Shadows at Midday
by alexphoenix42

Summary

When the Cardassian empire moved in to claim the planet Bajor, untold lives were both disrupted and lost. Despite the long shadows cast by the forced occupation, the many small stories of those struggling to survive continued. This is the tale of one Cardassian boy and one Bajoran boy who met on a warm summer's day.

Notes

Hey lovely readers! This story is primarily a Johnlock one though it is set on the planet Bajor from the Star Trek - Deep Space Nine series. While it might help to have some background info about this universe, it isn't necessary to enjoy the story of John and Sherlock meeting in another time and place, and finding themselves drawn together once again.

For those well versed in the Deep Space Nine mythos, I will not be following the canon history with all its political twists and turns. Think of this as another pocket in the multiverse where anything can happen . . .
GLOSSARY

Gul - Cardassian military title held by the commander of a vessel or acting as governor of an occupied territory
Glinn - Cardassian military title for a first officer below a Gul
Mok'bara - a Klingon martial art
Lek - Cardassian unit of currency
The small lizard whipped its tail about, flashing iridescent patterns in the bright afternoon sun. In the shadows of the bushes, two boys, belly down in the dirt, watched barely breathing lest they frighten it off. Two sets of eyes, one pair dark as rain, and the other pale as winter ice tracked its long tongue flicking out to snag a winged thing out of the air. A small thrill ran down each spine as they watched the insect struggling to escape before the reptile neatly snapped it down. They might have stayed that way all day, still as stones, witnessing the minuscule plays of life and death unspooling in the herb garden had a large boot not crashed down scaring the small creature away. Another boot, and the body attached to the footwear moved in blocking the view as the gardener hunkered down with a pair of clippers in hand.

“Hey now, trouble-makers,” he cried spotting the two watchers. “Get outta there!” He waved a hand encased in a thick glove as if shooing birds, and the boys wriggled backwards to escape. “And stay out of the gardens. I’ve work to do!” followed retreating backs as small feet pounded down the path deeper into the green of the compound.

John’s sun-streaked head bobbed as he ran ahead. The two earring studs in his right ear caught the light as he glanced back at Sherlock. Even though it was Sherlock’s home, and John had only recently come with his mother, the new cook, he already knew all the best hiding places in the yard. John found secret spots to slip into that Sherlock wouldn’t have looked at twice on his own. They quickly reached the end of the property, dropping to all fours to wiggle through a gap left between a stand of Tarra trees and the back stone wall. The boys collapsed beside each other in the sheltered space, breathless with giggles.

“Ha,” John barked. “We shook off the pirates. Knocked ‘em right off our trail.”

“That’s not a pirate.” Sherlock’s frown shifted the cranial bumps over his forehead. “It’s just Old Jenno, the gardener.”

“How do you know he’s not a pirate?” John stuck out his chin.

“He’s too old.”

“Old like a skeleton,” John said.

“Wrinkled as dried fruit.”

“Ugly as a benno dog.”

“Ugly as you,” Sherlock said with a small smile.

“Hey!” John squeaked. He reached over to give Sherlock a shove, but the taller boy pushed back. They fell into a wrestling match, laughing, rolling each other over as well as they could in the cramped space. Sherlock's head connected with a root sticking up from the ground, and he cried out. John let go instantly.
“Sherlock, are you okay?” John’s worried eyes hovered overhead as Sherlock reached back to rub at the sore spot on his skull.

“Yeah, it’s fine.”

“Let’s go get something to eat,” John, ever the practical one, said after a moment. “I’m hungry.”

“Okay.” Sherlock didn’t always think about eating if there was something better to be done. Eating with John was fun though. Everything was better with John around.

“Come on. Mum said she was making sweet rolls today.” John held out his hand.

Sherlock allowed John to help him up, following as he led the way back to the main path to the house. They kept a wary eye out for bandits, or wild beasts, or whatever other dangers might stop them from making it to Mrs. Watson’s pastries cooling at the kitchen window, but nothing appeared.

The boys crashed through the back door, and Mrs. Watson met them, tutting over their dirty state. She sent them off to wash up before allowing them back in the kitchen for a bun and a cup of milk. A place was set for them at the far end of a counter away from the gossiping scullery maids chopping vegetables for the evening meal. Their soft voices lent a counterpoint to the sharp whack, whack of the blades.

Sherlock stole glances John’s way when he wasn’t looking, cataloging his smooth tanned face, the thin stripes over his tilted nose, and the pale sweep of his blond eyelashes framing his dark blue eyes. Sherlock had a secret. He didn’t dare tell father with his important meetings in the locked study, or mother and her friends who gathered in the parlor to giggle and play cards, or even Mycroft who had just gone off to something stupid called military school but called home by vid on weekends.

Everyone talked about how ugly the Bajorans were, so far from a healthy grey, all beige, and soft, and spindly like larvae, but Sherlock disagreed. He didn’t think John was ugly at all. He thought John was beautiful.

John sat on the kitchen stool, swinging a foot against one of the legs as he bit into the sweet roll. Icing oozed onto his upper lip, and he licked it clean with a swipe of his pink tongue. “Come on Sherlock, eat your food, and then we can go look at the comic book I brought.” John pushed Sherlock’s plate a bit closer to him across the worktop.

“Ohay, John.” Sherlock smiled as he lifted his pastry.

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“I don’t know what to do about the boy.”

“Which boy?”

“Our youngest son, of course.”

“What’s Sherlock done now, dear?”

Sherlock shifted on his pile of cushions, setting down his reader pad to better listen to the conversation drifting up through the air vents. He often came upstairs to his hidden spot in the attic to read and think alone, but his nest had the misfortune of being directly above his parents’ dressing
room.

“I just found out Sherlock’s been missing his martial arts classes. He hasn’t gone to mok’bara in a week.” His father’s deep voice rose higher.

“Oh, husband. I’m sorry. I spoke with Sherlock about it. We agreed he’d give it up if he did extra music lessons.”

“MUSIC? He needs less, not more of that fiddle faddle. It isn’t right, the son of a Cardassian Gul spending his day cataloging bugs, playing music . . . he’s not quitting mok’bara . . .” his father’s voice went to a muffled garble as he moved away from the vents.

“Love, calm down.” The higher-pitched voice of his mother soothed. “Sherlock isn’t like Mycroft. He’s . . . different. You know full well that a scientist or a doctor could serve the empire just as well as a soldier. Sherlock isn’t cut out . . .” her voice dropped lower as she moved farther into the room as well.

“. . . hanging around with Bajorans all day, and the cook’s whelp, he’s like a shadow on the boy’s heels. Doesn’t feel right.” His father moved into range again.

“Ulric, Sherlock needs a friend. Watson John is a good boy . . . for a Bajoran. Very polite. I think he’s been a good influence on Sherlock. Besides, he’s just an infant friend. They’ll grow apart when Sherlock goes away to school.”

“We could send him now, he’s old enough.” Father said.

“You promised we’d wait until he was sixteen.” Mother sounded more plaintive.

The voices moved away as his parents left the room.

Sherlock rolled onto his belly with a sigh. It was an old argument, and one that he hoped his mother would win again with his father. The idea of going away to military school sent a shiver over Sherlock’s skin. He’d rather go the day after never, but it seemed inevitable that eventually he’d be following his brother, father, and grandfathers in a line to an illustrious military career. If it could be another three standard years away though, that would be the best of a bad situation. A lot could happen in that time, a life could be lived in that time.

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“So, if we factor in the sum of the remainder, what would our answer be?”

Sherlock rubbed at the end of nose, and pushed his stylus over his hand-held screen. “372.”

“Close, the answer is 374. Here, I’ll show you again how we reached this.” Mr. Jadzel gave Sherlock a falsely cheery smile, and turned back to the white board to scrawl more numbers across it.

Sherlock flicked his eyes from the chronometer on the wall to the windows of the schoolroom. When his tutor glanced over his shoulder, Sherlock sat taller, pretending to pay attention until the man turned around. Then his eyes were back at the window again.

Any minute now, John should come running up the drive toward the kitchen door, his short, sturdy
legs pumping, his bag bumping at his back. He would be here already if he hadn’t been kept late by a teacher, or been waylaid by any of the idiots in his class. As Sherlock scratched out another set of numbers on his screen, careful to make another small error, he could see it playing out in his mind’s eye. There, John ran about in the midst of some sweaty Bajoran boys, laughing as they kicked a ball around. Or here, a group of them rough-housing, shoving each other as they walked to the shops to buy sweets with their scrabbled-together change.

Sherlock shook his head to dispel the tormenting visions. He doubted he would enjoy spending all day with a room full of idiots as John did, attending a day school in the Bajoran sector, but he envied John the freedom he had to come and go as he pleased. There wasn’t a school good enough for the son of a Gul on Bajor, so it was a procession of tutors at home for him. Sherlock’s teachers were idiots. Honestly he’d read enough on his own already that he’d do a better job teaching them. Since he had no wish to give his parents any more reasons for shipping him offworld though, Sherlock was happy to continue playing the feckless schoolboy. This latest version, Mr. Jadzel, was easy enough to fool. He hardly noticed anything beyond his own fashion sense, and the pretty violin teacher who came three times a week.

Sherlock gave up dissembling, and did the next three problems correctly to Mr. Jadzel’s great delight. A blur of movement out the window caught his eye. Finally. Sherlock watched John moving up the drive, running as usual. Rather than slowing down to wave up the schoolroom though, he kept his head down, charging through to the back. Curious.

“Sir,” Sherlock said, looking innocently up at the tutor. “It’s half past, and I’m meant to have my tea now.”

Mr. Jadzel glanced at the time, surprised. “Ah, so it is. Well, I mustn’t keep you from your sustenance. Growing boys need their food, eh? We’ll pick this up again tomorrow. You’ve made excellent progress, Sherlock.”

“Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.” Sherlock nodded, tidying his things away into the desk as fast as he could.

The kitchen held its usual hubbub of noise, and good smells. The kitchen girls rolled out dough, sending clouds of flour around the room as they worked. Mrs. Watson looked up from the large pot she was stirring on the stove.

“Ah, Sherlock, hello,” she called over her shoulder, replacing the lid on her bubbling brew.

Sherlock looked about the room filled with all the normal things for the afternoon hour except the one thing he most wanted to see. “Where’s John? I saw him come up.”

“John had a spot of trouble,” Mrs. Watson said, wiping her hands on her apron as she neared.

Sherlock watched the sway of the chains connecting the earrings piercing the lobe and top of her ear as she tilted her head. He’d always admired them. All the Bajorans wore them. Sherlock remembered when he’d asked his mother at dinner one night if he could get an earring too. His parents had been horrified, acting as if he’d asked to start dressing like a girl, and had sent him to bed without finishing his supper. Sherlock had never asked them for anything Bajoran again. It seemed like a constant battle at their house, keeping out influences that were deemed un-Cardassian.

“There were some new guards at the front gate today,” Mrs. Watson said, pressing her lips into a thin line. “John forgot his pass, and they didn’t want to let him through. They finally called up to the house, and your mother vouched for him. He’s upset about it though. He’s out back.” She nodded toward the gardens setting the chain of her earrings swinging wildly.
“But that’s ridiculous! John practically lives here!” Sherlock exploded. The Cardassians that guarded the gate to their community were a nuisance to be gotten through every time their driver ferried them back and forth, but it was usually just a formality, a quick nod before they passed through.

“Here.” Mrs. Watson turned to collect a small basket on a counter. “Why don’t you take these to John. You’ll know best where he is.”

“Thank you, amma.” Sherlock took the basket, calling John’s mother, auntie, as he often did when his parents weren’t around.

“Oh, you’re a good boy, Sherlock,” she said, reaching out to smooth back hair that had flopped onto his forehead. He was surprised when he realized she had to reach up to do so. When had he gotten taller than her?

Sherlock worked his way straight as an arrow past the patio tables, through the flower gardens to the small bench half-hidden by the weeping bushes. A spike of pure relief shot through Sherlock at spotting a familiar form there. It slid quickly to concern at how the boy sat though, knees hugged to chest, his back a silent curve of distress. Sherlock dropped the basket in his hurry to reach him.

“John!” Sherlock called.

John buried his face in his arms, curling up even tighter on himself if possible. “Go away,” he growled.

Sherlock could only see the top stud of the earring on John’s ear. “What happened?” Sherlock asked quietly, sitting beside him.

“Don’t wanna talk about it.”

Sherlock reached out to lay a hand to John’s shoulder, and the boy flinched. “Tell me what those dirty sons of dogs did to you, or I’m going over and making a scene at the guardhouse right now.”

“You would, wouldn’t you?” John peeked over his forearms.

“You know I would.” Sherlock softened to see his face.

“Oh, it was stupid.” John unfurled, letting his legs drop to the ground. “I left my pass at home this morning. I hardly ever need it, they usually just wave me through.” John sniffed deeply to clear his nose. “Today though there were some new guards at the front. I could have just gone home to get the pass, but the new Raster the Ranger comic book came out today, and I knew you were waiting to see it.”

“What did you do?”

“Made a fuss,” John said. “I made so much noise they called in to the house rather than deal with it. It was dumb of me. I was just so mad that they wouldn’t let me through.” The sleeve of John’s tunic fell back as he reached up to scrub at his reddened eyes. Sherlock’s gaze caught on the long, angry scrape leading down John’s arm. He reached over to push the fabric farther back.

“Oh don’t...” John startled, pulling away.

“Where else?” Sherlock’s voice had gone low and tight. “Where else did they hurt you?”

“That’s the worst of it,” John said. “I kicked the big one in the knee and he knocked me on the ground.”
“The bastard.” Sherlock nearly vibrated with the sudden anger coursing through his veins. John was a standard year older than Sherlock, but he was small for his age, even for a Bajoran. The idea of a fully-armed guard knocking John to the ground . . .

“Hang on a minute,” Sherlock said. “Just wait here.”

“Yeah, okay.” John sniffed deeper.

Sherlock made his way to the herb garden quickly finding what he wanted. He returned to the bench reaching out for John’s arm. “Let me see.”

John extended his hurt arm, watching as Sherlock crushed fat, furry leaves against the scrape. “Mother’s Balm,” John said, perking up. “I didn’t know you grew that here.”

“Your mum keeps some in the herb garden,” Sherlock said, making sure he coated all of the wound to his satisfaction, “and speaking of your mother, she sent you something. Here press down for a minute.” Sherlock waited until John had his hand over the leaves before rising to find the basket he'd dropped in the grass. He peeked under the covering cloth as he brought it over.

“What is it?” John craned his neck, his curiosity piqued despite himself.

“Dozas.” Sherlock smiled, lifting one of the bean-filled puff breads to take a bite.

“Oh, well don’t hog them, give it over.”

“Rude,” Sherlock said, sliding the basket his way.

“Learned it from you.” John grinned, fishing a roll out of the basket.

“I’m curious,” Sherlock said as they munched side by side.


“You said you kicked the bigger guard. Don’t you think you should have gone for the smaller one, or was it just an accident?”

“Naw, picked him on purpose.” John’s lovely summer-night eyes sparkled. “The big ones, they sometimes feel guilty if they hit someone smaller. It’s the little guys you have to watch out for. They get mean. Feel like they have something to prove.”

“You’re not like that,” Sherlock said without thinking, suddenly horrified that he might have offended John.

John just bit meditatively into his doza. “Nope, cause I’m big on the inside where it counts.”

“Idiot.” Sherlock huffed. “He could have really hurt you.”

“Naw, I’m too quick.” John puffed out his chest. “Hey, did you want to see the comic?”

“Prophets, yes. Do you still have it? I want to know how he survives the runabout crash.” Sherlock dusted his hands free of crumbs.

“Yeah, it’s in my bag.” John scrambled to open his rucksack, digging around for the cheap newsprint book. “I didn’t even sneak a peek before you.”

“Bring it.” Sherlock wiggled his fingers.
“See, what did I tell you?” A smile lifted the side of John’s mouth. “Rude.”

“Less talking, more reading,” Sherlock said as John settled beside him, pressing shoulder to knee.

“Here,” John said spreading the book across their laps, and they each grabbed an edge to steady it. Two heads, one dark as midnight, the other bright as midday, bent over the pages as they devoured the story.

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Sherlock pulled the shawl more tightly over his head, a gloved hand leaning on his cane as he shuffled out of the library’s handicap toilet. He glanced about to see if anyone had noticed a Cardassian boy going into the small room, and an old, veiled granny exiting, but the lobby was blessedly empty. Sherlock breathed a sigh of relief, and made his way slowly but purposefully to the back of the building. As arranged, John lingered outside the rear door, waiting.

“John, you young scalawag, what have you been up to, boy?” Sherlock called in his best old-lady voice.

“Nothing, Bibi,” grandmother, John murmured politely. He winked as he took Sherlock’s arm, and the two of them moved down the street as quickly as Sherlock’s shuffling gait would allow.

They boarded a transit bus, Sherlock letting John help him up the stairs and drop their coins into the slot. John bit back snickers as several Bajoran matrons shifted packages from the front seats to allow Sherlock a place of honor to sit. John slid in easily beside him.

“Bless you, dear, thank you so much,” Sherlock croaked from beneath his veil in perfect Bajoran.

The bus took them farther away from the Cardassian areas that Sherlock knew, and deeper into the Bajoran sector that he didn’t. Sherlock all but pressed his nose to the window, peering through his veil as the brightly-coloured shops and eateries slid by. When John rang the bell, and the two of them alighted onto the pavement, the strangeness of the new neighborhood swept over Sherlock in a great rush.

Spices cooking in rancid oil wove into car horns honking, bleats from cattle pulling carts, eye-searing colours, loud music playing from somewhere, and over it all, the shouting. Sherlock felt his head swim, but John steadied him, reached over to tuck his arm firmly into his own.

“Come on, it’s this way,” John murmured steering them into a side alley. He led them through several twists and turns finally emerging on a slightly quieter street with sit-down restaurants, and the small theater they were headed toward.

Sherlock tottered to join the queue at the ticket booth, the two of them waiting their turn.

“Get the tickets for the balcony,” John whispered.

“Why?”

“More expensive, but less people up there,” John muttered.

Sherlock nodded. When they reached the counter, he dutifully drew several banknotes from his
handbag and asked for two balcony tickets to the adult-rated matinee in his most wavery voice. He was thrilled when the bored Bajoran girl chewing gum behind the desk slid him the tickets without comment. They took their time going up the stairs, and selecting seats near the back of the balcony for the most privacy.

"Do you have any more money? I can get us some snacks." John nudged him. Sherlock dug a few more notes from his bag that he happily passed over.

"Right, back in moment."

Sherlock ran his eyes over the few others sharing the balcony as he waited. A group of middle-aged women on an outing sat together laughing. A few young office workers lay scattered about, and a couple who must have been on their second or third date, hunched close, murmuring together. He was the only Cardassian present. It gave him a bit of a thrill when he realized nobody else here knew this . . . except John of course. John returned with a box of crispy crackers and a large fruit drink just before the lights dimmed.

"We’ll have to share. They were mad expensive," John whispered.

"Fine, thanks." Sherlock whispered, removing his gloves, and folding his veils back as darkness overtook the theater and the 3D vid flickered to life.

John held the box in his lap and they took turns dipping their hands in for crackers, pushing each other’s fingers aside, and passing the drink until both were empty. Sherlock soon lost himself in the action of the movie. It was a low-budget Bajoran-made thing, but the story was excellent and the Bajoran constabulary chasing the arch criminals were dashing figures. The show had none of the slow, artful pacing of a Cardassian vid, nor a slavish devotion to people always doing their duty. Everyone was so delightfully wicked in this show, it made Sherlock shiver.

When a thief jumped out brandishing a long knife, Sherlock cried out, and grabbed John’s arm. He would have been highly embarrassed if John had not been grabbing back. They stayed close until a sex scene a few minutes later. When the Bajoran actress stripped her tunic off, and her round, pink-tipped breasts filled the screen, the boys went tense, carefully moving away from each other. Watching as the handsome hero dipped his head to crush her into a kiss, his hands roaming over her bared body, Sherlock felt something hot and strange wash over him. He dared not look John’s way.

Eventually the action returned, and Sherlock relaxed, enjoying the movie’s end. The audience clapped as the credits rolled, and Sherlock made sure his wraps and gloves were firmly in place before the lights returned.

“Thanks, John.” Sherlock smiled widely though John couldn’t see it as they made their way from the theater and back to the bus station. “That was amazing.”

“That was grand, wasn’t it?” John’s grin was much easier to see. “I loved when the bad agent jumped off that bridge . . .”

They chattered on happily until they cleared the alleys, and Sherlock had to stoop over and shuffle beside John to take their place with those waiting for transit.

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them side to side.

“You’ll know when we get there,” Sherlock muttered unhelpfully from under his veils.

The Bajoran sector had lost its strangeness as Sherlock and John repeated their clandestine outings as many weekends as they could manage. Sherlock bundled up his disguises in his book bag, asking the driver to take him to the downtown library whenever mother didn’t have cursed social engagements planned for him.

Sherlock loathed the tea parties where he had to wear upright collars, and mingle with snotty Cardassians of his own age “to give him some polish in these accursed colonies.” He’d growled at the prats often enough that they cut him a wide berth at events now. Only one, Molly Hooper, a shy daughter of Glinn Hooper, one of the officers under his father, still agreed to suffer his surly company. Sherlock had to admit that Molly was one of the least idiotic specimens there, and the two enjoyed discussing scientific news as it came out in the journals. Molly probably would have become a friend to Sherlock if he hadn’t spent every minute of those gathering counting down the time until he could see John again. First-day was the only time in the week the two of them had the whole day together. Second-day was for religious observances, and many of the servants including John and his mum had the day off, spending it away from the manor.

“Are we going to the space port?” John hissed breaking into Sherlock’s meandering thoughts. “We aren’t supposed to go there.”

“Hush, boy, and don’t question your elders.” Sherlock raised his voice, waving him off like the feisty, old grandmother he pretended to be.

John ear chains swung as he quickly faced forward, crossing his arms to slink back down in his seat. Several of the other passengers gave them the side eye, and John knew better than to be seen disrespecting a grandmother in public. Who knew how many self-appointed ammas might be nearby ready to hand out a tongue lashing at the slightest offense.

John followed him meekly when they got off at a stop at the edge of the space port. They soon lost themselves in the flow of foot traffic looking quite unremarkable amidst all manner of strange outlanders. Sherlock stumped along with his cane, leading John until they came to a chemist shop. Sherlock ducked inside, pulling John along behind him.

“What are we . . .” John began.

“Just watch,” Sherlock reassured.

“Excuse me, my good man,” Sherlock hailed the shop keep, shuffling up to the counter. “I would like two of your daylight specials please.”

“Is that so, old mother? I’m not sure that would be to your liking.” The man, a burly Bajoran with a scar along one cheekbone, raked a skeptical glance over the two of them. John unconsciously puffed up, standing taller under the scrutiny.

“It’s my grandson’s birthday,” Sherlock pleaded, pulling several banknotes out of his handbag to place on the counter. “I’m giving him a treat.”

“Ah, well then, if you insist.” The man palmed the money quickly, transferring it to somewhere out of sight. “Just follow to the back, and knock twice.” He jerked his chin down an aisle.

“Thank you, sonny. May the Prophets bless you.”
“You as well, bibi.” The man nodded respectfully enough, though he continued to watch them as they made their way through the shop.

After passing the crowded displays of throat drops, and boxes of cure-alls, they reached the sturdy metal door set slightly recessed into the wall. It buzzed open at Sherlock’s brisk double knock.

“the hell?” John whispered as another burly fellow appeared inside to usher them through the dark hallway. He pointed the way down some steps leading into even deeper gloom.

Sherlock just shook his head. wait. Another heavy door finally brought them to their destination. It swung open to admit them to a large underground room awash with noise, and the nearly overpowering stink of cigars, sweat, and spilled alcohol. All manner of rough persons filled the rows of benches and small tables that lined the place. Voices bounced off the walls as scantily clad Cardassian women circulated selling drinks to the crowd. It was the action in the brightly-lit center ring though that grabbed both boys’ eyes and kept them there. Two Bajoran men stripped to the waist, shiny with oil that had been worked over their bulging muscles, faced each other with fists raised. They moved quickly, dodging and blocking until one of them misjudged. The sound of meat on meat made a dull thud as a blow connected.

“Oh Prophets’ balls. You’ve brought us to a fight club, Sherlock,” John groaned beside him.

“I heard some of my father’s men talking about it.” Sherlock shrugged. “I had to see it. I knew you’d say no, if I asked you.”

“Sherlock. We shouldn’t be here,” John hissed.

“Well, neither should any of these people. This is illegal, but look it hasn’t stopped them.” Sherlock countered reasonably, sweeping a hand out at the display before them.

The spectators in the club represented a number of different races and looked to be one of the few places where Bajorans and Cardassians gathered socially together, though they had segregated themselves to opposite sides of the room. Sherlock steered John toward the Bajoran area when a Cardassian man dressed all in black stopped them.

“Bets, please. We don’t put on a show for free here, granny.”

“Of course.” Sherlock rasped pulling a few notes out of a pocket. “We’ll bet on the little one.”

After settling their wagers, Sherlock led John to seats farthest away from the knots of men smoking like chimneys, and yelling themselves hoarse at the two men swinging at each other. Sherlock had to admit, the fight was a compelling sight. The men weren’t beautiful in a classic sense, and neither were their moves disciplined, but there was something about their muscled, scarred forms twisting and striking, a dance of back and forth that had him riveted. They wore no protective padding besides the strips of cloth wound about their knuckles, and tight leggings, but they had removed their earrings in concession to the match. Sherlock was so used to the chains hanging from the ears of all the Bajorans that he knew, that this omission made the fighters look more naked to him than if they had been truly stripped bare. One of them had words tattooed across his back, and Sherlock squinted trying to read it. Something in Bajoran.

“All right, what are you two having?” One of the waitresses leered in at them, balancing a tray of glasses on her hip.

“Nothing.” Sherlock tried to wave her off.

“Sorry, one drink minimum. Them’s the rules. Need to keep everybody happy.”
Sherlock glanced at her more fully. Her neck ridges and pattern of scales descending down her chest were scandalously on display with her skimpy top, but black shorts and some thigh-high boots covered the rest of her well enough.

“What’s the cheapest thing?” Sherlock asked.

The woman gestured to her tray of drinks. “We’ve got grog.”

“I’ll have two.” Sherlock said. “How much?”

“Ten leks.” She sighed, obviously unimpressed with their order.

“More like daylight robbery than daylight special.” Sherlock muttered fishing out the required banknotes. He counted out the bills, and the woman shoved two glasses into his hands.

Sherlock stole a glance John’s way, and found the boy looking gobsmacked.

“John, close your mouth”

John roused as if waking from a dream. “Here, what’s that?” He nodded to the drinks.

“Sherlock sniffed at the glasses. “Smells like paint thinner.”

“Give over.” John reached for one. He sniffed at it himself. “Yup. Paint thinner.”

The crowd roared to life as one of the fighters managed a solid kick to the head of the other. He went down like a sack of grain. A referee moved in from the shadows to hold up the winner’s arm while others darted forward to tidy the unconscious one away. Sherlock leaned forward finally able to read the tattoo across his ropey back. “The land and the people are one.”

John sputtered, coughing beside him. He’d obviously tried to drink some of the noxious brew in his glass. Sherlock set his down on the floor untouched.

“John, we just won something.” Sherlock turned crinkling eyes John’s way. “You were right, go for the small one.”

John nodded, still coughing, and Sherlock gave him a pound on the back.

They made it through two more fights, losing one, and winning the next before Sherlock looked at the chronometer in his bag. He nudged John. “We have to go.”

“Yeah?” John seemed lost in a bit of a fugue.

“Yes. Come on, we have to go before they take the next round of bets, and I have to be back at the library in time for my driver to pick me up.”

“Oh, yeah, alright.”

Sherlock managed to work their way through the crowd, pretending to lean heavily on John’s arm as their made their way to the door. They only had someone stumble into them twice. Sherlock grabbed at his veils making sure they stayed in place. No reason to blow his cover now.

It was nearly evening when they made it back outside from another door, emerging in the alley behind the chemist’s shop. Sherlock took a deep breath of fresh air, grateful to be out of the cloud of sweat, and smoke below.
“Well, that was something,” John said rubbing a hand over the back of his neck. “Leave it to you to find something so interesting to do today. I was going to suggest a shaved ice shop.”

“Come on.” Sherlock lifted his skirts in one hand. “We have to hurry if we’re to catch the bus.”

“All right. Keep your pants on, granny.” John chuckled at his own joke.

They followed the alley to back to the main road, and hurried along the pavement, retracing their path, making good time when John suddenly stopped.

“John, what . . .”

“Hey, look,” John exclaimed. "It’s Harry over there!”

Sherlock glanced across the road where John pointed. A ginger Bajoran girl, dressed in some tiny red thing that might be called a dress if one were being charitable, stood with several other girls dressed much the same. They were laughing merrily, heads thrown back theatrically at something a couple of Cardassian space port workers had just said.

The elusive Watson Harriet was John’s older sister, but Sherlock had only met her a handful of times over the years. Sometimes when mother was having a big party at the house, Harry had come in to help out with things in the kitchen, but mostly she was busy apprenticing with some tailor’s shop on the other side of Dahkur. Or being a tart at the space port if her current appearance was anything to go by.

“HARRY!” John called, stomping across the street.

Sherlock sighed. He had no choice but to follow. John didn’t have enough money on him to get home alone.

“JOHN?” Harry looked utterly shocked. “What are you doing here?”

“I could ask the same of you,” John huffed.

Harry had drawn herself up with some semblance of dignity to look down her nose at John. “Does Mum know you’re here?”


“John, stop it, you’re embarrassing me.” Harry herded her brother a few steps away as the other girls continued their flirting, “I can’t believe . . . Oh, amma, excuse me, can I help you . . .” Harry glanced up at Sherlock’s approach.

“That’s just Sherlock,” John said dismissively. “Did you tell Mum . . .”

“What? SHERLOCK?” Harry leaned forward to peer at him. “That Cardassian kid at the Holmes house?”

“Please, if you could just speak a bit louder . . . the people on the other side of the street might not have heard you.” Sherlock bristled.

“Yeah, I guess it is him,” Harry said, mystified, shaking her head. “That’s just weird. But you still haven’t told me what you’re doing here.”

“Well, I’m not working as a SLAPPER,” John huffed.
“Mind your tongue!” Harry snapped, sounding so like her mother, Sherlock felt himself straightening up. “I’m not working as a slapper. I’m here with friends. We just come down to the space port for a little fun. They’ve some nice bars here, yeah? Sometimes men chat us up and buy us drinks, but that’s all it is.”

“I don’t like it.” John crossed his arms over his chest. “I’m telling Mum.”

“Do that and I’ll tell her you were here with your weird, cross-dressing friend.” Harry narrowed her eyes as she nodded toward Sherlock.

“Cross what?” John faltered.

“Never mind.” Sherlock hurried in. “We need to GO, John, or we’ll miss the bus.”

“Yes, by all means, go catch your bus, JOHN,” Harry sneered.

“Fine,” John said, conceding defeat. “But I’ve got my eye on you Harriet.” John pointed two fingers to his eyes and then at his sister as Sherlock grabbed his other arm to pull him along.

“Yeah, yeah. Go home.” Harry waved them off as she returned to her giggling friends.

“Come on, we need to hurry,” Sherlock urged John along. The boys ended up running down the street, gaining not a few stares, to reach the transit stop in time. They sagged into a back seat of the bus trying to catch their breath.

“We could have caught a cab,” John panted. “You have enough money, right?” Oddly enough they had gained a few leks from their afternoon’s wagers.

“Yes, but a cab would have made a record of our travel. The bus is more anonymous,” Sherlock said. “The less evidence kept, the less chance of it getting back to my father.”

“Oh, right.” John nodded.

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“Dear, you look so tense tonight, hard day at the office?”

Sherlock looked up from his reader screen and blinked at his mother’s voice coming through the air vents. He didn’t realize it had gone so late that his parents were off to bed.

“Hmmmph? Oh yes. There were some riots in the outer edge of the province. Around Marzet. Had to send in some troops.” His father’s voice rumbled.

“What happened?”

“The usual. Some rabble rouser got the workers in the factory district all stirred up. They damaged some property, killed some guards before we could subdue it.”

“Oh, that is a shame,” his mother tutted.

“The worst of it is we had to ship the workers that weren’t killed off to a labor camp. Can’t have a bad element left around to poison the rest.”
“No, of course not, dear”

“Now we have to get a whole new crop of workers trained up out there. Animals. They’re like animals turning on the hand that feeds . . . where was Bajor before we colonized it? They hardly had a decent road system. They didn’t even have a real government for fucksake. Council of elders, *pah!*”

“Of course, dear, let me ring for one of the servants to bring you a nightcap.”

Sherlock stopped listening to his parents, and rolled up off his cushions to his feet. He made his way quietly from his hiding spot to the stairs, and back down to his bedroom, thinking all the way. It wasn’t something he’d ever studied before with his tutors – the planet before the Cardassian colonization. A cursory poking around at the web on his bedroom console quickly showed him the information wasn’t readily available. With a frustrated sigh, Sherlock shut the screen down, and went to brush his teeth.

