tumblr prompt, but it is way too long to be a short). I finally decided to finish it. So... I hope you enjoy it. Meanwhile, how is Sherlock so smoll?

Sherlock watched as the man pushed himself out of the water and onto the floating dock constantly anchored in the middle of the lake. Oh. He was... He was quite tanned. Broad shoulders sloped into a narrow, muscular waist and tapered hips that disappeared into the navy swim trunks. Somehow the breadth of the shoulders made the thighs and legs that appeared out of the bottom of the trunks look delicate. Tanned in their own right and powerful, but oddly proportionate to the shorter stature the man seemed to possess. Sherlock watched the water run off of him, down his back, tracing a path along his spine and through the pleasing fossae lumbales laterales and lumbar lordosis into the waistband of the trunks. Sherlock swallowed. Shit.

Notes

Sherlock sighed as he stepped out of the cottage. It was early yet, just after dawn, and the heavy smells of dew and the subtle decay of leaves and mulch were lingering in the light breeze. It was going to be hot today. By his estimates, and he was rarely wrong, come eleven, the sun would be unbearable and skin wouldn’t survive. Such was the result of four years locked away in a chemistry lab. The other result was an appreciation of a proper holiday; a moment to reestablish his fascination with the natural world. A chance to revisit the life-cycle of the forest, even if it wasn’t the natural woodland that had bordered his family estate. Family estate… He didn’t want to see his family right now and there’d be enough of them come graduation: hence the get-away.

He stretched, letting his toes fan out on the cool wood of the back porch. So quiet. Perfect. It would give him a chance to visit the lake, have a swim, maybe even read through those new journal articles before the neighboring, albeit distantly neighboring, cottages were even awake. Wonderful. The quiet hum of the forest. It wasn’t silent, just calm, peaceful; it gave him time to think.

He grabbed his towel, his bag of reading material, and a folding chair. It was a short jaunt through the woods to reach the lake, enough space to keep the noise from the water from reaching the small cottage, but close enough that he could see the water through the trees. It was perfect. He made his way down the path, half stone covered, half retaining wood, mostly moss coated, to the water’s edge. He set out the chair, draped his towel over the back of it, and dropped into it with a satisfaction he hadn’t felt since before beginning his degree. It had been an uphill battle. Four years of uphill battling, proving his professors wrong, proving his classmates wrong, publishing, researching. It was like grabbing them by the ears and dragging them into the modern world kicking and screaming. It hadn’t been made easier starting two years younger than everyone else. Idiots, all of them.

It wasn’t bright enough to need sunglasses yet, so he simply tugged the first journal from his bag and started reading. In the quiet. In the peaceful woods, next to the lake.

The splash took him by surprise. Surprise and irritation. No one else was ever up at this hour! Not awake, not up, and certainly not at the lake. And disturbing him. He let the journal drop to his lap and glared out at the far side of the lake. Glared at the ripples from where someone had jumped in. Maybe they’d drowned. It’d serve them right for disturbing his quiet. But then the body surfaced, strong arms pulling through the dark water, tanned shoulders, brown or maybe blond hair… Oh.

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The man let out a light whooping sound and leapt off the floating dock and into the water with a splash. The burst of water glittered in the early morning sun, the ripples rocking the dock and spreading slowly out until he surfaced a few feet away from his impact and started swimming, rather competently, away from the dock and away from Sherlock. Good. Away. To not be a distraction. Because Sherlock needed peace and quiet. Not tanned, muscular, fit distractions. Distractions that were apparently swimming laps between their dock and the communal float. Sherlock actually
groaned as he pushed out of the water again, up onto the dock, glistening and wet and… No.

Sherlock clenched his jaw and dropped his eyes to his journal. Dropped his eyes to the text, to the black and white, to the science and the quiet and the non-distraction, that was certainly not shaking the water from his shaggy, blond, yes definitely blond, hair like a dog and smiling to himself in a manner so broad that the glint off of his white teeth could be seen all the way to Sherlock’s lake shore seat. Fuck.

For a moment, Sherlock thought the man was about to dive back off the dock again, maybe swim some more. Which, when he really thought hard about it, he didn’t mind watching, not really. Or it wasn’t the swimming exactly, but the part where he stopped swimming and got out of the water, and stood in the low sunlight, and just glowed. He was wrong. The man wasn’t about to dive off the dock, he was about to start stretching… And… Oh Jesus, was that a sun salutation? And mountain pose, and plank, and up dog, and holy shit, down dog should be a crime. Rapt attention, that was what it was called; he was watching with rapt attention. Three cycles and then… Warrior two. Sherlock groaned. When had yoga become pornographic.

Sherlock draped the journal over his face to keep from staring, and flopped back into his chair. This was not why he came out to the cottage. This was not how he’d planned to spend the two weeks between the end of term and graduation. This was not what he’d planned to dedicate his brain power to. This was. Not. The. Plan.

Sherlock sighed heavily and risked sliding the journal off of his face, glancing out at the floating dock. Empty. He breathed a sigh of relief. Good. Back to more important and academic thoughts. Back to…

“Mornin’.”

“Gah!” Sherlock let out a startled shout, flailed, and fell out of the chair sideways onto the soft sand of the shore.

The words ‘shit’ and ‘sorry’ were drown out in a series of giggles as the man scrambled up the dock attached to Sherlock’s property and across to the shore. He held out a hand, grinning broadly.

“Sorry. I thought you’d seen me.”

Sherlock grumbled a negative and glared for a moment, but accepted the hand up, righted his chair, and then started looking around for his journal. “It’s barely six AM. Quite rude to appear out of nowhere when people are trying to read.”

“Reading… *Current Opinion in Colloid and Interface Science*?”

Sherlock spun around and snatched the journal from the man’s hands, pointedly ignoring the rather amused look on his face. “Give me that!”

“And you’d have me, what?” Sherlock straightened, trying to use his height as a threat. It didn’t seem to work. “Start off with a swim and some exhibitionistic yoga?” Condescending. He was going for condescending, but somehow missed that mark as well as the smile on the man’s face grew.

“And you said you didn’t see me.” The wink that followed brought a blush to Sherlock’s face. “Swimming in the morning is the way to go.”

“Please, the water can’t be much warmer than frigid. The temperature will hardly be bearable until noon.”
“It’s refreshing,” the man offered. Sherlock snorted. “And judging by your complexion, you’re not sitting outside at midday.” Sherlock wrinkled his nose and realized he’d lost the haughty air he’d been going for. “Besides, all the lads will be down at noon. Not as quiet then.”

“The lads?” Sherlock raised a brow.


That explained the distant noise he’d heard last night. Sherlock narrowed his eyes as he really looked at the man. “And you don’t approve… You… Ah, yes. Clearly coming from a chaotic house, an alcoholic parent and… older brother, and yet you’d spend the last few days before entering the workforce with people of whom you don’t approve. Why? Loyalty? No, duty. You had to be here, because… You’re the one handing over. You like shedding the archaic traditions, but not enough to forgo the typical male bonding holiday. Why?”

The man blinked a few times, his brow furrowing as he caught up with the onslaught of Sherlock’s rapid-fire speech. “I…” He shook himself slightly. “That… That was…” he blew out a breath. “Well, amazing.”

Sherlock blushed. “What?”

“You heard me. Brilliant. That was brilliant. How’d you know all that?”

Sherlock watched him cautiously, searching for any sign of sarcasm. “That’s… Not what… Was… I was right?”

The man’s tongue rolled out across his lower lip for a moment before that mouth was pulling back into a lop-sided grin, and Sherlock had to chide himself for staring. “John Watson,” he stuck out his hand. “Graduating captain, responsibility sponge, horrible sucker for other people’s entertainment, and better off here than home for the next few days.”

Sherlock felt the corner of his mouth twitch in amusement as he shook the warm and calloused hand. “Sherlock Holmes.”

He struggled not to blush again as John Watson chewed thoughtfully on his lower lip and nodded slowly. “Sherlock Holmes,” he echoed, settling the idea that all he would get is a name, and broke into a mischievous smile. “Sure I can’t interest you in a swim?”

“Er. No.” Sherlock glanced at the water. “Not… At present.”

“Alright,” he said easily. “Maybe next time.”

“Maybe,” Sherlock nodded.

“Or…” John turned and headed towards the dock that stuck out into the lake. “Maybe next time, I’ll just throw you in.”

Sherlock felt his eyes go wide. He would not let out whatever sound that was burning at the back of his throat.

“See you ’round, Sherlock Holmes,” John drawled, then took off down the dock at a run, diving into the water smoothly and pulling himself easily across the lake toward the distant property.
Sherlock tried to convince himself not to stare… and failed. He tried to convince himself to get back to his journal… and failed. He tried to ignore the cloyingly warm feeling lingering across his palm… and failed. He didn’t fail to notice when John reached the far side of the lake, or the way he gave himself a compulsory rub down with the small gym towel, or the way he tugged the bright, white tee shirt on and disappeared into the woods. Then Sherlock growled, ran a hand roughly through his curls, and headed back to his cottage. So much for peace…

It was five hours later, Sherlock had taken to lounging in the hammock on his front porch, the front that faced away from the lake, away from the distractions, away from sexy rugby men and navy swim trunks. Instead, the front faced the narrow glen and trees that lined the main road. ‘Main’ to obliquely avoid the word ‘only’, and ‘road’ rather flexibly describing the ‘trail’ that served cars and hikers and deer alike. If one car passed in a twenty-four hour period, it was busy. The sun was up high enough that the dew had burned off into a humid steam that promised a brutally hot and oppressive afternoon. Another few days of this and there’d be storms. In the mean time, Sherlock was content in the shaded space, sipping a cup of coffee, and perusing the local paper. Idiotic, dull, and boring sprang to mind, but it was a necessary exchange for the quiet he wanted, needed really.

“You knew this was part of the deal! Now move, lads!”

There was a series of breathy huffs and responses as Sherlock lowered the paper and turned to watch the road.

“Hope last night was worth it!”

“C’mon, Watson, you’re gonna kill ‘em.”

“You think this is bad? Wait until the tournaments. Four matches in a row.” The voice rose to a bellow. “That’s thirty miles in one day! This is ONLY SIX! HOP TO!”

Sherlock watched as the first figure came into view, a familiar figure, in running shorts and loose tee-shirt. Definitely blond, he thought absently. And running like it was barely an issue. The next nearest person was a good hundred meters back yet and was suffering. John turned, trotting backwards, steady even on the unpaved road, “COME ON LADIES! My grandmother runs faster than you and she’s been dead three years!”

Sherlock snorted.

John’s head swiveled as he twisted forward, finding Sherlock quickly through the trees. A broad grin stretched across his face. “Interest you in a light jog there, Sherlock?”

“Strike you as a runner, do I?” Sherlock called back. He was, actually. He ran frequently.

“I could always chase you.” Oh, Lord, that smile was dangerous.

Sherlock laughed. He actually burst out in an amused laugh, unprecedented, and lifted his mug of coffee in mock salute. “Maybe next time, John.”

John chuckled. “Next time then!” He gave a quick wave and glanced back at his squad, the labored breathing, the sweating, the clearly painful hangover they were all suffering, and he smiled brightly. “Here’s the deal, lads! We’re half way to six! This trail goes all the way around the lake. Last one home has to take the empties into town on foot!” A series of groans erupted from the passing mob.