Chapter End Notes

FYI: I've grabbed a few words from Earth languages to pad out some of my Bajoran options . . .

Bibi - grandmother (Uzbek)
Amma - aunt (Uzbek)

Also the puff bread that the boys enjoy, the dozas, are actually "dal puri" an Indian fried lentil-stuffed bread. So much of the Cardassian occupation of Bajor feels very British Empire in India to me, so I envision much of the Bajoran food and culture as being somewhat Indian in flavor.
Please, he’s my Lakayha

Chapter Summary

Sherlock gets bolder, insisting John accompany him to the Space Port one night when his parents are out. Understandably, John thinks this is a very bad idea.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

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Over two Bajoran years later (16 months)

“Urgh, look at these idiots.” Sherlock scowled at several couples flirting at a table across the room. “It’s horrid.”

“What’s so wrong with it?” Molly widened her eyes.

“Gland games,” Sherlock drawled, making his pronouncement as long and disgusted as he could manage. “It’s ridiculous.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Molly said airily. “It’s all about getting to know someone, feeling someone out before you commit.” She reached over to select a fruit tartlet from the plate before them, popping it into her mouth. “It’s not such a bad idea,” she added around her mouthful.

“Romance, sentiment, bah!” Sherlock nearly spat.

“Come on, Sherlock.” Molly nudged his shoulder. “Continuation of the species? Surely you can see the merit of it, from a scientific viewpoint if nothing else.”

“Hmmph.” Sherlock gave a noncommittal grunt, folding his arms over his chest, as he swept his gaze over the room of young high-ranking Cardassians gathered. A few still picked at the leavings at the luncheon buffet. Some were twirling about in the tedious social dances that seemed to be de riguer for these gatherings, while others simply chatted in small groups, employing brain-numbing amounts of giggling and eye batting in the process. Sherlock barely managed to keep the salad he’d consumed to stay in his gullet with all the revolting mingling going on. There were altogether enough idiots in the universe as far as he was concerned. Pairs of them getting together to replicate MORE stupidity to inflict on right-thinking people hardly held merit.

Sherlock looked at the chrono strapped to his wrist. Could this party take any longer to reach its longed-for ending? It was bad enough that his mother had forced him to attend the holiday soiree in the first place, but the fact that it was taking up an ENTIRE First Day afternoon that he could have spent doing something worthwhile with John was a wrongness of epic proportions. Sherlock glanced at Molly, truly the only person he could stand to talk to at these gathering, and frowned at what he saw. She was looking across the room as well, but with a decidedly wistful expression marring her face as she worried her lower lip with her front teeth.
“Molly?” Sherlock asked, surprised.

“Oh, it’s nothing.” She looked down, bashful at being caught out, and cleared her throat.

“No, it’s something. Tell.” Sherlock nudge her in return.

“Garret Kovat.” She managed.

“Kovat. Yes, what about him?”

“He’s not as bad as the rest. We’ve talked a few times. He’s doing a spore study for school that’s quite interesting. He’s really rather bright.” Molly shrugged a shoulder.

“And?”

“And so I fancy him, all right?” Molly looked as if she might melt at having gotten the words out.

“Huh.” Sherlock widened his eyes, absorbing this information. Molly was several years older than he was. It wasn’t out of the realm of possibility that she would be looking for a mate in earnest sometime soon. “So, what’s the problem then? Go talk to him. Smile at him. It’s what everyone else does.”

“It’s not that easy. Mandi Vorlem’s caught his eye, see.” She nodded sadly with her chin toward the dance floor. When Sherlock peered that way, he could definitely see the boy in question dancing with Mandi, one of the more ruffled specimens of the giggling and eye-batting crowd. “She’s... oh, I don’t know, so much better at being a girl than I am.”

“Nonsense,” Sherlock huffed, turning to consider Molly more closely. “You are a perfectly good example of a girl. In fact if I liked that sort of thing...” Sherlock flapped his hand at the whole sordid business going on around them, “you’d be top of my list. You aren’t unattractive, and you have more than half a brain. Who else here would be interested in discussing the recent studies on super nova radiation?”

“That’s just the point,” Molly said. “Boys don’t like girls who know about super nova radiation when they’re looking for dance partners.” She reached for another tart and bit into it with a sigh.

Sherlock wrinkled his nose. He watched Molly polishing off the sweet, thoughts roiling through his mind before he was able to focus them enough to ask a question.

“Molly, how do you know?”

“How do you know what?” she asked.

“How do you know when you fancy someone? Is it something you do on purpose, or does it just happen?”

She frowned, considering it for a moment. “Oh, Sherlock, I don’t know. It just sort of happens. You realize you like someone. You like spending time with them. You get a funny feeling here,” she pointed in the vicinity of her stomach, “that sort of bubbles up until it fills you all over. You want good things to happen to that person. You care.” She ended with a helpless shrug. “It’s not something you do on purpose.”

“Does that include wanting Mandi Vorlem for them if that’s what they chose?”

“Ugh, I guess so.” Molly dropped her chin into her hand propped up on the table. “You can’t force
someone to like you back.”

Sherlock looked at the dancing crowd, then at Molly again. “Well, this is just ridiculous. What does Mandi Vorlem have that you don’t other than an annoying lisp? Come on we’ll show Garret Kovat that you’re a much better dancer.” Sherlock extended a hand.

“Really? Dancing? I thought you hated dancing.” Molly stayed hunched, though a small light had kindled in her eyes.

“I make exceptions for friends. Come on. If we’re lucky maybe I can manage to step on Mandi Vorlem’s frock while we’re at it.”

“Oh, Sherlock, you’re terrible.” Molly clucked, but allowed Sherlock to lead her to the dance floor, a smile transforming her not unpleasant face to something quite pretty.

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“We can’t do this, Sherlock.” John whispered, peeling the last strip off a root bulb into the rubbish bin. “The fight club will be much more crowded at night. We’ll have a harder time of getting in unnoticed.”

“With a bigger crowd, we’ll have more people to blend in with.” Sherlock sat on a stool beside him, accepting the peeled vegetable to drop into a large ceramic bowl on the counter.

“I dunno.” John blew out a breath, glancing across the room where his mother yelled at one of the kitchen girls for letting a pot of food burn on the hob. The staff scurried about dealing with the small crisis, two throwing open the windows for the smoke, while another hurried the pan to the sink to cool. “Things can get a lot more dodgy down by the Space Port after dark.” John reached for another root.

Sherlock ran a hand through his hair, ruffling it up as he thought. It had been a full month since he and John had last been able to slip away and prowl the streets of Dahkur unfettered. Mid-Winter was a time of holiday observances that ground the usual routine of life to a crashing halt. First there was Warp Memorial Day, then Founders’ Day, then the New Year to celebrate. Sherlock had spent the last few precious weekends being dragged around to increasingly awful, holiday-inspired festivities with his family.

His older brother, Mycroft, had even been granted leave from his military service to spend time at home for the observances. Just last night Sherlock had been forced to attend a dreary opera squashed between his parents and Mycroft’s fat arse. The performance had been based on a historical account of the first families of Cardassia Prime, making it slightly duller than dust. The Bajorans only had Winter Solstice to celebrate and Sherlock envied them the uncomplicated nature of their holiday.

“Come on. I already got some money sent to me from my grandparents as a gift.” Sherlock pulled the transfer chip out of his pocket. “We can do some real betting.” Sherlock leered at John.

John’s gaze flicked down to Sherlock’s hand then back to his face. He licked his lips, breath coming shorter. They’d discovered that John loved gambling even more than Sherlock did. It helped that he was generally very good at it. When John closed his eyes with a groan, Sherlock knew he had him.

“All right fine, but we’re taking a cab home. Put some cash aside for that. We don’t want to be
mucking about the Space Port after hours.” John wagged the peeler at Sherlock before attacking the next root with renewed vigor.

“All right, John.” Sherlock grinned.

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Sherlock begged off that evening’s entertainment, a fancy-dress party at the residence of some high-ranking official, by claiming a debilitating stomach ache. It wasn’t so far out. He often had stomach troubles when he had to eat the heavy cuisine most Cardassian families favoured. His mother came to visit his bedroom herself trailing the long robes of her cleric costume to check on him.

“No, it’s not too bad.” She sat on the edge of his bed, pressing her hand to his nape, touching to see if he were warm. Since he’d raised the temperature in his room before bundling up in his warmest pyjamas, and heaping extra blankets on his bed, Sherlock was feeling quite hot and sticky. “You do feel a bit off.” His mother frowned down at him.

“No, it’s not too bad.” Sherlock hastened to not look so ill that his mother would feel the need to call a doctor in. “Just a bit sick. I don’t feel up to a party.”

“All right, dear. It has been a busy few weeks hasn’t it? I swear the holidays get more mad every year. You’ll call if you feel worse?”

“Yes, Mycroft wants to make sure they don’t eat all the cake before he gets there.” Sherlock’s upper lip lifted in a sneer as his brother stepped into the room.

Mycroft peered down at him suspiciously. “What wrong with you now, Sherlock? Is this a phantom pain that travels at your convenience?”

Sherlock opened his mouth to deliver some scathing retort, but Mummy intervened. “Now, now, Mikey, stop that. If Sherlock is under the weather, he can stay home and rest.” Mummy reached out to pat at the lump that looked to be Sherlock’s leg buried under his cocoon of blankets. “We have been busy lately.”

Mycroft gave Sherlock a pointed glare to which Sherlock replied by sticking out his tongue as soon as his mother turned. Being in the service hadn’t done a thing to improve Mycroft’s annoying, overbearing ways, not that Sherlock had though it would. Thankfully after a few more farewells from his mother, the lot of them moved out of his bedroom, and Sherlock could start phase two of the evening.

Sherlock leapt out of bed. He took a quick shower, dragged on some clothes, and gave his hair the most perfunctory of combings. After making sure to leave his mobile plugged in on the bedside table, it had a tracking device inside after all, Sherlock slipped out into the silent hallway. The servants, like John’s mum and the gardener who commuted, had gone home already, and those who lived on the premises had retired for the evening. Sherlock made his way out of the house and through the
gardens to reach the back wall unchallenged. He knelt down, feeling under the tangle of evergreen bushes to find the zippered case hidden there.

Quickly Sherlock exchanged his outer layer for the jumble of skirts, wraps and veils inside the bag. He snapped together his collapsible cane, and after stuffing a few necessary things into his large woven handbag, set off, his Bajoran granny transformation complete. At the small, little-used service door, Sherlock pulled out the illegal code breaking device he had acquired, and attached it to the lock on the gate. Its circuits whirred for just a moment before the door popped open with a satisfying beep. Relocking the door behind him, Sherlock pushed the device deep into a pocket and set off, grinning hugely, finally free.

John stood a bit apart from the others waiting at the transit stop just outside the neighborhood’s gates. The boy shifted his weight from foot to foot, hands shoved deep into his pockets as some protection against the cold. Sherlock could see the moment John noticed his approach, snapping to attention.

“Good evening,” John called out as Sherlock drew close enough to hear. “You’re looking very well, bibi.”

“Cheeky thing. I’m looking old,” Sherlock rasped. “Here, make yourself useful and take my bag.”

Once John had slung the handbag over his shoulder, Sherlock took John’s free arm in his own, leaning close as an old grandmother might. John’s heat seeped deliciously into him where they pressed together. The few Bajorans huddled away from the wind under the small enclosure barely spared them a glance.

“We don’t have to visit the Space Port club.” John muttered by his ear. “The dabo tables at the Lucktown casino could be just as fun.”

“Ugh, we’ve done that loads of times. Besides, this is the first time I’ve been out at night, and we’ve never seen the Space Port after dark,” Sherlock whinged. “Come on, it’s my birthday.”

“Not for two weeks.” John snorted.

“An early birthday gift then. Pleasease, John?”

“Oh, Prophets.” John sighed. “You’re a menace, you know this? Alright, fine. No talking to anyone, and when I say go, we go.”

“Thank you.” Sherlock gave John’s arm a quick squeeze.

“You’re welcome, bibi.” John’s lips tugged into a smile despite himself.

The transit bus was a welcome sight when it finally squealed to a stop before them. The servants slumped tiredly into their seats, and they all rode in silence through the dark residential areas toward midtown. The lights grew brighter as they travelled, bright lamps, and lit shops lining the street when John pushed the button to exit for their transfer. John helped Sherlock down the steps as he clumped along with his cane to reach the pavement. Once outside, Sherlock made a beeline for the bench, laying his handbag and cane out to claim the space. When it looked like no one planned to linger, he budged over, patting the seat beside him for John to join.

John chuckled. “Hey, did you see . . .”

“WATSON. Hey, Watson John.” Two Bajoran youths interrupted them, calling from across the street. They ran brazenly through the traffic. A few horns honked, but the boys just laughed as they made it safely through to the kerb. They were taller than John, and thicker, though some of that was
the padded jackets they wore, built up around the neck and shoulders to mimic the natural look of a Cardassian. It seemed to be the new fashion.

“Fancy meeting you here, bro,” The taller one said, extending his hand towards John.

“Heya.” John smiled and clasped his palm, the two of them running through a complicated series of handshakes before they both let go, fingers wiggling in the air. Sherlock frowned. It wasn’t something he’d seen before.

“What are you doing out here, ya wally?” The other one leaned in, and the complicated handshake was repeated.

“Oh, you know, nothing much.” John shrugged, slipping his hands into his pockets. “How about you two?”

“We’re off to see the new action vid at the Palace. Jo’s sister works there, and she’s going to hold the back door open for us.” The tall one nudged the shorter one with a grin.

“Hey, why don’t you come too?” Shorty said. “Costs the same to slip in three instead of two.”

“Erm, well . . .” John fidgeted. “I’d like to, but I can’t. I have to take my great aunt to . . . some relatives . . . across town . . .” John trailed off as he cut his eyes toward Sherlock.

The demeanor of the boys shifted immediately as they caught sight of Sherlock’s veiled form on the bench behind John. They stood taller, brushing their hair back, guilty looks replacing the sly ones on their faces.

“Oh, pardon me, old mother,” Shorty sputtered. “We didn’t see you.”

Tall one ducked his head. “We, uh, we were just kidding around about the sneaking in . . .”

“Yeah, we got tickets . . .” Shorty added.

“John, who are your little friends, dear?” Sherlock croaked from under his veil. “Introduce me.”

John fought back a smile. “Amma, this is Kirby and Jojo. They’re in my class at school.”

“May the Prophets bless you.” Sherlock tipped his head.

“Blessings also upon you.” The nervous boys chimed back, sketching a bow.

“Hey, we’d better go.” Jojo glanced at the cheap chrono on his wrist, nudging the tall one, Kirby. “We don’t wanna be late.”

“Oh right. Well, see ya later, John.” Kirby said. “Another time, eh? . . . amma.” He dropped a quick parting nod Sherlock’s way.

Sherlock returned it regally.

“Yeah, alright, later. Bye, guys!” John waved as they took off.

“BYE!” the boys called back, racing off down the street to disappear around a corner.

“You’re really scary when you do that, ya know?” John chuckled, settling on the bench next to Sherlock. “I could swear I had an elder here checking up on me. Gave me the chills.” John shook himself all over in demonstration.
“John, do you see them often? Those boys?”

“What, Jojo, and Kirby? Well, yeah. Like I said, they’re in my class.”

“But at night, do you go out with them?”

“Noooo. I’m always at your house.” John bumped into him playfully. “Don’t have a lot of extra time after that.”

“I don’t want you hanging out with them. Those boys are trouble.” Sherlock leaned in over his cane, one hand clasped over the other to fix John in a piercing gaze through the veils.

“All right, all right.” John waved him off. “Stop it. Creeping me out.”

The transit bus that arrived to ferry them across town was older, a bit shabbier with a much more diverse crowd inside. It was packed, and though someone moved for Sherlock to take a seat, John had to stand, hanging from a strap as the bus trundled along. The Space Port was just as exciting at night as Sherlock had thought it would be. A flurry of brightly-dressed natives and offworlders, flashing signs, and the savory smells of food stalls open for business all mingled into a thrilling buzz that crackled over his skin. They’d been to the fight club several times over the last few months, and set off confidently for the chemist shop hiding its entrance. John solicitously kept an arm threaded through Sherlock’s though as they wove through the heavy foot traffic.

Things were busy, and the door man might have turned them away if they weren’t semi-regulars who tipped well whenever they came. Sherlock bit his lip, tamping down the excitement that bubbled over him as they were shown into the downstairs room. The usual wall of noise and fug of smoke and unwashed bodies hit them as they wormed their way in toward the performance space. While the Bajorans and Cardassians had seemed to divide themselves naturally during the calmer daylit hours, for nighttime, an official space had been cordoned off in the back for the Bajorans to use. The bouncer herded them there none-too-gently. Like the rest of the club, it was crowded, and they only got seats on a bench when a man moved away in deference to Sherlock’s attire gesturing “for you, bibi,” as he rose. Sherlock sank down gratefully making space for John to squash in beside. Sherlock had grown two centimeters in the last month alone, and no he longer passed as an elderly Bajoran woman if he did anything more than hunch nearly in half or find a seat.

Sherlock bought two of the watered-down ales they served when a waitress passed. It wasn’t good exactly, but at least it didn’t give them a headache afterwards if they actually drank it.

A warm-up duo, some new Bajoran boys, had begun sparring in the ring. The crowd cried out, egging them on as they feinted and jabbed at each other. The scantily-clad bar girls whirled around the crowd, doling out drinks, and collecting bets, as busy as the brawlers. Sherlock looked around and smiled. For some reason the chaos of it suited him, and he relaxed into the frenetic joy of it all.

John was not so easily distracted, and he studied the fighters in the ring intently.

“What do you think?” Sherlock ducked his head close to John’s.

“The dark-haired one,” John said. “He looks like he knows what he’s doing.”

“My thoughts exactly.” Sherlock grinned behind his veil, and called over a bar girl to place their bet.

The evening was not so different from their other visits to the fight club though even more people crammed into the room as the night progressed. The fighters swung and kicked, slammed, and clawed, more nerve than technique, and the crowd cheered for each bloody hit. John was unwisely on his third drink, red in the face, and laughing at something Sherlock said, when a hush settled over
the crowd. The next pair of fighters to step into the ring were not a pair of Bajorans, but a set of Cardassians, stripped to the waist, stretching as they eyed each other, scanning for weaknesses.

“Oooh.” John’s eyes went comically round.

Behind his veil, Sherlock’s mouth dropped open. He hadn’t known the fight club did this.

A flurry of bets exploded across the place as the men bowed, and the combat began. It was glorious. These two were most likely ex-military, a bit past their prime, but well trained in a variety of fighting styles. They whirled and spun at each other, the fight almost more of a choreographed dance than a battle. The light over the ring was merciless highlighting the pallor of their skin, and their neck ridges and scales down their chest and back stood out in stark detail. Sherlock’s eyes slid to John as he remembered to breath. He wasn’t sure if John had ever seen adult Cardassian males so bared. The boy looked transfixed, the glass forgotten in his hand as he drank in every detail of the men thrashing about the ring. A rush of something like embarrassment shivered its way over Sherlock. Is this what he looked like to John?

One of the fighter’s punches finally connected and a line of dark purple blossomed over the cheek of the other, running to drip down his face falling on the sawdust bellow. John swallowed deeply, his adam’s apple bobbing in his throat.

Finally, it seemed an age had passed of grunts and blows, each wearing the other down, before one Cardassian knocked his opponent to the ground, and the man stayed down. The winner was declared and the crowd cheered or hissed depending on how their bets had gone.

John finished his drink. “Hey, we’d better go soon, yeah? Your parents won’t be out all night.”

“Oh, they may as well be. These balls go until dawn or later, but you’re right…” Sherlock trailed off as the next pair squared up inside the ring.

The Cardassian who had won the last round now faced the Bajoran who had survived three fights earlier in the evening. It was obviously to be a meeting of the champions to cap the night’s excitement. If the crowd had been effusive in their excitement earlier, their reaction now was like a reactor overloading. The walls fairly shook with the noise.

It was illegal. It was strictly forbidden for a Bajoran to meet a Cardassian in combat. The punishment was instant death without a trial. Sherlock knew they should leave, but he couldn’t tear his eyes away from the disaster unfolding before them. The Cardassian was tired, but as anyone knew Cardassian’s generally had double the strength of a Bajoran. It was hardly an equally-matched battle, but the Bajoran fighter was canny, he used his lighter size to his advantage, ducking and weaving, wearing the larger man down. You couldn’t hear the sound of their hits, not with the crowd screaming open-throated as they were, but each of the fighters had taken damage, they were wavering, exhausted, but somehow holding their own against each other.

Sherlock could see it coming, saw the jump and kick that the Bajoran managed to get in under the Cardassian warrior’s guard. It wasn’t a classical move, not something he’d have a standard block for, and the Bajoran was on fire, hanging on with a determination that had nothing to do with winning a bar fight in a dodgy little club underground at the Space Port. The Cardassian’s head snapped back, and he fell almost in slow motion, slamming backwards onto the ground.

“Go! We’re fucking going.” John yelled in his ear already tugging Sherlock out of his seat as the frenzied crowd erupted onto their feet around them.

It was impossible to track where it started, but a fight broke out that rippled quickly through the
crowd. Sherlock and John both ducked their heads down, making their way as quickly as they could toward an exit. Unfortunately many of the other patrons had the same idea, and a crush of people stampeding to get outside blocked the way. A stray glass thrown caught Sherlock in the back, and he grunted changing their direction to pull John toward the bar. They clambered over the bar top and burst through the service door into the kitchen and private areas behind. Sherlock hardly glanced at the stunned employees, boxes and equipment as they thundered down a hall to a service stairwell. They pounded up, taking the concrete steps two at a time, panting, until they found a door that expelled them finally into the blessedly cool air of the alley.

Sadly, the chaos was not to be escaped just by reaching the relative safety of the outdoors. Sounds of fighting followed them, the violence obviously spreading quickly into the streets. Someone threw a bottle that broke a window, and a shrill alarm kicked off.

“Come on.” Sherlock said, grabbing up his skirts. They set off in a flat-out run in any direction that took them from what looked like a riot sweeping across the whole Space Port. Official vehicles with sirens blaring raced past them toward the fray.

They were soon hopelessly lost in the twist of streets, with nary a taxi when they really needed one. They kept moving, winding their way through the streets and alleys, working themselves farther away from the trouble. Finally, they had to stop to catch their breath. Panting by some steps to a building closed for the night.

“Prophets, Sherlock I told you.” John wheezed beside him.

“Gods, bleeding Gods. I’m sorry . . . I . . ” Sherlock was cut off as two Cardassian guards on patrol turned the corner and spotted them.

“You there!” The one in front called.

They turned to run, but a third guard appeared behind them, blocking the way.

“Well, looks like we caught a couple of rats loose that need cleaning up.” He loomed over them, smiling nastily.

Sherlock realized he’d left his things behind in the commotion, and wished deeply he still had his cane in his hands. “Please, sir,” Sherlock croaked holding up his palms, “We mean no harm, we’ll just be on our way.” Somehow his veils were still hanging on.

“There’s a curfew on, old hag. You and your boy are under arrest for being in violation.” A guard reached out to grab Sherlock’s elbow.

“No, no, you don’t understand,” Sherlock squawked, struggling to pull away. It had never crossed Sherlock’s mind, not in his wildest dreams that someone might attack an old lady. He was completely unprepared when the guard whipped out a truncheon and cracked him across the temple. Sherlock fell to the ground, dazed, stars dancing across his vision. His attacker reared back to kick him, and John flew into motion, launching himself at the man, screaming like a wild thing. There was no contest, the other two guards caught John, pinning his arms behind him, and slammed him to the pavement beside Sherlock.

“Oh ho, looks like we’ve got some candidates for a labor camp, here. Excellent.” The head goon laughed.

“Not that one though.” Someone did kick Sherlock then. He cried out. “That one’s too old. Best to put the bitch down now.” To Sherlock’s horror, he heard a disruptor pistol being drawn.
On pure instinct, Sherlock snatched his veils away, rolling up to his knees to bellow in his deepest voice. “How DARE you! How dare you lay hands on the son of a Gul and his servant? I’ll have you all TRANSFERRED to a labor camp in the TUNDRA!”

The guards lurched backward, in shock, looking gobsmacked. Sherlock wasted no time in debating any further with the brutes. He pulled John upright, and the two of them stumbled off, running as fast as they could, nipping down an alley, hearts pounding in their throats. More sirens and lights flashing reached them from the streets nearby, and Sherlock turned wild-eyed toward John not knowing where to go next.

“Come on.” John took his hand, “I know where we are now.” With a renewed burst of energy, John led them down another set of streets, and up to the doors of a temple. Before any of the lights could reach them, they’d ducked inside.

The quiet of the building washed over them, their ragged breathing a roar in their ears after the noise of the city streets outside. John pulled Sherlock through the antechamber into the public prayer room, nodding his head on instinct as they cleared the doors. The room was deserted save for the rows of candles that flickered along the walls. They slumped to a bench inside, almost laughing now that the danger had passed. The thick smell of incense settled over them like a soothing balm.

“Oh, Sherlock, you’re bleeding.” John panted.

Sherlock lifted fingers to his smarting head, and they came away dark purple. The cut hurt as soon as he started thinking about it. “Ugh, you’re right . . . damn. How are you, did they hurt you?” He peered more closely at John.

“No, I’m okay, the wankers didn’t get a chance to rough me up.”

A rustle at a curtained alcove at the end of the room soon revealed a young priestess swathed in robes of purple, her ear chains dangling a number of pendants. “Good evening, how may we serve . . .” She stopped when her eyes landed on Sherlock. He ducked his head, trying to look small.

“Please, Mother, we need help,” John said. “There’s a curfew on, and we need to be off the streets.”

“I’m so sorry, my son. We help those in need, but we aren’t authorized to accept . . . Cardassians here.”

“Please, they’re arresting people for the labor camps, please.” John pressed.

“But surely not a Cardassian.” Her eyes widened as Sherlock turned toward John, and she saw the blood on his face.

“I won’t go without John.” Sherlock felt a wordless panic rip through him. He could see John crushed to the sidewalk again, two large guards holding him down. Sherlock reached out blindly to grab John’s arm. “I won’t leave him.”

The priestess paused, indecision flickering over her face.

“Please, he’s my lakayha,” John said. “He’d be in trouble for being with me.”

The priestess came to some decision. “All right, follow me.” She led them back into the temple stopping at a door that led to what looked like a storage room. “I can’t have you in our homeless shelter. Not with him.” Her eyes ran over Sherlock again. “You can stay here, but if anyone finds you, you sneakied in on your own. I don’t know you.”
"I understand, Mother, thank you," John said.

She returned to bring them a few things, water, blankets and some first aid items before leaving them for the night. "You have to be out by dawn." She said. "That’s the best I can do."

"Thank you, Mother, you’ve moved the world." Sherlock told her fervently. "I . . . we won’t forget it."

The priestess looked surprised. "You’re welcome. May the Prophets bless you." She bowed her head.

"Blessings also upon you." Sherlock and John replied in turn.

The woman smiled, shaking her head as she left them, pulling the door closed.

A faint light fell through the small window from a street light outside, and they spread the blankets on the floor, settling themselves by its dim glow. John helped Sherlock bandage his head before urging him to stretch out on their makeshift pallet beside him.

"That was good of her to help us," Sherlock whispered.

"I think it helped that you were speaking Bajoran," John whispered back. "Not that many Cardassians really do, you know."

Suddenly Sherlock had to blink back tears. A wave of shame swept over him threatening to send him weeping in earnest. "Prophets, John, I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.” Sherlock wiped his nose miserably on his sleeve.

“It’s all right, Sherlock, we’re okay.” John reached out to lay a hand to his shoulder.

“It’s not okay. I should have listened to you. The Space Port was dangerous at night. I’m an idiot. I almost got you killed.”

“It was you they were going to blast. I almost died when one went for his disruptor.” A shiver ran through John. “I couldn’t do anything to help you,” he added darkly.

“You were wonderful, John. There were just too many of them.”

“YOU, though. When you threatened to have the guards sent to a labor camp, that was brilliant! Prophets, I wish you could really do that . . . those bastards!”

Sherlock sucked in a breath. That day that the guards at the neighborhood gate had hurt John, Sherlock had hacked into his father’s computer system. It wasn’t hard, a few orders issued with the right names attached, the electronic trails erased. The guards had been reassigned to a mining camp on the southern province the next week. For some reason, he’d never told John about it though.

“Yeah, that would be something,” Sherlock agreed weakly.

“Those bastards,” John growled again.

Sherlock started to shake then, strangely overcome now that things had calmed. He couldn’t seem to stop it, even his teeth chattered.

“Oh, Sherlock.” John rolled over to pull Sherlock into his arms. “Shhhh. We’re fine.” He rubbed a soothing circle between his shoulder blades. It occurred to Sherlock then that they hadn’t done this since they were very small, lying down to sleep beside each other, and they’d never lain in each
other’s arms like this.

Sherlock buried his face into John’s tunic and breathed in deeply. John smelled like all things good and wonderful, like home. Gradually the tremors in his body eased.

"John, that word you used. What did you call me . . . your lakayha? I never heard that before what does it mean?"

"Oh." John shifted beside him. "It's an old Bajoran word. It just means . . . best friend."

"I'm your best friend?" Sherlock sniffed.

"Course you are. Who else, ya big git?" Sherlock could hear the smile in John's voice. "Look, try to rest a bit, okay? We still have to get home from here."

"All right, John." Sherlock wouldn’t have thought he could actually fall asleep on the floor like this, but the evening had been exhausting, and he drifted off. When next he opened his eyes, thin morning light filtered in through the small window.

John shook his shoulder. “Come on, we’d better go.”

Chapter End Notes

Did I ever tell folks unfamiliar with this Star Trek show that Bajorans traditionally use their family name first, and their given names second? I guess you figured it out if not. ;) If anyone is interested, I found a fascinating website chock full of information about DS9, and the places and people of its universe. It's been my canon bible while writing this fic - though of course I am taking great liberties with political events. Go check it out if you want to read more background on Bajorans, Cardassians and the worlds they live in . . . Memory Alpha

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Also here's a site with a nice artistic image of a Cardassian
Two Moons Out Tonight

Chapter Summary

When Sherlock's parents find out about his antics around town, they put their foot down, no more time with John. Sherlock is nothing if not clever when it comes to circumventing other people’s rules.

Chapter Notes

A huge shout out to iamjohnlocked4life. If not for her ABSOLUTELY fabulously inspiring comments, I would not have been motivated to take little fic back down off the shelf and write another chapter for it. Many thanks for her enthusiasm! It is nice to come back to Bajor. Hugs to everyone who leaves comments and kudos here! It really is appreciated. ;)

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Somehow the boys made it to John’s house without incident. Sherlock managed to fix his half-torn veils well-enough to cover his face. He followed John from the temple with his head ducked as the shorter boy led the way through the maze of passages that made up the old quarter.

“It’s not that far, let’s just walk it,” John said after seeing the line at the transit stop.

“Yeah, that’s probably safer,” Sherlock agreed.

More guards than usual seemed to be out patrolling the streets at daybreak, but with the city waking up for the day, a Bajoran granny and her grandson hardly stood out. They passed any number of people going about their usual business, off to work or worship, many most likely oblivious of the ruckus at the space port the night before.

Sherlock regretted putting them both in such danger. He still shivered when he thought of John at the hands of the brutes the night before, but a chance to spend a whole night with John, and now a chance to see John’s house for the first time, well, Sherlock could hardly contain his excitement.

John led him past a shopping district, already noisy with business to a twisting side street lined with small stucco dwellings packed cheek to jowl together. Each house had a meager plot of land before it, most a scrabble of bare earth or stone, but the one John stopped at boasted a number of blooming plants in ceramic jars along the front, and bright curtains in the windows. Sherlock could readily see Mrs. Watson’s hand in the decorating of the place.

“Okay, try to be quiet.” John glanced at Sherlock as he dug a key from a pocket. “I don’t want to wake up Mum if we can help it. This is her one day to have a lie in.”

Sherlock nodded absently, letting his gaze run over the house, drinking in every detail of John’s life that had been previously hidden from him. John unlocked the door and held it open for Sherlock to
pass through, securing it again behind them. Sherlock gratefully pulled off his head gear once inside, sweeping back his hair, and wincing slightly when his fingers hit the bandage along his temple. The room was a dim muddle to his eyes after the bright light outside, but he could see it was definitely a parlour of sorts.

“I’m sorry, I know it isn’t much, not what you’re used to . . .” John looked about the room, waving a hand, embarrassed.

“John it’s your home. I’m honored to be a guest here. Thank you for inviting me in.”

“Well, of course.” John shifted his weight awkwardly. “Listen, can you hang on a mo? I just want to check on my Mum, see if she’s still asleep.”

“Don’t mind me.” Sherlock nodded, watching as John stepped through the inner door to the darker corridor beyond.

Sherlock glanced about the room as his eyes adjusted to the light, trying to take in everything at once. Faded tapestries graced the stone walls, while a scattering of old, mismatched pieces made up the furniture in the room. Sherlock was momentarily surprised to realize that he recognized both the chairs and the floral rug across the floor. In a previous life, they had sat in their entry hallway before Mummy’s big redecorating project a few years ago. It was passing odd seeing the familiar things rendered almost exotic in their strange, new home. A set of shelves crammed with any number of books, and knick-knacks drew him like a magnet. He’d already cataloged most of the contents, and was sticking his head into a narrow wardrobe, accidentally jostling the things crammed inside when John’s arm shot out to ease him back.

“Prophets’ eyes! Sherlock, can you not climb into the cupboard, please?”

“Sorry, John, I was just curious.”

“Well, stop.” John sighed. “Come on, I’m starving. Do you want something?”

At Sherlock’s vaguely hummed reply, John closed the wardrobe, urging Sherlock into the narrow hallway that led to a small kitchen and three more doors farther down.

“Do you need the loo?” John gestured to the first door left half open.

When Sherlock answered affirmatively, John left him to use the facilities while he moved into the kitchen to forage for breakfast. The washroom was miniscule, there was hardly space to turn around inside it, but it was cleverly outfitted with a low toilet, a sink stacked over it, and a shower head that obviously turned the whole space into a shower when it was activated. A sealed cupboard built into the wall held all manner of supplies. After relieving himself and washing his hands, Sherlock poked through it until he found a tube of antiseptic and plasters that he used to better dress the wound on his head.

Sherlock left the toilet, and on impulse opened the neighboring door sporting a number of peeling stickers across it. He was rewarded with the sight of John’s bedroom, a space half the size of the cupboard of his own quarters at home. A bunk bed took up most of the room, but a set of shelves and drawers had been crammed creatively into the rest of the space. Sherlock had only stepped inside long enough to catch sight of a cheap print-out framed and hung on the wall of a younger John, Harry and his mother in fancy clothes, obviously taken at some festive occasion when John himself appeared behind him.

“Sherlock, come on, don’t be in here,” John whispered. “I don’t want to wake up Mum.” He tipped
his head to the room across the hall.

Sherlock nodded, and followed John back to the kitchen. Places had been set, and a number of different foods laid out over the narrow table, while a kettle heated on the small stove in the corner. After John excused himself to use the loo, Sherlock seated himself at the table peering into the various containers. He was pleased to find some pickled vegetables, hasperat, in one bowl and happily ladled a scoop of it onto a chunk of fresh bread. The water boiled just as John reemerged looking tired but cleaner, wearing a fresh shirt. He lifted the kettle off the hob before it could whistle too loudly, and turned off the burner.

“Mmm, I think this morning calls for some deka tea, I’m knackered,” John said, looking through the pantry to select a box.

“Indeed,” Sherlock agreed, humming his thanks when John placed a steaming cup and a small jar of honey at his elbow. Sherlock reached over to stir a heaping spoonful of the sweetener into his drink.

“Oh, I am so hungry,” John said, pulling various dishes closer to heap food onto his plate.

After several blissful minutes of companionable chewing, John leaned back to take a sip of his tea, now cooled enough to drink.

“I’m sorry we don’t have any eggs or zuba in. We can’t use the icebox anymore with all the brown-outs.” John’s gaze flicked toward the small refrigerator set under the counter.

“No matter. I hate heavy things for breakfast.” Sherlock waved the suggestion away. “What about brown-outs though?”

“Yeah, we only get power for a few hours a day in the old quarter now.” John shrugged. We’ve got some solar cells on the roof as well, but it isn’t enough to run big appliances.”

“How long has this been going on?” Sherlock brought his cup to his lips.

“A few years,” John said, taking another sip.

“You never told me.” Sherlock frowned.

“Honestly, I’m not here all that often.” The side of John’s mouth tipped up. “It seems I’m generally either at school or your house.”

“Still, that doesn’t make sense. If something were wrong with the power grid, you’d think the authorities could have fixed it within the space of several years.” Sherlock tipped back his cup for a large swallow.

John simply shrugged. “The facilities are old, things fail over time, and the Bajoran sector isn’t exactly a priority with those in charge.”

“That’s outrageous.” Sherlock bristled.

“Let’s not worry about it right now.” John lifted his shoulder again. “We can’t change anything this morning, and to be honest, I’m just happy you’re alive and I’m not on my way to a work camp.”

“John, I am so sorry.” Sherlock couldn’t help flinching. “You were right, the space port was too dangerous after dark.”

“Ooh, can I get that in writing? Sherlock was wrong and I was right?” John leaned back in his chair
with a creak, a cheeky smile chasing its way over his mouth.

It was hard to stay upset when John looked like that. “Yes, I’ll have it printed out and framed for you, alright?”

“Getting better,” John said. “Hey can you pass me the hasperat before you polish it off?”

The sun shone cheerfully through the thin curtains, sparkling on the glass beads hung in the window for protection, and illuminating all the gold highlights in John’s hair as he leaned over his food. Sherlock reached for another slice of bread and for a moment, all seemed right with the world. The fact that Sherlock was still dressed in Bajoran women’s clothes and had stayed out all night without his parents’ permission seemed like the distant buzz of an insect, hardly worth his attention. John poured him another cup of tea, and their easy talk turned to ideas about what they might do the next weekend that wouldn’t put them in the middle of a riot.

The trill of a mobile phone going off sounded from the back of the house. John stiffened, catching Sherlock’s eye as the quiet moment was broken. In just a few minutes, Mrs. Watson appeared, her long hair in a braid, tying a wrapper around her night clothes as she bustled into the kitchen. “John, that was the oddest thing. I just got a call from the Holmes house. Sherlock is . . .” Her eyes widened at the sight of the boys around the table. “apparently sitting in my kitchen. Oh, Prophets.” She groaned as she sank into the remaining chair.

“I’m in trouble, aren’t I?” Sherlock looked sheepishly at her.

“Sherlock, your mother is frantic, and I don’t blame her.” Mrs. Watson frowned. “You, young man,” she said swinging a steely glare John’s way, “had better have a good explanation. This is not acceptable and you know it.”

John opened his mouth to answer, but Sherlock jumped in. “It wasn’t his fault, amma. I made him go with me last night. We went . . .”

“ . . . to a vid show, and it ran really late,” John added quickly. “We just crashed here rather than trying to get Sherlock home. You were already asleep when we got in, and we didn’t want to wake you.” John looked absolutely guileless as he beamed up at his mother. Sherlock could have kissed him.

“Why is Sherlock wearing a dress?” She blinked his way just having noticed this salient fact. “Oh and your head. Sweetie, what happened?” She reached up, lifting his hair to better inspect the damage.

“It was a Bajoran vid theater,” Sherlock explained. “I didn’t want to stand out so I wore a disguise. I have a head wrap.” He gestured lamely back toward the front room where he had left it. “And I tripped on the skirts. Hit my head on a door frame. It’s nothing really.”

“Of course.” Mrs. Watson shook her head as if she simply couldn’t believe the two of them. The fond exasperation wasn’t an unusual expression for her.

“I’m sorry,” Sherlock mumbled. “I didn’t mean any harm.”

“Oh, honey.” John’s mother softened as she reached out to pat his arm. “Do you have a phone?”

When Sherlock told her no, she stood and made to retrieve her own. “You can call your parents on mine. They shouldn’t worry another minute. I heard there was a riot down by the space port last night of all things. Thanks the Prophets you weren’t anywhere near all that bother.” She shivered as she left the room.
Sherlock caught John’s eye and they burst into sniggers hastily muffled behind their hands.

Things moved too fast after that. Sherlock called his mother, and in a matter of minutes, a sleek back car had pulled up in front of the Watsons’ house to ferry him home. The neighbors peered out their curtains, watching avidly as Sherlock made his walk of shame to the vehicle. At least John had lent him some regular clothes to wear home, but the borrowed shirt and trousers looked a bit ridiculous on him barely grazing his wrists and ankles. Sherlock looked back at the Watsons' place as the car purred away from the kerb. He thought he might have seen their curtains twitch as well, but he wasn’t sure. Sherlock only turned to face forward once the Watsons’ street had passed completely out of view. He settled into his seat with a sigh. Sherlock was confident that this would quickly blow over, and he and John could get back to their regularly-scheduled activities as soon as possible.

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At home, everything changed. At first Mummy was simply grateful to see Sherlock. She fussed over him, clucking at his story about the late movie, and worrying over the cut on his head. By the next day though, Father had a report on his desk, and Sherlock was called in to hear a detailed account of his activities over the weekend, and the several weekends before that.

“It’s bad enough that you gave false accounts of your whereabouts, and frequented GAMBLING dens, but with a Bajoran, and in a dress?” His father loomed menacingly over his desk. “This is unacceptable. You bring shame and ruin on our family name with such childish behavior. I won’t have this anymore. Do you understand?”

“But Father . . .”

“No more. I’ve been lenient on you for your mother’s sake, but I see now what an error that was.”

“Oh, Sherlock we raised you better than this.” His mother turned her crumpled face away.

“But, but you don’t understand . . .” Sherlock tried to speak, and was simply cut off.

He was informed that the lax guard who had been driving him to the library was being replaced with a new escort, one who would be staying by his side when he was allowed to leave the house once more. As Father yelled, and Mummy cried, Sherlock stood stiffly, jaw locked, and let it roll over him, planning what he would say to John when he saw him next. Then Father dropped the bomb he’d been saving for last. John was no longer welcome to come to the house, and Sherlock was not to see him elsewhere. No contact of any sort would be allowed any more. Sherlock yelled back then, railed at the injustice of it all, and was banished to his locked room for the rest of his day for all his efforts to make his parents see reason.

Like the Cardassian empire itself, in the Holmes household, there was apparently order to be upheld, rules to be followed, and precious little concern for anyone’s personal feelings on the matter. After Sherlock had thrown everything in his room at the wall, screamed into his pillow and cried hot, bitter tears into his sheets, he finally reached a moment of clear-headedness. He sat up, wiped his eyes, and began to plan. John didn’t have a console, a reader, or a phone. His mother’s mobile was the only tech device in their home, but there were other, more rudimentary ways for communication to occur for the moment, and more elaborate plans to be made for a longer endgame.

Thankfully Mrs. Watson remained head of the kitchens despite the huge fiasco with John, and
Sherlock was determined to make good use of the fact that she traveled between their homes nearly
every day. Sherlock would write John a letter. He would also play the model citizen at the Holmes
Gulag, lulling everyone into a false sense of security until he could enact his long-term schemes.
Vision. A battle was won by beginning with a vision. Sherlock started his campaign by picking
everything up from his floor, and painstakingly putting his room back to rights.

Just a few days later when the worst of the surveillance had waned, Sherlock made his way down to
the kitchens unnoticed before breakfast. He carried the clothes he had borrowed from John folded in
a small bag under one arm. Sherlock paused, waiting for the right moment. When most of the
servants were busy at various tasks, he slipped in through the pantry door, catching Mrs. Watson
alone looking through the spices.

“Amma, I’m so sorry about what happened.”

“Oh, Sherlock.” She whirled around nearly dropping the jar of powdered rekja in her hand. “You
startled me.”

“I’m sorry for that too.” Sherlock bit his lower lip. “Please, I have the clothes that I borrowed from
John.” Sherlock held up the small bundle by way of explanation. “I wanted to return them to you
along with my thanks.” He bowed his head. “I enjoyed the hospitality of your home.”

“You are always welcome at my home.” Mrs. Watson bowed her head slightly in reply, giving the
correct response to the ritual exchange. “Thank you, dear,” she ad libbed, accepting the parcel from
him. “Sherlock, listen, you know if your parents didn’t mind you would be welcome at our house
anytime, it’s just . . .”

“I know.” Sherlock dropped his shoulders. “I just . . . how is John? Is he okay?”

“He’s fine.” A tight smile found its way to her mouth. “Well, I say fine, but he’s upset of course. He
misses you, and he’s bored stuck at home.”

Sherlock nodded, not trusting his voice for a moment.

“Is there something you’d like me to tell John?”

A spark leapt in Sherlock’s chest. “Well, I was hoping you wouldn’t mind taking him a letter. I
actually have one folded up inside his clothes.”

“Well, I probably shouldn’t, but yes, it’s the least I can do.”

“Thank you, amma, thank you.” Sherlock drew her into a quick, impromptu hug. She smelled of the
spices she’d been working with, a scent that never failed to make Sherlock feel small and safe again.
She reached up with her free arm to hold him, patting at his back as she always did.

“Oh, sweetie.” Mrs. Watson blinked rapidly as they drew apart. “You’d best get out of here before
someone sees you. I promised your parents I wouldn’t let you back into the kitchens again. You’re
meant to be spending your time in more productive pursuits.”

Sherlock could hear his father’s words in her mouth. “I know. Thank you for your help, amma. It
means so much to me.”

She nodded, swallowing, “All right, off with you now.” She pushed his shoulder, shooing him out
the door.
The next fortnight was a special sort of hell for Sherlock. He wasn’t allowed out of the house for the first week, and it was infinite torture having Mycroft home on leave, swanning in and out, sneering at Sherlock whenever he saw him.

“Honestly, it’s your own fault you’ve been grounded, Sherlock. What were you thinking playing with the cook’s son at your age? Out in public dressed like a servant yourself? Madness.”

“I was thinking he was better company than your fat arse.” Sherlock grumbled and slouched off to practice on his violin, the only thing that gave him any solace during his incarceration.

The days stretched on horrid and bleak even with the refuge of his music. Sherlock didn’t think he’d been this long apart from John since that trip to Cardassia Prime to visit his grandparents when he was nine. He kept wondering what John was doing with his holiday break from school. Was he sneaking into vids with those awful boys, JoJo and Kirby? Was he visiting the dabo tables at the midtown casino and losing far too much money without Sherlock there to restrain him? Besides a few short emails exchanged with an account that he’d had John set up at the library, Sherlock hadn’t heard from him. Though he simply itched to have more news, Sherlock dared not be seen in the kitchens questioning Mrs. Watson as he honed his “perfect son” act.

Sherlock made sure to shine in his tutoring classes. Mr. Jadzel puffed up thinking he had inspired Sherlock with some part of his mediocre teaching skills, and Sherlock let him.

Sherlock appeared on time, neatly dressed at dinner with his parents and his tosser of a brother each evening. His father was called away for work several times which made it easier for Sherlock to sit up and look attentive. He loathed his father at the moment. The only bright spot was that Mrs. Watson always managed to slip in some Bajoran food that he liked next to the steaming platters of Cardassian meat dishes that turned his stomach. If Mrs. Watson had the presence of mind to include his favourite dishes at dinner, that meant John continued to be all right.

Sherlock went to a dull soiree in honour of the junior cadets without a complaint the next weekend he was allowed out, even agreeing to put pomade in his hair. He was relieved beyond measure though to find Molly there as well. His façade of perfect manners only stretched so far. He ended up pouring out his whole sad, sordid tale to her while she fetched him cups of punch and patted his hand.

“Have you told John how you feel?” Molly asked, her pretty face puckered with concern.

“Told John what?” Sherlock reared back slightly.

“That you care for him, that you fancy him. Does he know?”

“Molly, he’s MALE.” Sherlock sputtered.

“So? I assumed you weren’t asking me about love earlier for simply theoretical reasons. I couldn’t imagine who you were talking about, but now I have a pretty good idea.”

“But Molly. . . that would be homosexual.” Sherlock dropped his voice. “It’s . . . it’s wrong.”

“Oh, social construct.” Molly waved a negligent hand. “I would think that you of all people wouldn’t worry about things like that. There are any number of species that experience homosexual pair bonding. From a biological standpoint it’s perfectly natural.”
Sherlock glanced about to make sure no one had drifted closer to their table in the corner, and his bodyguard remained by the drinks station. “It’s illegal on Cardassia Prime.”

“Well, we aren’t on Cardassia Prime, are we?” Molly dropped her voice. “Besides the Bajorans have had same-sex marriages for centuries. From the way you talk about John, it sounds like he cares for you too. I think you should at least discuss it.”

“We won’t be discussing anything if my parents have anything to say about it,” Sherlock huffed. Molly laughed at that. “If you can manage sneaking into an illegal fight club at thirteen, I think you can manage seeing John.”

“You’re right.” Sherlock nodded. “I do have plans.”

“Tell me.” Molly widened her eyes.

“You’re coming to my birthday party next week?” Sherlock smiled slightly. His mother had insisted that his fifteenth birthday celebration be a huge and monstrous affair to top off the holiday season. She seemed to have invited most of the high ranking families in Dahkur City, and many from the neighboring towns as well.

“Of course. Wouldn’t miss it.” Molly smiled.

“Well . . .” Sherlock leaned in to confide his upcoming scheme, bolstered when Molly clapped her hands, saying she couldn’t wait for the party and would help any way she could.

%%% The day of Sherlock’s party dawned overcast and chill. It rarely snowed in Dahkur province, being the bread belt of the northern continent, but they could get a sprinkling from time to time. Sherlock’s mother had the heat increased in the house, and the servants mopped at their brows as they finished decorating the main rooms for the party. Sherlock hung about the hallway watching the last of the preparations, too excited to pretend to do any schoolwork or even saw at his violin.

“So, the big day.” Mycroft appeared to hover at his elbow as they watched the servants stringing some fairy lights around the room.

“Ugh, Mycroft, stopping sneaking about like some operative in the Obsidian Order. It’s annoying.” Mycroft’s face barely moved, but Sherlock caught the twitch of his left eyelid. He’d only been teasing his brother about being a spy, but it seems he’d inadvertently hit a nerve. “Nooooo. You?” Sherlock’s jaw nearly dropped.

“Shhh. Don’t announce it to the whole neighborhood.” Mycroft unconsciously straightened his tunic as he moved his shoulders back. “It isn’t official, but there’s been some interest. I may be offered a position with the Order in the coming months.

“Ugh. As if you needed any MORE reasons to be an insufferable, smug git.” Sherlock grimaced.

“You know, Sherlock, you’re far too old to be interested in infant things any longer. It’s high time you took your own place in society. Why, when I was your age, I’d already been at the academy for
two years.”

“Don’t want to be a soldier.” Sherlock felt himself regressing, sticking out his lower lip as if he were
the baby Mycroft accused him of being.

“Oh, and what pray tell do you think you should be doing with yourself?” Mycroft narrowed his
eyes. “Becoming a professional gambler? Or perhaps you’d do well as an actor on the vid screen
what with all the dissembling you do around here.”

“A scientist.” Sherlock raised his chin defiantly. “I’d love to do some work with hyperbolic phase
transmission. There are some fascinating new discoveries being made in the area, but the field is still
wide open for advancement . . .”

Mycroft sobered when he saw that his brother was in earnest. “Sherlock. You can’t be serious. You
come from a long line of elite officers. It simply isn’t an option to chose another profession. You
know this. Besides the empire will have need of your intelligence for more practical matters than
particle physics. War is brewing.”

“War is always brewing somewhere.” Sherlock sniffed. “What’s that to do with me.”

“Discontent is festering closer than you might think, brother dear.” Mycroft tipped his chin toward
the servants at the end of the room laying out table cloths. “Do you think they welcomed the superior
leadership and protection of the empire with open arms? Nay, the populous of herbivores sharpens
their teeth as we speak.”

“Talk plainly.” Sherlock crossed his arms over his chest. “Most of Bajor is omnivorous, and I hate
the empire with a passion. What of it?”

“Insurrection, brother, is that plain enough? And I’d not speak ill of the government that might care
for your well being. These Bajorans you love so much are vipers waiting to strike if given half a
chance. I’d not put too much stock in any friendship you hold with any of them.”

“Oh, piss off, Mycroft.” Sherlock whirled angrily on his heel to stalk away, deciding the tedium of
his bedroom was preferable to another moment spent in the presence of his offensive brother.

Sherlock was bathed, polished, dressed in new clothes, and near to bursting out of his skin when the
guests finally began arriving. He took his place near the front door with his parents to welcome
people as they entered, but his mind kept flying off to the servants’ side of the house. He prayed that
his plans had held and John had arrived safely in his disguise alongside the catering staff. Molly had
been invaluable helping Sherlock get a false I.D. card made for John under the name of Perr Tomas.
Sherlock only hoped it had been good enough to fool the guards at the front gate, though he’d had a
crate of ale sent to the guard house in honour of the New Year to ensure their good mood that
evening. He was hoping with every fiber in his being that in a few hours he’d be able to make a get-
away and meet John undetected.

The intervening time was interminable, but Sherlock forced himself to be polite, shake hands, and
accept the well-wishes of his parents’ friends. The only true suffering came from deflecting the
attention all the young ladies in attendance seemed to be sending his way in unwanted waves. Again
Molly remained his savior, allowing him to pay court to her as soon as she showed up with her
family. While her two younger brothers dived into the food table, Sherlock crooked his arm for
Molly and escorted her to the dance floor with decorum. He felt a bit guilty when he saw her mother
beaming brightly their way.

“Sooo?” Molly nudged. “How are things going?”
“Operation Perr Tomas is a go,” Sherlock whispered back.

Sherlock had happily received a thumbs up from one of the regular maids, a girl named Geeta, confirming that John had joined the kitchen staff. Sherlock felt as if small bubbles were washing over his insides. He had to work to keep the grin down that threatened to take over his face. Part of Sherlock’s grand plan had involved ingratiating himself with the downstairs staff. He’d spent much of his personal savings on boxes of jumja nougats and bags of ground kava that he had distributed amongst the servants with best wishes for a Happy New Year. Later when he’d slipped around letting a few of the more biddable individuals in on his plan, they’d been quite amenable to helping. He’d had to keep it all under wraps from Mrs. Watson though. She would of course recognize John as soon as he stepped into her sight despite any costume he managed to wear, but by then it would be too late for her to stop anything without getting John into trouble.

The music started, and Sherlock bowed, straightening to take Molly’s hand and move into the proper steps with her.

“Molly, I can’t keep monopolizing your time like this,” Sherlock said leading Molly to a quiet corner after the quadrille had finished, “though I do appreciate it. Surely you’re meant to be finding a true companion in the midst of all these accursed gatherings?”

“Oh, Sherlock, as you’ve so often said, they’re all idiots. I’d much prefer to talk with you.”

“All of them? Even whatsisname? Kovat?


“You HAVE? I thought it was true love.”

“Obviously not. I tried talking with him about the latest work on the superconductor alloys and he didn’t understand a word of what I said. Later he told me I had eyes that reminded him of a vole and laughed.”

“The ingrate. I’ll have his father assigned to the moon station on Demos 1.”

“Is there a station there?” Molly asked, tilting her head.

“We’ll have the Kovats start it.”

Warmth spread over Sherlock at the laughter that spilled out of Molly. An overwhelming need to do her a good deed suddenly struck him with some force. Glancing about the room with a practiced eye, he finally located what he was looking for. “Molly, come with me.”

“Wait, what?” Molly sputtered as Sherlock pulled her across the room.

Sherlock said not a word until he’d successfully deposited Molly in front of an old friend of his brother’s, a man named Dov Vorlem. The man quickly swallowed his tartlet to take Molly’s hand as Sherlock went through the rigamarole of introducing them. They were smiling so much at each other when Sherlock left them, he knew he’d made a good guess.

“Hmm, I can always consider a career in Match-making.” Sherlock muttered to himself as he snagged a glass of juice off a passing tray.

“Oh, Sherlock, how nice to see you again, dear.” An older matron, a friend of Mummy’s blocked his way with a hideous smile creasing her face. Sherlock tried to nod and go around her, but she moved in quickly. “I don’t believe I’ve had a chance to introduce you to my niece, Illiana.”
Sherlock sighed, and did his best to smile as a young woman hove into view, a typical simpering creature, her dark hair caught up in a complicated system of braids. Sherlock nodded, and murmured a few polite replies as the niece put a hand to his arm, prattling on about the weather, and other assorted mind-rotting drivel. Sherlock lifted his glass to take a drink, and almost choked on the swallow when John came into the room carrying a platter of food for the buffet table.

Sherlock almost couldn’t believe it was him. He was dressed in a bland dark uniform, and his lovely golden hair had been transformed into a muddy brown from a bottle of dye to match. A large pair of heavy spectacles covered most of his face, but it was John, here, actually here in the flesh. When he turned, Sherlock saw that he still wore his usual earring with the Watson clan markings clearly visible above the swinging chains. Thankfully most Cardassians wouldn’t know the difference Sherlock thought ruefully.

John tried to keep his face lowered as he dropped off the food, but Sherlock knew he’d seen him by the flush that crept over the back of his neck. John flashed his hand twice behind his back as he pushed through the service door with his empty tray.

Ten minutes. Sherlock licked his lips. The niece paused, frowning at him. He’d obviously missed some verbal cue. Sherlock flashed a pained smile, and excused himself from the conversation as quickly as possible. He worked his way through the room, deflecting any more chatty people with the news that he was just nipping off for the loo. Finally Sherlock broke free, scuttling down the corridor to slip from the public side of the house to a servants’ hallway, and out through a side entrance. A few lights around the perimeter of the house kept the yard lit, but Sherlock knew the darkest path to take, quickly circling around to the back, his breath frosty in the cold evening air.

Conversation buzzed at the kitchen door, and Sherlock spied a number of Bajorans from the catering staff huddled together, obviously taking a smoke break.

He hurried deeper into the grounds. It was dark with only two of Bajor’s three moons visible tonight, a pair of crescents hung artfully in the sky. Without much sight, Sherlock let pure muscle memory lead his feet through the dark gardens to the hunkered-down shape of the work shed. The door wasn’t locked, and Sherlock slipped easily inside. The night was cold, and the outbuilding was only nominally warmer than the outside. Sherlock rubbed at his arms. It would have looked suspicious if he’d grabbed a coat, but like most Cardassians, he didn’t do well with the cold. It was good Old Man Jenno had thin blood as well. Sherlock quickly located a small portable heater under a work bench and flicked it on. Instantly a red coil inside the unit buzzed to life giving both scant light, and a moderate blast of warmth to heat the space. Loamy smells of potting soil and fertilizer came to life as the air warmed around him.

Sherlock found a stool to perch on, and pulled his knees up to wrap his arms around himself as he settled into wait, his anticipation nearly making him forget about the cold. It took forever, but most likely only a few minutes before Sherlock heard a familiar tread on the path, the shed door being pulled open, then finally . . . John tumbling into the space with a burst of cold air from outside.

“Ooh, John, close the door, it’s freezing.”

“Sherlock, where are you? I can hardly see.”

“Over here.”

John pushed the door shut behind him, and shuffled in closer, following the sound of his voice. “Oh, there you are.” John stopped just before him, sporting a smile that Sherlock could see even in the dim light.

“You came.” Sherlock grinned in reply, dropping his legs to sit taller. With Sherlock on the stool,
they were almost of a height, with John standing only slightly above him.

“Of course I came.”

There were so many things Sherlock had wanted to discuss, but with John here before him, they seemed to have flown out the window. Luckily they both seemed content to simply stare at each other grinning stupidly in the dark for the moment.

“Nice disguise,” Sherlock said the first coherent thought that popped into his head, “but you wore your own earring.”

“Doh.” John reached up to smack his forehead. “I knew I forgot something. I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s no problem. I don’t think anyone else noticed it. I’m . . . I’m glad you could come. I’m so sorry about all this . . .” Sherlock flapped a hand towards the house and all contained within.

“It’s not that big of a surprise really.” John shrugged. “I mean I’ve just been waiting for us to get caught, and it’s been YEARS.”

“Was your mother really angry?”

“A bit,” John said. “She’s annoyed I’m not around to help in the kitchens, and we can’t ride home together on the transit bus at night.”

“What . . .” Sherlock had to clear his throat suddenly gone clogged. “What have you been doing?”

“Well, oddly enough the idea of going to hang out at the space port alone just didn’t appeal.” John chuckled. “I did go visit Harry one day, but otherwise, I’ve been to the library and the shops a bit, but what about you? Mum said they had you locked in your room.”

“Not for very long. I’ve been catching up on my studies – all the usual dull, boring things, to be topped off by this dull, boring party.”

“It looked like a nice party to me. You seemed happy enough with that girl draped all over you.” Something strange had crept into John’s voice, and Sherlock didn’t like it.

“Ugh, people. I’d almost take being locked in my room again over talking to any more people tonight.”

“Yeah, I guess so,” John mused, and stepped even closer. “Happy Birthday by the way. I got you something.”

“You didn’t have to.”

“Course I did. I got it ages ago.” John reached into a back pocket to extract a small item folded up in lightweight paper. He passed it over, and Sherlock held the crinkled package for just a moment, turning it over, wondering what it was.

“It isn’t much . . .” John trailed off, but Sherlock had already released it, letting the paper fall to uncover the flat metal thing inside, still slightly warm from being in John’s pocket. It had a chain on one end, and Sherlock held it up to dangle from one finger to better inspect it. An image of an eye was stamped into one side while small holes punched around the edges formed a lace-like pattern.

“A Prophet’s eye.” Sherlock couldn’t help smiling. The shops in the Bajoran quarter were filled with cheap little household charms like these. He remembered clearly several weeks ago, it seemed like a
lifetime away now, he and John had been out buying sweets while he wore his bibi clothes. The shopkeeper had tried to get John to buy a charm for his grandmother, or mother, or perhaps a girlfriend. The woman had been so insistent, but John had put her off, smiling. It seems he had gone back to buy one after all.

“I feel blessed already,” Sherlock said. “I’ll hang it in my bedroom for luck.” No reason to say that if he hung it anywhere else in the house, his mother would have it sent to the rubbish bin. “Thank you, John, it’s perfect.”

“Sherlock . . . I . . . I’m not sure when I’m going to be able to see you again. I can’t sneak in like this again. Mum was furious when she saw me here.”

“I know. This was a one-time thing. Thank you for coming, by the way. I know you had to lie your way past the guards at the gate.”

“Naw.” John blew out a breath. “They were all half drunk and barely checking I.D.’s”

“I’ll come to you,” Sherlock said. “They can’t keep me under surveillance forever, and I’ll be able to slip my minder once he’s gotten too used to my being good.”

“Sherlock, I don’t want you getting into trouble either.”

“What? We just never see each other again. You want that?”

“Course I don’t want that.” John had drawn closer, so close he could feel the heat of John's body as he slid in between Sherlock’s knees.

“I . . .” Sherlock had nothing to say as John bent down and put his lips over Sherlock’s.

Sherlock had seen people kiss before, of course he had. Bajorans seemed to do it much more frequently than Cardassians, but both species might bestow a kiss upon the lips or drop a peck on a cheek to express affection. A few times he had hacked through the firewalls of their network and found some illegal porn to watch. The Bajorans featured had slobbered horribly all over each other, and it had disturbed him more than aroused him at the time.

This was nothing like those kisses at all. This kiss was in a whole other solar system from any other kiss that Sherlock had ever experienced thus far in his life.

John’s mouth was soft, and warm, moving over his in gentle pulses of motion that had his higher brain functions all but shutting down. Sherlock’s hands went nerveless, and he dropped the charm, barely registering the light jingle as it hit the ground somewhere. He found his hands reaching up to bury themselves in John’s hair without even a conscious decision to move them there. Oh, but he had wanted to do this forever he realized, feel the soft texture of John’s hair sliding through his fingers. The reality didn’t disappoint.

John made a wonderful, growly noise at the back of his throat, and Sherlock pressed in, kissing John more actively, no longer content to simply let him set the pace. One of John’s arms slid around him while the other reached up to cup the side of his face. John’s fingers moved over him, lightly tracing the ridges along his jaw. He moved to follow the path of his fingers with his mouth, his tongue flicking out to lick delicately down the side of Sherlock’s face. Sherlock nearly jerked back off his seat as a spike of something hot and delicious went straight through the core of him. He couldn’t help the strange, needy noises falling from his own mouth.

“Oh, Sherlock,” John muttered, both arms moving to wrap tightly around him, holding him close. “I’ve got you, I’ve got you.”
Sherlock floated in a world of John, John's scent enveloping him, John’s amazing mouth moving over him, mapping out the edges of his cheeks, and jaw, marking the boundary of his warming skin and the cooler air beyond. It felt marvelous, but still, Sherlock missed the feel of John’s mouth on his own, and he chased after him, sighing when their lips connected.

“Mmmmm,” they moaned into each other’s mouths, already thrilled to be reunited.

After a time out of time, they finally drew apart just enough to catch their breath, arms still wrapped around each other.


“Ah, well.” John chuckled, a lovely, lovely sound. “I think I just might fancy you as well.”

“Oh, good,” Sherlock muttered as John’s mouth found his again, and they fell into each other once more.

When John pulled away enough to take a step back, Sherlock nearly whimpered at the loss.

“Shhh, shhh. We can’t stay here all night, you know.” John cupped the back of Sherlock’s head, letting his thumb stroke gently along the side of his neck. It felt gorgeous.

“Why not?” Sherlock turned to nuzzle into John’s palm.

John sucked in a quick intake of breath. “Because, someone will miss us and come looking.”

“So?”

“Oh, Sherlock, stop. Stop doing that. I need to think.”

“Thinking is boring.”

“Who are you and what have you done with my Sherlock?”

His Sherlock. Sherlock liked the sound of that. He definitely didn’t want to belong to anyone but John. “Kiss me again,” Sherlock commanded, raising his face. John swore under his breath and abandoned all restraint to do just that.

Sherlock thought he just might burst into flames from how beautifully John held him, all but devouring him, lips and teeth and tongues joining together in a dance that threatened to melt every last nerve in his body.