“And if ANYONE beats me back, no run tomorrow!” There was a small stutter of footfalls as they tried to run faster, but John laughed and started running in earnest. They didn’t stand a chance. And Sherlock couldn’t fault the view as John disappeared down the trail. Sherlock went back to the
Sherlock had a lazy day. It wasn’t like him. It made him twitchy. It made it nearly impossible to sleep at night. Window open, fan running, and the humidity and lack of city sounds and the need to move was leaving him wide awake. With a low growl, he pushed out of bed, stalked to the kitchen, and fished a bottle of water from the fridge. Then he found himself outside on the back porch, watching the firebugs zip around and the listening to the drone and hum of the nocturnal forest life.

Somewhere in the background, Sherlock could hear shouts and yells and jovial laughs carrying across the water. If he strained his eyes, he could convince himself that the light flickering in the distance was a bonfire. John Watson would be there, laughing and messing. Drinking? Perhaps. Probably in jeans and a tee shirt. Probably casual and comfortable. Probably perfectly at home in a mob of people. He’d look like a golden god by the light of a fire. What? Shit. Sherlock shook his head, trying to clear the image. It didn’t seem to want to budge. Now he really wouldn’t be able to sleep. With a groan, he pushed off the rail and trudged back inside. One day. It had only been one day, and his plans were ruined.

Sherlock was up before dawn again. Or, debatably, he’d never really slept. He grumbled his way into the kitchen and brewed an entire pot of coffee. While that was on, he changed into his swim trunks and tee shirt. It was going to be hot again today. Hot and humid. And he felt sticky, grimy from the heat overnight. He needed a swim. And he wouldn’t be chased from the lake by a good looking… He grumbled again. Somewhere in the kitchen there was a thermos. He dug around until he found it and filled it with the coffee, adding a healthy dose of milk and sugar. Towel, coffee, book, that was it, he headed down to the lake.

Rather than dealing with the chair, Sherlock spread his towel at the end of the dock, stripped off his shirt, and stretched out on the still cool wood, dangling his legs over the side so his feet were soaking in the water. Comfortable, he closed his eyes. The sun was up, but still close to the horizon; still, he’d burn if he wasn’t careful. He sighed, don’t care. The air was heavier today, and so calm; there wasn’t even a breeze. It was enough to lull him into a doze; maybe he should have started in on the coffee.

“Knock, knock?”

“Who’s there?” Sherlock smothered the grin that tugged at the corner of his mouth, reluctant to open his eyes on the very, very slight chance that he was dreaming.

“Ah…,” John scratched at the back of his head, perched at the top of the dock’s ladder. “Interrupting cow?”

He hadn’t planned it as a joke then, just announcing his presence. Somehow, that made it more amusing. “Interrupting co-”

“Moo.”

Sherlock cracked one eye open and glared at John. But faced with the grin stretching John’s mouth, Sherlock gave in and chuckled. “That was absolutely atro-”

“Mooooo,” John cut him off again, the vowels disintegrating into giggles.

Sherlock propped himself up on his elbows and shook his head. John finally managed to stop giggling and Sherlock raised a brow. “Done?”

“Probably,” he finished climbing the ladder and dropped to sit cross-legged next to Sherlock.

“No yoga this morning?”
“You slept through it,” John grinned.

“You?”

“Why? Were you going to join?”

Sherlock snorted. “I’d have enjoyed watching.”

“Oh would you?” John wiggled his brows suggestively. “You could still join me for a swim.”

Sherlock flapped his hand and flopped back down on the dock. “I’m lazy. It’s too hot.”

“No,” John said slowly. “It’s too hot to run today. Swimming will cool you off.” Sherlock flinched as a spatter of drops hit his face, and he wrinkled his nose, opening his eyes to John standing over him, hair dripping from the swim. John shook his head, spraying another round of drops across Sherlock. “Look, you’re already wet. Might as well get in the water.”

Sherlock flinched, “Don’t be ridiculous.”

“C’mon, Sherlock,” John held out a hand, “Get up and in the water. It’ll make you feel better.”

Sherlock avoided the hand and pushed himself up, rising to his full height and leaning down into John’s space. He cocked a brow, “Make me.”

John’s head tilted to the side as he caught his tongue between his teeth. He was otherwise still as he studied Sherlock’s face, and even when Sherlock felt the blush slowly eek into his cheeks, he refused to flinch. “Make you,” John said finally.

Sherlock made an affirmative noise. Waiting to see what John would do. Waiting for him to check where he was standing; a small shove would knock him backwards into the water. Waiting for John to size him up, or check exactly how Sherlock was standing, or... He would swear the color of John’s eyes changed from royal blue to navy. Then again, he would also swear that his pupils had dilated. And that was it; that was the only warning he had. And Sherlock yelped as John, in a flurry of motion, hefted him up onto his shoulder and before Sherlock could appreciate the view, John turned easily and tossed him straight into the water.

Sherlock surfaced and sputtered and swept his hair back from his eyes only to have another splash hit him as John dove over his head. Once he managed to get his bearings, John was halfway to the floating dock and laughing whenever he came up for air. Sherlock took off after him, but even the length of his stroke wasn’t enough to catch up before John was safely on the floating dock, giggling, and stretched out on his side.

Sherlock hefted himself out of the water. “You seem rather pleased with yourself.”

John kept smiling. “Got you out here, didn’t I?”

“And what does that get you?”

He shrugged. “A bit of company.”

“I’m not terribly good company,” Sherlock answered automatically.

“No?” John rolled himself onto his back, pillowing the back of his head on his hands. “Tell me about your research then?”

“My research?” He mirrored John’s position, careful to keep from knocking his elbows with their
proximity.

“Go on, soon to be graduate chemist like yourself. You have to be stuck in with some sort of research.”

“How do you know I’m a chemist?”

John rolled his head to the side and gave Sherlock a look that he was certainly not used to being on the receiving end of. “Sherlock. Really. I saw what you brought down to read today. No one with just a passing interest in chemistry would bother.”

“Graduate?”

John gave him a rueful smile. “No one as clever as you could be far from graduating. Did you start early? Or finish quickly?”

“Both,” Sherlock said flatly.

“So that makes you… what? Twenty?”

“You’re awfully observant.”

John huffed. “I’m really not.”

“And you, then? Not a chemist?”

John sighed. “No, and not a prayer of coming near it.”

“But you’re too smart to be a meathead.”


“Is it?” he raised a brow. Meathead wasn’t the worst thing he’d called the jocks that’d tormented him throughout school. Uni had been no different. Just older, bigger, and stronger sods that didn’t take kindly to his ability to out think them.

“Ah,” John frowned, squinting up at the clouds, mulling it over for a moment. “Yeah. It’s probably not.”

Sherlock tried to understand the multitude of emotions that tugged at the surprisingly deep lines on John’s face. He couldn’t suss them. There were too many or too complex or… He was rubbish at this. “Sorry.”

“Hm?” John furrowed his brow. “Oh, no. No, no. Don’t be sorry. Can’t blame you. Can’t imagine that lads like me make your life terribly easy.”

“And yours?”

John’s brows went up. “Mine?” Sherlock bit back the wave of deductions, the pile of things he’d observed, he knew now; and instead, Sherlock shook his head. John sighed. “Don’t do that. Come on, out with it. You won’t offend me.”

“Everyone else tells me to piss off.”

“Ends with just words, does it?”
Sherlock frowned. “No.”

“I won’t be mad.”

“You don’t know that.” He pulled his arms down, resting his palms on his stomach, just below his ribcage.

“I have anger problems, but they aren’t because I don’t know myself. G’wan, Sherlock. I’m hardly interesting.”

“But you are!” Sherlock wrinkled his nose. “How do you survive it?”

“Survive what?” John asked.

“Your parents. Your father. When was the last time he hit you? Isn’t that why you’d rather be here? And your mother and brother, they drink don’t they? Not terribly supportive and how often did they throw you under the bus when your dad was cross? And you don’t come from money. And you’re naturally shorter. And you clearly train hard to be proficient. But you’re not continuing on. And you’ve worked hard for all of your academic achievements. But in a soft-science. And your sexual orientation clearly won’t endear you to your teammates. And I’m sure it went over swimmingly with your father. And yet you just…” Sherlock made an odd gesture with his hand. “How do you… You smile and mean it.”

“I won’t begrudge a bit of sun on a foggy day,” John said simply.

“Sun on a foggy day?” Sherlock echoed absently. “It’s not exactly foggy today.”

John’s gentle smile grew as he twisted his face towards Sherlock. “No. No it’s not.” A small furrow appeared between Sherlock’s brows, but John just smiled brighter. “Damn near blinding from where I’m sitting.” John rolled onto his front, drawing himself along Sherlock’s side. “Brilliant even.”

Sherlock felt his face color. “You’re avoiding the question.”

“Am I?”

Sherlock wrinkled his nose. He knew avoidance when he saw it.

“Ok,” John said evenly. “It’s perfectly simple. If you were over on your dock right now. And I was here on the float. And I lit a match. Would you be able to see it?”

“Maybe,” Sherlock’s face pinched. “Not… Not really, no.”

“Right,” John shifted up onto his elbows, looking down at Sherlock. “And if it were the middle of the night. Black as pitch out. What about then?”

“Of course.”

“Well,” John tilted his head, his voice dropping lower. “However dark it is at times, right now, you are fucking brighter than a beacon. And that’s plenty to make me smile.”

Sherlock blinked, then cast his eyes down to where he was twisting his fingers together. “I… I’m not…”

“Not what? Gorgeous?”

Sherlock’s lips twisted in a self-deprecating smile. “Don’t be ridiculous.”
John simply smiled.

“I’m really not…”

John’s hand instilled itself into the weave of Sherlock’s fingers, easing them apart, then around his own as his palm rested on the natural convexity of Sherlock’s lower abdomen. And John’s eyes traced the flush that spread from Sherlock’s face down his neck and along his chest. “Keep going,” John murmured. “Keep trying to find one that I’ll believe.”

Sherlock blinked rapidly.

“So far we’ve got terrible company: no. Lazy: nope. Uninteresting: wrong. Not gorgeous: I’m not the one being ridiculous here.” John raised a brow pointedly at Sherlock’s silence. “For such a verbose and brilliant chap, you’re awfully quiet on this issue.”

“John…”

“Mmn,” John hummed seriously. “Right. Ok.” He gave a small, self-deprecating smile. “Alright.” He sat up, cross-legged, and propped his chin in his hand. “It’s going to be too hot for a run later today, so I guess the lads are getting a pass. Might go for one myself though.”

“Oh?” Sherlock furrowed his brow, not quite sure what had happened.

“Mmn,” John gave a sharp nod. “We’ll be having another bonfire tonight. You should drop by.”

“Me?” Sherlock snorted.

John simply shrugged. “Open invitation. Whenever you want.” Then John stood, flashed Sherlock a smile, and tipped himself backwards into the water.

Sherlock scrambled to the edge of the raft as John surfaced with a grin. “John?”

“Yeah?” John bobbed up and down, treading water a few feet from the raft.

“If you… Will you be… Where are you running?” Sherlock cursed the flush he felt creep up the back of his neck.

John shrugged and tilted his head back. “I like routine, Sherlock. Probably the same place I did yesterday.”

“Oh.”

John flashed another smile and pulled up into something of a deadman’s float. “Probably. I’m really predictable like that.”

“Right.”

“Maybe I’ll see you around then,” John murmured quietly, letting himself drift towards his dock.

“Maybe,” Sherlock agreed. He hadn’t meant to agree, but that’s most certainly what he did.