“Sherlock, really, please. Stop.” John panted, pulling away again. He grabbed Sherlock’s arms gently pulling away hands that had roamed down to grip handfuls of John’s luscious arse. “I have to go back. You do too. Please.”

The distressed tone in John’s voice finally snapped Sherlock from the haze of lust that had descended to cloud his brain.

“Yes, alright.” Sherlock gulped in lungfuls of air trying to come back to his senses.

“We can meet again after the party, after everyone goes home.” John’s voice was achingly tender.

“I’ll sound the fire alarm, and get everyone out right now,” Sherlock huffed.

“No, come on, let’s go back and get the rest of this out of the way . . .” John broke off looking out
the small window behind Sherlock’s shoulder. “What the hell . . .”

“What? What is it?” Sherlock swiveled to find what John was reacting to, and saw it then. Someone, or a number of someones with small electric torches were stomping through the garden, heading straight for the house.
Troubles All Around

Chapter Summary

Sherlock's birthday party doesn't end as he'd expected at all, and the boys must rise to the many challenges thrown their way.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“That looks like nothing but trouble,” John said grimly, watching the passing mob.

Sherlock leapt to his feet to peer out the small window, tracking the strangers’ progress as they crunched along the garden path. “It appears to be nine, no ten of them, Bajoran, labourers . . . oh yes, and armed . . . with incendiary devices as well as some disruptors.”

“Prophets, we need to . . .” John looked ready to spring out after them.

“We need to warn the others,” Sherlock said, placing a calming hand to John’s shoulder. He moved past him to flip open the console box mounted by the door. The screen woke to life as Sherlock’s fingers flew over the keypad. “Damn, they’ve disabled the main system,” Sherlock growled.

“Mum,” John whispered next to him.

“Come on,” Sherlock said. “We can take the long way through herb garden, they won’t see us.”

John followed Sherlock as they slipped out of the shed, and moved like ghosts through the dark, following paths they knew better than the back of their hands. The intruders seemed intent on moving toward the well-lit public section of the house. Sherlock could see the windows along that side of the house shining like beacons in the night, the partygoers no doubt still blithely reveling inside.

They went the other way, back toward the kitchen door, moving unseen until Sherlock stopped, John almost running into the back of him. One of the thugs had peeled away from the pack, and stood blocking the path to guard the back of the house. He turned at hearing their approach, disrupter in hand, and Sherlock moved without thinking. The man was knocked out cold and on the ground in a matter of moments.

“How did you do that?” John stood with his mouth half open.

“Mok’bara.” Sherlock grinned, pocketing the intruder’s weapon. “Been taking classes since I was seven.”

“Oh, right, right.”

“I think he was alone.”

John nodded, taking the lead, hurrying the last few paces to the kitchen door, Sherlock at his heels. They burst in to the heat of the busy room, a flurry of activity as red-faced servants scurried about, struggling to keep up with the needs of the party.
“WATSON JOHN, . . . oh, Sherlock.” Mrs. Watson stopped in her tracks running a hand over her forehead, flustered. “Boys, this is not acceptable . . .”

“No time, Mum!” John gasped.

“Intruders.” Sherlock managed before lunging forward to punch in a code on the panel set into the wall. Finally something worked as it should as loud klaxons set off overhead. The staff froze, shocked, until just as suddenly, the lights and alarms cut out mid-bleat. Emergency lights flickered to life bathing the room in a weak light, until a huge explosion from nearby rocked the room, and those went out too.

“Get OUT!” Sherlock bellowed into the sudden silence. “The house is under attack! Everyone OUT!”

He didn’t need to say it twice. Someone knocked a pan to the ground and cried out as the staff scrambled to exit, phones appeared in people’s hands to light the way.

“We need to go too.” John tugged at Sherlock’s arm.

“But I need to see . . .” Sherlock pulled away from his grip, turning toward the main part of the house. The smell of smoke was already reaching them.

“You need to get out of here. They’ll be looking for Cardassians, not Bajorans!” John’s voice was frantic.

“John’s right, dear, take this.” Mrs. Watson appeared beside them, guided by the blue glow of her mobile, bundling something into Sherlock’s arms. “Right then off we go. Ideas on the best route?”

Something about the calm that Mrs. Watson exuded even while staff panicked around them, centered Sherlock. “Yes, this way. Turn off your phone.” He guided John and his mother out the back door, and through the dark of the gardens unerringly toward the back of the property.

They only paused once as another explosion split the night. They turned, three pairs of wide eyes gaping as a fire ball blooming out the windows of the front parlour. A soft sound escaped Sherlock’s throat as he watched the sprinkler system come online, struggling to put out the roaring blaze.

“Come on now, they’ve guards and help aplenty.” John’s mum nudged Sherlock. “WE need to get out of the way.”

“Yes, of course.” Sherlock tamped down the wave of emotions that threatened to overwhelm him, thinking only of moving forward, getting them to safety.

Sherlock reached the back bushes where he normally kept his bag of disguises. He hadn’t had a chance to restock his stash, but Mrs. Watson nudged his arm, handing him something. “You can wear this, dear.” Sherlock shook out the wad of cloth, and found it to be a hooded cloak. He shrugged it on gratefully while Mrs. Watson passed something to John. “Put this on, love, quickly now, it’s cold.”

“Oh, Mum, you got my coat!”

“It cost me a pretty stack of leks. I wasn’t about to let it go,” she clucked. “Now, how have you been sneaking out of your house, Sherlock Holmes?”

“Old service entrance, it never gets used,” Sherlock said, leading the way. His heart sunk at hopes of a quiet getaway when he saw someone hunched down, leaning on the wall by the gate.
“All right, who’s there?” A quavery voice demanded as the figure rose awkwardly. The stranger flicked on a small torch in his hand, the light flashing up between them. Sherlock realized it was Old Jenno, the gardener.

“It’s just us,” Mrs. Watson called out, putting up a hand to shield her eyes. “For Prophets’ sake, get that light out of our faces, Jenno.”

Jenno ran the torch over their little group, stopping when he reached Sherlock.

“You and your boy can go, Lara, but the Spoonhead stays here.” His voice had hardened.


“You heard me, go now.” Jenno tried to shoo them, jerking the light of the torch quickly toward the gate. He sighed when no one budged. Switching the light to his other hand, he rummaged in his jacket. As he stepped closer, Sherlock realized the man had a disruptor trained on him.

“John, no!” Mrs. Watson cried as John launched himself head-first at Jenno. The old man folded, dropping the torch as they hit the ground, but the weapon remained in his grip, firing crazily around them.

A wild panic gripped Sherlock, almost closing his throat as the two figures wrestled. He rushed forward, pulling out the weapon he’d gotten off the thug earlier, and with a silent prayer fired. All went still.

“JOHN! JOHN!” Mrs. Watson moved in, dropping to her knees by the pair now still on the ground. Sherlock hurried to join her. To their immense relief, John rolled the inert form of the gardener off of him and sat up, unharmed.

“Did you kill him?” John panted.

“I don’t think so. The weapon should be on stun.” Sherlock put a finger to Jenno’s throat and felt . . . nothing. The man was quite dead.

A shiver ran down Sherlock’s spine. “What? I don’t understand . . .” Sherlock inspected the disruptor, pointing it away to depress the trigger again. It seemed to be jammed. He threw it into the bushes, not wanting it near him any more.

Mrs. Watson remained where she was, kneeling, a hand pressed to her mouth.

“Mum.” John shook her shoulder gently. “Mum, we need to go.”

“Yes, alright. I know.” She allowed John to help her to her feet.

Loud noises, and voices raised somewhere behind them, convinced Sherlock that haste was the most important concern of the moment. “Come on.” He urged John and his mother to follow him through the service gate into the alleyway beyond. “Should we lock it?” Sherlock glanced back.

“Better leave it open. Others might need to get out,” John said wisely.

Sherlock nodded. The buzz of disruptors sounded from the compound behind them, and the three of them took to their heels running without another glance back. They reached the end of the alley, stopping to catch their breath. The main power was obviously off, all the lamps were out, but several other houses up and down the street had gone up like funeral pyres burning brightly against the black of the dark sky. The vandalism was more than the work of a few madmen, this was a concerted
attack on the whole neighborhood. Sherlock gasped at the wanton destruction of it all. He felt John’s fingers curling over his arm on one side, and Mrs. Watson shaking her head beside him on the other.

“What the hell?” John swore.

“Prophets.” Mrs. Watson sucked in a breath. “I don’t know what’s going on, but I do know we’re leaving. Sherlock, I’m sure your people will take care of things, but for now, we’re getting you out of here. Put your hood up, and tie it tightly, dear.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Sherlock used shaking fingers to obey her, drawing the hood up, and silently gave thanks when John stepped closer to tie it in place.

“Ready? Let’s go. This way.” Mrs. Watson gestured, and took off, glancing back to make sure John and Sherlock were right behind. John reached out to catch Sherlock’s hand, and the two of them pounded after her, making their way toward the gate.

They were joined by other servants with the same idea, scores of frightened maids, footmen, and other Bajoran staff running as fast as they could toward the only exit to the gated community. The sounds of feet hitting on the pavement, and the bleat of far-off alarms added to the sound of Sherlock’s own heartbeat pounding in his ears. When they reached the guard house, Sherlock couldn’t help stopping to view the two Cardassians there, bloody and unmoving on the floor, the empty bottles of ale he had sent down earlier scattered about them. He shivered.

“Sherlock, come on, we can’t stop.” John wheezed, tugging on his arm, and Sherlock hurried to rejoin Mrs. Watson who had pulled ahead. They had barely made it through the gate, and across the street into some bushes when an emergency vehicle blazed by. The flash of disrupter blasts shooting off from its sides lit up the night like a strobe light. The beams cut down every moving body that it passed, the unfortunate souls in its path bursting into de-atomized ions as the car screamed past.

“Prophets.” Mrs. Watson shuddered beside them. “Prophets bless.”

“Bastards,” John swore softly.

Sherlock gulped air struggling to process the unthinking murders.

“Come on.” John’s mother recovered first. “We need to keep moving.” She tugged the two boys to their feet, and urged them onward.

They kept to the sides of the roads, walking through pale winter grasses, skirting the tall fences that boarded the quiet neighborhoods, hiding whenever something passed. The buses seemed to have suspended as they never saw one, and of course few taxis ever ran out this far out. Only a few private cars passed by, and when several military-looking vehicles screamed by, Mrs. Watson had them duck down to lie flat on the ground until they had passed.

It seemed like they had been walking for eons through the dark night, though it had probably only been just over an hour when Mrs. Watson let them take a break. They reached a small shaved ice stand closed for the winter with a faulty door that opened when they jiggled it. They slipped inside to sit on the floor. A lone patch of light from a street light filtered in through the front window. The room was barely warmer than outside, but at least they were out of the cold wind that had picked up.

Sherlock’s feet were pinched and hurting, his dress shoes had never been meant for extended walking. It occurred to him that Mummy had been so pleased when he’d agreed to wear them, and his thoughts swept into a whirlwind wondering what had happened to her, his family, the house. He’d hardly been thinking of anything other than putting one foot in front of the other as they
walked. John sighed as he stretched out his legs beside him.

“Prophets’ hands.” Mrs. Hudson blew out her breath, sinking down.

“The gardener,” Sherlock said as his mental processes finally picked up to analyze the evening. “Old Jenno, let the attackers in. But he’s been with us since we moved to Bajor.”

“Yeah, I guess so,” John agreed. “He was never a friendly sort, was he?”

“Yes, but to want to see us all killed?” A shiver ran over Sherlock spine. “I didn’t know he hated us so.”

“I’m not saying it makes sense.” Mrs. Watson shifted next to them, pulling her bag into her lap to begin rummaging through it. “Prophets know it’s madness top to bottom tonight, but Jenno’s not been right lately. His grandson was killed in the marketplace a few weeks ago. He got into some argument with a guard, and things got ugly.”

“Fuck!” John breathed.

“John, language,” his mother snapped in reflex.

“Sorry, Mum.”

The small room lit up as Mrs. Watson located her mobile and thumbed it on. “You boys stay here and stay down. I’m going to make a phone call.” After getting affirmations from the two of them that they wouldn’t budge, John’s mum slipped back out into the dark.

Sherlock had started to shiver from nerves as much as the temperature. He silently cursed his physiology. Cardassians were useless in the cold.

“Oh, Sherlock. Are you alright?” John scooted closer.

“Yes, fine,” Sherlock lied as his teeth started to chatter.

“No, you aren’t, come here.”

John hauled Sherlock into his arms, wrapping him close. Sherlock let his head drop to John’s shoulder, gradually relaxing as John’s body heat warmed him.

“Prophets, half the house was in flames, all those armed men . . .” Sherlock choked out. “My family . . .” he couldn’t finish the thought.

“I know, I know,” John repeated. “They’re probably fine though. You’ve got all those guards at your house. I’m sure they’ll be okay.”

“John, I hated my father for grounding me,” Sherlock whispered. “I kept wishing him hurt or dead all last fortnight, horrible things, and now . . .” he broke off as a sob bubbled up his throat.

“Shh, shh. Don’t worry, alright?” John squeezed him tighter. “There’s no sense in thinking the worst until you get all the facts.”

Sherlock buried his face in John’s coat, letting the familiar smell settle over him, and nodded. “I’m sorry, John.” He looked up. “I’m being such a ninny.”

“Hey, hey, it’s alright. Prophets know you’ve a right to be upset.” John pressed a kiss to his forehead. “We’re going to be okay though. You know this, right?”
“I know,” Sherlock mumbled, turning his face up toward John like a flower seeking the sun. He was rewarded when John bent down, his mouth finding Sherlock’s blindly. John’s warm breath, his gentle lips and tongue, and the lovely sound he made as he sighed into Sherlock’s mouth surrounded him. Everything else simply fell away, ceased to exist, held as he was in the universe of John’s arms.

When they finally broke off, they stayed close, breathing each other’s air. John’s face was a mystery in the dark, his eyes unseen pools. He reached up, laying a palm on Sherlock’s cheek that felt hot enough to brand him.


“Oh, Sherlock. I owe you mine just the same.” John leaned forward again, and Sherlock met him happily. Their sweet kiss turned instantly heated as they gripped at each other, too overcome for softness. It wasn’t till they heard the scrape of the door opening that they parted, springing guiltily away from each other.

“Alright, we’re in luck. I’ve got a friend who drives a taxi who can pick us up.” Mrs. Watson joined them, sitting back on the floor. “I talked to a couple of people. It looks like this wasn’t an isolated thing. There are fires and . . . troubles all over town tonight.”

“But why?” John asked.

“Holiday weekend, end of the New Year celebrations,” Sherlock answered. “If you’re going to launch an attack, it’s best to do so when your opponent is off their guard.” He shrugged. “It’s probably dangerous for me to be with you. Both Cardassians and Bajorans will think the worst.”

Sherlock’s statement hung heavy in the frosty air between them. John hadn’t moved far away, their shoulders still touched, but Sherlock felt the loss of John’s warmth pressed against him keenly.

“We weren’t going to leave you behind!” John huffed.

“No, of course not dear,” Mrs. Watson added.

“I don’t understand why people are doing this,” John complained.

“Well, there’s been unrest,” his mum said. “There’s a growing faction that’s pushing for independent Bajoran rule. Things have been getting worse, and . . . well, some felt they needed to use violence to make their point.”

“Sometimes violence is needed,” Sherlock said thoughtfully. “An enemy who doesn’t listen to words needs to be spoken to with force.”

“Sherlock, you aren’t our enemy!” John protested.

“No, I’m not. Never, John.” Sherlock turned pained eyes his way. If John ever thought that . . .

“Well, of course Sherlock, isn’t our enemy. Don’t be silly,” John’s mum said. “Who’s thirsty? I found a bottle of water and a packet of kava nuts in the bottom of my bag.”

Everyone it seemed was thirsty, and they shared the meager supplies, passing them around until they were gone. Sherlock’s fingers itched to pull John back into his arms, but he couldn’t with John’s mother right there. He laced his hands together tightly in his lap instead to stop them from going where they shouldn’t. They played a word game that Mrs. Watson suggested to pass the time. Sherlock had to smile. He remembered when she’d first taught him the game to help him learn
Bajoran, and to settle them for dinner after he and John had been running in the garden all afternoon. They played, even laughing, until a flash of headlights, and a squeal of brakes alerted them to a vehicle arriving outside. They fell silent, waiting.

“You boys stay here, I’ll go check,” Mrs. Watson insisted, popping up to leave them alone in the half-light, nerves pingining.

John’s hand instantly found Sherlock’s and squeezed. “It’s going to be alright.”

“I know.” Sherlock squeezed back.

John’s mum reappeared to let them know their ride was there, and it was safe to go. They piled into the small cab, all three of them cramming into the back seat. Mrs. Watson’s friend turned out to be a fat Bajoran man who looked as if he might be a jokester in happier circumstances. As it was, he wiped his damp brow with a cloth, and peered constantly out the windows, scanning all around them as he drove the dark streets.

“I tell you, Lara, it’s good you caught me when you did,” he called back over his shoulder. “They’re closing some of the roads down. I’ll have to stay with my sister tonight as it is.”

“Thank you, Domir. I won’t forget this.”

They passed a few smoldering buildings until they reached the old quarter. It looked largely unmolested from what they could see of if with all the street lights gone dark. Thankfully, they encountered no resistance, and their rescuer dropped them off at the Watson’s home safe and sound. Mrs. Watson lingered to speak a farewell as John led Sherlock to the house, the two of them tumbling inside with great relief.

“Thank the Prophets,” John sighed, and Sherlock nodded, at a loss for words. John swept Sherlock into his arms, holding him tight before he had to release him when Mrs. Watson stepped inside.

“Well, I think that was enough excitement for one evening. Why don’t you two take turns with the shower while I make some tea?” she said, turning on a small battery-powered lamp.

Through sheer determination, John’s mum chivvied them into feeling normal again, finding Sherlock some spare pyjamas, and filling the kitchen with lit candles, and the rich smell of steeping Jumja tea.

Once Sherlock had on clean clothes, his wet hair slicked back, no longer smelling of smoke, the events of the night receded taking on an almost dreamlike quality. He and John sat at the table as John’s mum filled their cups.

“Oh, Sherlock, I’m so sorry all this had to happen on your birthday of all things. I had such a lovely cake made.” Mrs. Watson tutted as if a riot had happened simply to vex her party planning.

“It’s all right, amma,” Sherlock reassured her. “I had some of the appetizers, and they were delicious.”

“Hmm, I was saving this . . .” John’s mum rummaged about in the pantry. She returned after a moment victorious with a wrapped seed cake in hand.

“Oh, mum, it’s perfect.” John said. “I’ll get the plates.”

“It’ll do well enough.” Mrs. Watson nodded, and set to work cutting the confection into pieces to slide onto the dishes John provided.
“Happy birthday, Sherlock.” She passed him a slice.

“Yeah, happy birthday.” John smiled at him across the table.

“Thank you.” Sherlock smiled shyly back. He forked up a piece of the cake, and chewed appreciatively. He actually enjoyed Bajoran seed cake more than the thick Cardassian desserts Mrs. Watson made for parties.

“You, young man. Don’t think I’m not still not angry with you for sneaking onto the estate like that.” Mrs. Watson waved her fork at John.

John had the wherewithal to look apologetic. “I’m sorry, Mum, but it was Sherlock’s birthday.”

“Don’t be mad at him, amma, it was my idea. Besides, John helped us escape.”

“Well, yes.” Mrs. Watson looked thoughtful, considering the unexpected way the night had gone. “There is that,” she relented.

John slipped a hand under the table to pat Sherlock’s leg.

Sherlock glanced about the small kitchen, lit by the warm glow of the candles, and the familiar faces smiling around him. No matter what might come, for this moment, he felt safe.

“Okay you two, let’s off to bed, it’s late.” Mrs. Watson shooed them from the kitchen when they were finished eating. “Sherlock I tried calling your house, but the landlines are down. We’ll try again in the morning.”

“Alright, amma.”

“Don’t worry, dear, I’m sure everything will turn out fine.”

“Yes, I hope so.” Sherlock swallowed, trying to keep his worries at bay.

“Here, I’ve got some clean sheets for the extra bed.” Mrs. Watson bustled them along getting fresh bedding for the top bunk in John’s room. The two boys didn’t catch her eye as they dutifully helped her make up the mattress.

“Good night.” Mrs. Watson dropped a kiss to each of their cheeks. “I’m just so glad you’re both safe.”

“Thanks, Mum.”

“Try to get some sleep, alright?” she said.

“We will, amma, thank you.”

John’s mum shut the door behind her.

“So, erm…” John gestured awkwardly toward his bed, “do you want to . . .”

Sherlock reached out, hauling John against him. They came together, kissing madly, fingers gripping at each other’s clothes, but so quietly, mindful of Mrs. Watson just across the hall. They parted just long enough to strip off layers, working down to undershirts and briefs, reaching frantically for each other again. When they came up for air, John climbed into his bed, folding back the blankets for Sherlock to follow.
“Come on,” John whispered patting the mattress. Carefully, Sherlock climbed in to the lower bunk, slotting himself against John to fit on the narrow bed.

“I’m sorry it’s such a squeeze . . . mmfff,” John said as Sherlock dived back in, recapturing his mouth. They melted into each other, kissing, mouths open and hungry. Sherlock worked his fingers into John’s soft, darkly-tinted hair.

“I miss the gold,” he said against John’s ear. “I don’t like the brown colour on you.”

“It’ll come out in a few washings.” John smiled. “Here, just let me . . .” He scooted up to lean off the bed and turn off the small lamp on the chest of drawers. John moved back down to settle Sherlock against him again. “There, now you can’t see it.”

“I can still smell it,” Sherlock complained. It was true, the hair dye had left a slight chemical taint to John’s hair.

“Prat.” John chuckled quietly. “It was your idea.”

“It was necessary to get you in to the party. John . . .” Sherlock stopped, his thoughts a whirl of worry.

“I know it was crazy tonight. Come here,” John pulled Sherlock impossibly close to him. “If I ever lost you, if something ever happened . . .”

“I . . . couldn’t . . . bear . . . it,” Sherlock muttered in between John’s wet, sweet kisses. Sherlock slotted his thigh solidly between John’s legs, and John made a delicious sound, torn from the back of his throat. It delighted Sherlock that he’d made John do that. He pressed in again, and rocked.

“Ungh, Sherlock,” John choked out, groaning deep and low.

Shhh.” Sherlock moved his mouth over John’s to swallow his sounds. “Your mum . . .”

John nodded, his hand slipping down to grab Sherlock’s backside, pulling him flush against him, and it was Sherlock’s turn to gasp, and writhe, trying desperately to keep silent. John moved his mouth down Sherlock’s jaw to explore the line of his ridged neck. The touch over the sensitive spot felt like fire ripping through Sherlock’s veins.

“John . . .” Sherlock ground out.

“Can I, can I just . . .” John whispered.

“Oh, please.”

John’s fingers pushed down past his waistband to close over him. It was, it was . . . John’s hot mouth trailing over him, and his hands, his lovely hands touching, caressing everywhere. Sherlock felt as if he were dissolving, scattering into unbonded atoms as surely as if a disruptor blast had hit him. He shook through his sudden release, biting back any sounds. When the earthquakes stilled, he found himself limp, half collapsed over John, still hot and straining against his hip. Sherlock sucked in a breath and dived in, letting his own fingers push clothing aside, and stroke over John’s soft, smooth skin, hot, so hot. His fingers closed over John’s hardness, and John whimpered, his hand clutching hard at Sherlock’s shoulder. In the dark, he felt John stutter, and spend, warmth spreading over his hand. They cleaned off with a stray sock John found under his bed, giggling, trying to stay quiet.

“Sherlock, you’re amazing.” John breathed against his throat when they settled back together.
“John, I love you.” Sherlock whispered, feeling as if his body were filled with bubbles, millions of tiny bubbles bouncing against each other.

“I love you, oh, I love you.” John sounded as if he might laugh or cry, and Sherlock held him as tightly as he could, as if they could sink into each other’s skin and stay together like that for always.

They fell asleep with limbs entwined, breathing in the scent of each other, and the smell of them combined. Morning came all too soon with a bright light filtering in through the one small window, and a knock at the door.

“Sherlock, John? Boys, are you up?” Mrs. Watson called through the door. “John, why did you lock the door?” She rattled the knob.

“Coming, Mum!” John called back, as they struggled upright. Sherlock almost hit his head on the bunk above scrambling out of John’s bed.

“Get up there,” John hissed, and helped Sherlock to climb quickly into the upper bunk.

John glanced back to make sure Sherlock had settled, pulling the covers over him before moving to unlock door.

“Sorry, Mum, didn’t mean to.” John slid the bolt back, and opened the door. “I’m not sure Sherlock is up yet . . .”

As if on cue, Sherlock rolled over, rubbing his eyes, looking innocently sleepy as he sat up. “What’s up?” he asked.

“Oh, sweetie, your family called, someone is on their way over. You need to get up and get dressed.”

“Thank you, amma,” Sherlock said, climbing down from the bunk. “Is everyone . . .” he couldn’t finish the sentence as his feet touched ground.

“They’re all fine.” A small knot drew Mrs. Watson’s eyebrows together, but she flashed Sherlock a smile. “See, I told you things would come out alright in the end.” She reached out to pat Sherlock’s arm. “I’ve got your things in the bathroom. I’ll just go make some tea.”

Sherlock turned to look at John, gorgeous, wonderful John, and felt his heart sink. John watched him silently with eyes gone huge.

Sherlock’s family was safe, and that was the best news, but they still didn’t want him seeing John. The idea of not seeing John had been horrid before, but after unraveling themselves together, after a night of sleeping cradled in John’s arms. Well, the idea of not being able to see John when he needed to was intolerable.

Sherlock caught John up in an embrace, pressing his face against the crown of John’s hair. “It’s alright. I won’t let them keep us apart,” he whispered fiercely.

“No . . . Prophets . . . no.” John clung to him.

Finally, they had to part for Sherlock to wash and dress. Sherlock wanted time to stop, to freeze in place and let him stay here with John forever, but all too soon they were clutching cups of tea as someone pounded at the front door.

John’s mum moved to open it, admitting none other than Mycroft into the house. Sherlock had
expected some lackey sent to fetch him, and the sight of his brother stood in a Bajoran home was so incongruent, it took Sherlock a moment to process. He blinked stupidly as Mycroft looked around the mismatched sitting room with a sneer. Sherlock felt his spine stiffen, how dare Mycroft judge . . .

“How’s your mother, is she...”

Sherlock tuned out the rest of the conversation as he turned to John. This was it, the time to say good-bye and he had no idea how he was going to manage it.

“John . . .” the words tangled in Sherlock’s throat.

“Sherlock . . .” John looked as terrible as he felt.

“Come on, brother, the car is waiting. Do you have everything you brought with you?”

Sherlock nodded. He hadn’t come with anything the night before but the clothes on his back. There was nothing to gather up, nothing left to use as a reason to linger another moment.

“Thank you, Mrs. Watson.” Sherlock leaned down to hug her.

“Oh, you’re welcome, dear.” She patted his back.

Sherlock pulled away to face John. “Bye.” He held his hand up in farewell.

“Bye, Sherlock.” John tried to smile and failed abysmally, his mouth making a strange grimace.

“Come on, Sherlock, let’s go. Good day to you all.” Mycroft nodded as he steered Sherlock out the door, a hand lightly on his back.

Sherlock let himself be ushered down the front walk toward the armored vehicle idling at the kerb. He glanced back to see John on the front step watching them, his face a misery. Sherlock broke away then, Mycroft be damned, and thundered back across the yard to catch John up in a tight embrace. John’s arms came around him, and he squeezed back, hard. Sherlock breathed in one good breath, and let go, moving to rejoin Mycroft at the car. He didn’t look back once, struggling to fight hot tears as Mycroft took a seat beside him, and the door closed, signaling the driver to move on. The vehicle pulled away from the kerb ferrying him away, farther away from the one place he wanted to be.

“%%%

“What do you mean? You can’t be serious!” Sherlock felt all the blood leave his head as he stood abruptly from his seat. He reached back to grasp the back of his plastic chair to keep from pitching over.

“You can drop it, Sherlock. We don’t have time for your childish theatrics.” Sherlock’s father paced over the carpet of the flat they’d been assigned at the military base. “You’ve been coddled too long. That stops now.”
Since the night of the attacks, all the families of key personnel had been evacuated from the civilian area to the better guarded military complex outside of town. It seems a number of Cardassian homes and installations had been targeted in a coordinated effort the night of Sherlock’s birthday.

“But we can’t just go.” Sherlock’s voice rose, warbling higher in pitch, sounding much more childish than he meant to. He sucked in a breath trying to gather his wits.

“Of course you need to go. The situation is unstable on Bajor. Your mother is returning to Cardassia Prime, and you are starting at the military academy. It’s past time if you ask me. You need to step up and take your place, son. It’s time you became a man.” His father stepped forward to clap a hand to Sherlock’s shoulder. “I know you’ll make us all proud.”

Sherlock swallowed, feeling his insides turning into ice. It was no use, he could cry and rant, but the facts were the facts. He was leaving Bajor in a matter of days, and there was nothing he could do about it.

Sherlock was barely left alone over the next few days. One afternoon, he and his mother, along with a phalanx of guards to attend them, returned to the house to pick through things, packing up anything they wanted to keep. Only the front rooms had suffered major fire damage though smoke had permeated much of the house. At the end of it all, only two guests and a guard at the party had lost their lives, though most of the Bajoran attackers had been cut down. How much of the staff had been killed in their escape for freedom as early responders swept the streets hadn’t been documented. Sherlock thought about the possibility of John and his mother losing their lives simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time and shuddered. He pushed the thought away, and the many others tearing at his heart, and put himself to the task of filling the two bins allotted to him with any personal effects he wished to take.

Sherlock hadn’t managed to contact John at all, and the worry was burning a hole inside him. His phone had been lost, and he’d only been able to sneak onto a console with outside access twice to email John’s account at the library. John hadn’t replied.

Sherlock picked through his bedroom, going through the books, and clothes, sorting out what he wanted to keep while a guard waited politely at the door. He located his reader, and tossed it haphazardly into the bins with the rest. Sherlock passed into the loo to pack whatever toiletries he wanted to include, and a wave of something dark and horrible washed over him and he had to bend over, gripping the sink. He couldn’t believe he was really leaving. Sherlock had only been a toddler when they’d left Cardassia Prime and he barely remembered that time at all. This house was all he’d ever really known. The idea of leaving it, of leaving John was like carving his own heart out. Sherlock remembered then the cheap metal amulet that John had given him the night of his birthday. It was suddenly the only thing Sherlock wanted to pack in his travel cases. Sherlock pushed off the counter, and hurried through his room out to the hall.

"Garden. I need to see something outside," Sherlock informed the guard as he marched past.

“Certainly, sir,” his minder said, falling into step to follow.

Sherlock rushed through the house, fairly flying out the back door to reach the grounds. It was passing strange in some ways how little things had changed around the property. For once no
Bajoran servants flitted about tending things, though his mother had a number of Cardassian guards banging around, carrying things she’d selected to the transport van outside.

Sherlock reached the gardener’s shed, nearly breathless, wrenching the door open to dart inside. The stool he’d sat on when John first kissed him was still there, and he dropped to hands and knees beside it to look for the dropped amulet. It was insane. Sherlock scabbled about on the dirty floor, but look as he might, he couldn’t find it. Suddenly the loss of the cheap metal thing was just too much to bear. He dropped his head into his hands and wept. How could he possibly do this? How could he leave John and still draw breath into his body?

It was only the guard knocking at the door to get his attention that roused him from the miserable ball he’d curled up into on the floor.

“Excuse me, sir. Your mother is looking for you.”

Sherlock wiped his nose and eyes on his sleeve, and stood. He followed the man dully, to find his mother on the terrace by the outdoor tables waiting for him.

“Sherlock, there you are. Oh, did you have to get so dirty?”

“Sorry, Mummy, I was looking for something. I couldn’t find it.”

“Oh, poor dear. Don’t worry we’ll buy any new things we need later.” She reached out to pat his arm. “It’s hard leaving, isn’t it?” His mother looked around the yard. “I’ll miss it in a way. Won’t miss the cold, that’s for certain, but it’s been a good old house, hasn’t it?”

Sherlock nodded, unable to trust his voice.

“Come on, let’s take a last look around, say good-bye to things.” His mother led him for a final walk through, and Sherlock couldn’t believe how much everything he saw reminded him of John. There was the cupboard he and John had crept inside to eat an entire jar of stolen klavaatu jam. Here were the rooms they’d played hide and seek in on rainy days. Here was the classroom where he’d watched for John’s arrival every afternoon. There wasn’t a corner of the house or a corner of Sherlock that wasn’t somehow part of John too.

“Mummy, can I please go see John before we go. I wanted to say good-bye. Please, he’s my best friend.”

“Oh, Sherlock, for the last time, no. We’re well shot of these people, they’re dangerous. It’s best you just cut ties. You’ve got so much to look forward to now. You’ll do so well at the academy, I just know it.”

“Yes, Mummy,” Sherlock mumbled, deciding then and there he was running away. He’d live as a Bajoran granny for the rest of his life if he needed to, but there was no way he was leaving John behind.

Decision made, Sherlock was able to smile and nod, agreeing with his mother that they needed to get some wall paper in their new house to match the pattern in the back parlour. It was a lovely green. Sherlock returned to his room to gather up a bundle of his old Bajoran clothes, stuffing them into a bag to carry as the last boxes were moved out to the van. When all was stowed to Mummy’s satisfaction, Sherlock and his mother returned to the vehicle waiting to drive them back to the military base.

“Good bye, old house,” Mummy trilled. “Well, it will be so nice to get fresh rokassa, and taspar again. And the shows we can see, and the shops. Oh, Sherlock, you’ll love being in Cardassian
space again.”

“Yes, Mummy.” Sherlock stared out the window.

The only time they left the base again was to travel to their shuttle at the space port. Sherlock and Mummy would be journeying to a nearby space station to catch an interstellar flight to Cardassia prime. Mycroft had already shipped out, returning to his army posting, and Father wouldn’t be joining them until later. They said their good-byes over breakfast, his father wishing them a good trip, giving Mummy a kiss, and Sherlock a pat on the head. Sherlock had it planned, down to each variable. As their vehicle pulled away through the gates of the base, traveling toward the space port, Sherlock knew the best place to stop. He bent over, and began retching.

“Stop the car, let me out. I’m going to be ill,” he moaned.

“His mother banged on the partition to the driver. “Stop, oh stop the car!”

Sherlock was ready. As soon as the vehicle pulled to a halt, he slapped open the door, dropped to the ground with his bag on his back, and took off running. The guards hadn’t even left the car by the time he had cleared the roadway and disappeared into the warehouses that lined the road. He quickly switched clothes, pulling on his Bajoran skirts and veils, and hurried on until he found a busier street where he could catch a cab. He croaked out John’s address in his best wavery Bajoran, and sat back chewing at his lips, praying to every Prophet and Intercessory he knew that this would work. His nerves felt raw when the driver finally let him out at the business road by John’s street.

“Sorry, bibi, I daren’t take the car back into those neighborhoods. Here’s as far as I go.”

“That’s fine, sonny. Prophets bless you,” Sherlock croaked, counting out the coins to pay his fare.

“Blessings also upon you, bibi.” The man nodded, happy for the amount Sherlock poured into his palm.

Sherlock shouldered his bag and continued on past the businesses, finding most of them still closed despite the lateness of the hour, and made his way to the twisty street that held John’s home. He could barely contain the excitement that bubbled up his throat. John, he was finally going to see John. Sherlock hoped he’d be home, but he was prepared to sit on their step to wait the whole day if need be. Of course Mrs. Watson would need to find new work, losing her job at the manor, and Sherlock wasn’t sure if John’s school was back in session or not.

Sherlock almost ran the last few steps to John’s front door. It was half-way open. Something pricked Sherlock’s spine as he pushed it further open to enter. The place was a shambles. Everything had been tossed over or ransacked. The lovely chairs Mrs. Watson had inherited from Holmes manor lay broken on the floor. Sherlock ripped off his veils, and tore through the tiny house. It was hopeless he knew it, but he searched for clues, for anything that would tell him what had happened. The food was gone, the pantry and cupboards stripped bare. He flung himself into John’s room.

A few pictures hung on the wall, and the bed frame, dresser and shelves remained, but the mattresses, clothes, anything that could be easily carried off was missing. He opened the emptied dresser, searching, searching until his fingers scrabbled against a bit of paper caught against the side of a drawer. He pulled it out only to find an old picture of himself and John staring back. They couldn’t have been more than six and seven. His mother must have taken the picture. The two of them were on a swing they’d had in the back garden for years before the ropes rotted and broke. John was sitting in his lap so they could swing together, and they were smiling, smiling so wide. John had lost a tooth in front, and Sherlock hardly had his full cranial ridges in. They looked so
happy. How hadn’t he known he was in love with John even then?

Sherlock pushed the picture into his pocket, and continued his search of the house finding nothing but rubbish, a few odds and ends, and the big heavy things left behind. All the evidence pointed to the fact that the Watsons had well and truly vacated the place. Sherlock found his veils and went to the next house, rapping on the front door to find no one at home there either. At the third house, someone finally answered, a little Bajoran girl staring up at him.

"Hello, sweetie, I needed to ask you about your neighbors, some friends of mine, the Watsons? Do you know anything about them? They've gone missing."

"Yes, the soldiers came. Big men with guns. They knocked all over the house."

Sherlock’s blood went to ice. “But the Watsons, dear, do you know what happened to the family?”

“Gone, bibi. They’re gone."

"Emmie, who’s at the door?" A worried voice came from farther inside. A woman soon joined the girl, wiping her hands on a dish towel.

“I’m sorry to bother you, dearie. I was asking after the Watsons. They’re friends of mine. Do you know where they've gone?”

“I’m sorry, I don’t know. They were there one day and gone the next. It isn’t safe to be out on the streets today though, bibi, there’s a curfew on.” The woman frowned. “Do you need me to call someone for you?"

“No, no, thank you. Prophets bless you,” Sherlock managed to croak.

“And you, bibi.”

Sherlock returned to John’s house. He was sat on the floor in John’s room, dry-eyed, when his father’s guards arrived to drag him away. He offered no resistance, allowing them to bundle him off like so much luggage into the armored vehicle and on to the space port.

Chapter End Notes

I know, I know, this chapter is super sad. I had some upset moments writing it. Don't worry, there's more to come, and things will get better . . . eventually. (Cue evil author laugh.)

Seriously, thanks to everyone who's following this story - all five of you. ;) I so appreciate the kudos, comments and notes on Tumblr. This isn't a popular fusion - DS9 and Sherlock, and I enjoy the company of the few of you who are excited about this little tale. Thanks so much, I raise a raktajino your way in tribute! XD
Someone That I Used to Know

Chapter Summary

Finally back on Bajor, Sherlock is shocked at the changes that have been wrought on the planet in his absence.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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Ten Standard Years Later . . .

Whirra-whee. Whirra-whee.

Sherlock’s head whipped to the side, following the high-pitched call coming from a nearby stand of trees.

Whirra-whee. Whirra-whee.

It had to be a kubaroo. Sherlock couldn’t help smiling. He hadn’t heard a kubaroo sing in ages. The small birds had build a nest in the tree right outside his childhood bedroom window. He’d spent years waking in the morning to the sound. The call repeated as a light breeze ruffled through the foliage, and he spotted the bright aqua feathers buried amongst the dull green of the leaves.


Sherlock spied a patch of darker blue nearby. Oh, it was a male and a female, a mated pair. Lovely. They ducked their heads, bowing to each other, bright eyes scanning for trouble.

“AaaCHOOO.” Anderson, the dolt behind Sherlock sneezed loudly breaking the relative calm of the evening. The birds took to flight, momentary splashes of color against the darkening sky before they disappeared from view.

Sherlock sighed.

“Damnit.” Anderson ran his sleeve over his nose, sniffing grumpily. “This whole sodding planet is a fucking dustbowl.”

“This is the mountain region of the northern continent,” Sherlock clipped. It’s less windy when you go farther south. All of Bajor isn’t like this one province.”

“Whatever. It’s bright, it’s cold, it’s dusty. I need a drink.

Sherlock held his tongue. Idiot. Where did the empire find these people?

They continued their patrol, their boot heels clipping on the pavement. Anderson of course immediately announced his intention to stop in for a pint when they passed a small pub.
“You’re still on duty, soldier.” Sherlock fixed him with a hard glare.

“Oh, come off it, Holmes, no one cares what you do in the colonies. As long as you clock in and out on time, and kick some Bajoran scum in between no one gives a sodding arse.”

Sherlock couldn’t fault his logic. He’d been back on Bajor less than a month, and he was already appalling at the lack of discipline he’d seen in the lower ranks of the occupying army.

“Fine, you go in. I’ll wait out here. Stay at my post.”

“Good on you, Holmsie,” the man leered an ugly grin. “Keep yourself all spit spot.”

“Don’t take too long,” Sherlock called to Anderson’s retreating back.

Anderson gave a grunt as he waved him off, already legging it over to the battered door of the drinking hole.

Truth be told Sherlock shouldn’t be this man’s equal in rank. He should be his commanding officer with the power to send him to court martial for such insubordination, not forced to stand on the street alone while his patrol partner nipped off to get pissed. Sherlock had of course been placed in the officer track at the top military academy on Cardassia. With his line of commanding forefathers, no one expected any less of him.

Then the nightmares and the bedwetting had begun. He’d had rounds of therapists and rotating meds. The other boys had sensed the weakness in him, and had taunted him relentlessly for it. Sherlock’s state had worsened. It was a mercy when his father finally relented and had him moved to a basic training facility, sealing his personal record. No one he worked with knew he was related to those Holmeses. He wasn’t anything other than Private Holmes now, and that suited him just fine.

Sherlock turned, scanning the area, and continued down the street. A park lay farther down the road, and Sherlock let his feet carry him there. Solar-powered street lights were just beginning to click on as he stepped onto the soft grass, moving into the whisper of the long-fronded bushes. Sherlock caught a whiff of something sweet and spicy growing nearby and he inhaled deeply. He could indentify kava, jumja, rekja and something else, something . . . it smelled like the gardens he’d run barefoot through every summer, like the women baking in the kitchens of the manor, big metal pots bubbling on the hob. It smelled like home. Sherlock blinked at the sudden prickle of tears under his eyelids, unprepared for the wave of feeling that suddenly lanced through him. Bah, sentiment. It had obviously been too long since he’d breathed anything but the recycled air of space ships and way stations.

It was a blessing and a curse being reassigned to Bajor proper. He’d even been stationed in the same province where he’d grown up in a city called Illria. Sherlock’s entire being reveled in the familiar scents and sights of Bajor, but the changes to what he remembered kept surprising him. Years of martial law had taken their toll on the beloved country of his childhood. Sherlock had boarded a train to Dahkur City on his first day off for a visit full of disappointments. It had been shocking to find the Bajoran quarter, a place he remember filled with brightly–painted buildings and a bustling traffic of autos and animal-drawn carts side by side, all but gutted. Most notable was the complete lack of any standing temples wherever he went. He remembered the call of temple bells in the background steadily sounding out each hour so vividly. Their absence was jarring. So many Bajorans had fled the planet, escaping to refugee camps in nearby systems, that the Bajoran quarter was nearly a ghost town now. The neighborhood where Sherlock had grown up had even changed beyond recognition. The rows of stately manors he remembered had been knocked down, replaced by a low, squat military facility built in their stead.
The Cardassian driving the taxi he’d hired dropped him off near the space port when he requested a restaurant that served native food. “Don’t know why you’d want that swill, but here’s your best bet, mate.”

Sherlock had actually found a Bajoran-run place as suggested, and the food hadn’t been bad. Sherlock had ordered more than he could possibly eat in one sitting trying to taste all the remembered dishes, but the beaten-down look of the waitstaff had taken away his appetite. The young woman who brought out his plates of hasperat soufflé, ratamba stew, and veklava shuffled out with her head down, her ear bare of the usual swinging Bajoran earrings. Sherlock could see the holes where the studs and chains were meant to hang. No doubt she’d been ordered to remove them. No self-respecting Bajoran ever went out without their family crest firmly in place. It just felt wrong. Sherlock managed a few bites before asking for a bag to take the leftovers away. He put as much of a tip as he could afford on the table as he left. He hadn’t sought out a Bajoran restaurant again.

Sherlock stepped deeper into the shadows of the park letting the cool brush of the plants envelope him. He breathed in more of the smells of loamy earth and rich, growing things, letting it fill something inside of him that he hadn’t realized was empty. He felt a weight roll off his shoulders as he relaxed, letting his mind merge with the quiet around him.

A sudden movement startled his reverie, and he turned quickly watching as a large lizard burst out from under a bush. Sherlock almost laughed. It died in his throat as a net spiraled after the creature, landing neatly to snare it up. The lizard tripped, legs and tail thrashing as it tried to escape the webbing. When a Bajoran man in a knit cap darted out to kneel beside it, Sherlock was ready. He stepped forward, his drawn disruptor already in hand.

“Halt! Citizen please rise with your hands above your head. Hunting in city limits is in direct violation of governance code 517- A99 . . .”

The Bajoran rose slowly, hands up as directed. He kept his face ducked, shoulders hunched, a submissive posture as he took a step closer.

“Please, sir, the children were hungry . . .”

Sherlock glanced quickly about, but there was only the one of him. Bajorans weren’t supposed to have weapons of any sort, but a net was harmless enough. He’d let the man keep the thing, send him off with a warning.

“Fine, fine . . . just . . .” The words were knocked from Sherlock’s throat as the Bajoran suddenly rushed him.

The man caught Sherlock around the middle, and they bowled over to the ground in a tangle as Sherlock’s weapon flew from his hand. Sherlock’s training kicked in without any conscious thought, and he blocked the man’s savage blows, countering with his own strikes. The man was shorter than he was, but well muscled, and equally well versed in combat.

Something about his opponent pinged his senses, as familiar as the kubaroo song, but Sherlock’s attention was caught in defending himself, each moment stretched out shimmering in blood pumping and limbs flying. They seemed locked in a stalemate, neither getting the upper hand, until Sherlock rolled the Bajoran onto his back, knocking his cap away. He was rewarded with a clear view of the man’s face then, and the shock of golden hair that spilled out over the ground. Sherlock's grip went completely slack in shock. It couldn’t be . . . His attacker pressed his advantage immediately rolling on top, punching him hard in the stomach.

“John!” Sherlock wheezed out.
“SHERLOCK?” The man stilled his raised fist to peer at him in the near-dark.

Prophets it couldn’t be. Not after all this time, but it was. It was Watson John in the flesh, older, heavier, but John all the same.

“Yes,” Sherlock gasped when he could suck in some air.

“Fuck.” John froze, only his chest moving as he struggled to draw a good breath.

“John, I went to your house the day I left. You were gone. Where . . .”

“No, no . . .” John shook his head, incredulous. “No . . . Sherlock?” He seemed unable to trust that this wasn’t some trick.

“Yes.” Sherlock almost couldn’t believe it himself.

John reached out to touch Sherlock, hands on his face, his hair, patting over his (damn thick, heavy) uniform. He leaned closer as if to examine Sherlock’s face in closer detail. Sherlock could smell John’s breath. It was achingly familiar. Sherlock let out a terribly undignified little squeak.

John seemed to snap out of his shock, suddenly aware of his position straddling Sherlock, pressing him to the ground. The Bajoran jolted back as if burned, scrambling to his feet. He raked his hand through his hair, shoving the longer strands from his face. “Damn . . . I . . . damn.”

Sherlock pushed himself upright. “John . . . you look . . . well.” He didn’t. He looked like he’d been sleeping rough for days, but still, he was John, here, right before him.

A short bark of laughter escaped John’s throat before he cut it off. “You’re a soldier,” he said sounding dazed.

Sherlock looked wryly down at his uniform. “It was somewhat inevitable. But you . . . John what have you been doing?”

“Surviving,” John said shortly.

“What happened. Can you tell me? I was ready to join you. My parents were taking me offworld, and I came to your house. Everything was gone.”

“Prophets, that was so long ago.” The man drew a breath. ”They were executing every servant they could round up from the manors. Mum had friends I didn’t know about. They found us somewhere safe to go.”

“Your mother, how is she?”

“Offworld,” John said. “She’s in a refugee camp in the Magellan system . . .” John trailed off.

“And Harry? How is your sister.”

John’s shoulders tightened. “They took Harry. She got sent to some brothel in a space station. I lost touch with her after that. I don’t know what happened to her.”

“Prophets. I’m so sorry John. I can look, see if I can find her.”

“I . . .” John ran a hand over his face. “Sherlock, what are you doing here? Don’t you know it’s not safe?”
“I was assigned to Bajor a few weeks ago.” Sherlock lifted a shoulder in a half-shrug. “I go where needed. I serve with honour.” Sherlock parroted the military slogan wryly.

John looked more closely at him, eyes flicking over his uniform markings. “But I thought you were meant to be an officer, not a soldier on the ground! Why . . .”

It was Sherlock’s turn to bark a laugh. “That didn’t work out quite as planned. Seems I was something of a disappointment in officer training. My father hasn’t spoken to me in years because of it. There’s a small blessing.”

The netted lizard took that moment to resume its trashing, trying to escape the webbing.

“Sorry, do you mind?” John asked.

“Please.” Sherlock swept out a hand.

John dropped to the ground, a glint of steel appeared in his hand as he stabbed at the creature. Once it stopped moving, John quickly cleaned the blade. He wiped it and his hands over the grass, slipping the weapon away as he stood.

“Why are you hunting in city limits? Don’t you know how dangerous that is?” Sherlock clenched his fists. “You could be arrested for that.”

“Arrested?” John huffed. “I’d be more likely shot dead where I stood.”

“Exactly, why take the risk?”

“Because people are starving, Sherlock.”

“Why? The harvest was good this year, I know I read that somewhere.”

John laughed again, a bitter sound. “Oh, the harvest was spectacular this year, and the spoonheads took most of it as a tax leaving people with next to nothing to eat. Anyone who wants food has to go to the ration centers to get their daily hand-out.”

“I had no idea.” Sherlock felt a wave of shame washing over him. “John, are you hungry? I can get you food.”

“We need food, yes, and so much more – medicine, blankets, clothes . . .” Again John trailed off, censoring himself.


“I . . .” John sucked in a breath. “Okay. We . . . I would appreciate it. People are suffering so much, Sherlock. So much has changed since you left.”

“I know. I visited Dahkur City last week . . . everything was gone.” Sherlock shook his head. “But you haven’t told me how you’re here. Why aren’t you with your mother?”

A group of Cardassians passed on the street nearby, their raised voices, and a burst of laughter reached them through the bushes reminding them of where they were.

“I can’t stay,” John said. “I have to get off the streets.”

“Yes, I know, there’s a curfew.”
John dropped to the ground, and found his knit cap that he tugged back in place. He grabbed the edges of the netting around the lizard, heaving it over his shoulder to carry as he straightened.

“Can you meet back here in three days?” Sherlock said. “I can have some things for you by then. Same time?”

“Yes.” John nodded. “I can, and thank you, Sherlock, you don’t know how much this will help.”

“Anything. I’ll do whatever I can.” Sherlock swallowed. “John . . .”

“I have to go.”

“I know. Be careful.”

“Always.” John hesitated as if he might say something else, but stopped himself. “Bye, Sherlock.”

“Good-bye, John.” Sherlock watched as John darted off farther into the park, disappearing into the dark clump of bushes and out of sight.

Over the next few days, Sherlock found himself wondering if he’d dreamed it all, stumbling over John in a city park. It was too much like the nightmares he’d had over the years. He’d discover John somewhere, and reach out to touch him only to watch him melting away as he desperately tried to grab hold.

Sherlock had retrieved his fallen disruptor after John had left the park that night, and chivvied Anderson out of the Damn pub to finish their watch before returning to base quarters. He didn’t have much privacy, sharing a room with a number of other soldiers, but he quickly found a small utilities closet with space to store things, and began “midnight requisitioning” supplies, lifting things when no one was watching.

Everything Sherlock did, he did thinking of John now. He lined-up at morning report looking at the bland, closed faces in a row wondering what John would think of his life. When he carried his tray through the mess, past steaming trays of food, and pyramids of fresh produce, Sherlock thought of the many Bajorans going hungry while the army ate so comfortably. He managed to slip several pieces of moba fruit into his pockets before he left the table.

During patrol, Sherlock was pleased to find himself assigned to a new partner. This one was named Larex, a soldier who thankfully didn’t try to chit chat or nip into pubs while on duty. He was a by-the-book, dry-as-dirt bloke, and that suited Sherlock just fine. Their first day out together was dull routine, but on their second day, they encountered a Bajoran granny, and a younger woman with two small children out after hours. Larex charged forward to stop them, threatening the whole group with arrest for being out past curfew.

The women looked terrified, clutching the children closer. “I’m so sorry sir,” the younger woman said, ducking her head. “It’s just that the nearest rations center is so far from where we live. We don’t always make it back before dusk.”

“That’s not an excuse . . .”

One of the children started to cry, and Larex whipped out his disruptor on reflex at the noise. The women shrieked causing the child to cry louder, her brother chiming in.

“Enough.” Sherlock shoved in front of the idiot. “Put that away now, soldier. There are children
present.” Thankfully, the man obeyed, however reluctantly, and reholstered his weapon.

“Where is your home?” Sherlock asked the younger woman in Bajoran. It shocked her so much, she answered him immediately.

“Four streets that way, sir.” She pointed. “We aren’t far now.”

“Why aren’t you going to the distribution center on Wayborne street?” Sherlock switched back to Cardassian for the benefit of his fellow soldier glaring daggers at them all.

“It runs out of food and closes early.” The woman switched languages as well to answer.

“There’s another center that opened up nearby. At Wayborne and Russlie,” Sherlock said.

“Oh, I haven’t heard of that,” the older lady spoke up.

“Try it tomorrow,” Sherlock said. “You shouldn’t have to walk so far, bibi.”

“Thank you, son.” The granny smiled revealing a mouth of missing teeth.

“Here, we’ll watch you cross the street, make sure nothing happens to you, so you get home safely,” Sherlock said.

“My feet hurt, Mama, I can’t go any further,” the little boy whined in Bajoran, plopping down onto the pavement.

“Stefan,” his mother hissed, obviously afraid their good luck might run out. “You must get up, now.”

“Long walk, hmm, mate?” Sherlock squatted down to reach eye-level with the boy. The boy nodded miserably. “Well, how about a lift?” Sherlock surprised them all as he hefted the little boy up. The child laughed delightedly as Sherlock settled him over his shoulders. Sherlock winced only slightly as the boy grabbed onto his neck ridges to steady himself. “Come on, Larex, make yourself useful. These ladies have some heavy bags there. Why don’t you carry something?”

Larex looked as if he’d bitten into something sour, but he reached out and took a bag from the boy’s mother, slinging it distastefully across his back. Somewhat awkwardly, the soldiers escorted the family through the several blocks until they reached a small enclave of ramshackle huts on the edge of a factory building.

“Thank you, sonny, we’re fine from here.” The granny accepted the boy from Sherlock, as the younger woman took the bag from a scowling Larex.

“I’m sorry, we don’t have much to offer you in thanks for your kindness.” The younger woman licked her lips, glancing nervously at both soldiers. She smoothed a hand down her faded skirts as her gaze locked with Sherlock’s. “If you would like to step inside for a moment though, I could make you comfortable.” Oh, Prophets, no. This poor woman was offering them sex.

“NO, thank you,” Sherlock barked out. “We need to get back to our patrol route. May the Prophets bless you.” Sherlock backed quickly away, pulling Larex with him.

“Blessings to you as well.” The woman nodded, looking confused but grateful.

“What the hell was all that?” Larex spat as soon as they reached a main road. “And how do you know so much Bajoran? I couldn’t follow much of anything you said back there.”

Sherlock hadn’t realized he’d slipped back into speaking Bajoran again. “Nothing, just telling her
good-bye. It helps to speak some of the language of the people you’re patrolling, you know.”

“We aren’t patrolling to help them. *Bajoran scum.* We’re trying to keep them from wrecking up the place,” his fellow Cardassian sneered. “Do you know a band of them torched a water recycling plant in Tahore yesterday? They had to use plasma canons to fight them off. Savages, the lot of them. Where do they think they’ll drink with the water system down?”

“I heard that most of their food supplies have been impounded,” Sherlock returned hotly. “No one seems to be caring much how the Bajorans will survive. I can see why they’d want to lash out. The Governors have stopped doing their job if they can’t even manage to maintain the basic necessities of the people they are supposed to be ruling.” Sherlock was shocked at the man’s stupidity.

“What are you some kinda Bajoran-lover, gone native or something?” Larex narrowed his eyes. “These aren’t people, Holmes. Not like you and me.”

Sherlock thought for a moment. He was technically a Bajoran-lover, yes. He’d had two to date. He tried not to think too hard on the trip to the brothel he’d had as a new recruit. His fellow soldiers had dragged him on a horrid outing to some rundown sex club on Space Station Alpha 24. He’d looked at the buffet of tired-looking women of varying species on display, and reluctantly chosen the Bajoran. The prostitute had dutifully set about giving him a blow-job, but he’d started crying in the middle of it. She’d listened to him talk about John for the rest of his stay in her room, assuring him he wasn’t the first to cry in her bed. He’d emptied out his credit chip for her when he left.

Sherlock took a deep breath to calm himself. It would do no good to bait this moron. “You’re right, Larex. They aren’t like us at all.” He turned to stride ahead. “They’re much better,” he muttered under his breath.

“Don’t let your guard down, Holmes,” Larex called out, hurrying to catch up. “They’ll cut you if you turn your back on them.”

Sherlock refused to reply, and they finished out their patrol in blessed silence until it was time to go in.

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Sherlock worked hard to maintain a bored expression as he left the base on his night off. They often searched bags coming into the facility, but no one ever thought to search people going out. *Fools,* Sherlock thought as he walked out with a pack and all his pockets stuffed with his ill-gotten supplies. He took a taxi into town, getting out to walk the last few blocks unwatched. He felt like his stomach just might crawl up his throat with nerves as he approached the city park where he’d met John before. Sherlock stepped into the shadows of the trees, every sense on high alert, but there was nothing to greet him but the sigh of the grasses and the leaves in the light breeze. Disappointed but reminding himself that he had no idea what hurdles John had to clear to reach this park, he took an ambling walk around the perimeter, finally finding a bench under the trailing leaves of a tall Tarra tree. The place had definitely seen better days, the garden beds untended, bits of trash caught in the weeds, but it still smelled wonderful, rich and redolent.

Sherlock took off his heavy pack, slinging it onto the seat beside him. He spent some time unpacking all the things in his rucksack, and pockets slipping them into two laundry bags he’d had stuffed inside his jacket. Task done, Sherlock settled in to wait. A few people walked by on the street beyond, but no one approached the park. An hour ticked by before Sherlock finally heard footsteps hurrying on the path through the tall grasses. He looked up as a Bajoran man approached him, huddled in his jacket, a heavy cap pulled low over his brow.
It was John. Sherlock would know John’s loping walk anywhere, but it struck him suddenly how little he knew of this new, older John. So much time had passed, so much had happened since they’d been together. In some ways, he really didn’t know this John at all.

Sherlock thought to stand, but stayed seated until the Bajoran was upon him. He shifted his bags from the bench to lie by his feet, making space for the man to sit. John hesitated, finally sinking down, leaving a good foot of space on the bench between them. It was so odd, this person he once knew as well as the back of his own hand, now a virtual stranger.

“Sorry I’m late,” John muttered, glancing almost shyly his way.

“No, it’s fine, I’m glad you could make it.” Sherlock cleared his throat. “I brought you some things.” He motioned toward the bags.

“Good, that’s fantastic. I can’t tell you how much we need supplies.” John made no move to take them.

“John, when you say we . . .”

“Friends,” John said. “I’m staying with friends.”

“I looked you up on the database,” Sherlock said. “You aren’t listed as being on Bajor. Your file marks you as a person of interest gone missing ten years ago.”

John barked a short laugh. “A person of interest? I was a kid whose mum worked in your kitchens.”

“John.” Sherlock dropped his voice. “Can you tell me what happened to you back then?”

“I don’t really know exactly.” John shook his head. “One day we were running from your house on fire, and the next day your brother showed up, and then suddenly mum had friends coming over to help us move. We had to go. They were taking anyone associated with the manors that were attacked. I thought my mother was crazy, but then I heard tales. The sweet little girls who worked in the kitchen with my mum, Serra, and Uma? They were shot in the street by some soliders. Killed as they came out of a temple.”

“Damnit. John, I didn’t know. They shipped me offworld, back to Cardassia Prime.”

“Yeah, we had friends who helped us get offworld too, to some refugee camps.”

“You said the Magellan system.”

“That’s right. Mum’s still there,” John said grimly. “Horrible place, the refugee camps. Never enough of anything to go around for all the people stuck there.”

“And you? How did you end up back on Bajor?”

“What’s that you said earlier? I go where needed? I serve with honour?”

“You’re part of the terrorist network.” Sherlock sighed. It wasn’t a surprise, not really.

“Freedom fighters,” John hissed turned fully to face him on the bench. “I’m part of the Resistance, Sherlock. It’s not like when we were kids with a rule here, a curfew there. Things have changed. They’re systematically killing us – destroying the planet with strip mining, driving us away from our homes, and either working the people left here to death or starving us. The Cardassian Empire won’t stop until they’ve obliterated Bajor. I can’t just sit back and watch them do it. Could you?”
“Prophets, no. John, I’m sorry. I had no idea.” Sherlock felt like he might be ill.

John seemed to reign himself back in, swiveling to face forward again. He dropped his head. “I don’t blame you, you know. I know you aren’t in charge of things.”

“I want to help, anything I can do . . .”

“What are you saying, Sherlock, are you going to join the Resistance? Commit treason?”

“I don’t know.” Sherlock felt a wave of frustration wash over him. “What the hell can I do? I can bring you some ration bars, some pain killers, socks, and antibiotics. It’s the least I can do.” He gestured angrily toward the bags.

“You have antibiotics?”

“I broke into the infirmary’s supply cabinet.”

“Wow. Sherlock, I’ve seen so many die due to a simple infection. It’s been YEARS since any of us had access to proper medicine.”

“I can get you more. I might be able to get you some travel replicators.”

“Prophets . . . replicators.” John could hardly speak. “That would be . . . no, won’t they notice? Surely you can’t hide that level of theft? You’d get caught.”

“Nope.” Sherlock smiled. “Not if I hack into the data system and change the inventory. I already did that for the stuff that I took. No one will ever miss it.”

“Right. Of course you hacked into the inventory system. Silly me. What was I thinking?” John giggled, and Sherlock felt himself laughing along with him. Suddenly it didn’t feel so strange sitting here talking with this odd, new version of John. It was just John.

“We can’t keep meeting here in this park,” John said once their chuckles had died down. “People will notice.”

“What do you suggest?”

“We have some safe places to meet. Here, I drew a map.” John fumbled inside his coat, pulling it out of an inner pocket.

Part of Sherlock lit up like a firework knowing that John had come already planning their next meeting. He reached over to accept the folded bit of paper John held out. Their fingers barely brushed as Sherlock took it. He unfolded the note, squinting at the page. The nearby streetlight didn’t throw enough light into the park for him to read it, and Sherlock wasn’t sure he wanted to risk any possible attention, pulling out the torch on his belt.

“I’ll have to look at it later. Is it far from here?”

“No,” John said. “It’s an abandoned house – looks all boarded up from the front, but the back door still works.”

“All right. I won’t get another free night for another week. Is that okay?”

“Okay?” John huffed. “Sherlock you’ll be Father Winter and the Good Fairy all rolled up together if you can get us things like antibiotics and replicators.”
“I’ll do my best.” A tiny smile tugged at the corner of Sherlock’s mouth.

“Thank you. Really, this is . . . just incredible.” John cleared his throat. “Look, beyond all the stuff, it’s . . . it’s good to see you again. I heard your family went back to Cardassia Prime. Your father’s been all over the news.”

“Yes, he has,” Sherlock said simply. “It’s good to see you again too. I had no idea what happened to you. I thought . . . well, I thought you had died.”

“Naw, can’t keep a Watson down that easily. Listen, you said, you might have some word on Harry?” A note of quiet hope coloured John’s words.

“Right. I didn’t manage to get into those records yet. I’ll try again over the week.”

“Oh, okay, good, thanks.” John nodded, his face a silhouette in the near dark.

“It’s fine. I want to help.” Sherlock hoped his sincerity was evident.

After a moment, John seemed to collect himself. “Well, I’d best go before it gets too late. Those patrols get meaner as the night goes on.”

“Of course.” Sherlock watched the Bajoran roll easily to his feet.

John stuck out a hand. Sherlock reached up and took it. Warm. John was always so warm. After just a moment, John released him, and bent to scoop up the bags.

“I’ll see you in a week,” John said.

“You can count on it.” Sherlock worked to keep his voice steady.

“Oh, and Sherlock? Destroy that paper I gave you after you look at it.”

“Of course.”

John nodded briskly, turned, and slipped quickly back into the shadows and off who knew where into a city that no longer welcomed his presence.

“Good-bye, John,” Sherlock whispered to the dark tangle of trees, waiting several minutes before making his own way from the park, back where a lonely bed waited for him at the base.

Chapter End Notes

"Spoonheads" is a classic Star Trek slur for Cardassians referring to the spoon-like ridge structure on their foreheads.
Searching, Always Searching

Chapter Summary

Sherlock finds John at their rendezvous point, and something more - perhaps a way back to a place he only half remembers.

Chapter Notes

For those watching the tags, I decided to bump this story up to "explicit." I was going to keep things kind of light in the alien sex department - all fade to black, and curtains blowing in the wind, but the lads had other plans in mind. Who am I to argue!? Hope you all enjoy the new chapter. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

%%%

“What are you doing in here, soldier? This area is authorized.”

Sherlock felt his spine stiffen at the sharp voice behind him. He made himself relax as he released the drawer handle and turned slowly around.

“I have orders to collect medicine for distribution, sir.” Sherlock shrugged nonchalantly.

“These are restricted things in here.” The man gestured angrily toward the tall cabinet. Sherlock’s eyes flicked quickly over the insignia of his uniform. *Private first class. Clerk.*

“Let me see your orders, please.” The clerk held out his hand, and Sherlock dutifully passed over a data cube. The clerk slotted it briskly into his reader pad.