Four hours later, Sherlock was back installed on his hammock. He’d traded the paper for one of his books, and the coffee for fresh lemonade. And by God, it was sweltering. Even in the shade with the cool drink, Sherlock was sweating. He eyed the trainers he’d left just inside the front door. Far too hot. There was no way he’d join John. It had been a foolish idea to begin with. But now, with the heat, and the way he was sweating, and the sun… He groaned and let the bottom of his glass sit on
his forehead, the condensation joining the sweat rolling across his temples and into his curls. It was nearly too hot to think.

“Now there’s an image that’d sell lemonade in the dead of winter.” Sherlock started so hard he nearly tumbled out of the hammock. John just chuckled and tugged his ear buds free, the thrum of something fast with a heavy beat drifting loud enough for Sherlock to hear. He caught his balance without spilling his lemonade and gave a shy smile. “Funny seeing you here,” John smiled and sat on the edge of the porch, then flopped onto his back with a groan.

“How’s the run going?”

John groaned again. “It’s hot as balls, Sherlock. How does it look like it’s going?”

Sherlock gave him an appraising look and quirked a brow. He wondered if edible was an appropriate way to describe it. Probably not. He held out the lemonade. “Drink?”

“Please,” John sat up and accepted the glass. “If this were water, I’d be dumping it over my head right now.” He took a large gulp.

“Heathen,” Sherlock muttered.

John chuckled and leaned back on his elbows. “No really. I’m actually regretting this run. I didn’t realize how humid it was.”

Sherlock squinted at the grill on the far side of the glen and pursed his lips. “It may actually be hot enough to fry an egg.”

John grinned. “It isn’t.”

“Not enough to safely eat, just to denature the proteins.”

John rolled the glass along his forehead. “We haven’t had ice in our cottage since the night we arrived. This is luxury.”

It was Sherlock’s turn to chuckle. “How barbaric.”

“Such is life with the rugby lads.” John handed back the glass and dropped flat again, closing his eyes against the glare of the sun he was no longer directly under.

Sherlock watched him for a moment, admiring the way his tee shirt clung, the way his muscles moved smoothly, carelessly, the way the sweat changed the shade of his hair, and the way his legs and feet continued to shift in spite of his sprawl across the porch. “Why?”

“How?”

“Why are you training so hard? Surely you don’t expect to be continuing on a career in rugby.”

John blinked one eye open. “It burns off the pent up energy.”

“There are better ways of doing so,” Sherlock muttered.

John cracked his other eye open and raised a brow, “Is there?”

Sherlock blushed again. “Less likely to kill you, surely.”

John hummed. “But then, if I wanted safe, I wouldn’t be over here on the wrong side of the lake,
now would I?” When Sherlock blinked and didn’t respond, John sighed. “And you keep refusing my
invitations, so…”

Sherlock cleared his throat. “John, I’m not exactly what one might call ‘athletic,’ and while I know
how to and am well able to run, I’ve rather learned from the necessity of being chased throughout my
youth. I’m rude and abrasive and don’t get on well with others and people don’t like me. Particularly
people like your team.”

John’s brow furrowed as he listened to the short rant. “What has my team got to do with it, Sherlock?
I don’t see them around right now, do you?”

“Yes, well. You’ll be going back there. It’s the natural order of things.”

“Natural order? What are you talking about?” he sat up with an agitated huff. Sherlock flushed. He
was never lost for words. Never. Why now? John licked his lips absently. “If you want me to chase
you…”

Oh God. It had to be the heat. It was melting his brain. “C-chase me?” he stammered.

John watched him intently, and Sherlock wasn’t used to the type of scrutiny. It made him shift
nervously. Is this what other people felt when he observed them? No wonder they didn’t like it. John
set him mouth in a fine line and sighed. “Look. I feel like something is getting lost in translation here.
So. If you want me to stop, you’re going to have to tell me.”

“Stop?” Sherlock frowned. “Stop what?”

Irritation and affection, that was the odd combination that flashed across his face. Irritation was one
Sherlock was well used to, but affection… That didn’t make sense. He started to second-guess
himself. John shrugged up a shoulder and gestured vaguely. “Stop… I don’t know, dropping by. If
you really want the solitude, I’ll stop bothering you.”

“You’re not bothering me,” Sherlock said quickly. Well, he was. But not bothering in the bad way.
Not exactly. Sherlock was bothered. Hot and bothered. Shit. It must be the heat. Definitely melting
his brain.

“Right,” John gave a slow nod. “Alright. Then.” He pushed himself to standing and gave Sherlock
another long look. “Come to the bonfire tonight. It’ll be fun.”

Sherlock hesitated. “John…”

“No pressure. Just. You should… come.” John shifted. Why did he look nervous?

“I don’t get on with people.”

“You get on with me,” John countered.

“You’re a person,” Sherlock said pointedly. “I can get on with one person. It’s people that are the
problem. And I’m still not quite sure how it is I get on with you in the first place.”

John gave a small smile. “Maybe because I like you.” That didn’t make sense. Did it? No, certainly
not. What had he possibly offered in the past day that would, in any way, cause John to like him?
He’d been rude and condescending and evasive and… John hopped off the porch and hooked his
fingers in the weave of the hammock, pulling it towards him and Sherlock scrambled to keep from
spilling his drink and from tumbling out of the damn thing. And by the time he was steady, he lifted
his eyes to find John’s face only inches from his. “Come over tonight.”
“I…” John’s eyes were pleading, cobalt, hopeful, lapis lazuli, promising? Sherlock swallowed. “Maybe?”

John cocked a brow and gave a tight nod. “It’s an improvement over no.” Then he grinned and sent the hammock swaying. “Catch you later, Sherlock.”

By the time Sherlock’s head had stopped spinning and the hammock was steady again, John was disappearing back down the road. At least he had a moment to appreciate the departure before John was out of sight. Then Sherlock groaned and flopped backwards in the hammock. So much for peace.

After a while, the outdoors was just too steamy and Sherlock was forced to retreat inside. And he became absorbed in one of his books. And by the time he looked up, his neck was cramped and the sun was low on the horizon. It occurred to him that he’d yet to eat anything of substance, so he set about making a sandwich and sat on the screened back porch with his food and a soda and propped his feet up on the wicker sofa’s cushions and settled in to watch the sunset.

Another day with only the smallest amount of activity would threaten his sleep, but the heat had sapped most of his energy. It was still unbearably hot. Possibly hot enough to warrant an evening swim. But as he stood to change, the sounds of shouts and music and splashes broke the stillness of the night, and Sherlock changed his mind. He couldn’t just go down and swim with a bonfire going on. Well, he could, but he had no intention of going down to the shore with the bonfire going on and swimming across from it when he was trying to avoid it… Well… that was stupid. And Sherlock was not stupid. Besides. He couldn’t really bear the idea of John shunning him at a party. And that would certainly happen the moment Sherlock opened his mouth.

He settled on a cold shower. It washed the stick and sweat from his skin and cooled him enough that he managed a long-sleeved tee and shorts when he emerged. Clean and dry and far less filthy than before, Sherlock returned to the porch and settled in for a long think. He’d been too distracted during the day to file away what he’d been reading, and enough was enough. His mind palace was due a deep clean. He left a light on in the sitting room, but nothing out here; too many bugs. A distant hum was soothing, the constant drone and patter as they smashed into the screens was annoying.

“You make relaxing look easy.”

Sherlock tried not to jump. “John?” He squinted into the penumbra of the outside foliage.

“Can I come in?”

Oh, there he was, just to the left of the door, in dark clothes. “You know, you move awfully quietly in the woods for a city bloke.”

John grinned and his teeth flashed in the dim light. “I’m sneaky. What can I say?”

Sherlock waved him in and he slipped almost silently through the door, removing his hood and running a hand through his hair, though whether to set it right or muss it further was a mystery. “So,” Sherlock took a moment to appreciate the navy of the hoodie against John’s tanned hands, around his face and sun bleached hair. “Sneaking. Why would someone like you be sneaking around up here?”

“Ah you know.” John managed to drop artfully into the narrow space on the sofa not occupied by Sherlock’s feet. “I had a feeling you’d be here. And I thought to myself, if Mohammed won’t come to the mountain…”

Sherlock’s smirked. “You are not a mountain, John.”
“No? You haven’t seen me on a pitch.”

Well that’s an image, Sherlock thought. John Watson on a rugby pitch. In full kit. In the socks and the shorts. And in charge. And Sherlock hummed in amusement at himself. “I have not. Quite an obstacle, are you?”

“When I put my mind to it.”

“And what have you put your mind to now?”

John gave a sly grin and pulled a pair of cans out of his pockets. “Beer?”

“I thought you didn’t like to drink,” Sherlock blurted out.

“Never said I wouldn’t have a beer.” John cracked one of the cans open and handed it to Sherlock. “There’s a difference between having a beer with good company and drinking your face off. One of those is happening here and one of those is happening across the lake.”

Sherlock took the beer with a tight nod. “Ah. Anything else I get wrong?”

“Wrong?” John opened his beer and took a sip.

“Yes, wrong. I’ve been known to be wrong from time to time,” Sherlock huffed in agitation.

John smiled. “You don’t seem like someone who admits to being wrong.” He pursed his lips at the moue of displeasure on Sherlock’s face. “Or who is frequently wrong.”

“Yes, well.” Sherlock waved a hand aimlessly then narrowed his eyes at John. “You’re avoiding my question again.”

John snorted. “Maybe.” He took another sip of his beer. “I do drink, on occasion. But you already got that one. I don’t have a brother, I’ve a sister.”

Sherlock sighed. “Sister.”

“I’m not in the soft sciences either.” John gave him a wry grin. “Unless you consider medicine a soft science. Do you?”

“What kind of medicine?”

John shrugged up a single shoulder. “Dunno yet. Maybe ortho.”

Sherlock snorted. “Meatheads.” He started in on his beer.

“And… I’m thinking about joining the army,” he finished simply. “Hence the training.”


“Oh?” John raised a brow.

Sherlock nudged his toes under John’s thigh. “Clearly.” The corner of John’s mouth twitched. “It’s escapism. You think you don’t like command now. You think you’re angry now, but wait until you’re saddled with a horrible CO and you’re not allowed to argue with them. There are better ways to diffuse your temper. Less stupid. Less... Deadly.”
John sighed and dropped his head onto the back of the couch, closing his eyes. “Making decisions is exhausting sometimes, Sherlock. Don’t you get it?”

“You want someone to boss you around?” Sherlock raised a brow. “I can be bossy.”

John smiled without opening his eyes. “I bet you are.”

The distant light from the sitting room backlit him, casting a warm halo about his blond hair, the slight upturn of his nose and crest of his cheekbones glowed golden with his tan, even his eyelashes held an untenable, delicate auric gilt. And the bob of his adam’s apple as he swallowed. It was unbearably “I can,” Sherlock insisted.

John’s teeth flashed as he rocked his head to the side and cracked an eye open. “I don’t doubt it,” John closed one warm palm around Sherlock’s ankle and dragged his feet one at a time across his lap. His fingers wrapping around his shin and pressing rhythmically into the soft skin of his calves. “Why are you here on your own?”

“What makes you think I’m here on my own?” Sherlock bit back the urge to sigh at the impromptu massage. God that felt good.

John raised a brow and cast a sly glance towards the heart of the cottage then expertly prodded the arch of Sherlock’s foot, eliciting a loud squeal. John looked a bit surprised at the ferocity of the reaction, but settled back on the couch, holding both of Sherlock’s leg firmly to his lap. “I suppose your parents will come kick me out now,” he sighed resignedly.

“Fine,” Sherlock hissed, catching his breath. “I’m here on my own.”

John grinned. “And you’re avoiding my question now. Why are you here on your own?”