“Hmm.” He frowned at the screen. “This says you’re to collect pain killer and antacid. Those are in the next row over.”

“Oh, sorry, sir, I made a mistake.”

“Well, next time get a med tech to help you. We don’t need people banging around in here. Also, don’t put your errand off. We have stated hours for regular pick-ups.” The man detached the data cube, thrusting it back at him.

“Yes, sir.” Sherlock slipped the cube holding his falsified orders into his pocket. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to be late. Got lost.”

“Fine, just be quick. I need to lock up the supply area.”

“Of course, sir.” Sherlock suppressed a sigh as left the cabinet holding the skin-regeneration wands,
and nanobot packs, and returned to the main supply shelves.

Security was generally lax during shift change time, but this eager creature had obviously decided to come in early and get caught up in his inventory logs. Sherlock wished he could just create an order to get all the medical things he needed, but high-end items tended to get tagged in the system. It was harder to hide his tracks. The man watched Sherlock irritably as he loaded several packs of pain pills, and some generic stomach medicine into his bag before ushering him out of the medical supply room. At least Sherlock was able to get a few useful things on this trip. It was better than nothing.

Sherlock spent a week plodding through his regular duties. He clocked in and out of patrol, scanning the ID chip attached to his uniform, working mechanically through his watch. It was only the beggars they occasionally had to roust that punched through his fog. He made sure the Bajorans weren’t hurt as they sent them on their way, slipping them a few folded bills if his fellows Cardassians weren’t watching. He ate his unimaginative meals in the mess, sitting near his squad mates, grunting if addressed, keeping quiet if not. It was after hours, when a skeleton staff remained on alert, that he came to life and his real work began.

Years had passed since Sherlock had actually cared about anything. It was a heady brew to have something to live for again. Sherlock reveled in the excitement that coursed through his veins as he secreted a stack of supplies in the utility closet, or hacked into another logy computer system, bending data trails to his will. Sherlock had almost forgotten how good it felt to turn his sizeable intellect toward something worthwhile.

He slipped out easily again on his free night, laden with his spoils, and made his way to a taxi stand to travel into town. The only fly in the ointment was the large, dark storm cloud gathering at the horizon.

“Looks like a real corker coming tonight, mate.” The Cardassian driving the cab commented, peering out his window. “Wouldn’t want to be out in that when it hits.”

The electrical storms of early autumn were always a danger, but Sherlock refused to miss his chance to meet with John. "I'll be sure to be indoors," Sherlock commented dryly, leaning back in his seat, closing his eyes to discourage any further conversation with his driver.

Again, Sherlock got out several streets away from his final destination, exiting near a row of restaurants. He waited until the cab had pulled away before he turned to find his way to the rendezvous spot. The house that John had indicated on his hastily-drawn map was deep in a neighborhood of abandoned buildings. Only a dodgy corner store at the end of the block seemed to show any signs of life in the area. Sherlock ducked down an alley to find the back of a row of old houses just as the rain began. A shimmer in the air, and a soft boom in the distance told him the big thunderstorm was rolling in fast. Sherlock quickened his pace, ducking his head against the cold drops starting to fall.

The rain fell more steadily as he found the right gate. It was marked with a small upright oval with a line through it, scratched into the wood. John had drawn a quick sketch of it on his map, the symbol of the Resistance. Sherlock was sad that he’d had to destroy the paper John had given him. It was the first time he’d seen John’s blocky handwriting in years, but of course he’d shredded the note, throwing it into the first rubbish bin he’d come to after memorizing its contents.

Sherlock hurried through the overgrown garden, across the cracked paving stones to reach the back steps to the house. He found the newer keypad nested by the old, weathered door, and quickly punched in the numbers John had given him. The door popped open with a small creak, and Sherlock hurried indoors, escaping the wet.
The loud roar of the rain dropped, instantly muted as he closed the door. The interior was dim, and Sherlock unclipped his torch, snapping in on to survey his surroundings. It must have been a nice enough family home once, but years of neglect had left the wallpaper sagging, and paint peeling. This back room was empty, probably once a kitchen though the appliances had been gutted. The front sitting room was likewise deserted, the boarded up windows leaving it in dark gloom.

“Hello?” Sherlock called out, his voice surprisingly loud, echoing in the hollow space. When no answer came, he decided John must be running late again.

A quick trip up the stairs proved it just as free of life as the ground level though the three bedrooms showed much more evidence of recent habitation. Heavy curtains blocked the windows while rugs, cushions and low tables littered the floors in two rooms. The third held rolls of bedding stacked against the wall. Small skylights let in a scant amount of illumination overhead as the rain poured down furiously over them. Sherlock supposed the hidden natural light was one of the reasons the Resistance had picked this place as a bolthole. During the day, it was probably quite cheerful. Sherlock poked around a bit more, found a toilet that seemed to be functioning, and a small storage room crammed to the ceiling with bags and boxes. Though his curiosity itched at him, he left them untouched.

Sherlock dropped his heavy pack in one of the furnished sitting rooms, but he felt strange making himself at home alone there. He found a spot to wait on the stairs instead, bringing out his reader to look over some recent news reports. When he heard the sound of the back door opening, Sherlock popped up, making his way quietly down to investigate if it were friend or foe. Relief leapt in his throat at finding nothing more ominous than a soaked John locking the door behind him. The Bajoran turned, a look of delight flashing quickly over his face as he saw him.

“Sherlock. Oh, good, you found the place. Any troubles?”

“No, none.” Sherlock shook his head. “How about you?”

“They were checking ID badges down the way.” John shrugged, pulling off his wet cap. “I had to take a more roundabout route to get here.”

Sherlock couldn't help looking at John’s naked right ear. It had held the posts and swinging chains of John’s earrings for as long as Sherlock had known him. He looked so strange without them, the small piercings around the shell of his ear left startlingly empty.

“Glad you didn’t get stopped,” Sherlock said, trying not to stare at John while still cataloging everything about him. He was hungry for every detail.

A sudden flash of light filtered in through the cracks of the covered windows. An enormously loud crack followed quickly on its heels. They both jumped.

“Prophets, that was close,” John said with shudder. His clothes weren’t waterproofed like Sherlock’s and water dripped from them steadily onto the scuffed floor.

“I’ve got something that might help you, upstairs,” Sherlock said. “You look . . . wet,” he finished charitably. John looked like a drowned rodent, his slicked hair plastered to his skull. He looked cold.

“Yeah, I should get out of this wet stuff.” John shook his fringe out of his eyes. “Don’t want to get sick.”

John gestured for Sherlock to go first, so he led the way back to the furnished rooms upstairs. John paused in the hallway to strip off his sodden outerwear, hanging it on some pegs along the wall,
while Sherlock moved past him into the room where he'd dropped his pack. Sherlock hunkered down to dig through his things on the floor, setting his torch beside for some light. He gave a triumphant cluck when his fingers finally closed over what he was looking for.

John joined him, barefoot, stripped down to soaked trousers, and a damp vest carrying a small travel lantern he'd gotten from another room. He set it on a table, and flicked it on. The soft glow within sparked to life, throwing shadows around the room.

“Try this,” Sherlock said, tossing John the small bag he’d managed to locate.

John quickly unpacked it to reveal a self-heating blanket. “Ah, brilliant!” he said, unfolding it to spread around his shoulders.

“I’ve got fifteen of them,” Sherlock said. “I wish I could get more, but I’m limited in my distribution mode.” He patted at his bag. It carried a surprising amount, but there was only so much he could pack out on his person.

“No, this is fantastic, Sherlock, really. Anything helps.” John moved to take a seat on one of the nearby cushions, easily crossing his legs to settle in. He pulled the warming blanket closer, tucking it around his feet to encase all of him. The cover looked to be doing its job. John’s pale cheeks were already gaining some colour.

“Are you hungry?” Sherlock continued rummaging through his pack.

“Always hungry,” John said wryly.

“I found a number of MRE’s with Bajoran dishes. They obviously aren’t as popular with the troops. There are stacks of them in the supply cabinets.” Sherlock fished out several silver packets of food, peering at the outside labels. Do you want hasperat or ramufta?”

“Oooh, hasperat, please.”

Sherlock leaned over to pass it to John.


“Ah, okay.” Sherlock had actually been too nervous to eat much that day, worrying about their meeting. He could probably benefit from a meal himself.

Sherlock took the ramufta and settled on a cushion beside John’s. After peeling the plastic spoon off the side, he ripped off the top of the packet, watching as John did the same. The bags heated their contents once opened, and in just a minute, the food was, if not exactly hot, not cold either. They spent the next few minutes in companionable silence spooning up their dinner. John ate quickly, efficiently, scraping his package clean with a practiced air. Sherlock had only eaten half of his meal in the same time.

“Mmm, that was good.” John smiled, leaning back. “Damn, I could eat three more of those, I think.”

“There is more . . .” Sherlock glanced at his rucksack.

“No, better not.” John shook his head. “We’ll need it later.”

“Here, have the rest of mine.” Sherlock held his packet out.
“You’re sure?” John eyed it hungrily

“Quite.” The side of Sherlock’s mouth tipped up. “I’m full. Wouldn’t want it to go to waste.”

“Well, in that case, pass it over.”

Sherlock watched John tucking into his leftover stew almost mesmerized at the motion of John’s hand methodically scooping up the food, bringing the spoon to his mouth. Something inside Sherlock melted. How many meals had John had to miss recently? Sherlock didn’t like to think too hard on it.

Sherlock shook himself from his reverie, reaching over to snag his pack. “I’ve some tea too if you have a way to heat water?”

John’s eyes went round. “Tea? Real tea? Prophets, I’d take a disruptor blast to the ballsack for some actual, real tea.”

“Well, I don’t think you need to do anything quite so drastic.” Sherlock smiled, digging a box from his pack, looking at the cover. “It’s Red Leaf.” It was a popular Cardassian variety. Not Sherlock’s favorite, but passable stuff.

“Prophets, yes.” John rose to his feet, letting his blanket fall away. “Yeah, there should be a kettle around . . .” He glanced about before locating a solar-powered kettle in the corner of the room. “Ah there it is.” He brought it over to table near them, pushing the lantern aside to set it down. “We’re lucky this place has running water.”

“That is good.” Sherlock agreed privately wondering why the water was still on in this old building. “Oh, but I don’t have any sweetener.”

“I can look . . .” John left the room with the water pot. Sherlock could hear the sounds of taps running in the loo and a cabinet door being opened before John returned balancing the filled kettle, two mugs, and a small jar. He snapped the kettle onto its base to boil, dropping the rest of the things beside.

“I actually found a bit of honey.” John held up the small jar, smiling as if proud to be a decent host. “I know you like it in your tea.”

“I do.” Sherlock tried not to smile too widely, pleased that John remembered that after all these years.

They watched as the water boiled, and John continued his role as gracious host, dropping a tea bag in each cup, pouring out the water, giving Sherlock the jar of honey to scoop with one of the plastic spoons.

They settled again when all was done, mugs in hand. John pulled the blanket back around himself, just one foot poking out below the bottom edge. “Ohhhh, that’s good.” John sighed after his first swallow of tea.

Sherlock found himself focused on that one bare foot sticking out between them. John wiggled his toes, and Sherlock had to catch his breath at the sight of those pale knobby digits he knew almost better than his own lying so close.

The rain continued to beat down outside, pinging off the skylights and windows, but inside they seemed to be in a cocoon of sorts, a cave where nothing bad from outside could reach them. Sherlock took a long sip from his own mug letting it warm him. His clothes were padded, sturdy military issue, good in the rain, but his hair remained damp, and the room was cool. The heat of the
tea was marvelous. “Mmm, it is nice,” he agreed.

Another bolt of lightning flashed outside through the skylight, illuminating the room with a sudden burst of light. For just an instant, John looked like a black and white drawing, waiting to be coloured in. The crackling boom of thunder reached them a few seconds later. The jarring moment passed quickly, leaving them in the cozy glow of the lantern again. It was almost like camping, Sherlock thought. Stuck in a tent, waiting for the rain to pass.

“John, I wanted to let you know I managed to do some digging online for Harry.”

“Oh, Sherlock, wow. What . . .” a number of expressions seemed to vie for the use of John’s face at once.

“I couldn’t get an exact location for her, but I know she was returned to Bajor five years ago. She was transferred from a space station called Terok Nor to a labor camp in the Southern hemisphere around B’hala.” Sherlock leaned forward slightly. “It was an agricultural plantation, not a mining camp,” he hastened to add. Casualties tended to be lower for farming details, and starvation was not such a risk there.

“Prophets, Harry.” John’s eyes misted over as he covered his mouth with his fingers.

“I wish I had more recent information. Records on the labor camps aren’t always kept as up-to-date as they should. I’ll keep looking, do some cross-referencing. There’s no reason to think she’s not alright . . .”

“No, stop.” John held up his hand in protest. “Just let me know if you find out anything more. I’m sorry, Sherlock but a little bit of hope without all the facts can be a bad thing.”

“Alright.” Sherlock cleared his throat, looking down. He’d debated sharing his inconclusive results with John.

“Thank you though . . . I . . . thanks.” John focused pointedly on his mug, taking another swallow.

“So, how was your week, anything interesting come up?” Sherlock struggled to find a neutral topic of conversation.

“Oh yeah! We had a really successful raid on . . .” John trailed off, catching himself at the last moment. “Actually, I guess I shouldn’t give you any details.” He bit at his lower lip. “It’s better if you don’t know anything if you get asked later.”

“Yes, I guess you’re right.” Sherlock nodded. Of course he knew all about the bombing of the vehicle maintenance facility three days ago. It was all over the newsfeeds.

“Look, Sherlock, I’m not sure if I can do this.”

“John . . . I . . .”

“I mean I appreciate all the things you’ve brought, and the help for the Resistance, but I’m not sure I can just meet like this – pretend that everything is like it used to be. It just isn’t. So much has changed, I’ve changed . . .” John’s hand had tightened around his cup, his knuckles going white.

“I understand.” Sherlock put his nearly empty mug down on the table with a clunk. “Perhaps we can arrange a place for me to simply drop off supplies.” He made to unload his bag completely, piling the things he’d brought on the ground. “I can go.”
“No, Sherlock, no.” John looked embarrassed. “You can’t just go, there’s a storm on.” He flung an arm out to indicate the weather raging around them.

“Well, alright, I can wait abit, but we don’t have to meet in person again.” Sherlock zipped his empty bag closed, slung it over his shoulder. “I can drop things off here next week or somewhere else if you like.” He rose to his feet. “I’ll just wait downstairs until the rain lets up.”

“No.” John stood quickly, something like panic blooming over his face. “Sherlock, no, that isn’t what I meant.” He reached out to grab Sherlock’s arm, stopping him in his tracks.

Sherlock held himself so still, looking down at where John’s hand gripped his sleeve. “No?”

“Don’t go. Please.” John's voice cracked.

“John, it's alright. I don’t expect you to be . . . who you were before. We were children.” Sherlock’s voice sounded strange to his own ears. “What did we know about the world?”

“I can’t believe I was ever that naïve.” John laughed, a hurt sound. “Prophets, I used to think things weren’t that bad. I thought things were going to be okay for Bajor. I was a fool.”

“No more so than me, John. I sat in my fancy house, with anything I needed at my fingertips. I had no idea the backs breaking to keep our lifestyle going. Your mother . . .” Sherlock had to swallow deeply. “Your mother was more of a mum to me than my own. I used to wish I was Bajoran like you John . . . I was so ashamed . . .” Sherlock was horrified to find that tears had gathered in his eyes. They welled up, overflowing, spilling down his cheeks. He turned, trying to duck his face, thinking of nothing other than getting away to hide.

John was having none of it. He clung to Sherlock turning him around, pulling him into his arms. “Sherlock, Sherlock . . .” John crooned his name, a hand gripping the back of his neck, as another wrapped around his shoulders.

Sherlock near collapsed into John, gripping handfuls of his shirt, struggling to breathe as he pressed his face to the side of John’s neck. John smelled like every good thing that he had ever had in his life and lost. He smelled like home, a home that had once followed him everywhere, dark blue eyes and a wide grin sparkling in the sun. The floodgates crashed open, and Sherlock found a sob rising from his throat.

“Shhh, love, shhh.” John cradled him as he murmured nonsense in his ear. “It’s alright. It’s okay.” He smoothed a hand down Sherlock’s back.

John’s lips found their way to Sherlock’s temple, pressing little kisses against his skin. Sherlock turned his face, seeking the warmth of John blindly until their mouths connected. John’s sweet little pecks turned instantly molten as he opened up and they surged together.

Sherlock pressed forward, and the two of them sank to the floor, half on the cushions and half on the rug. They rolled together, kissing wildly, grappling to hold each other ever closer. Sherlock felt like he just might explode from the feelings rattling through him threatening to shake him apart, and he gasped, completely overwhelmed. John wrapped him in arms as sturdy as steel, and gradually Sherlock settled, his ear crushed to John’s chest listening to the steady whump of his heart.

“John, when you left, I thought I’d never see you again,” he whispered to John’s shirt. “I felt like I died that day.”

“I know, I know, love. I felt that way too. I hardly ate for a month,” John choked out, his hands splayed across Sherlock’s back. “My mother shook me one day, told me she’d had enough of my
nonsense, and that Bajor needed me. It was the only thing that brought me back.”

“John, I’m sorry, so sorry . . .”

“It’s okay. It’s okay now.” John held him tighter. “Prophets, Sherlock, I missed you.”

“John . . .” Sherlock managed to get out before they were searching for each other’s lips again, kissing heatedly, swallowing down each other’s frantic noises.

“How much time do you have? When do you have to be back?” John’s lips roamed over his face, kissing, seeking, mouthing over the topography of him.

“No until tomorrow.” Sherlock struggled to get a good breath. “I put in for an overnight leave.”

“Oh . . .” John gulped. “Sherlock, come to bed. Come to bed with me.” His eyes were vast, open pools of want.

“Yes, please.”

John led him to the room with the bedding, lighting the way with the lantern. Together they rolled out pads and blankets, making a pallet for two across the space. John reached up, helping Sherlock to shed his bulky layers, pulling fasteners apart, sliding the thick fabric away. Sherlock shivered when he was down to nothing but his pants. He knocked John’s hands gently aside then to work on his things. John lifted his arms letting Sherlock peel away his damp tee shirt and then push his trousers off of him. They stood together then in nothing but their pants, only a whisper of fabric still between them. Sherlock reached out to run his hands up and down John’s lovely smooth back, mapping the feel of him. He was so gorgeous, the corded muscles of his compact body, the lines of his strong arms and legs so perfect, just the curve of John’s bicep made his knees go weak. John reached for Sherlock’s briefs, and Sherlock balked, stepping back as a fit of shyness swept over him.

“John,” Sherlock cautioned him, not sure exactly what to say. He worried that he would look ugly to John when his Cardassian frame was fully bared in all its underwhelming glory.

John ran his palms over the crests of his lightly scaled chest, following the contours of his flesh. “You’re beautiful.” John breathed as if reading his mind, leaning in to drop kisses to follow the path of his fingers. “Come here.” John pulled him down to the bedding, reaching to settle the covers over them as they snuggled under their comforting weight. John fumbled a bit, shucking off his underwear before reaching for Sherlock’s.

“May I?”

“Yes,” Sherlock whispered letting John’s fingers dip under his waistband pushing the fabric down, and away, returning to smooth over him, petting down his flank and arse over and over.

When John’s hand closed over his cock, Sherlock felt a bolt of electricity run through him. He shivered at the intensity. He reached out, running his fingers over the lines of John, the heat of him, reveling in the contrast of crisp hair and the smoothness of hardening flesh. He was gratified to hear John gasp.

Cardassians didn’t have body hair and though Sherlock knew his cock wasn’t anything out of the ordinary for his species, a Cardassian penis was only half the size of a Bajoran’s. There were jokes about it, dirty ones told any place soldiers had a few minutes to linger, drinking or smoking, shooting the breeze – Bajorans little better than beasts, hung like a waterbull, splitting their women in two when they mounted them, animals who could hardly stand upright from the massive organ hanging between their legs. It was all unbearably rude.
John was exquisite. Everything about John was poetry in motion. Sherlock marveled at the chance to run his fingers over this incredible man stretched out in bed next to him.

“Oh, yes, like that, yes . . .” John voice hitched as Sherlock wrapped his hand around the gorgeous heft of his erection. Oh. Sherlock was unprepared for the feeling of completing a circuit, it fairly crackled over him as he tightened his grip to stroke, easing the foreskin back and forth. Each shudder through John’s body transmitted itself directly through Sherlock. He might as well be touching himself, each pass of his hand over John echoing in his own rapidly-filling cock. John jerked, gorgeous sounds spilling from his throat as he spilled over Sherlock’s fist. The intimacy of it rocked Sherlock to his core, holding John like this, seeing his face laid bare as he came. He held John’s cock protectively as it softened, unwilling to let it go just yet.

“Prophets, you beautiful, beautiful thing.” John crooned as he came back to himself, his eyes fluttering open to focus on Sherlock in the soft glow of the lamplight. He reached up to cup the side of Sherlock’s face, rubbing a thumb gently over the ridge along his cheek.

“No, no, I’m not, you’re the beautiful one.” Sherlock felt another wave of shyness swamping over him, as he pulled back, his erection retreating.

The room flooded with another flash of lightning from above, but this one was weaker, and the accompanying boom was merely a rumble, even farther off. The storm outside was finally moving on.

“Sherlock, how can you say this?” John rolled Sherlock onto his back. “Oh, love. Prophets, you’re tall and elegant, you move like sunlight on water, and your hands, oh your hands.”

John lifted one to kiss over Sherlock palm in demonstration, his pink tongue moving out to lave between his fingers. It felt wildly exciting in a way Sherlock would not have thought possible. John moved to suck a digit down into the heat of his mouth, his tongue swirling over the tip. Sherlock felt as if he’d been tasered. He struggled to draw a good breath as John repeated it for the next finger.

“Joooohn . . .” he gasped.

John released Sherlock’s hand to kiss his way up his arm, reaching his neck to mouth along the ridge he found there. When he found the sensitive spot beneath Sherlock’s jaw and sucked, Sherlock lost the ability to form words.

“And then there’s your arse, this gooorgeous arse. Aaah, it feels even better than it looks,” John growled as his hand reached down to cup said backside, dragging Sherlock even closer against the inferno of his body. He kneaded gently into the flesh of Sherlock’s bottom, and the feeling was incandescent – each and every one of Sherlock’s nerves sparked on fire.

“And your eyes, your beautiful eyes. They’re like beach glass, they change in the light. I dreamed about your eyes for years before I knew what that meant.” John pulled back a bit to stare over him, drinking in the sight of Sherlock’s face.

“What did it mean?” Sherlock whispered, near breathless.

“It meant I fancied my best friend, and I was afraid to tell him in case it made him hate me.”

“John, I could NEVER hate you.” Sherlock was shocked.

“Well, you could never be anything but beautiful. We think stupid things sometimes, don’t we? Let other people put ideas into our heads.”
“Yes,” Sherlock agreed. “But John . . .” Sherlock had trouble ordering his thoughts again as John’s hands had trailed southward again, petting over him.

“Yes, love?”

“It’s just, I know my penis is so small compared to yours . . .”

“Nooo, not small. Thin, elegant, like you. It suits you. I love it.” His hand enclosed around the part of Sherlock’s anatomy in question.

“Oh, do that again.”

“That?”

“Yes, uuungh.” Sherlock brain went off line as John caressed him.

After Sherlock exploded, after John worked him through every lingering aftershock, they lay entwined, breathing together listening to the soft patter of rain outside, the tail end of the storm. Sherlock held John in his arms, burying his nose in his soft hair, memorizing the smell and feel of him. He put his tongue out to lick along John’s cheek, and John giggled softly. He tasted like a meadow, the way new spring grass smelled.

A sudden wave of almost terror washed over Sherlock from nowhere. He could hardly breathe for the panic that flooded him. Sherlock clutched at John then, struggling to absorb the wave of emotion.

“Sherlock?” John looked up, concerned. He ran a hand over his back. “Love, what is it?”

“John, I don’t want to lose you again. I can’t . . .”

“No, I can’t either.” John held him tighter as understanding seeped in.

“I’d die, John, if I lost you. I couldn’t take it. I couldn’t.”

“No one is going anywhere,” John said firmly. “I’m not leaving you, Sherlock, not ever. No one is coming between us. No one, not even the whole bloody Cardassian Empire.”

“Fuck the Cardassian Empire,” Sherlock growled.

John barked a laugh.

“What?”

“You. It’s so funny to hear you curse.”

“I can curse.”

“Yeah, but you do it in that posh accent. Prophets, I love it.”

Sherlock replied by grumbling and swatting John on the behind.

“Aha? Like that is it?” John chortled, reaching up to dig his fingers into Sherlock’s ribs, a place he knew was the MOST ticklish spot on Sherlock’s body.

"NOooo!” Sherlock exploded in a flurry of limbs and blankets as he leapt up to retaliate.
They laughed as they pounced on each other, pushing, tickling, breathlessly trying to gain the upper hand. Sherlock swiped a hand along the back of John’s knee, and the man nearly shrieked. Sherlock couldn’t help grinning. He knew where John was most ticklish too.

Of course all the mucking about soon melded into heated kissing again, their mouths moving over each other as their bodies pressed together. John ending up on top, sprawled across Sherlock when they finally came up for air.

“Oh, Sherlock,” John gazed meltingly down at him. “I love you.”

“John, I love you too, so much.” Sherlock smiled. “I miss your earrings.” He reached up to trail a finger across the empty holes on John’s right ear.

“Me too.” John sighed. “It’s immediate execution for any Bajoran seen wearing their family crest.”

“It’s not right,” Sherlock grumbled.

“No. It’s meant to demoralize us, break our will,” John said glumly.

Sherlock hated the look that had settled over John’s face. “Ah, well, it leaves more room for me to do this.” He pulled John closer to lick over his ear, catching the lobe between his lips for a soft nibble.

“Ah, stop, that tickles too.” John laughed.

It was then Sherlock realized with a start that he and John had been sliding in and out of Bajoran and Cardassian, mixing and matching the two languages together. He hadn’t even been aware of it. It was something that used to happen all the time between them, their brains naturally selecting the word that best seemed to fit.

Sherlock grinned mischievously. “I love you my sweet little jumja pudding.” He emphasized when he slid from Cardassian into Bajorn this time.

“Ah, I adore you too, my delicious little Taspar egg.” John went from Bajoran into Cardassian, grinning back to show the joke.

“John, those are disgusting.” Sherlock wrinkled his nose.

“No, you’re right, they are,” John agreed amicably. “But YOU are delicious.” He bent to run his tongue down Sherlock’s throat.

Sherlock arched his back at the delightful sensation, and no more words were exchanged beyond groans and sighs for quite some time.

It was early when Sherlock opened his eyes, clear morning light just seeping in through the skylight above, John, a sweet warmth at his side. The storm definitely looked to have cleared out, leaving a fresh washed sky in its wake. Sherlock turned his gaze to John sleeping so peacefully slumped against him, one of his legs slung carelessly over Sherlock’s. He looked so much younger with his face relaxed, almost as Sherlock remembered him when they were boys. Brave warrior. Sherlock could only guess how fiercely John must be hanging on to fight a war with an imperial army equipped with nothing more than bits and bobs, and a burning spirit to survive.

I’ll keep him safe. Sherlock thought. I don’t know how, but I’ll keep him safe, any way I can, I swear it. Please, please, let it be so. If any Prophets or errant Gods happened to be wandering by, Sherlock hoped they’d look kindly down on his half-formed prayer. John made a snuffling noise in his sleep and Sherlock had to wake him, wriggling down to drop kisses across his face. The last of
their time together was too precious to waste sleeping.

John blinked his eyes open. “Oh, hello, you.” John smiled drowsily. He pulled Sherlock down into his arms, and they were off again, devouring each other with soul-searing kisses and touches that felt as if they left fire in their path.

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“Deka tea. Hot, sweet.”

The replicator buzzed just a moment as Sherlock’s order materialized inside it. He reached in to pluck the steaming paper cup from the shelf, taking it back to an empty seat the farthest away from anyone else in the rec hall. Sherlock settled down to peruse a new scientific journal on his reader pad, sipping at the brew. He considered the drink. Not bad. Not as good as fresh brewed, but not bad. He’d recently made a decision to stop ordering Cardassian foods just to fit in. If the replicators could make Bajoran things, he decided he would have them as he liked.

“Holmes, you’re needed.”

“Pardon?” Sherlock looked up to see Anderson looming over him.

“Got an order that you’re to report to the Commander. You’re to follow me.”

“Alright,” Sherlock agreed genially as a coldness crawled up his spine. Sherlock rose smoothly, pocketed his reader, and moved to drop his half-drunk tea into a bin, giving nothing of his agitation away. He followed the man into the corridor, walking easily, his mind racing at top speed. Had someone seen him in the supply cupboards lately? Had he tripped any alarms in his data hacking? He could come up with nothing conclusive.

“Well, Holmes. Wonder what you’ve done now? Not as spit spot as we all thought?” Anderson took the opportunity to sneer at him.

“Don’t be absurd.” Sherlock used his frostiest, upper class tone. “I’m sure it’s nothing dire.” Internally though a klaxon had started ringing. Sherlock began cataloging all the ways he could get off the base right then. Nothing practical presented itself at the moment though so he tamped his panic down, and allowed Anderson to escort him to Commander Reja’s office. There were always options to be explored later.

All too soon they reached the officer’s door. Anderson pushed a button, waiting until the door slid open to admit them.

“Holmes, sir.” Anderson indicated Sherlock with a sweep of his hand.

“Thank you, Anderson. That will be all.” Reja glanced up from his desk.

Anderson looked annoyed at being so quickly dismissed, but he nodded and left as directed.

Sherlock stepped farther inside, the door whooshing closed behind him. “Sir, you wanted to see me . . .” Sherlock trailed off at spying a familiar-looking back of a head in a nearby chair.

“Yes, soldier. It seems we have an important visitor who wishes to meet with you today.” Reja’s eyes
moved to the man.
The bottom of Sherlock’s stomach dropped away as the guest turned to greet him. Mycroft.

“Brother, dear, how ARE you?” A terribly insincere smile slid itself across Mycroft’s face.

“Well. And you?” Sherlock clipped.

“Can’t complain.”

Sherlock’s gaze slid over Mycroft’s uniform. He hadn’t clapped eyes on his brother in years. Obsidian Order, of course. Leadership stripes, naturally. The command structure wasn’t advertised beyond foot soldier or leader in any markings for the Order, but Sherlock could bet his back teeth Mycroft was running the place by now.

“We don’t usually grant R and R in the middle of the week, but seeing as your brother is such a distinguished guest, you’re free to leave the base, Private Holmes. Enjoy your visit.”

“Thank you, sir.” Sherlock felt as though he were made of ice as he waited for Mycroft to bid his Commander farewell, moving automatically to follow his brother’s black uniform as he led him from the room.

“Oh, now you don’t need to look as dismal as all that.” Mycroft muttered as they fell in to step, moving briskly down the corridor toward the front door.

“Am I going to prison?” Sherlock asked quietly. There was no reason to dissemble with his brother.

“Why, have you done something wrong?” Mycroft’s eyebrows rose in a parody of surprise.

“I . . .” Sherlock found himself at a loss for words.

“Don’t answer that here,” Mycroft cautioned, nodding as two of his assistants stepped up to join them, escorting them outside where a sleek, black groundcar waited for them. One of the nondescript men flipped a back door open, standing politely aside to let them board.

Sherlock’s eyes flicked over the landscape.

“Get in, Sherlock. You wouldn’t make it ten meters before someone brought you down.” Mycroft wasn’t even looking at him.

Sherlock sighed and slid into the car, moving over as Mycroft joined him. A dark panel separated them from the front of the vehicle, and the windows were deeply tinted. It was like falling into a sealed box once the door closed behind them. Sherlock settled warily into the luxuriously padded seats. Once Mycroft’s goons had climbed into the front, they started up, the car purred through the gates, away from the base, headed toward town.

“This is nice.” Sherlock looked around, grasping for something to break the silence.

“It should be. It cost more than your annual salary. So, how’s Watson John?” Mycroft turned his head to fix Sherlock in his steady gaze.

Sherlock suppressed a shiver. Prophets, not John, not John. “How would I know? I haven’t seen the man in years.”

“Well, that’s not what I’ve heard. I’ve heard you’ve seen quite a bit of John over the last few weeks.”
“You have no proof,” Sherlock snarled at him.

“Oh Sherlock, as the old adage goes, the Obsidian Order sees everything.”

“That’s bullshit, Mycroft.”

“Oh, how about your recent acquiring of . . .” Mycroft proceeded to rattle off a list of all the supplies that Sherlock had lifted in the last few weeks as if he were reading them from a printed page. Sherlock’s heart sank through the floor. “The theft of these items along with your search for one Watson Harriet,” Mycroft continued, “combined with your recent encounters with a Bajoran male matching the description of Watson John has led me to believe that you have indeed been in contact with the man.”

Sherlock felt as if he’d swallowed lead. “Alright, Mycroft. I’ll go quietly to prison, but leave John out of it.”