Sherlock frowned. Because people are intolerable. Because his family was insufferable. Because he needed to breathe and think and escape the din of stupid thought that interrupted his every moment. “Because…”

John tilted his head. “For someone who is so ticklish and in such a compromised position, you’re awfully stubborn.”

Sherlock went to snap his feet back, but John’s grip was firm and sure. “Don’t.”

John hummed in consideration and finished the dregs of his beer, setting the empty can on the end table. “So?” He picked up Sherlock’s right foot and dug his thumbs into the sole of his foot.

Sherlock groaned. That. Just keep doing that. “So?”

It was the perfect amount of pressure, pressing along his tendons and ligaments. It was soothing and teasing at once. “Why are you here all by your lonesome?”

“Why do you think?”

John’s fingers did something complicated along the dorsum of his foot, sliding between the delicate bones in a counter pressure to his thumbs at the ball of his foot. “Because I think you find people exhausting.”

“Mnn,” Sherlock flexed his toes. “Then why do I let you over?”

John smirked, letting his grip ease over Sherlock’s ankle so he could dig into the calf muscle easily.
“Because I’m not people. I’m just one person.”

Sherlock felt the blush suffuse his cheeks. He didn’t think John had been listening. Maybe he was hoping he’d been trying not to hear. But no, John heard. John had paid attention. Why was he paying attention? “Maybe.”

John replaced the right foot on his lap in favor of picking up the left, and started in with equal attention, manipulating the joints and flesh with a casual ease. “There’s no maybe. I know that look. You have, what? A gaggle of family about to invade your Uni space for graduation and you’d rather they just… not.”

And how would he know that? How could he just… Oh. Because he felt the same way. Because with those parents and that br-sister, who would want them rubbing their tarnish on the hard won achievements? And sure, Mycroft would sniff and look down his nose at what Sherlock had done, after all, it had taken Sherlock one year longer to manage the masters. And mummy would just pat his head and say well done and ask what he would do now, as though there was more he needed to do for approval. Sherlock felt the furrow appear between his brows. “Yeah. Yes. That.”

John’s smile looked forced as he set Sherlock’s foot back in his lap. “Well, you know what they say.”

“No…” Sherlock shook his head slowly. “What do they say?”

“Smile because they’re your family.” The flash of mischief was back when John grinned this time. “Laugh because there’s nothing they can do about it.”

Sherlock chuckled. “Interesting.”

“See, you’ve got the hang of it already.” John gave his legs one last squeeze and shifted to stand. “I ought to get back.”

“Why?” Sherlock sat up, feeling the loss of warmth instantly. “They’re adults.”

John gave him a wry smile. “Not really. And I need to keep an eye on them, make sure they don’t burn the place down, or get themselves in trouble.”

“Oh,” he tried not to pout. He probably failed. He definitely failed. That wasn’t like him.

John planted a hand on the back of the couch and leaned in close, trapping Sherlock in the corner. “Don’t pout; you can join me for yoga tomorrow.”

“I’m not pouting,” Sherlock objected instantly.

Any other words he had dried up as John’s eyes flicked down to his lips and back up to meet his gaze. “Sure you’re not.” And John chucked him lightly under the chin and stepped back, heading for the door. “Sleep well, Sherlock.”

“John?” Sherlock managed to muster enough thought to get out the name and then realized he didn’t have a question. Shit. Shit shit shit. John paused with his hand on the door. “Um. Tomorrow? Same time?”

“Sure thing.”

Then John was gone out the door. Sherlock tracked him with his eyes for as long as the shock of blond hair was visible, then he was out of sight and Sherlock heaved a sigh and flopped backwards.
on the couch. There was no chance of sleeping now.

Sherlock woke feeling slightly damp. Mostly because he’d fallen asleep on the sofa and the humidity was oppressive, but even with the minimal air movement, he’d been sweating. This heatwave needed to break. He rolled off the couch and stretched, the dim light belying the hour. Sherlock squinted out towards the lake. It was overcast, grey and humid, the damp making the air heavy. He groaned. The weather would be damn near insufferable until it rained.

He changed into his swim trunks and brewed himself a pot of coffee. He could bring it down to the lake. Though today, he knew he’d need it. He collected a towel and a book, though he had no intention of reading, and headed down to the dock. It was too hot for fog. It was too hot to rain. But the clouds were low and thick, the air still, the lake placid, and it had the bugs buzzing and swarming. Like moving through molasses. Gross. He’d only just spread out his towel when he heard a loud splash. It was the first thing that’d given him cause to smile today. He was sitting on the edge of the dock by the time John reached the ladder. “Good morning.”

John pulled himself out of the water easily and shook himself like a dog, spraying droplets everywhere. Sherlock frowned in irritation until he caught sight of John’s broad smile. “Mornin.”

“You look rested,” Sherlock muttered, reaching for the coffee and taking a sip.

John laughed. “Somewhat. It’s bloody miserably today.”

“Mmn,” Sherlock agreed, offering the thermos.


“You’re the one going into medicine,” Sherlock muttered.

“Nuh uh,” John pulled the thermos away and set it on the edge of the dock. “Yoga first. Then a swim. Then coffee.” Sherlock stuck out his lower lip and John chuckled. “C’mon, up you get.”

Sherlock grudgingly rose and watched as John adjusted the towel. “Should I go grab another one?”

“Hm? No, don’t worry.” John held up his hands. “Calluses.”

Sherlock snorted. “Don’t complain when you get a splinter.”

“Yeah, yeah.” John took three large strides from the edge of the dock and turned around, facing out toward the water. “Ok, ready?”

“Ready?” Sherlock cocked his head.

John shook his head with a laugh. “Yoga. Are you even awake?”

“Probably not.” Sherlock was feeling a bit groggy. He shouldn’t have slept on the couch.

John sighed and pulled Sherlock’s towel an extra few feet back and gestured to the edge. “Just follow me, yeah?” Sherlock gave a nod and took up his spot on the towel. It made it possible for him to watch John and copy the movements, or just watch… “Deep breath in and…” John swung his arms out and up, “Mountain.” Sherlock watched as John tilted easily into a forward bend, “And half lift.”

Sherlock grunted. “It is embarrassing how flexible you are.”

John chuckled. “Are you not bendy? Hop back into plank. Hold it.”
He huffed. He was reasonably flexible, just not recently practiced at it. “Bendy? Is that a technical term?”

“It’s a medical term,” John giggled. “And chaturanga, push into up dog.”

“What’s up dog?” Sherlock murmured.

John twisted to look over his shoulder and stifled an all out laugh. “Hush.” Sherlock grinned and bit his lip to keep from chuckling, stretching himself up and arching his back. “That’s better,” John muttered. “And tuck your toes, and push back into down dog.”

Sherlock pressed into his hands and dropped his heels. The humidity was making him sweat already, but the heat was making it easy on his joints. He lifted his head and tried not to choke on his own tongue. Well, that was a fabulous view. He wondered how long he could get away with staring.

“And step forward with your right leg, up into warrior two.”

The movements were perfectly fluid and balanced. And in spite of the shimmer of sweat breaking out across John’s skin, he wasn’t breathing hard. It was controlled power. And it was beautiful. And Sherlock started to wonder if he’d survive a full cycle of sun salutation. He managed two before he was watching the path of sweat tracing down John’s spine. Good God, yoga was not supposed to be sexy.

“How are your balance poses?”

“Hm?” Sherlock pulled his head up from his plank. “Balance?”

“Up,” John huffed, hopping forward to meet his hands and rising into mountain pose. “Vrksasana.” Sherlock watched as John turned out his hip and tucked his foot high up his thigh and stretched his arms up and back. “If I turn around are you doing this? Or are you still just staring?”

Sherlock flushed. “I’m doing this.” And he scrambled to match the pose, wobbling a bit on his left leg. When they switched sides, it turned out that he was better on his right.

“And down,” John returned to center in a controlled, measured way. Sherlock stumbled out of the pose. “What about dancer’s pose,” John offered, stepping back to bring himself in line with Sherlock. “You ever try that one before?”

“I doubt it.”

“You’ll be fine.” John gave him an easy smile. “Hand out at your side. Then bring your foot up and catch the instep in your palm.” John paused and frowned at him. “No, the instep.”

Sherlock tried again.

“No… Sherlock, your instep. Stop turning your hand.”

Sherlock sighed and tried again.

“No,” John closed his hand gently around Sherlock’s wrist. “Here, now foot.” Once Sherlock had a grip on his foot, John didn’t leave, he just moved around to his other side. “Good. Now, this arm up. Chin up.” Sherlock swallowed and tried not to tremble as John’s fingers skimmed his spine. “Ok, so you’re going to stretch up and out with this arm and kick back into your hand. Nice and slow.”

Oh shit. He wobbled.
John’s hands grabbed his hips and steadied him. “Stay grounded. Don’t dip. Nice and straight.” He rested a hand on Sherlock’s sternum. “Lead here. Hinge at the hip only when you have to. Press back into your palm.”

Sherlock squeaked as he lost his focus again, rocking dangerously to the side.

John chuckled. “Stop, stop. Relax.” He waited for Sherlock to return to standing.

“This is hopeless,” Sherlock muttered. His balance was fine. It was the concentration. That was the problem.


He frowned at John, meeting the challenge in his gaze with skepticism. “Right. That was my problem.”

“You want me to bend over?” John raised a brow. “Seemed to keep your attention before.” Sherlock flushed instantly, but couldn’t bring himself to deny it. He stared at John resolutely. John nodded and shifted so he was perfectly in front of him. “Now.” He replaced his palm on Sherlock’s sternum. “Lead here. Press back into your palm.”

Sherlock wondered if it was a trick of the light, the reflection of the overcast sky, but John’s eyes looked grey today. A French blue, denim and periwinkle. Like the weather controlled his moods. It looked like a brewing storm. John was murmuring something, but it took a moment for Sherlock to hear.

“And slow breaths.”

He took a long breath in.

“Good and let your hip drop in line.”

Oh, that was more comfortable.

“Good. That’s really good.”

Sherlock blinked. What was good? Him? Oh. He was rather deep into the position, his belly nearly parallel with the dock. That shouldn’t allow his center of gravity… Oh. OH SHIT!

He felt his weight shift too far out on his hip and tried to drop his leg in time, but he’d never make it. John, however, seemed to be expecting it, and his arm shot out, wrapping around Sherlock’s back as he twisted and swung his leg, catching him before he could hit the dock. Sherlock blinked up at him. John grinned. “I gotcha.”

Sherlock blinked again and cautiously eased the grip he had on John’s forearms. “Excellent reflexes.”

John burst out laughing. “You’re a lunatic.” John’s laugh devolved into giggles and he carefully dropped Sherlock to the dock in order to double over in mirth. Sherlock had to chuckle along, it was just too silly not to. It was another two minutes before John caught his breath and flopped over onto his back. “Ok. Ok. Enough yoga.”

Sherlock hummed. “You’re the one that wanted to try that.”
John snickered. “I did. I did.” He sighed and scrubbed at his face. “And you looked fucking stunning.”

“What?”

John huffed out a small laugh and cleared his throat. “Yeah. I have to get back. Roust the layabouts. Make them clean up before the run.”

Sherlock sat up sharply. “Clean up?”

“Yeah,” John scratched the back of head. “We’re done tomorrow first thing. They’ve to get back. Some pre-season, friendly, exhibition match day after tomorrow.”

“You’re going tomorrow?” Sherlock echoed.

“Well I…” John shook his head. “I mean, I don’t have to be back for the match. Just. That’s the rental done.”

“Oh.” Sherlock frowned and looked out across the lake. “So.” That was… unsatisfactory.

“How long are you staying?”

“Another ten days,” Sherlock answered flatly.


“You’re going on a run though?” Sherlock asked hopefully.

“Hmm?” John glanced over, seeming distracted. “Oh, yeah. Course. Probably will make it a bit fun, but yeah. Definitely. Mid morning or so.” He smiled, but it was tight around the edges of his eyes. “You planning on joining us?”

It was a hesitant nod, but Sherlock found himself agreeing. “Yeah. I will.”

“Brilliant.”

And Sherlock believed him. It could have been a casual comment, but John didn’t just throw away words. He felt the color creep into his cheeks. “I should probably get something to eat first.”

“Alright.” John grinned properly. “I’ll see you… soon.”

“Mmn,” Sherlock smiled back. “Soon.”

He had watched John swim back across the lake. He’d watched John pull himself up onto the dock and dry off. And he’d ducked his head and waved back when John caught him watching. He’d collected his things and returned to the cottage, made a sandwich, and had his coffee and food. He’d changed into running clothes and stashed his kicks by the door. And then he’d grown impatient. So he flopped out in the hammock, in the grey day, and tried to read. He managed to drink some water, but the words on the page danced around, the heat or the distraction making it impossible to parse their meaning.

“Holmes? You home?”
Sherlock felt his mouth quirk into a grin. He’d never been excited about running before. He slid out of the hammock and crammed his feet into his shoes, trotting out to the road to meet John and the oncoming team. John was, as per usual, out front by a good couple hundred meters. But strangely, he was also carrying a rugby ball. “John,” Sherlock gave a nod and ran a hand through his curls.

He slowed to a stop and grinned up at Sherlock. “Glad you could make it.” He turned back down the path, waiting for the team to catch up. “Lads,” he called as the dozen other rugby players made it to the crest of the hill. “This is Sherlock, Sherlock, this sorry mess is my former team.”

One of them planted hands on hips and glared, “Oi! Just because some of us had a bit of fun last night.”

John smiled rather ruthlessly. “You better get used to running, Tom, this is rugby life. Fun or not.”

The next to arrive huffed out a laugh. “You’re a masochist, Captain.”

“Maybe a sadist,” another one added.

John cocked a brow, but Sherlock smirked. “And you are all hedonists. I thought we were going for a run?”

“Quite right.” He spun the ball in his hands. “How do you all fancy a game of keep away? Whomever gets back with the ball wins.”

There was a small series of groans. “No one can catch you though.” That was amusing. Most of the lads had at least six inches on John. Then again, height didn’t equate to speed.

“Oh.” John frowned comically. “That’s sad.” He tapped the tip of the ball against his chin. “Sherlock?” He raised his brows.

“What?” Sherlock blinked. Sherlock what?

John tossed him the ball. “We’ll give you a ten second lead.” Then he grinned. “Told you I would chase you.”

“Me?” Wait. Chase him. Like, through the woods?

“Pretty straight shot to the other cottage. You’ll know it for all the cars.” John turned back to the team. “No more than a hundred meters off the road. You catch, you get the ball and five seconds. Two hand touch. Winner gets… Out of cleanup after the bonfire tonight.” There was a ripple of approving murmurs. John winked at Sherlock. “Ten.”

“Ten?” Ten what?

“Nine,” John bobbed his head. “I’d start running if I were you. Eight.”

“Oh,” shit. Sherlock took off at a fast jog, listening to the countdown behind him. Seven. Six. Five. He’d stay on the road. It’d move faster. It was a direct path. It made the most sense. Two. One.

“Go!”

He heard the thunder of feet coming after him. Gaining. No. He’d have to run faster. For a brief moment, he wondered how long he could sustain a sprint. They were catching up. He’d have to sprint. He kicked into a higher gear and chanced a quick look over his shoulder. Only about four of them looked to be keeping pace. John was one of them… And he wasn’t even trying. Sherlock
puffed and tried to push faster, but three sets of feet were still closing the distance. Ok, he couldn’t out run them. Maybe he could out maneuver them. He swerved off the path into the woods, heading uphill first, using his light weight to his advantage.

There was a cutoff curse and a few muffled swears as the crunch of leaves and the slip of treads on the damp ground pursued him. Sherlock ducked down and around a few trees as he switched directions and backtracked, gaining momentum downhill and burst across the path behind the remainder of the team. He couldn’t bite back the amused whoop as he dashed into the forest on the other side of the road, shouts and laughter following him into the trees as more than half of them followed. He wove through the trees, changing directions often due to the obstacles in his path rather than those chasing him. He’d managed to put a good few hundred yards between himself and the lads as he darted back up onto the road with a chuckle.

“Enjoying yourself?”

Sherlock let out a startled eep as John eased up beside him.

“A g’wan, Sherlock. Don’t make it too easy.” John flashed him a grin.

Teasing. John was teasing him. He could have caught him from the get-go. It was a game though. Sherlock blew him a raspberry and veered sharply, heading straight up into the forest again at an all out sprint. John chased after him. For his size, John was incredibly agile, changing directions almost effortlessly on the unpredictable terrain. Right, so. Sherlock ducked his head and tried to outrun him, weaving around the trunks and ducking under branches, and after a moment, he didn’t hear John behind him. Maybe he’d lost him. He could hear some of the lads down on the main road, and someone way back in the woods, bumbling along. But John wasn’t behind him anymore.

“Gotchya.”

Sherlock tried to stop, but he was going too fast, his feet slipping on a particularly slick patch of leaves. Oh no. He was going to smash into that tree rather hard. He grimaced and threw out his free hand to try to stop the impending fall.

A firm hand grabbed his forearm as his feet went out from under him. His body changed direction, and for a moment, Sherlock thought he’d land on his head instead of his bum, but a strong arm wrapped around his waist and he came to a sharp stop inches from the tree, hovering over the ground. “I gotchya.” John grinned down at him. “Again.”

Sherlock huffed out a nervous laugh. “That was about to end poorly.”

“We have to stop meeting this way,” John winked and pulled him to his feet, propping him against the trunk of the tree with a steady hand on his chest when his legs didn’t quite seem stable.

Sherlock was only a little bit pleased that John was actually breathing heavily, not outright panting the way Sherlock was, but he’d had to work hard to catch him. And the way his chest was heaving, his face flushed with exertion, his eyes sparkling with amusement. Well, that just made his legs less likely to cooperate. “So. What do you win?”

The corner of John’s mouth twitched backward. “Hold that thought.” He snatched the ball from Sherlock and let out a shrill whistle, shouting down at the road. “Mike! You’re up!” Then the ball sailed neatly between the branches to one of the lads on the path. There was a flurry of shouts and shuffles and the near ruck of them was off at a run again. John turned back to Sherlock, his eyes lit, and a broad grin stretching across his face. “Now, what was that about me winning?”
Sherlock chewed on his lower lip for a moment. “Your game, your rules?”

John watched Sherlock’s mouth with interest, his tongue peeking out before the smile settled back where it belonged. “My game?” He raised a brow. Sherlock nodded, letting himself relax against the tree, his breath returning, but the color in his cheeks staying bright and hot. John stepped closer, leaning into his personal space. “My rules?” Sherlock nodded, willing John to come just a bit closer. He was so close, he could feel the heat radiating off of him. John’s head tilted slightly. “Shouldn’t you be, I don’t know,” John met his gaze and Sherlock’s brain spun out trying to name the colors. Cobalt? Columbia, Persian, Carolina, Royal, Ultramarine. “Upset that you lost?”

Sherlock blinked as John tilted his chin up. Tufts. Azure. Midnight. Steel. “I didn’t lose,” he hissed, grabbing a fistful of John’s tee shirt and dragging him forward the last inch so he could press his lips against John’s. He saw John’s eyes go wide, but then they fluttered closed as John’s hands, his wonderful, strong, work-worn hands were on his hips, gripping, holding him back against the tree as John leaned in, pressing their chests together and parting his lips. Sherlock couldn’t hold back the moan as John’s tongue slid along the seam of his mouth, dipping in to slide against his own. This wasn’t losing. This was definitely not losing. One of John’s hands released his hip to wind fingers in Sherlock’s curls and Sherlock whined into the John’s mouth. Panting as John finally broke the kiss, resting his forehead against Sherlock’s.

“You’re a lunatic,” John whispered.

Sherlock chuckled, loving the way he could feel it against John’s skin.

“We could have done this last night,” John continued. “With a comfortable and private couch.”

Sherlock laughed harder. “Where’s the fun in that?”

“Nutter,” John giggled, easing himself free of Sherlock’s hands and catching his breath. “Now we’ll never catch up with them.”

“You want to finish the run?” Sherlock smirked. “And you call me crazy.”

“My game, my rules.” John grinned and poked Sherlock’s shoulder deliberately. “You’re it.” Then he took off for the road at a dead sprint.

Sherlock heaved a sigh and closed his eyes. Peace and quiet. He’d wanted peace and quiet. God dammit. Now he wanted to grab a handful of John’s arse and he certainly didn’t want to be quiet about it. Well, he’d have to catch him first, it seemed. With a growl, Sherlock pushed off the tree and tore off after John. They weren’t trying to catch the ball anymore. John was trying to keep himself away from Sherlock and Sherlock was doing nothing by trying to catch him. Damn but he was quick. By the time Sherlock caught up with him, he was back at the rugby cottage and flopped flat on his back in the grass. Sherlock collapsed next to him and blinked up at the blue-grey, cloud covered sky.

John sighed and giggled. “Well that was a fun game.”

Sherlock groaned. “You didn’t get the ball though.”

“I’ll have to help them clean anyway. Bunch of slobs. No point in pretending.” John folded his hands across his belly and chuckled as a few drops fell from the saturated sky, landing heavy and wet on his chest and forehead.

“What’ll they do if the bonfire is rained out?”
“Party inside.” John twisted to smile at Sherlock. “Hopefully without the fire bit.”

Sherlock huffed out a laugh. “Hopefully.” It felt as though the rain was waiting, holding back, just the occasional heavy drop escaping to land in the grass.

The sound of footfalls grew louder and John pushed himself up onto his elbows, watching the pack of lads approach. “Looks like Murray has it,” John murmured absently. Sherlock watched as the one in the lead dove with the ball, marking a fake try on the grass.

Murray let out a loud, victorious whoop as he rose and held the ball out to John with a wide smile. “Captain to Captain!”

John stood and took the ball, clapping Murray on the back. “I’m leaving them in good hands, so.” Murray grinned, dropping an arm around John’s shoulders as Tom and Mike joined him. Oh. Oh no. Sherlock saw it happening just before John noticed and all three lads grabbed him. Tom and Murray each took an arm and shoulder and Mike hoisted up his ankles as John let out an indignant squawk. “Oi!” John shouted. “No! No, no, no! Put me down!”

Murray threw his head back and laughed. “You know the rules!” They headed for the dock.

“Bill, No! Put me down!” John flailed uselessly between them.

Sherlock scrambled up off of the lawn and chased after with the rest of the lads. Halfway there, Sherlock stooped and collected John’s shoes from where they’d been knocked off, setting them off to the side and following the crowd to the dock.

“Come on! Bill!” John pleaded. “Mike! I’ve always been nice to you!”

“And with the old! In with the new!” Murray shouted. And the entire team started to chant as they reached the end of the dock. Murray took John’s other arm from Tom and between himself and Mike, they started swinging John out over the water.

“Guys! Please!”

“One!”

“No! Don’t you dare!”

“Two!”

“I swear to GOD!”

“Three!”