“Oh, Sherlock. I’m not here to arrest you.” Cool, so cool. Mycroft was always so inscrutable.

“Damnit, Mycroft!” Sherlock spat. “What DO you want then?”

“I want to promote you. Congratulations, Sherlock, you’ve just made Lieutenant.”

“What?” Sherlock felt as if he were spinning in freefall.

“Well, that’s the cover story. You’ll actually be working for the Obsidian Order, special ops, but that will be on a need-to-know basis. As far as anyone else knows, you’ll be working in our military data division. You’ll have your own quarters of course, an office in town, and a doubled salary.”

“I won’t spy on John.” Sherlock pressed his lips to a sharp line. “I won’t hand him over to you.”

“Sherlock, I’m not asking you to turn John in. Far from it. I’m giving you the means to continue what you’ve been doing, but on a larger scale.” Mycroft waved a hand about. “You’ll be able to funnel some real supplies to the Resistance this way.”

“In exchange for what? What is all this?” Sherlock narrowed his eyes. If only his brain could catch up. He felt as if he were standing on quick sand.

“Sherlock, I’m certain you’re familiar with the United Federation of Planets, yes?”

“Of course, what do they have to do with anything . . .” Sherlock cut himself off. “They want Bajor.”

“They do.” Mycroft nodded. “More specifically, they want access to the wormhole next to Bajor, and they’re willing to fight to gain access to it by bringing the planet into the Federation.”

“And the High Council disagrees with simply retreating? Handing Bajor over?”

“Correct again.” Mycroft sighed. “Some conservative old sticks have completely lost sight of the big picture. We are simply hemorrhaging resources funding this occupation, and the Bajorans have made it increasingly difficult to maintain even status quo.”

“The Obsidian Order wants to make it impossible for the Cardassian Empire to keep Bajor.”

“Just so,” Mycroft agreed mildly. “It no longer makes any sense for Cardassia to be here. The Federation is not an enemy we can afford to make. This is a war we must lose, Sherlock.”

“What do I need to do?” Sherlock chewed at his lower lip.
“Oh, nothing you’ll be uncomfortable with. Nothing you aren’t already doing – besides holding a
day job at a desk with computers. You’ll be much better suited to that anyway I think. You’ll direct
supplies that the Resistance needs, while erasing your tracks. Perhaps you might pass the odd bit of
information back and forth in confidence. Don’t worry, it will all be in support of your Bajoran
friends.”

“And if I refuse?”

“I’ll have you shot for treason.” Mycroft smiled blandly.

Sherlock snorted. “And if I do what you want?”

“Then you get the liberation of Bajor, and the rest of your life to do with as you please.”

“If it goes sour, I want John protected.” Sherlock folded his arms tightly over his chest. “No one goes
after him.”

“He isn’t even registered as being on the planet.” Mycroft shrugged.

“Promise me, Mycroft, on the bonds of being my brother. Promise me nothing happens to John.”

Sherlock could see John in his mind’s eye, the long eyelashes that framed his glorious night-sky eyes
as he gazed up at him. He’d clung to John, exchanging last lingering kisses before they had to say
good-bye, slipping out separately from the safe house. It had only been two days since he’d lain
naked in bed twined around John, and it already felt like an eternity.

“I give you my word, Sherlock. For whatever is in my power to direct, no harm comes to John.”

“Alright, fine. I’ll do it.”

“Try to cheer up, Sherlock. Most people enjoy having their fondest wishes handed to them.”

Sherlock snorted. “It isn’t that simple, and you know it.”

“I do,” Mycroft agreed mildly.

Sherlock noticed that the car had begun to circle around, heading back to the base.

“When does this promotion take place?”

“You’ll receive the news tomorrow,” Mycroft said. “Try to look surprised.”

Sherlock snorted in reply. They rode in silence until the car pulled up close to where they’d started
their journey.

“Sherlock.” Mycroft stopped Sherlock as his hand moved to pop open the door. “Do write Mummy,
and let her know about the promotion, won’t you? She does worry about you.”

“Good-bye Mycroft.” Sherlock sneered as he hit the button. The door swung open, releasing him
back out into the cool of a Bajoran evening.
Chapter End Notes

MRE’s - a military term - "Meals, Ready to Eat"
Chapter Summary

Sherlock juggles the realities and the expectations of his new life.

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Sherlock trailed his fingers over the stone countertop in the kitchen. The furnished flat he’d been given was simple in the way that only very expensive things can be. Some sleek, functional furniture, a full console wall, and a few tasteful pieces of art he would never have chosen himself made the whole of the décor. Of course concealed recording devices also lay tucked away throughout the place. Sherlock had located all the hidden bugs in the flat, but had prudently left them alone. If he disabled them it would only serve to have more and better devices slipped into his rooms when he was out . . . and a red flag added to his personnel record.

*Nothing indiscreet in the flat.* Mycroft had told him. As if he needed to hear this.

*If you’re caught, we don’t know you.* Sherlock wasn’t a child any longer. He knew the shape of things.

Sherlock opened the small fridge under the kitchen island and pulled out a bottle, his most recent purchase. Rigellian wine was a luxury offworld item, pricey, and this was a fine year. He found a glass from a cabinet and opened the wine to pour himself a drink, watching as the pale blue liquid filled the glass. *Never trust a man who has no vices.* He’d taken to having a glass or two each evening before bed as he watched something on the wall screen that wasn’t too brain numbing.

He took his glass to the sofa. “Vid screen on.”

The wall screen leapt to life on a reporter speaking, a recorded clip playing over his shoulder. “ . . . recent terrorist attacks on the East Lothar power plant were easily repelled by military forces stationed nearby. Only minimal damage to the facility . . .” An explosion in the recording highlighted the masked figures scrambling about in the foreground. It looked like a scene from an action drama, hardly something out of real life. Sherlock sighed.

“Change channel.” The vid screen shifted to another version of the same news report filmed from a different angle.

“Shuffle channel selection,” Sherlock said, taking a sip of his wine.

Sherlock’s new job looked to be simple enough, maintaining internet security for the Cardassian web in Dahkur province. He worked with ten others, had his own room with a door, and a superior who rarely stopped by in person. It would quickly be dull as dust if not for his side projects. Finding supplies that could be funneled to the Resistance with no trails left on the web, and no coworkers alerted was a worthy enough challenge. Sherlock found that he enjoyed the subterfuge more than he thought he would. *Playing pirates in the garden again.* He could almost hear Mycroft’s voice in his ear.

Sherlock shook off the thought, watching as a selection of cooking shows, lurid dramas, and several
shopping channels flipped quickly by.

Sherlock had begun taking rambling walks after work. Sometimes he ran errands, or ate dinner out.
Once he caught a vid at a cinema – anything to establish a pattern of random activity in his schedule.
On his shopping trips he acquired a variety of civilian clothing, picking up some Bajoran things at a
second-hand shop. The amount of personal freedom at his disposal was almost disconcerting after so
many years of being on someone else’s schedule.

The vid screen finally found landed on a documentary on quasars that didn’t look too asinine. “Stop
shuffle,” Sherlock commanded, settling back to watch the show as he finished his wine.

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“Sir, you’ve another progress report to sign.”

Sherlock minimized his console screen as the clerk stepped into his office with a reader pad. He was
busy relocating a shipment of all-weather tents to a warehouse closer to the edge of town, and he’d
rather the woman didn’t see.

“Ah, red tape.” Sherlock sighed accepting the pad from her. “I think I’d be out of a job if I didn’t
have things to sign.”

“Yes, sir.” The woman smiled shyly as Sherlock scrawled his signature with a finger over the
screen. “Sir, there’s a get together planned at the end of the week at the pub down the road. I, that is
we were wondering if you’d like to join us . . .”

“Splendid idea.” Sherlock smiled widely. “It’s so good for team morale, sharing social time together.
A pity I have something already scheduled that night. But then again, perhaps it’s better if I don’t
hone in on your bonding time.” Sherlock winked as he returned the pad to her. “Always a bit sticky
having the boss listening in.”

“Yes, sir.” The clerk blinked as she accepted the device. “Of course, sir.”

“And, Jenna? Please hold any calls I get. I’m going out for lunch.”

“Yes, sir.” The woman looked noticeably more wilted as she quit the room.

Sherlock sighed, and ran a hand back through his hair. It was best to nip interest like this in the bud
before anything got started. He finished his task before closing the screen down, and rose to fetch his
jacket from the small cupboard behind his desk. The office had a replicator for those who wanted to
eat in, but Sherlock found the taste woefully lacking compared to anything prepared fresh.

The day was bright outside, and Sherlock let the light cool breeze blow any lingering cobwebs from
his mind as he strolled. This part of the city had a mix of Cardassian and Bajorans going about their
business. Though the latter moved around with prominent ID tags clipped to their fronts, Sherlock
could almost pretend things were as they’d been when he was a child. He had just decided to stop in
at a café that served decent Bajoran food when a raised voice caught his attention. A pretty blonde
Bajoran woman clutching a basket stood flanked by two Cardassian soliders, each of them easily
twice her size.

“Please sir,” her voice grew louder. “I need to get to the chemist for my missus. She’ll be angry if
I’m late.” She looked so brave, as though she might fend them off with simple reason. “Sir, I’ve done nothing wrong. Let me pass, please.”

One of the soldiers stepped back, making a sweeping gesture with his arm as though gallantly allowing the servant to pass. As she started forward, the other grabbed her about the waist, and carted her off like a sack of flour toward the entrance to a nearby alley. The woman shrieked, but no one else seemed to be paying the little drama any attention.

Sherlock saw red. How dare they. He jogged forward, quickly clearing the mouth of the alley. The soldiers had the woman up against the wall as she sobbed. One of the slime-dwellers kept her pinned, pawing at her breasts as the other worked to unfasten his trousers.

“SOLDIERS, REPORT.” Sherlock cried at top volume. It was almost comical how quickly the men spun around, one still holding his trousers. The Bajoran woman sank to the ground, weeping softly as they released her.

The two idiots simply boggled at him. He could see their eyes latching on to the officer insignia on his jacket.

“What is the meaning of this?” Sherlock bore down on them.

“Sir, nothing, sir,” one of them stammered.

“NOTHING? Are you on DUTY, private?”

“Yes, sir, we’re on patrol.” The other managed to get out.

“And is this citizen that you are tasked to protect somehow interfering with planetary security?”

“No sir, we were just having a bit of fun.” The other said with a sneer, thinking Sherlock was sure to join in on the joke at any moment. His buddy snickered.

Sherlock whipped out his reader to scan the chips in their uniforms watching as their names popped up on the screen. “Well, Private Boca, and Private Evrek, I see nothing fun in deserting your post, and endangering the well being of a law-abiding citizen. This is shameful behaviour. I’ve a mind to report this to your commanding officer.”

The two looked nervously at each other, realization sinking in that Sherlock wasn’t laughing along.

“No sir, sorry sir.” They straightened to full attention.

“Go, return to your duties, and try to remember your job is to protect and serve.”

The pair continued to stare, undecided. One flicked his eyes back toward the woman obviously unsure about letting their little fish get away.


The two hustled off finally deciding leaving Sherlock’s sight was the better course of action for the day.

Once they had cleared the alley, Sherlock turned to the poor Bajoran girl still huddled on the ground.

“Are you alright?” He crouched next to her, putting a hand to her shoulder.

“Yes, sir, thank you.” She cringed away, curling deeper into herself.
Oh, for the love of . . . Sherlock moved back, feeling a flash of irritation flow through him. He had only wanted to go out for something hot for lunch, not enter a daytime vid drama.

“Here now, where do you live?”

“Ganaam court.” She swallowed. “I work for the Dovett family.”

“Well, let’s get you home then.”

“Please, sir I need to get the medicine for my missus.”

“Oh, fine, then, let’s go.”

The servant seemed to respond better to Sherlock’s irritation than his kindness. He escorted her to the chemist’s shop, and then insisted in putting her into a cab. Finally she had thanked him with something other than fear in her eyes as he pushed money into her hands for the fare.

In the end, Sherlock gave lunch out a miss, and returned for a bowl of luke-warm soup from the office replicator at his desk.

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It was close to sunset when Sherlock left his flat, shopping bags in hand, wearing something casual but clearly Cardassian. After several blocks on foot, he slipped into a public toilet and emerged in Bajoran wear. With a cap pulled low over his brow, and a scarf around his face, he blended in with a crowd of commuters, mostly Bajoran, moving toward the nearby monorail station.

Sherlock found a seat alone on the next train outbound. He hunched down, staring out the window, avoiding the gaze of the guard that paced the length of the carriages. Only a handful of travelers got off at the last stop with him, and Sherlock left them easily behind, walking with a practiced lope along the pavement. He turned down a quiet road that led to a line of old, forgotten-looking warehouses, finding the one that matched the address John had given him. Circling to the back, Sherlock discovered a small door left unlocked as described. Sherlock stepped warily inside, sniffing the stale air, and passed through a foyer to the dim main space of the storage area. He barely registered the bulk of some nearby farm equipment when a voice called out.

“Sherlock, hey!”

Sherlock peered into the gloom. He felt a hot rush of relief as John’s familiar shape detached itself from the shadows to move closer.

“John. Hello.”

“I’m glad you made it. Any troubles?”

“No. I made sure no one followed me. Sorry I’m late though. It took me longer to get out here than I thought it would.”

“I know, it’s not exactly the space port, is it?” John smiled just before he stepped into Sherlock’s orbit, tugging him down to seal their mouths together.

Sherlock dropped his bags to wind his arms around John, one hand thrusting up into the slip of his
soft hair, dragging him closer. John smelled of the outside, woodsy, with a trace of something odd, metallic, and beneath all of that, warm, good, home, John. The taste of him zinged through Sherlock blood faster than any wine.

“Unngh, I missed you,” John mumbled, turning his welcome kiss into something much deeper, hotter as they pressed together, mouths devouring, suddenly desperate to be as close as possible.

“Prophets, John . . . is there . . .” Sherlock gasped as they broke off.

“Yeah.” John bent to lift Sherlock’s bags from the floor. “Come on . . . it’s through there.” He took Sherlock’s hand, leading him to what must have been a smaller office in the back, now turned into another way station for the Resistance. John dropped the bags, flicking on a travel lamp to reveal the supplies stacked by the wall, and the cushions scattered over a threadbare rug.

“Prophets, come here.” John reached for Sherlock, pulling him unceremoniously to the floor.

“Please . . .” Sherlock sank down unto him, greedy for as much of John as he could possibly feel.

“Too long, been too long,” John muttered as he alternately licked his way into Sherlock’s mouth and attempted to shove his clothes aside.

“Yes . . .” Sherlock struggled to untuck John’s shirt seeking the warm, smooth skin under his fingertips.

They tangled limbs, at cross-purposes, and cursed. “Here, just wait . . .” Sherlock pushed back, his hands flying to unfasten his own clothes. John grunted assent, and moved to do the same, watching with dark, hungry eyes as Sherlock peeled his things away.

“Oh, love, come here.” John licked his lips, tugging Sherlock back into his arms when they were finally stripped.

Hands flew over each other, as mouths continued to connect and roam. John nipped down the side of Sherlock’s neck, as Sherlock reached blindly for John’s shoulder to draw him closer. John cried out and twitched away at his touch.

“What is it, what’s wrong?” Sherlock rolled up to sitting to better examine John. He found the back of his shoulder marred by angry red burns. Laser fire most likely. Sherlock couldn’t help sucking in a quick breath in sympathy.

“It’s nothing. It hardly hurts anymore.” John tried to shrug it off, and winced.

“It isn’t nothing. This could turn septic if it isn’t treated properly. Luckily, I have something . . .” Sherlock trailed off as he moved to search through one of his bags. He dug for a moment before pulling out the tube of medical cream he wanted. John sat up, wrapping his arms around his knees, presenting his back to him.

“Here, hold still.” Sherlock squeezed some of the cream over his fingers to smooth across John’s injured shoulder.

“Alright, thanks.” John bowed his head, stretching the lovely, long muscles cording down his neck.

“Do I want to know how you got this?” Sherlock rummaged in the bag again to extract a large bandage.

“No, you really don’t.” John said wryly.
“I want you to be careful.” Sherlock unwrapped the large plaster, and pressed it over the wound, sealing the edges.

“Sherlock, you can’t always be careful. Not if you want to win.”

“John.” Sherlock wrapped his arms around him from behind, leaning in to press his face against John’s nape. He breathed the smell of him in. “I don’t like you getting hurt.”

“I don’t fancy it much myself.” John huffed. “Here, why don’t you come kiss it better?” John turned in his arms, pulling Sherlock down, tumbling them together, mouths searching as hands gripped eagerly.

It was some time later, John and Sherlock lay spent side by side over the cushions. Sherlock opened his eyes content to watch John simply breathing, comfortably sprawled beside him. Sherlock reached down to smooth a hand along John’s flank. He was so lovely, all compact muscle, and golden skin. He reminded Sherlock of a show he’d seen once on mountain cats, deadly beauty. John rumbled appreciatively merely adding to Sherlock’s fanciful notion. He let his hand trail up John’s back stopping when his fingers encountered the edge of the bandage.

“So, the laser burns. Did that have something to do with an attack on a power plant in Lothar?”

John sighed. “I can’t talk about it Sherlock. Please don’t ask.”

Sherlock felt a sharp stab of hurt. “You don’t trust me.”

John pushed up on one elbow to better regard him. “Sherlock, that’s not it. The first rule, is no more information than you need to do your job.” His dark blue eyes bore down on Sherlock. “It’s for everyone’s safety.”

“John, I’m not a child. I’m not going to talk about things you tell me in confidence.” Sherlock felt himself bristling.

“Hey, love, no, no.” John scooted back down to throw an arm around him. “I just don’t want you involved any deeper. You’re doing more than enough getting us supplies like this.” His eyes darted to the bags on the floor. “I keep worrying that you’re going to get caught stealing . . .”

“I received a promotion,” Sherlock blurted out.

“What? Really?” John’s eyes widened.

“I was promoted to lieutenant, I’m working offsite heading up an office for IT security now.”

“But how did this happen, so soon?” John frowned.

“Mycroft.” Sherlock scrunched his nose. “I think he felt sorry for me. He pulled a few strings, got me the cushy position. I have a lot more time on my hands now, and huge resources at my reach. I won’t be able to just steal a few bags of supplies anymore. John, I could fill this warehouse with things the resistance needs and no one would ever know the difference.”

“Prophets,” John breathed. “Wow. This is huge, Sherlock, HUGE.” John squeezed his arm. “Well, I think we need to celebrate. I’m sorry I don’t have any wine on me.”

“Oh, I do.” Sherlock moved to tug over another bag, working out the bottle of Bajoran springwine. “Are there glasses?”
“Hang on, I’ll check.” John smiled.

In short order they had a picnic assembled from Sherlock’s bags, and the cups and plates and blankets that John managed to scare up from the room.

“Cheers!” John said as they touched the rims of their mugs of wine together.

Sherlock wanted to tell John the whole of it, but somehow the words just wouldn’t come. What could he possibly say - John I’m actually in the Obsidian Order now. It was the stuff of nightmares, something mothers told their children to scare them - *be good or the Obsidian men will come for you.* Sherlock flashed John a tight smile, and filled his mouth with a swallow of wine.

They sat on one blanket and pulled another around their shoulders to stay warm, eating in companionable silence until John glanced back up.

“Prophets, I feel so guilty sometimes,” John said, considering his last bite of larish pie before popping it down. “I mean so many in the Resistance are starving, and here I am . . .” He gestured to the bounty laid out before them.

“You need to eat, John, and there’s more to share. Still, I meant it when I said I could get some serious supplies now. Get me a list of what you and your friends need, and I’ll see what I can do.”

“Wow, yeah. I will.” John ran a hand back through his fringe. “I still can’t believe you can do this.”

“Oh, yes, and I almost forgot.” Sherlock scooted forward to dive back into his bags. He rooted around until he produced a mobile. “I got you a phone to use. It’s got all the latest trace-blocking technology and it’s paid up through the year. My number’s in the contacts, so you can let me know if something comes up and you can’t make a meeting.”

“Wow, you really are Father Winter.” John took the phone, and snagging his jacket from the floor, zipped it into one of the pockets.

“I thought it would help.”

“Prophets, yes. Sherlock . . .” John moved in for a quick kiss. It morphed almost instantly into something much more interesting. John shoved things aside to push Sherlock onto his back, climbing over him. “You . . . I’ve thought about you constantly since we last met. Couldn’t get you out of my mind.”

“Yes, me too.” Sherlock looked up into the depths of John’s eyes, feeling dizzy. It might have been the wine or it might just have been the predatory look John raked over him. When John stretched his body fully over him, Sherlock felt himself beginning to harden again already.

“Do you know what I dreamed about for days in a row?” John whispered.

Sherlock shook his head, nearly entranced watching John’s mouth as his tongue darted out to wet his lower lip.

“I thought about everything I wanted to do to you when I got my hands back on you.”

“Really?” Sherlock was mortified when his voice came out sounding something like a squeak.

John seemed not to notice as he had already begun to gnaw his way down Sherlock’s neck.

“Mmm, yes. Delicious.”
Sherlock’s back arched up as John kept a steady march downward, laving and kissing his way down Sherlock’s body.

“Prophets, I woke up hard as a rock just thinking about this.” John’s breath came warm ghosting over Sherlock’s belly.

“Mmmm.” Sherlock’s eyes slid closed. He groaned at the exquisite feel of John’s warm tongue making its way past his navel, lower and lower, licking into the crease of his groin and thigh.

“Love, can I . . . ?

“Yes, yes, yes,” Sherlock ground out hardly knowing what he agreed to as John’s mouth slid over him, finding all his secret places with his warm, probing, clever tongue, fingers wrapping around his cock. It was heaven, it was John, it was . . . all thought processes left Sherlock as he exploded, white-hot bliss rolling over him. John gathered him close, holding him as the tremors stilled.

“John,” Sherlock gasped in wonder when he could speak.

“Sweetheart.” John whispered into his hair as he ground himself against Sherlock, the length of him burning like a hot brand over Sherlock’s slippery stomach. John came with a gasp adding to the mess between them.

Later when they’d cleaned up and lay wrapped together under the blanket, just breathing in each other’s air, Sherlock reached up to run a finger down John’s face. Sometimes he still couldn’t believe John was here, here in his arms, here in his life.

“John, that thing you did, with your tongue . . . that was . . . good.”

“What, the rimming?” John smiled meltingly soft. “I enjoyed it.”

“Where did you learn to . . .” Sherlock cut himself off. “No, sorry . . .” He realized intellectually that it was highly unlikely John had spent their years apart being celibate. Still, it didn’t mean he wanted to hear the details.

“No, it’s alright. You can ask me if you want to know.”

“You’ve had lovers . . .” Sherlock trailed off.

“I have. There wasn’t anyone for years after . . . after you left. Then I joined the Resistance. When you know that you could die any day, well, it makes people a bit crazy. There aren’t a lot of permanent relationships, people tend to keep things casual, but yeah, there’s a lot of fucking around. To be honest, I didn’t really keep track after awhile.”

“I understand. John, it’s fine.” Sherlock nodded. It was the life of solider. He understood the impermanence of it all too well.

John’s cheeks reddened. “Sherlock I meant to tell you, but there never seemed to be a good time. I was sort of seeing someone. Like I said, we keep things casual, but we were kind of exclusive for awhile. I broke it off with her after finding you again.”

“Okay.” Sherlock bit his lip. He couldn’t help the visions that flashed through his mind. Who would catch John’s eye? He found himself imagining a short, curvy Bajoran woman with long blonde hair before he realized he was just remembering the woman harassed by the soldiers earlier in the week.

“What about you?” John tilted his head. “Anyone I need to compete with for your attentions?”
Sherlock almost laughed. “No. There was a boy at school, Victor. We had . . . something for awhile, but he was worried about being found out. It would have meant jail time, a career ruined if we’d been discovered together. He broke it off after a few months.”

“Oh, honey.” John’s arms around him tightened. “I’m sorry.”

“It was a long time ago.” Sherlock dropped his eyes. It had been excrutiating at the time. Victor had made fun of him after their break-up, made a point of distancing himself to quell any rumors.

“And no one since stupid Victor?” John asked softly.

Sherlock shook his head. “There were a few sex workers. Things I couldn’t get out of with my squadron. Nothing voluntary.”

“Baby.” John pulled Sherlock close enough to kiss his forehead. “You’re mine. You know that, right? No one else matters.”

“I know, John. You’re mine too. Always.”

“Damn right.” John sounded angry, though the kisses he dropped over Sherlock’s face were achingly tender. It felt like drops of water falling, like warm spring rain thawing the frozen ground after winter. With a cry, Sherlock cracked open. He hauled John’s mouth to his own, and kissed him hard, every fiber of being crying, yes. John met his onslaught just as fiercely, the two of them rolling together, trying to merge into a single being as they grappled and twined themselves together long into the night.

%%%

Sherlock pulled at the collar of his dress uniform trying to settle it better around his neck ridges as he stepped into the ballroom. He had loathed these kinds of gatherings as a child. It was like being locked in some hellish time loop complete with ugly floral arrangements and a quintet providing tasteful music from a corner. Prophets, what had his life come to that he was required to attend these things again?

Sherlock huffed out a sigh, and moved to accept a shot glass from a circulating waiter. Being promoted to Lieutenant had its privileges. Having the ease and the resources that his desk job brought was a blessing, but dinner invitations with a note from his superior officer that his presence was required was a decided negative. Sherlock knocked back the cocktail, dropping the glass with another passing staff member, before moving to inspect the buffet table. If he had to endure the drivel of small talk this evening, he hoped there’d be something sweet to soften the blow.

“Sherlock, oh my . . . it’s really you!” A woman by the table gasped, her hand flying to her mouth.

“Molly.” Sherlock felt his own surprise roll over him. She looked lovely, clad in a long silvery dress, her hair piled up over her head in the latest style. Instantly Sherlock felt guilty. He’d hardly thought of Molly since he’d last seen her– at that ruined party at his parent’s house on Burning Night.

“Sherlock, what are you doing here?”

“Working in web security at the moment, and you?”
“Teaching astrophysics at the Polytechnic College. Oh, Sherlock, it’s been an age. I worried about you so . . . after the attacks. I heard your family went back to Cardassia Prime.”

“We did. Molly, I’m so sorry I never contacted you . . .”

“It was a crazy time.” Molly waved a hand about. “I moved offworld with my own family to Enteros 9 for awhile.”

“Oh, and you’re married.” Sherlock caught the flash of a ring on Molly’s finger.

“I am. Sherlock, I have you to thank for introducing me to Dov.” A warm smile slid over her face. “Come on, you have to say hello. I know he’ll be pleased to see you.”

Molly tugged Sherlock over to a chatting knot of officers, and introduced him around. Sherlock plastered a smile over his face, mechanically enduring the flurry of handshakes. Sherlock’s eyes flickered over the insignia on Molly’s husband’s uniform as he greeted him. Dov Vorlem was an officer now, a Glinn, just like Molly’s father.

“Sherlock! How are you?” Glinn Vorlem’s teeth flashed white over his tanned face as took Sherlock’s hand. “I have this one to thank for meeting my wife!” He crowed to those gathered nearby.

It was some time later before Molly and Sherlock found a table, plates in hand, free to eat while Molly’s husband continued to circulate through the crowd.

“I always knew you’d do well.” Molly smiled at Sherlock as she popped a rulot seed cake into her mouth. “Lieutenant.”

“It’s a recent thing.” Sherlock confided glancing wryly at the stripes on his arm.

"Tell me. Tell me everything that's happened to you since I last saw you." Molly leaned in.

It didn’t take much before Sherlock was spilling out about his last days on Bajor, the academy, his recent return, and the promotion . . . though he edited a good bit out.

“Oh, but you lost touch with John so suddenly.” Molly laid a soft hand to his wrist. “That must have been so awful. Did you ever hear from him again?”

“It was hard, and no, I never got a message from him when I left Bajor.” Sherlock couldn’t meet her eyes. There were some things he couldn’t confide, not even to an old friend.

Molly glanced about. “It’s horrible how the Bajorans are being treated these days. The new laws . . .” She dropped her voice. “Most of the other officers’ families won’t hire them, but I made Dov agree to all our servants being Bajoran. It keeps them out of those labor camps. It’s . . . it’s simply horrid.”

“I agree.” Sherlock said quietly. “Things are much worse.”

“It makes me so angry. I wish I could do more, but . . .” Molly cut off as her husband joined them.

“Molly, love, I got you some of those makapa things you like.”

“Oh, thank you.” Molly looked up with a smile as she accepted the rolls. She flashed Sherlock an apologetic look later as two more officers and their wives joined them and talk turned to trade rights, and the availability of Andorian ale in the local market.
Even though Sherlock had the trace-blocking technology on his private phone, there was no sense pushing his luck in using it too often. He refused to access it at his monitored flat, and he didn’t want to distract John from whatever it was he did with the Resistance. Still he ached to send John messages through the day. He composed them in his head, unsent.

*Had a disappointing hasperat soufflé for lunch. Office replicator is crap.*

*Saw a Bajoran boy and his mother on the street today and I realized how much I miss talking with your mum. I hope she’s well.*

*I met an old friend at a party and she remembered your name.*

*I ached for you last night. My bed was too cold without you.*

Sherlock was able to find caches of field supplies, food, and even some ground transport vehicles that he had shipped to another warehouse that John gave him as a site the Resistance had easy access to. They’d agreed that it was best if John didn’t tell anyone else about him, and just “happened” upon the things that Sherlock was setting aside as happy windfalls.

John’s availability grew more erratic, and he had to cancel their next appointment. They managed a quick meeting at a new location, a boarded-up petrol station, though John could only stay for an hour. He said his group was moving out for a few weeks to a new location. He managed to give a list of other sites where Sherlock could send things, and then ripped open their clothing so they could bring each other off leaning against a dirty wall before John had to go.

Once John sent him a message late at night. Sherlock caught it the next day at a busy café, one of the few places he felt safe checking his messages.

*Whatever you see on the news. I’m okay.*

*I thought about you all day today.*

*Love you, J*

*Come back to me, safe and sound.*

*Love you too, S*

It was so little, so little time, so little chance to say what he wanted to say to John, but Sherlock clung to whatever they had.

%%% The console in Sherlock’s flat chimed with an incoming call. He looked up from his solitary dinner at
the kitchen island, surprised. No one ever called him at home.

“Answer incoming message,” he commanded, moving to stand before the screen. It flickered to life, the face of Molly Hooper-Vorlem appearing larger than life across the wall.

“Sherlock.” She looked as if she was almost surprised to find him answering his phone.

“Molly, how are you?”

“I’m good. It was so lovely to see you again at the gala last week.”

“You as well. I’m glad things in your life have worked out so well.”

“Yes, and how funny that we’re both back on Bajor again.”

“I agree.” Sherlock nodded, hoping they would move past the chitchat to the reason for Molly’s call soon.

“Listen, Sherlock, I had a bit of a favour I wanted to ask you about.” She looked down briefly, biting her lip. “I wondered if you might like to get together for a cup of tea on First Day if you’re free, and talk about it? I mean I’d love to see you for a chat even if you can’t do the favour.” She smiled, obviously flustered.

“I don’t think I’ve anything on. Certainly.” Sherlock mustered up a returning smile. “When and where did you have in mind?”

Molly named a time and a café not too far from his office, and Sherlock agreed. She nattered on awhile longer about how nice it was to see him again before signing off.

Sherlock returned to his plate of stew, this time with a bit of a mystery to mull over.

%%%%

The outdoor restaurants had shut down with the approach of winter, but the tea shop Molly had picked to meet in was a cheerful place filled with plants on the window sills, and the warm smell of simmering spices. Sherlock easily spotted Molly at a small table in the corner, and wound his way past the few other customers engrossed in their reader pads to join her.

“Sherlock, hullo!” Molly waved him over with a bright smile.

“Molly, it’s good to see you again.” Sherlock slid into the empty chair across from her.

“I’m so glad you could come today.”

“So what’s good here?” Sherlock glanced over one of the small plastic sheet menus on the table. It had little flowers drawn all over the margins.

“Oh everything, though I especially like the dozas.”

“It’s hard to find those outside of Bajor,” Sherlock said.

“I know. I found myself craving them the whole time we were on Enteros 9,” Molly confided.

Their conversation stopped when the waitress bustled in to take their orders. Molly made sure to add a plate of dozas to share.
They talked of idle chitchat. Molly’s younger brother had recently graduated from the military academy Sherlock had attended, and started service. Molly was worried about him. She bit her lip as she glanced out the window. “Just once it might be nice if someone I loved became an architect or a painter, you know? Why does everyone have to be in the army?” She flashed Sherlock a lopsided smile.

“I know what you mean,” Sherlock said. “I might have gone into something else if my father hadn’t been so insistent on the military.”

“You were always so good with maths,” Molly said. “I think you would have done well with astrophysics, or something in the other sciences.”

“In another life, perhaps I did.” Sherlock smiled wryly. The Bajorans had a belief in reincarnation, but the Cardassians stayed away from such philosophical matters.

Molly looked as if she might say something more, but the waitress returned with their orders, and the thought was derailed as they focused on setting the cups and teapot, and plates of food across the table. Molly poured the tea for them once she had moved away.