And John was airborne. He hit the water with a large splash and the entire team cheered. Sherlock gaped, pushing towards the edge of the dock. He’d been right. Meatheads. All of them. John surfaced with a sputter and a glare.

“Out with the old!” Murray called.

“In with the new!” the team responded.

Then a smile broke over John’s face. And he started laughing. Treading water and laughing. Sherlock almost sighed with relief. He didn’t fancy a fight. He didn’t want to see John upset. And he certainly didn’t want to be on his own in a crowd of people he didn’t know. John made his way back to the edge of the dock and grinned up at Murray. “Alright, give me a hand.”
“Aye, Sir!” Murray beamed, squatting and sticking out a hand for John. It was quick. So quick, Sherlock nearly missed it. John winked at him. He winked, grinned, and surged up to grab Bill’s hand and yanked, pulling the larger man down into the water with shout and a splash.

“In with the new!” John crowed. Another cheer erupted from the dock as Murray surfaced with a laugh. Sherlock huffed out a laugh as Mike leapt off the dock of his own volition, cannonballing into the water and spraying half the lads left on land.

Sherlock smiled and took a step back. He knew when he was out of his depth. These weren’t his friends. They weren’t really his people. He’d just make his way back across the lake… And his back collided with something solid and immoveable. He twisted around to see Tom standing there, a wicked smile on his face. Sherlock gulped, he may have squealed a bit, and with a mighty shove, he was falling backwards into the water.

He broke the surface with a sputter, swiping his curls out of his eyes with one hand as he tried to get his bearings. Everyone was in the water now; all of them, running gear and all. And the air was filled with shouts and splashes and whoops and hollers. Finally finding the ladder, he headed for it and the relative safety of dry land when a firm weight latched onto his back. Sherlock choked out a shriek and then he was dunked back under the water. He flailed and kicked back up with a gasp, coming face to face with a beaming John Watson.

“Got you too, did they? C’mon. It’s about to lash.” John led the way back to the ladder and out onto the dock where he stood, hands on his hips, glaring at the planks and the nearby shoreline.

Sherlock tried to wring out his shirt. “What’s wrong?”

“Shoes,” John pursed his lips. “I had them…”

“Up by the bench,” Sherlock gestured with his chin as he gave up on the shirt. The rain was starting in earnest. Big drops splatting on the wood and into the lake.

John looked up at the sky with a sigh, “I hate being right.”

Sherlock chuckled. “At least I don’t have to worry about getting wet going home.”

John just smiled and shook his head. “I’m not making you walk home like that. I don’t care how well worn those trainers are, they’ll give you blisters soaking wet like that.” He tilted his head up toward the house. “Come on.”

Sherlock trailed after him as he collected his shoes and paused to rinse himself under the outdoor shower. He waited patiently for the three minutes John was inside, and when he returned, he was dressed in navy cargo shorts and his navy hoodie again. He jingled a set of keys from his index finger and pointed at a beat up car. “You don’t have to,” Sherlock held up a hand. “I mean… This is your… Thing.”

John popped the boot and tossed a towel at Sherlock. “My thing? Didn’t you hear them?” The rain became rather steady as he made it to the driver’s side and unlocked the doors. “Out with the old.” Sherlock slipped hesitantly into the passenger seat. “Besides, they’ll be messing in the lake for an hour.”

Sherlock furrowed his brow and tilted his head to catch a glimpse of the sky. “I rather doubt it. This is a proper storm that’s been brewing for a week.” John grumbled and turned up the wipers. It was really coming down. It took an extra few minutes to reach Sherlock’s cottage due to the volume of rain, and when John pulled up as close to the porch as he dared, he squinted at the rain. “You should
stay here,” Sherlock said flatly over the sound of water pelting the bonnet and roof of the car. “There’ll be deep puddles and the visibility is horribly poor.”

John’s face scrunched. “I’m not intruding?”

“No.” Sherlock flashed a grin and darted out of the car, racing for the shelter of the porch. He was pleased to hear John close behind and he paused to slip off his shoes just inside the door. He smiled as John did the same. “I’m just going to grab a quick shower. Uh,” he waved a hand at the kitchen. “Make yourself at home.” He waited for John to nod, then ducked into the bedroom. It wasn’t that he fancied leaving John alone, it was the idea of the lake water drying in his hair. Needless to say, it was a quick and Spartan shower, a few moments to throw on pants and his shorts and a button down, and Sherlock was padding back into the sitting room, running a towel over his hair.

He stopped a few strides into the room. It was quiet beyond the din of the rain. John was staring out the front windows at the rain, elbows propped up on the sill, chin in his hands, his hood down, and hair sticking out in messy chunks. Something about it made him seem… small, young. He looked like the rain was keeping him indoors. Like... Cat in the hat. Sherlock smiled; it was adorable. A bright flash of lightning streaked across the visible clouds and loud clap of thunder rattled the panes of glass. John jumped back as though he’d be burned. Oh.

He tossed the towel aside and cleared his throat. “All clean.”

John spun around, his fingers tucked up in the sleeves of his hoodie. “God. Sherlock.” He frowned. “You said I was sneaky…”

“No,” Sherlock hummed. “You said you were sneaky. I said you moved quietly. Besides, you’re the one that managed to cut around me in the woods like a ruddy cat.” He took his time crossing to the front door, pushing open the screen and stepping out on the porch. “I love storms,” he murmured.

John followed as far as the threshold. “Oh yeah?”

“Mmn,” Sherlock nodded. He did. The rhythm of the rain on different resonate surfaces, the change with wind and obstacles, the Doppler of thunder, the charge of lightning. It was fascinating and soothing. “That’s really what the hammock is for.”

“The hammock?”

Sherlock held out a hand, beckoning John out onto the porch. When John didn’t immediately come outside, Sherlock frowned and caught his hand, pulling him outside. “It’s a great place to watch the rain, John. Come over here.”

John followed rather cautiously, his socked feet side-stepping as many of the damp patches of wood as possible. “How do you even get two people onto one of those?”

Sherlock considered it for a moment. If John got on first, he could… No. If he got on first and then pulled… No. It was nearly too high for John to even climb into it carefully. Maybe if they got a running start, and… No. He sighed and looked at John. “Really there is only one way.”

“Oh?”

“Do you trust me?” John furrowed his brow but gave a curt nod. Sherlock grinned. He wrapped both arms and one leg around John and tumbled them both backwards onto the hammock, rolling to try to find center as quickly as possible.

“Ak!” John let out a bark of protest, his hands fumbling against Sherlock’s shoulders as he scrambled
for purchase, finally managing to dig his fingers into the weave of the hammock and spread his knees wide overtop Sherlock’s hips. The hammock swung violently for a moment before slowing and John glared down at Sherlock. “Was that necessary?”

“Nope.” He popped the stop-plosive at the end, watching the flash of irritation melt off of Johns face. He was trying not to laugh, that was what he was doing. And Sherlock really wanted to hear him laugh. “I’ve never tried that before. Couldn’t be sure it would work. I’m just glad this old thing managed to support our combined weight.”

“I’m sorry, what?” John hissed. Sherlock smiled prettily. John frowned and Sherlock broke into a wide grin. It wasn’t an outright lie. Sherlock never had tried anything like that before. And while he’d done the calculations in his head, he couldn’t be truly sure until they tested the supports. Then again, Sherlock was very rarely wrong. And in the face of Sherlock’s grin, John lost his battle with laughter, breaking out in a fit of giggles that forced him to drop his forehead against Sherlock’s collarbone. Sherlock joined in, deep rumbling chuckles escaping him. “You,” John rocked his forehead against Sherlock’s shoulder. “Are a raving lunatic.”

Sherlock hummed and brought his arms up, smoothing his palms down John’s back to feel the last of the laughter vibrate through the cotton of his hoodie. “And you decided to trust me, so what does that make you?”

“Either arse over tits or incredibly stupid,” he answered into Sherlock’s shirt collar.

“Stupid?” Sherlock wrinkled his nose, risking letting his fingers wander into the soft hair at the nape of John’s neck. “I wouldn’t bother wasting my time with a moron.”

John pressed back up onto his hands and raised a brow. “That so?”

“Clearly,” he couldn’t keep a smile from tugging at the corners of his mouth. “Though, I’m rapidly reconsidering given the distance you’re keeping at the moment. Highly unsatisfactory.”

“What?”

John’s sigh bordered on a groan as he met the kiss gently. Sherlock hummed his approval, yes, kissing, good. More of this. He nipped at John’s lips, threading his fingers through John’s hair, holding him close so he could dip his tongue between kiss-swollen lips. Another loud boom of thunder cracked overhead and John pulled back with a start, his spine tensing, eyes going wide. After a moment, he let out a self-conscious huff, his cheeks flushing. “Sorry,” he wet his lips nervously, wrinkling his nose. “Don’t… I don’t really like thunder.”

No. It wasn’t the thunder. It had been rolling and rumbling in the background for the past few minutes. It was the bang. The sudden and loud of it. The vibration through the ground and the way it rattled the windowpanes. And it didn’t just startle him, it put him on edge, on alert, like he was bracing for impact. Or a hit. Oh. Sherlock only just held back the flinch as he saw it for what it was.
He tilted his head. “You know what would show that thunder?”

John narrowed his eyes, but bit his lower lip and shook his head.

“Get rid of the hoodie,” Sherlock said firmly. “Before I tie knots into the end of those sleeves.”

John’s tongue crept out over his lower lip as his eyes went dark. “You are bossy.”

Sherlock bit back a laugh and snaked one hand under the cotton to trace the waistband of John’s shorts. “I believe I mentioned that before.” John sat back on his heels and the tops of Sherlock’s thighs, and the heat of where they touched thick and heavy. John tugged the hoodie off, grinning as Sherlock snatched it from his fingers and balled it up for use as a pillow, returning his palms to run up the muscles of John’s thighs. For the briefest moment, Sherlock was disappointed that John had bothered to wear anything under the hoodie, but the stark white, snug tee shirt set such a lovely contrast against John’s tanned skin that Sherlock found it even more enticing than a bare chest would have been.

John tilted his head to the side. “What?” When Sherlock didn’t answer, I mean, how could he? He was a bit stunned. John gave a self-conscious huff, “Problem? My hair ok?”

Sherlock clutched John’s wrist before he could do anything like attempt to right the mussed hair. He could feel the flush in his cheeks and tried to ignore it, trying to make John blush in return just by staring at him. “Leave it.” He released John’s hand to catch his chin and pulled him gently back down. “The only problem is that you repeatedly stop with the kissing.”

John’s lips pulled into a smile that Sherlock tasted with his tongue, and John hummed a rumbling approval. For nearly ten whole seconds, Sherlock was in charge of the kiss. Then he discovered that John Watson kissed the way he lived his life, as if it were something to be perfected and controlled and performed with gusto and a hint of danger. And he buried a hand in Sherlock’s curls and tilted his head just so and Sherlock’s toes curled. And he gasped in a breath as John slid his lips across Sherlock’s cheek, scraping teeth along his jaw, and nipping at Sherlock’s earlobe. “Alright, bossy. What else?”

Sherlock rocked his hips up against John’s, drawing a gorgeous groan from him as he plucked at John’s tee shirt. “Take this off too.”

John started laying open-mouthed kisses down the side of Sherlock’s neck, across his collarbone, pressing his tongue to Sherlock’s sternum. Oh. Sneaky bugger. He hadn’t noticed. He shivered as John’s knuckles grazed his abdomen, skin on skin as he freed the last buttons of the shirt. “Just mine?” John raised a brow, his mouth hovering over Sherlock’s chest.

“Everything,” Sherlock murmured. “Take everything off.” John chuckled and started paying rather close attention to Sherlock’s nipple, licking, sucking, then blowing a cool stream of air across it. “You’re a horrible tease.”

“We are outside, Sherlock Holmes.” He switched sides, pinching the hardened nub between his teeth before pulling back. “In a hammock.” His thumbs pressed into the soft skin along the inside of Sherlock’s hipbones as he rolled his pelvis down. “In a thunder storm.” Sherlock couldn’t find fault with any of his observations, just the conclusion. “I’m not stripping naked. You lunatic.”

“Afraid of pervy deer?” Sherlock started rucking John’s shirt up towards his armpits.

John giggled as Sherlock’s fingers found a sensitive patch of skin over his ribs. Then he sobered quickly and tried to look stern. “Pervy deer, dear?”
Sherlock growled and grabbed John’s hips, pulling himself to sitting so that John had to drop further onto his lap. John let out a soft eep and grabbed Sherlock’s shoulders as the movement sent the hammock swinging violently. “I promise to protect your modesty from lascivious Cervidae.” He took advantage of John’s distraction and tugged the tee shirt over his head.

It wasn’t the first time Sherlock had seen John without his shirt. It wasn’t even the second time. But suddenly presented with the tanned, toned expanse of John’s chest, Sherlock’s thoughts spun out and he bit down on his lip to keep from letting himself gape. His hands, however, had no such reservations and he quickly found himself with one handful of rather firm arse and a separate fist full of golden hair. He let his legs fall open just enough that John’s knees had to grip at his hips to keep from slipping into the sag of the hammock. And that, quite rightly, brought the neat lines of John’s neck to mouth height. And nothing was going to keep Sherlock from sinking his teeth into that.

“Fuck,” John groaned.

“Later,” Sherlock murmured, nipping his way up the muscle of John’s neck to the corner of his jaw. Not enough space. Unacceptable. He tugged with both hands, dragging John’s head back, exposing the soft skin under the solid line of bone. He nudged that spot with his nose first, taking a deep breath, filling his head with the smell of John before nudging with his lips then his tongue then his teeth.

And the breath punched out of John as his fingers dug into the meat of Sherlock’s shoulders. “God, Sherlock.” Sherlock’s lips stretched into a smile before he bit down, pulling a choked off gasp from deep in John’s throat. “Sonuva… Bloody… Shit…” John huffed and drew back from the gentle press of tongue Sherlock was laving against the mark he’d left.

Sherlock blinked up at him. Oh no. What if he’d gone too far? What if John didn’t like… Oh. John’s eyes were a deep navy, dark enough to match that damn hoodie, and his pupils were blown wide, his cheeks flushed an enticing pink. Oh. He definitely liked. “Oh.” It happened so quickly that he lost track of where he was. But there were hands on his face, fingers in his hair, warm skin pressed along his chest, a flutter of blue and there were lips, hot breath, and Jesus Christ what John Watson could do with his tongue when he put his mind to it. And, “John!”

John growled, something low and possessive and pleased, and it echoed the thunder that rumbled above them. Force of nature, that’s what he was. It was in the way his knees tightened on either side of Sherlock’s hips to keep him upright and pressed close in spite of the dip in the hammock. It was in the firm grip of his fingers and twist of his tongue. It was in the rock of his hips and the sounds he was pulling unbidden out of Sherlock’s chest. And the heat of his palm as it cupped him through horrid layers of fabric. And the moan Sherlock released was swallowed, sucked straight into John’s lungs.

The back of John’s knuckles scraped down Sherlock’s belly as he groped for the button on his shorts. No, no, no. That would be too quick. Take too much of his attention. Too much. Too quick. He batted John’s hands out of the way and attacked his shorts instead, freeing the button and unzipping the fly in short order and shifting, sliding both hands down the small of his back and under the shorts to find soft, fitted cotton. Sherlock squeezed with both hands and John huffed, releasing Sherlock’s mouth to heave in a much-needed breath. “You really have a thing for my arse, don’t you?”

“Well, have you seen it?” He squeezed again, twisting his hips up and against John.

It was a near whimper, and Sherlock was proud to have elicited it himself. “I’m sort of… attached.”

Sherlock nipped at John’s lower lip in retaliation, soothing the sharp sting of teeth by sucking on the tender flesh, drawing it between his own lips and stroking with his tongue. John’s grunt sounded like
a moan and Sherlock hummed. “Navy boxer briefs? Is everything you own the same color?”

“I had… A…” John panted as Sherlock palmed him through the front of his pants. “A white shirt… a, fucking hell, minute ago.”

“Hush.” Sherlock captured John’s lips again. Much better use for that man’s mouth. One hand firmly gripping, groping, flat out fondling one arse cheek, Sherlock snaked his fingers under the elastic waistband of John’s pants, wrapped them around John’s cock, and squeezed.

John gave a loud cry and his hips twitched forcefully. “Christ,” he hissed through clenched teeth. Sherlock slid his hand up and down experimentally, in a slow, firm stroke, rubbing his thumb over the head of John’s cock. Oh. He liked that that. Listening to the sounds he wrought from John’s lips, classifying them, categorizing them, adjusting to force a repeat. Sherlock shifted his grip, stroking faster, harder, twisting just so. Oh. OH. He really liked that. “Jesus, Sherlock,” John groaned. “Don’t… goddammit, don’t stop.”

Sherlock relished the solid flex of muscle under his spare hand as John fucked up into his fist. It was shockingly athletic and, “Gorgeous,” he murmured.

“Your fucking hands… Bloody hell, Sherlock.” John let out a startled gasp as Sherlock licked back into his mouth, trying to chase the taste of his name on John’s tongue.

His hand was going to cramp, but John. The angle was completely wrong, but John seemed to make up the difference in his thrust. He hadn’t caught a proper breath in what felt like ages, but John was heaving air between them. The hammock was swinging a bit too much, but John was so steady. The rain was so loud, but John was getting louder. John was getting closer. At some point, he’d pulled back, resting his forehead against Sherlock’s, shaking his head as if trying to stop the tension that even Sherlock could feel drawing his spine tight. “John.”

John whimpered, his eyes pressed firmly shut as he panted into Sherlock’s mouth. “So… Close…”

Sherlock, almost ruefully, released John’s arse and wrapped an arm snuggly around his waist, holding him closer. “Come on, John,” Sherlock nuzzled the lovebite he’d left and John whined. “Come on.” It wasn’t like he’d make the mark any worse. Sherlock dug his teeth into the bruise and John keened loudly, choking out a string of what sounded like cusswords and Sherlock’s name in a sinful litany of praise as he came on Sherlock’s hand, his belly, and most likely, all over Sherlock’s shorts.

John dropped his forehead onto Sherlock’s shoulder with shudder and a sigh and a long, drawn out, “Fuck.”

Sherlock groped blindly until he found John’s tee shirt and used it as a cursory cleaning tool, mopping up what he could from his hand and abdomen; he would need to change his shorts soon. But not for a minute. He was still achingly hard. And John was still coming down, trembling slightly, his chest heaving as though he’d just run a race, and leaning himself rather bonelessly against Sherlock. Which, when he thought about it, was rather flattering. Sherlock traced fingers up and down John’s spine, rifled the sweat soaked tips of his hair at the nape of his neck, and risked pressing his lips to John’s temple. “Good?”

It sounded like a laugh, a sigh, a whine. “Are you kidding?”

“No.”

A breath shuddered out of him and he managed to run a palm down Sherlock’s arm. “I don’t think
'good’ is the right word.”

Well that was rude. Sherlock stiffened, an angry flush coloring his cheeks. “Right, ok, then.”

John huffed and brought his other hand up to cup the back of Sherlock’s neck as he kept stroking his arm. Petting. It was like he was petting him. And he dragged his lips rather heavily across Sherlock’s shoulder. “Bloody brilliant, maybe,” he murmured.

Oh. “Oh,” Sherlock sighed.

John giggled. “Fucking fantastic.”

“Stop,” he didn’t want him to stop. He was growing rapidly addicted to the sound of John laughing. He shivered as John kept up the petting, his touch growing lighter, teasing, tickling as he seemed to regain his senses. Sherlock squirmed. John was such a warm weight in his lap, pressed solidly against him, his breath heavy against his neck. Exquisitely painful. Pleasurable. He really didn’t want him to move, but God did he want him to move. Except when he moved, he’d probably go, and that didn’t seem at all pleasant. God, why was he touching so… So… Sherlock groaned. If John started touching his prick the way he was touching his arms, he’d go off like a rocket.

John made a soft inquisitive sound, his face still buried in crook of Sherlock’s neck.

“Hungry?” It was the only thing his brain could come up with. He could probably get John to stick around for food. Or at least something to drink before he headed back to the other cottage.

“Starving,” John growled.

“Do you want a sandwich or…”

John laughed into Sherlock’s skin. “Do I want a sandwich?” He giggled.

“I dunno,” Sherlock mumbled. “I could make you some soup or…”

“Sherlock,” John’s smile stretched his mouth where it pressed into the side of his neck. “Sherlock,” he murmured again, licking his lips before kissing the pale skin before him. Sherlock sighed and whimpered at the same time. “Sherlock,” John’s breath puffed across his ear. “I’m not hungry for food.”

Oh. “Oh,” he shivered, the implicit tone in John’s voice shuddering down his spine. Oh. John’s teeth closed around his earlobe and tugged lightly. “O-oh.”

“Are you fucking kidding me, Sherlock?” The tip of John’s tongue swept the curve of Sherlock’s ear and Sherlock felt his mouth drop open in a breathy moan. “I have all of this,” John’s palm swept up Sherlock’s arm and his fingers twisted into his curls. “Fucking banquet laid out.” He tugged until Sherlock arched his neck, which led to a deliberately slow lick from his sternum to his adam’s apple. “And you think I want a sandwich?”

Sherlock twitched his eyes open as John pulled himself up onto his knees properly. Oh. He was… Angry? Was that anger? Or irritation? Not good? Not good. “So,” he breathed. “You don’t want a sandwich?”

The corner of John’s mouth drew back. “No, Sherlock. I don’t want a sandwich.”

Sherlock swallowed. Right. It wasn’t really anger. He wasn’t really offended. So he was… Impatient? No. Annoyed? Maybe. “What do you want… then?”
One of John’s palms rose to cup Sherlock’s cheek, his free hand grasping the collar of Sherlock’s shirt where it draped across the back of his shoulders. “I thought,” he murmured, the pad of his thumb tracing Sherlock’s lower lip. “That you were clever.”

“I am clever,” Sherlock whispered, shifting his arms backwards as John seemed intent on stripping the shirt. John raised a brow, pulling the shirt further down Sherlock’s arms and twisting sharply, pinning his wrists at the small of his back. Sherlock sucked in a breath as John’s pupils seemed to dilate further. Oh. Oh God save him. That was hunger. John Watson was hungry and looked as though he’d devour Sherlock whole. “Oh.”

“Yeah, oh.” John wet his lips absently. “Alright?” Sherlock nodded, trying desperately not to dislodge John’s palm from his cheek, or his grip on the shirt, or his position on Sherlock’s lap. John bent his head, ghosting his lips over Sherlock’s. “Sure this is ok?”

“God yes,” Sherlock huffed.

A low rumble rolled through John’s chest where it pressed against Sherlock’s and he pulled tighter on the shirt. “I thought you were bossy,” John murmured, holding himself just a breath out of Sherlock’s reach.

Sherlock groaned. “I am bossy.”

John dragged his nose along the side of Sherlock’s, nuzzled his cheek. “Alright, bossy. What now?”

“John,” he complained.

“Nope, we’ve done me.” He pressed a kiss to the corner of Sherlock’s mouth, then the other corner. Flicked the tip of tongue along his lower lip. Sherlock whined. That wasn’t fair. Not fair. “What next?”


“Anything?”

“Kiss me.”

Oh. Oh that was perfect. Brilliant. Oh John’s mouth. His lips were so warm, firm, practiced. Good. Yes, more of that. He moaned as John’s tongue slid smoothly into his mouth, twisted and wrapped around his own tongue, played and flicked and danced and retreated. Sherlock tried to chase it, back into John’s mouth, taste the back of his teeth. And John sucked on it, very briefly, and drew his lower lip between teeth before pulling back again. Just too far again. And Sherlock tried to reach for him, he could hold him in place, make him stay, keep his mouth for his own, but his hands were stuck, twisted in the fabric of his shirt, and he let out a frustrated groan.

“What else?”

“John, please.” Sherlock squirmed. He was too far away. He was up on his knees instead of in Sherlock’s lap, he was holding firmly to the shirt but not touching. Why was there no touching? There had been kissing, why was there no more kissing? Not just anything; everything.

“Please what?”

“Oh God, I don’t care!” Oh shit, that was out loud.
“You do care.”

“I don’t care.” Sherlock closed his eyes as John’s fingers tugged gently on his curls, exposed his neck, as John’s breath ghosted under his jaw. There was a single wet press of lips and a slow stream of cool air over the damp, raising gooseflesh everywhere in an instant. Sherlock caught a breath and glared at John. “I don’t care, but I swear to God, if you don’t fucking touch me, I will make sure you regret it.”

John only seemed to smile with one side of him mouth, but his eyes lit with amusement. No arousal. No both. And in spite of the rain and the thunder and the lightning and the swaying of the hammock, Sherlock was locking into the subtle shift of John’s legs as his weight dropped onto Sherlock’s thighs, and it was touching, it was some touching. And John’s hand slid free of Sherlock’s curls to trail around the curve of his jaw, down his neck, across his chest, and down. Down. Why was it so slow. Sherlock closed his eyes. And John’s lips were back on his own, the counterpoint pressure at the small of his back holding him upright as John licked into his mouth. Oh, he wasn’t stopping. He was swallowing gasps and moans and clever fingers were flicking open the button of his shorts, and John’s chest was pressed against his. When the warm, callused palm wrapped around his cock, Sherlock could barely recognize the sound that tore out his throat. “Like this?”

John. John, John, John. “John!” His spine arched as he pushed up into the touch. And John nipped at his throat, finding all the delicate and sensitive spots along his shoulders, up his neck, his ears. Oh God, his ears were so sensitive. His hand was steady, firm and deliberate strokes up and down, the soft skin between John’s fingers in contrast to the rougher pads. And John rolled his palm up over the head and there wasn’t enough air left.

“God, look at you.”

That was absurd. How could he look at himself? How could he think about looking into himself? With John having those hands. And having that mouth. And looking at him like that. God. Oh God, John. “Oh God!”

“Look at me,” John cupped his cheek in one palm. “Sherlock, look at me.”

His hand didn’t stop moving. But his hand was on his face. So… That was two hands. God that was slow. Sherlock tore his hands free of his shirt and reached for John. “John!” It was a trick of the light, an oddity of sound, the electrical charge in the air when there was a flash of lightning and roll of thunder that illuminated John’s eyes into a crystal clear, pure shade of the deepest blue. And that was it. It was surrounding, oppressive and overwhelming, enclosing and insulating. And he went off like a shot.

“… Stunning, so brilliant. Jesus, Sherlock, you’re incredible.”

Oh. John was talking. Had been talking? Was still talking. Rambling. Petting his arm, his side, his chest. When had he made it to horizontal. Was he dizzy? Or…

“Did you use my tee shirt to clean up?” John demanded.

Sherlock sighed, “It was available.”

“So was yours.” John wasn’t cross. Sherlock could tell. There was an edge of humor to his voice as he dragged the cotton across Sherlock’s skin. Not cross. Not really. “In the future, my clothes are not come rags.”

Sherlock smiled and hummed. “I like the sound of that.”
“The sound of what?”

“In the future,” he cited.

“Hush.”

Sherlock woke to a gentle rocking sensation and the pleasantly warm weight of one John Watson draped across his chest. Frankly, he should feel heavier. Maybe it was a trick of the hammock or the swaying or they way John was slotted against him just so… It smelled like ozone and petrichor and sweat and sex, and the storm had wound its way down to a light, persistent drizzle. Even through the unbroken cloud cover, the sun was casting a glowing haze that gave the damp world a halo. All of it was overwhelmingly… Good?… Nice?… Pleasant?… It felt right. That was the thing. Harmonious. Lovely. *Sentimental,* he chided himself.

John hummed and snuffled, burying his face further into the crook of Sherlock’s neck. “‘S’lock, s’t’time?”

It was a challenge not to smile. Then, Sherlock found that he didn’t really care and he’d smile if he wanted. He took to running his fingers down the knuckles of John’s spine. “Nearly six, I suspect.”

“Mmnp.” John’s arms tightened around his chest and a warm puff of air billowed across his skin. “Still raining.”

“Yes,” Sherlock twisted to press a light kiss to the crown of John’s head. “A little.”

“No bonfire,” John huffed.

“No, I suppose not.”

“God, they’ll make a mess tonight.”

“You could stay here.” Do. Do stay here.

“They will trash the cottage,” John grumbled. “And I can’t afford the incidentals.”

“Ah.” Well that was a sharp disappointment.

“You could come for the party.”

Sherlock scoffed. There were few things less appealing than a rugby party with loud music and alcohol and a bunch of people he didn’t know. Having his fingernails pulled out would be less appealing, but not by much. “Thank you, but no.”

John let out a small, disappointed sound and pouted. Sherlock could feel it against his neck, and started tracing circles, swirling his fingertips along the nape of John’s neck. And after a moment, John hummed contentedly and nosed against the oft skin behind Sherlock’s ear. “I know. Not your thing.”

“No, not really. You could come by after.”

“After like… In the morning?”

“Why not?” Sherlock was going for casual, but he knew it didn’t sound casual. “I have the place for another few days. You don’t need to be back in London yet. Get a little peace and quiet before graduation.”
“Peace I like. Don’t know about the quiet…”

Sherlock blushed. “I can be quiet.”

“Don’t you dare.” There was a low rumble, this time not thunder, but a growl of actual hunger from John’s stomach. Sherlock twisted, pulling back to look at the flush of embarrassment that spread across John’s face. “Sorry,” he whispered.

Sherlock felt the smile break open his mouth and he started chuckling. John’s expression was still chagrin, but he snickered and Sherlock started laughing outright. “How about a sandwich?” John pressed his face into Sherlock’s shoulder, giggling uncontrolledly.

Sherlock couldn’t be sure when he finally fell asleep. It was late in the night to be certain. And he definitely shouldn’t have stayed on the couch. It wasn’t horribly uncomfortable, but he was too tall for the thing, and as he woke, blinking at the morning sun filtering through the trees, he was sure he wasn’t terribly rested. Why had he woken? The sun wasn’t in his eyes. The temperature had dropped to something pleasant in the wake of the storm, and it was warm but distinctly less humid. He wasn’t lying on his arm in a way that would leave him with pins and needles. He wasn’t propped up uncomfortably in a way that would leave a crick in his neck. The woods were humming with birds and bees, but softly so. The lake was quiet. So why was he awake?

There was a soft rustle from the inner section of the cottage and the sound of water running. What? He sat up quickly, drawing the blanket around himself like a shield. “Hello?” he croaked. Oh that was clever, Sherlock. Someone has broken into the cottage and your response is to call out to them? So clever. Then again, who house breaks and boils water in the kettle? Awfully British of the burglar. But still. He padded quietly towards the kitchen, risking poking his head around the door.

“Oh, hey. I… I didn’t want to wake you.” John smiled warmly and gestured at the cafetière. “Coffee?”

Sherlock felt the blush start in his cheeks and fan out across his face. John Watson was in his kitchen. First thing in the morning, and John Watson was in his kitchen making him coffee. And he looked pleased about it.

“I…” John hesitated. “I mean. I don’t want to intrude. It’s just you said… That… If I wanted… For the next few days…”

The smile was small to begin with, but stretched wide across his face, and he was pleased to see the doubt fall from John’s face. “I meant it.”

John nodded, his smile returning as he poured out two cups of coffee. “Milk and sugar, right?” Sherlock hummed an affirmative and John chuckled. “So sweet it’ll rot the teeth straight out of your adorable head, yeah?”

“Yes. Wait, what?” Did he say adorable?

John handed him a steaming mug and headed out for the porch, ruffling his curls in passing. “You. You’re adorable when you first wake up.”

“I… what?” Sherlock followed after him, settling in the opposite corner of the couch once John was seated. John propped his feet on the table, gazing out at the early morning with a contented smile. Sherlock opted to prop his feet on John’s lap, and when there was no objection, he sighed and settled easily against the cushions. “So, the lads gone?”

“Mmn,” John nodded. “No one died. Everyone survived. Though, there were some fairly impressive
hangovers this morning.”

Sherlock smirked. “Not you?”

“ Nope.”

“ You already been for your swim?”

John snorted. “Not yet, no. It’s cooled off, so there’s no need to be so early about it. Besides,” he rested a heated palm on Sherlock’s ankle, giving a gentle squeeze to let him know it was welcome. “Wasn’t sure I had access to the shoreline.”

“Of course you do,” Sherlock said quickly then snapped his mouth shut. He hadn’t intended to be so blunt about it.

John didn’t seem offended. “Lovely view you have up here.”

“ Oh, yes. It’s the rise of the…” He trailed off as he realized John was not looking at the view. Well, he wasn’t looking at the view out of the cottage. He seemed rather interested in view inside the cottage; specifically, the way the blanket had slipped off of Sherlock’s shoulder. Sherlock blushed. “When do you have to be back in London?”

“ Next Thursday.”

“ Seven days?”

“ That alright?”

Sherlock nodded emphatically. “Yes. Yes of course. You’re more than welcome to stay.”

John stretched an arm across the back of the sofa. “You know, I only just noticed something.” Sherlock raised a brow. “There’s only one bedroom, Sherlock.”

“Problem?”

“ Not at all,” John said easily. “As long as you don’t expect me to sleep on the bloody hammock.”

Sherlock chuckled. Now there was an idea. “I’m rather fond of that hammock.”

John twisted to give him a wry glare, but the corner of his mouth drew back and Sherlock was suddenly really fond of the hammock. “There are things that a hammock just isn’t built for, Sherlock Holmes.”

“Oh?” he asked innocently, contemplating the wide range of things he’d figured were rather unlikely to happen in a hammock. Things that could easily happen on a couch, for example, or a bed. Or the kitchen counter. Or on the dock.

John snickered and reached across to tug on one of Sherlock’s curls. “You still with me?”

“Of course.”

“Good.”

“John,” Sherlock began rather haltingly. “You never said. Where are you starting you training after graduation?”
John smiled around the rim of his mug and took a sip of his coffee. “I never said, because you never asked.”

“I’m asking now,” he insisted. “Stop trying to avoid the questions.”

John grinned so wide his dimples appeared. “Uni. I start at UCH.”

“Oh.”

“Oh?” One of John’s brows went up.

“Well,” Sherlock mused. “I’ve rather had my eye on a flat…”

End Notes

There are things that a hammock just isn’t built for, Sherlock Holmes.

— JW

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