“So, you called me about a favour?” Sherlock leaned into the steam rising from his cup, wrapping his hands around the warmth of it.

“I did. It’s a delicate thing, but you were the first person I thought of.” Molly paused, taking a deep breath before continuing on. “I have a friend, she’s a fellow teacher at the college. She has a girlfriend, they’ve been together forever – they’re practically married. My friend is up for a promotion and if it was found out, that she was with another woman, she’d lose her job. She needs to be seen dating someone, someone who won’t mind playing pretend for a little while. I thought you might not mind . . . helping.” Molly trailed off, uncomfortable.

“What would I need to do exactly?” Sherlock sipped at his tea, a Deka blend. It was delicious.

“Oh nothing too time consuming, just arrive with her to a few of the officer balls, dance a little, maybe go out to dinner somewhere popular a few times. Irene is a lovely person, just brilliant too. I think you would enjoy talking with her if nothing else.”

“I understand. Of course I can do it.”

“Oh, Sherlock, that’s fantastic, I so appreciate it.” Molly fiddled with the cuff of her shirt, setting it straight. “Plus, I wasn’t going to say anything, but I heard some of the other officer wives talking about you. People are going to want to set you up with their daughters and sisters fairly soon. This would head them off ahead of time.”

“Well, then I’ll be doing us both a favour, won’t I?” Sherlock wrinkled his nose. “Thanks for the information, and I don’t mind helping your friend.” Sherlock lifted the doza platter, holding it up to offer one to Molly. “I do seem to have a little free time on my hands these days.”

“I’ll let Irene know. She’ll be so pleased to hear.” Molly flashed a smile as she reached out to select a doza. “Thank you, Sherlock, really.”

“It’s no problem.” Sherlock selected a pastry of his own. “I know how hard it can be, keeping up appearances.”

%%%
The weather had dipped to raw as the days slid into winter proper, but Sherlock kept up his habit of after-work walks, simply adding an extra layer or two to his outfit. He’d found a shop a few kilometers from his flat that sold jumja sticks and he enjoyed the chance to stretch his legs, traveling back and forth there on foot.

He wasn’t terribly surprised when a black groundcar with tinted windows slid into view one evening, stopping beside him on the street. A man in a dark suit popped out to smoothly open the back door for him. “Sir, if you’ll allow me?”

Sherlock simply nodded at him as he climbed in, conscious that refusal wasn’t an option. Of course Mycroft’s smug face waited to greet him from the car’s cushy interior.

“Brother dear, how are you?” Mycroft drawled as the door clicked shut behind them, sealing them into the steamy heat of the walled-off rear compartment. It felt somewhat shocking after the brisk wind outside. Sherlock took a moment to remove his hat and scarf before answering.

“Fine. So, what do you want?”

“I’m hurt. Can’t I have simply wanted to say hello to my only brother?”

“You could have called me on my phone if that were the case.”

"Hate phones.” Mycroft waved an elegant hand about. “They’re always bugged.”

“Well, as the Obsidian order does much of the bugging, I’d reckon you’d have something to do with that, Mycroft.”

Mycroft snorted. “So, what’s been happening with our little project?”

Sherlock sighed, and proceeded to give Mycroft a report on his endeavours, what supplies he’d managed to direct to the Bajorans. He carefully left out any mention of his meetings with John though he knew Mycroft was well aware of them.

“Good, you’ve done well Sherlock. I have some information I think certain people will find quite interesting.” He activated a reader pad and handed it to Sherlock. There are four facilities that will have their security systems suddenly malfunction on the dates listed beside them. I want you to memorize these and pass them along to your friends.”

“Alright.” Sherlock glanced over the list, quickly committing it to memory, a research facility, a storage building, and two power plants scattered throughout several nearby areas.  “Will they be staffed at the time of these malfunctions?” Sherlock handed the pad back.

“There will be minimal staff in the night time hours at most of these places.” Mycroft tilted his head to regard Sherlock. “So, how’s . . . John?”

“He’s fine,” Sherlock ground out.

“Sherlock, I’m wondering what you have envisioned for your future. Riding off into the sunset together? A small whitewashed house in the country perhaps? You know your union with a Bajoran male will never be deemed acceptable regardless of the future of Bajor.”

“I have getting out of bed each morning and putting one foot in front of the other in mind. Anything beyond that is a bonus.”
“As long as you understand the reality of things.”

“I understand.” Sherlock forced out between his teeth, “things just fine, Mycroft. Is that all? Am I free to go?”

“You are.” Mycroft sighed. “Just . . . be careful, brother mine.” Mycroft touched a button, and the car pulled to a stop by the side of the road.

“I’m always careful, Mycroft.” Sherlock flashed a toothy smile as he gathered his things. “Except when I’m not.” He reached out to pop the door open, and escaped to the pavement into a neighbor that looked only vaguely familiar. Pulling his hat and scarf back into place, Sherlock walked quickly away, hearing the purr of the groundcar as it pulled into traffic behind him.

%%%

“Darling, I can’t tell you how long it’s been since I had a good soak at a spa.” The woman beside Sherlock tipped her glass back to drain it. “Where has that waiter gotten off to? I’m feeling half parched this evening.”

Sherlock nearly rolled his eyes, stopping himself at the last moment. She was the wife of Gul, and not someone he could afford to annoy.

“I believe I saw one go by . . .” Sherlock waved discreetly and a servant moved over to refresh the woman’s cocktail.

Sherlock glanced over and watched as his date for the evening, Irene Adler, did roll her eyes. He had to stifle a laugh. The band started into a rousing tune that Sherlock recognized, and he stood, holding a hand out to Irene. “May I have this dance?”

“Well, sir, I would be most honored.” Irene smiled.

Molly’s friend Irene had turned out to be even better than she’d described. Sherlock had taken her out twice now to several horrible official events, and her wry humor had lightened the dull company enormously. She was an attractive woman, and Sherlock appreciated the way she looked on his arm as he led her to the dance area. He took one of her hands in his own, while his other slid to her waist as they joined the other couples moving about the floor.

“Thank you,” Irene sighed. “I’m not sure I could have taken another thing that woman had to say.”

“I was saving myself from her as much as you.”

“Can you believe it when she said Bajorans were no better than animals? That they benefitted greatly from Cardassian direction? Ughh.” Irene grimaced. “Half of Cardassian warp technology comes from Bajorn engineering concepts.”

“I know.” Sherlock lifted a shoulder. “The Bajorans had a thriving civilization before the Cardassian occupation. People tend to forget the big picture if it doesn’t suit them.”

Irene sighed as they slid into the rhythm of the dance, moving easily together. At one moment in the song as the key shifted, Sherlock spun Irene away, pulling her back into his arms for a dip. She smiled as he righted them.
“You, sir, dance beautifully,” Irene said, “and I especially enjoy the fact that you aren’t trying to get me out of my pants while you do it.”

“I’d probably just want to borrow your pants.” Sherlock leaned in to whisper. “John might enjoy seeing me in them.”

Irene threw back her head and laughed. Though Irene’s partner, Kate, was Cardassian, society would no more accept their pairing than they would look kindly at his relationship with John. It had been a relief to talk with Irene about his life, though he’d spoken of John in only the broadest of terms.

Molly and her husband twirled by at that moment, and she grinned at them, obviously pleased to see them enjoying themselves. She gave a thumbs up before being lost again in the swirl of dancers. As the song crashed to a close, Sherlock led Irene off the dance floor, a hand lightly at her low back.

“Ah well, shall we faff off, then?” Irene glanced around the room at the sea of glittering frocks and dress uniforms. “I think we’ve been here long enough to make a decent showing.”

“I couldn’t agree more, madame,” Sherlock said, crooking an elbow for Irene to take. “Let’s leave this place behind.”

They found Molly to say good-bye, and after collecting their coats, caught one of the cabs idling outside.

“Come in with me?” Irene asked as the taxi pulled up in front of her building.

“I don’t want to intrude.” Sherlock shifted on the seat.

“Oh, don’t be an idiot,” Irene chided, swatting his knee with her hand bag. “Kate loves company, and we hardly ever have anyone over. Do come up.” Irene knew Sherlock had only an empty flat to go home to.


After he paid the cabbie with a scan from his credit chip, Sherlock climbed out of the taxi, following Irene’s clicking heels over the pavement. A buzz from Sherlock’s pocket alerted him to a message received. He stopping to pull out his phone, thumbing it on. He’d sent John the information from Mycroft two days ago, framing it as a list he’d found of places set for routine maintenance on their security systems. Sherlock swiped the screen to life, and felt a shiver course up his spine when he saw the note was from John.

*Brilliant intel! Good work!*

*Tomorrow evening,*

*safe house where we first met. U free?*

*Love you, J*

Sherlock replied back quickly, typing an enthusiastic yes before pushing send.

“Something important?” Irene had doubled back to check on him.
“Love note.” Sherlock smirked.

“Lucky boy.” Irene threaded her arm through his. “Come up and tell Kate all about it. She loves romantic stories with a happy ending.”

“Don’t most people?” Sherlock asked.

“Hmmm, most Cardassians I know seem to prefer long, dull allegories about a duty well performed.”

“How hideous.” Sherlock mock shuddered.

“I know. Ordinary people can be so boring.” Irene squeezed his arm. “How lucky we are to be above all that.”

%%%
Gratitude

Chapter Summary

Even in the darkest of times, something can be found to be grateful for.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the hiatus between chapters here. Real life has been kicking my butt, and as those in both the U.S. and around the world know, the recent election was a blow to many of us. Still life goes on, and as we in the states are set to celebrate Thanksgiving this coming week, we can remember the good things. There are always things to be grateful for as long as we still draw breath, as long as we stand together.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

%%%

Sherlock glanced back as he slipped into the alley behind the row of derelict homes. Thankfully no one but him was about. It wouldn’t do to be spotted here at this time of day. He moved easily down the narrow road, avoiding the potholes and ruts, only belatedly realizing he was humming a jaunty tune. He clamped down on it immediately. After weeks of little contact with John, news of this rendezvous at the safe house where they’d first met was an unexpected windfall. Sherlock simply ached to see John. Texts sent back and forth were good for keeping in touch, making sure John was alright, but they weren’t the same as meeting in person.

Sherlock did allow himself the luxury of a smile as he pushed open the gate, easily finding the symbol of the Resistance carved into the side. Warm memories rose unbidden as climbed the steps to the back entrance. Reconnecting with John in this unlikely old house had been a gift beyond measure. The door flew open as he reached for the keypad, startling him out of his reverie.

“Sherlock!” John launched himself forward.

“Ooff.” Sherlock caught him, letting his hands splay over John’s back as he absorbed his weight, keeping them both upright.

“Darling, I missed you so.” John surged up, greeting him with an enthusiastic, open-mouthed kiss.

Sherlock stiffened, a flicker of concern moving through his mind at being seen outside together, but he quickly relaxed into the pleasure of John pressed against him. Their mouths slotted together naturally, finding a familiar rhythm. He melted against John in a sigh.

When John finally lifted his head, he pressed a last lingering kiss to Sherlock’s jaw. “We have company. Just go with it,” he whispered.

Sherlock’s eyes lifted to see what he had missed earlier, two people waiting in the shadows of the kitchen beyond.
“Come in, love,” John said louder, taking Sherlock’s hand to pull him through the door. “I want you to meet someone.”

The Bajoran man and woman inside were nondescript, both whipcord thin, dressed in neutral coarse-spun wear, nothing fancy. Their eyes were sharp though, cataloging Sherlock’s every move.

“Sherlock, these are some friends of mine. Kira Nerys, Shakaar Edon, this is Sherlock Holmes.” John gestured between them.

“Charmed.” Kira, the woman, nodded, looking anything but pleased as she kept her arms crossed tightly over her chest.

The man, Shakaar seemed more welcoming. A small smile creased his handsome face as he extended his hand. “Sherlock, how do you do?”

“Fine,” Sherlock replied automatically. Unsure what to do, he fell back on long-ingrained manners, shaking the man’s hand politely. “And you?”

“I’ve been better.” Shakaar chuckled. “Well, why don’t we take this somewhere more comfortable?” He gestured expansively in the direction of the stairs. “We can sit, have a drink, talk awhile.”

Sherlock cut his eyes toward John again who gave a tiny nod. “Alright.” Sherlock agreed mildly.

These were John’s superiors, Sherlock could see it in the way they held themselves, and the way John deferred to them. Shakaar strode up the stairs first, confident that the others would follow. Sherlock fell in line behind with John at his heels. Kira hung back, bringing up the rear, no doubt on high alert. Sherlock could feel her dark eyes boring holes in the back of his head, just waiting for him to make a wrong move. It made the short hairs stand up at his nape.

They had settled tailor-fashion on cushions around a table when Shakaar produced a flask. “I hope you don’t mind something a bit strong.” Shakaar smiled as he poured a measure into the mugs found in the room. “It’s called Urgot. I brew it myself.”

Sherlock accepted one with a murmured thanks.

“To good friends.” Shakaar held his glass in toast. The others echoed his words, tipping their drinks back. Sherlock was surprised at how spicy the Urgot was. It burned its way down his throat. He’d have suspected that he’d been poisoned, but Kira and John’s coughing reassured him that everyone was suffering the same.

“Sorry.” Shakaar smiled. “It can take some getting used to.”

“Edon, that could dissolve nails.” Kira swatted at Shakaar.

“It’s good isn’t it?”

“No, but it is strong. I’ll take another.” Kira held her glass out, flipping her long brown braid over her shoulder out of the way.

Sherlock waved Shakaar off when he made to refill his glass as well. “No thank you. One was . . . sufficient.”

Shakaar laughed and reached out to pound Sherlock on the back. “John, I like your friend. He’s honest. I’ll give him that.”
John waved off a refill as well. “He is honest, and a very good friend. You can trust him.”

“Well, more than friends,” Sherlock said.

John’s eyes softened. “Well, yes of course . . .”

“John’s my lakayha,” Sherlock announced proudly.

The Bajorans paused in raising their glasses to stare at him.

“Is that so?” Kira quirked an eyebrow. “Do you know what that means?”

Sherlock did. John had called him the name years ago. It was an old Bajoran word, something he hadn’t been able to find on any of his databases. The Bajoran sex worker on Terek Nor space station had explained it to him of all people.

“I do. John called me that years ago. It means soulmate for lack of better translation.” Sherlock met John’s melting gaze. “It goes across caste lines. It means you leave your family of origin to be with your beloved. It’s what John and I are to each other.” He stretched his hand across the table toward John. John reached up instantly to grab it. His eyes were shining.

“But he’s CARDASSIAN,” Kira burst out. “How in the world . . .”

“I know he’s Cardassian.” John turned on her fiercely. “But it’s true. He is my lakayha, and I trust him with my life.”

“Alright, settle down.” Shakaar raised a calming hand. “We aren’t here to debate anyone’s status.” He shot Kira a stern glance. “We’re here to build bridges. Sherlock, John tells us you are interested in helping the Resistance.”

“I am.” Sherlock swallowed quickly. “If John’s told you about me, then you know I grew up on Bajor. It’s my home. I don’t want to see it destroyed any more than you do.”

“But he’s a soldier in the Cardassian ARMY.” Kira flung an arm out. “How can we possibly trust him . . .”

“Kira, I said peace.” Shakaar finally raised his voice. “John tells us that Sherlock has access to resources we need, and Prophets know we can use any help we can get.”

“Yes.” Sherlock took a deep breath. “I can reroute supplies to go missing, and put it in places you can reach it. If you give me a list I can do my best to fill it.”

“A shopping list?” Kira’s eyes narrowed. “Whatever we need?”

“Well, essentially, yes.” Sherlock shrugged.

“What guarantee do we have that he isn’t a spy?” Kira spat. “He could be cozying up to the Resistance just to get information on us to pass to the Cardassians.”

“I’m not a spy.” Sherlock could feel his blood pressure rising. “I want what’s best for Bajor.”

“We want to believe you, Sherlock,” Shakaar said gently. “John has had nothing but praise for you.”

John looked embarrassed when everyone’s gaze slid his way.

“But I’m sure you can appreciate that there’s a lot at stake here,” Shakaar continued. “We need to be
“Sure of your commitment.”

“Countless lives are at stake.” Kira leaned in to fix Sherlock with a hard glare.

“I understand. What sort of proof do you require?” Sherlock glanced nervously around the room.

“We have someone we’d need you to meet, to get clearance, if you’re amenable,” Shakaar said.

“Yes, of course.” Sherlock nodded.

“Good. We’ll arrange a meeting time. You’ll need several hours when you won’t be missed.”

“Alright. The weekend is best.”

“Of course.” Shakaar smiled kindly again. “We’ll have John keep in touch, and work out the details.”

Sherlock looked over at John as he licked his lips. He obviously felt responsible for Sherlock being blindsided like this. Sherlock slipped a hand over to touch John’s leg, just a quick gentle pressure. John met his eyes, and flashed a smile, a small quirk of his lips.

*I’m sorry*, his face seemed to say.

*It’s alright, I don’t blame you.* Sherlock squeezed John’s leg before retreating.


After another round of the drink that Sherlock made himself choke down, Kira announced that it was time they were on their way before curfew made traveling dangerous.

“Can you . . .” Sherlock turned to John as they rose.

“Sorry, John doesn’t have free time tonight.” Shakaar stepped in. “We need all hands on deck, it’s busy work this revolution business.”

“Yes, of course.” Sherlock tried not to let his disappointment show.

“We do appreciate all that you’re doing for us, Holmes.” Shakaar extended his hand. Sherlock took it, feeling the callouses on the man’s broad palm.

“We look forward to working with you.” Kira moved in to shake his hand as well, her eyes boring in to him as her smaller hand gripped his own. “Bajor needs friends.”

“Of course, whatever I can do.” Sherlock met her gaze unflinchingly. Whatever Kira saw seemed to temporarily mollify her. She released him with a brisk nod.

“Well, now, why don’t we leave the lovebirds a moment or two to say good-bye?” Shakaar said with a grin. “Surely the Resistance can spare that.”

“Yes, thank you sir.” John ducked his head, embarrassed until the two Bajorans had cleared out, moving to wait discreetly downstairs.

“Sherlock, I didn’t mean to spring this on you.” John curled in on himself, looking wilted. “Kira found me texting you . . .”

“No, no, I understand. It’s fine.” Sherlock pulled John into his arms, wanting to kiss the sadness off
his face.

If they only had a few minutes, he didn’t want to waste it apologizing for things outside their control. John instantly responded, his hands winding around to grip the back of Sherlock’s jacket as he all but devoured Sherlock’s mouth. They might have stayed that way, twined together snogging frantically all night if a discreet throat clearing from the hall hadn’t broken in. They pulled apart just enough to stand forehead to forehead as they caught their breath.

“I’ll text you,” John whispered.

“Okay. I love you.”

“Love you too.” With a last quick kiss pressed fiercely to his mouth, John tore himself away and darted off. Sherlock waited, giving the Bajorans a head start, letting his body and mind settle before he made his own way from the house.

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The text came a few days later. Sherlock thumbed through his messages while out running errands. John had sent him the meeting information, an open-aired market, next First Day, just after dawn. Sherlock had a little time to prepare. When he checked his calendar he had to laugh. It was Peldor, the Gratitude Festival. Of course it had long been declared illegal to celebrate Bajoran holidays, but Sherlock remembered Peldor vividly from his childhood.

The servants had decorated the kitchen and back rooms with purple banners, and burned incense while Mrs. Watson made special biscuits and served cups of hot spiced punch. Sherlock’s mother hadn’t gone so far as to allow the servants to build bonfires on the back patio to burn renewal scrolls, but he and John had burned scraps of paper in candles behind the gardening shed all the same. They’d written down silly things they wanted to get rid of, homework, chores, dress suits. Once Sherlock had penned his Father’s name, but John had stopped him. “It can’t be people, Sherlock,” he’d laughed.

After an interminable week of slogging through his desk job, forms to sign, people to talk to, Sherlock woke early on First Day. He’d spent the whole night in restless half-sleep, and it was a relief to just get up, stuff the things he’d need into a bag and leave the flat. Sherlock found an alley, a place behind some skips to change his clothes. It had been a long time since he’d used disguises like this one, but it amused him to shuffle back out to the street hunched over a cane in a patchwork dress and veils.

Although celebrating the Peldor festival was forbidden, Sherlock still saw hints of the holiday all over the marketplace. It was in plain sight if you knew where to look. Scraps of purple fabric tied in out-of-the-way spots fluttered in the breeze, good luck charms swung from several stalls, and the smell of burning Bateret leaves laced the air. The Bajorans out shopping smiled, bustling about with a joviality that defied the chill, overcast day, and the few Cardassian guards glowering from the corners.

A woman with a large basket and a line of rag-tag children almost knocked Sherlock over. “Oh, excuse me, I didn’t see you there. Peldor joi, bibi!”

“Peldor joi, my child,” Sherlock quaked in his sham elderly voice.
The woman beamed, and shooed her children along before her.

Sherlock saw John in the marketplace long before John noticed him. He was dressed in something beige and bulky, a cap tugged low over his head, his eyes hopeful as he scanned the crowd. A stray ray of sunlight broke through the clouds and for a moment, John looked radiant bathed in the sharp winter light. It made something swell in Sherlock just to watch him step aside to let a group of women move past him. Sherlock stopped to buy a token from a booth, handing over a folded bill for a prosperity charm on a cord.

“Good day, bibi.” The shopkeeper smiled, passing Sherlock his change.

“Keep it.” He waved the man off.

“Thank you, bibi, Peldor joi.” The man smiled wider.

Sherlock nodded and shuffled off, making his way through the crowd to where John waited, back to a food stand selling hot soup. Although he generally wasn’t one for breakfast, the rich smell of broth and noodles made Sherlock’s stomach rumble.

“Peldor joi, son,” Sherlock croaked, stopping before John, holding the charm out to him.

“And to you, bibi . . .” John replied automatically reaching out to accept the cheap pendant. “Sherlock?” He startled as he recognized him. A disbelieving smile spread over John's face as he dropped the cord over his neck.

“Have you eaten, sonny?” Sherlock asked, already tugging John toward the queue for the broth.

“Not well,” John admitted.

The shop passed over two large paper cups of soup at Sherlock’s order. He gave one to John, and they made their way through the crowd, finding a bench to sit where Sherlock could discretely lift his veil to eat.

“I should have known it was you.” John smiled fondly as he spooned up his noodles.

“I am a master of disguise,” Sherlock said.

“You’re an idiot.” John snorted. At Sherlock’s noise of protest, John reached over to pat his leg. “But you’re my idiot.”

Sherlock harrumphed, but settled in to slurp the rest of his soup without further comment. When they were done, they binned their cups, John leading Sherlock down streets farther and farther away from any foot traffic. When they reached a transit stop by a small abandoned-looking park, John let them rest, finding a low wall to perch on.

“So, where are we going, and who am I meeting today?” Sherlock settled his skirts to better cover his boots.

“I can’t say.” John looked away, scanning the quiet street.

“Can’t or won’t?”

“Sherlock, just leave it, alright?” John sighed. “The less you know about anything, the better.”

Sherlock had an angry reply on his tongue when they were interrupted by a ground car with tinted windows sliding up to the kerb. Sherlock tensed, but John stepped forward to open the back door.
“Your chariot awaits, bibi.” John smiled.

The two Bajoran men in the front seats turned to look at Sherlock quizzically as they climbed into the car. It was scuffed and worn inside, a vehicle that had obviously seen better days and other owners. Sherlock settled himself somewhat fastidiously over the cracked upholstery.

“Is this him, then?” The passenger asked, a man with a burn scar marring his forehead. “The one we’re taking?”

“It is.” John smiled wryly sealing the door behind him.

When Sherlock pulled off his veils with a sigh, the two Bajorans did a gratifying double take, watching as he shucked his outer dress to reveal his very masculine tunic and trousers beneath.

The burned man chucked a dark canvas bag toward John. “He needs to wear it. Over the head.”

“Is that necessary?” Sherlock grimaced, patting his mussed hair back into place. “Surely my face isn’t that unappealing.

“Sorry, that’s the rules.” Burny looked like he’d never cracked a joke a day in his life.

“Sherlock, I’m sorry.” John winced. “Can you?”

“Oh, alright,” Sherlock huffed, dipping his head to allow John to pull the dark hood over him and secure it under his chin. John gave his shoulder a reassuring squeeze when he was done.

Sherlock fell back against the seat as the car started moving. Deprived of his sight, his other senses kicked in keener. Quick stops and starts soon morphed into long uninterrupted stretches of driving telling Sherlock they had left the city limits behind. The Bajorans in the front seat muttered quietly to themselves, and Sherlock could only catch a few phrases “border guard” was only one he heard clearly. He could feel that car was moving west toward the mountains as they traveled along the more uneven surface of country roads.

Sherlock couldn’t help the niggling feeling of foreboding that crept over him. This could so easily be a double cross. Images of being taken out into the brush for a quick execution passed through his mind. What was another Cardassian officer gotten rid of to some disgruntled dissidents? And what would happen to John when he tried to stop them? Sherlock swallowed as a shiver coursed over him. John leaned in, warm, and steady at his side, and he calmed.

The end of journey grew very bumpy indeed as they seemed to go off-road entirely, jostling over uneven, bone-jarring terrain. John reached out to steady Sherlock, until blessedly, they jolted to a stop. A window rolled down, the driver exchanging terse words to what was obviously outer security before they finally moved down an incline, and came to a complete stop. It was with great relief that Sherlock took a full breath when John released him from the prison of the cloying canvas.

“We’re here,” John said, though what “here” was remained to be seen. Lights clicked on around them in what turned out to be an underground garage of some sort, a few other battered vehicles parked nearby.

The two burly men flanked them as they exited the car, leading them toward a set of stairs that seemed to have been carved out of the natural stone walls. The driver took the front while Burny fell to the back. After an interminable climb, they finally reached a dim corridor above, barely lit by one small lamp on the wall. A doorway at the end led to a new set of corridors branching off in several directions.
“This way,” the lead man grunted and directed them through some pattern of his own knowing through the twisting hallways, each barely lit well enough to see. They continued without speaking, only the sounds of their footfalls, and labored breaths keeping them company. John fell in behind Sherlock and reached out to pat at Sherlock more than once as they made along. Sherlock wondered if he were aware he was doing it. It seemed to a gesture designed to reassure John as much as offer comfort to Sherlock, though he was grateful for it.

When at last they reached an archway that opened to an actual room, a large antechamber of some sort with chairs, and a large patterned rug underneath, Sherlock breathed a sigh of relief. The room was flooded with natural light falling from sky lights above, while an indoor fountain gave a cheerful burble as it recycled a stream of water over an artful tumble of rocks.

“John, just who am I meant to meet with?” Sherlock leaned over to whisper by his ear.

“She’s here.” John nodded, and Sherlock turned to see that people had joined them from another door.

Several armed guards moved aside to allow a short round woman draped in purple and orange robes, wearing a brimless maroon hat with a veil trailing down her back to greet them. Her ears were left uncovered, the right one framed in a set of earrings connected by several decorated chains swinging between them.

“Welcome. I trust you had no difficulty getting here?” She asked their car’s driver.

“No Kai, it went as easily as you said it would.” The man bowed respectfully as all the Bajorans in the room save her guards followed suit. Sherlock quickly copied them, ducking his head. The Kai was the top position of the Bajoran religion, the holiest of holy people.

“So, you must be Sherlock Holmes.” The woman smiled lightly, but her gaze was heavy, piercing Sherlock with a look that seemed to see straight through him.

“Yes, sir, ma’am, your holiness. I am,” Sherlock muttered, finding himself flustered. It wasn’t every day you found yourself confronted with the speaker for the Prophets.

“You may call me Kai Opaka,” she said with genuine warmth.

“Watson John it’s good to see you again.” She nodded his way. “Thank you for bringing our guest today.”

Sherlock flicked his gaze toward John, surprised. He’d met the Kai before, and had never told him?

They’d be having words later.

“No, of course not.” Sherlock moved to follow her.

“Sherlock?” John stepped toward him, uncertain.

“I’m sorry.” The Kai turned to smile at them. “Only Sherlock and I can be present, but you may wait here until we return. I promise, no harm will come to him.”
“Yes, of course. Sorry,” John muttered, dropping back, still looking worried.

“Come.” The Kai placed a hand lightly to Sherlock’s arm leading him past the guards through a sliding door into a darker, smaller space. Sherlock paused letting his eyes become accustomed to the lower light as the door whooshed closed behind them.

“He’s very protective of you,” Kai Opaka observed.

“I know. I feel the same about John,” Sherlock said, squinting around the space. Candles dotted the perimeter of the room, and the smell of incense lay thick, almost cloying. “We grew up together. He’s my lakayha, my everything really.”

“So I’ve heard,” Kai Opaka said thoughtfully. “Sherlock, I know I don’t need to tell you. These are dark times for Bajor. We are reaching a tipping point where things can go either way toward the light.” She held a palm open near a large candle on a stand, “Or toward the dark.” She unfurled the other toward the shadows of the room.

“Kai, if there’s anything I can day to convince you, I really do care for Bajor. It’s been the only home I’ve ever known.”

“I believe you, child.” The Kai nodded, “but it’s not me you need to convince.”

“Then who?” Sherlock glanced about the small room despite knowing they were the only two in it.

“The Prophets will decide,” Kai Opaka said, leading him toward a small table that held an ornate metal box.

“The Prophets?” Sherlock repeated, feeling confused.

“Sherlock, I am about to show you something that few outside the inner orders ever get a chance to see. This is a relic from the Prophets themselves.” She reached out to the box swinging its sides open to reveal a bright light within. It was shaped like an hour glass and spinning lazily around its axis.

“What . . .” Sherlock asked, and suddenly he was crouched down in his back garden, the one where he grew up, poking at a small dead bird with a stick.

“What are you doing?”

Sherlock looked up, squinting into the sun to see a boy standing next to him, a Bajoran boy.

“Who are you?” he asked stupidly, rising to his feet. Sherlock had spent a good bit of time in the back garden, and this was the first time he’d ever encountered another child in it. He noticed that he was a bit taller than the strange boy.

“I’m John,” he said. “Who are you?”

“Sherlock,” he replied automatically. “Are you meant to be here?”

“I am.” John stuck out his chin. “My ma told me to go play in the garden while she got set up in the kitchen.”

“Your mother’s the new cook?” Sherlock remembered Mummy complaining about it at dinner the night before. The old cook had left, and the kitchen girls weren’t managing very well on their own. Sherlock hated most things served for dinner, so he hadn’t really noticed anything different.

“That’s right.” The sunlight glinted on the chains hanging down from John’s earrings.
“I like your earrings.” Sherlock reached out to touch the chain, stroking it with one finger.

“Thanks.” John wrinkled his nose. “Do you want to play?”

“Oh, yes.” Sherlock smiled.

“Good, let’s explore!” John reached out and took his hand pulling him toward the tall bushes lining the patio.

Sherlock blinked and found himself suddenly grown bigger, dressed in his veils and skirts at a table outside a shaved ice stand. He was spooning up Jumja ice under his veil and dripping half of it down his front when John nudged him.

“I never said that.” John laughed. “Lauret won’t win it for them. Not in a million years.”

“Oh ho. I beg to differ. The man’s clearly been practicing longer than any of the competition,” Sherlock huffed. “He’s the clear choice for the team.”

“Yeah, but even that won’t get Dahkur into the running for top spot. Oh look, you’ve got syrup all over you. Have we any napkins?”

When Sherlock told him no, John shook his head, and moved back to the stand to grab a few. Sherlock watched him returning when a blonde girl stepped into view halting his progress.

“John, hello!” She chirped brightly.

“Oh, hi, Shanna.” John returned her greeting half-heartedly.

“Fancy meeting you here!” she simpered.

“Yeah, I come here some times.”

“I haven’t seen much of you lately, down at the ball courts after school?”

“Been busy.” John shrugged.

“I was wondering, if you might like to go for a walk some time? Down by the city gardens?”

“Kinda busy.” John repeated.

“Busy now?” She tilted her head and smiled coyly, no doubt thinking it made her look sweet.

“John, you lazy boy, what are you up to?” Sherlock tired of waiting, shuffled up between them, careful to lean on his cane. “Dragging your feet as usual.”

“Sorry, Shanna, have to go. Need to take my great-auntie home.” John grinned widely, catching Sherlock’s hand in the crook of his elbow.

“Oh, yeah, okay.” The girl backed off, uncertain. "See you later, John."

“I think Yaddo is the better pick.” John said as they moved further down the pavement.

“Yaddo’s an idiot.” Sherlock sniffed. “He hardly knows a ball from his arse.”

“I can’t believe you’d SAY that . . .”

“Well, that’s interesting.” Sherlock heard someone say. He looked over his shoulder and the Kai was
standing behind him by the ice stand, watching them.

“What is it?” John asked, tugging on Sherlock’s arm, trying to catch his attention.

Sherlock turned back toward John, and it was suddenly night. John, years older, stood before him in the bedraggled city park, panting, holding his cap in his hands. “I have to go.”

“Don’t go, stay.” Sherlock reached out to touch John’s face, his lovely face, now too thin, and pinched. Sherlock found he had a data stick in his hand. He pressed it into John’s palm. “Take it, John, it’s yours.”

“Alright.” John fell into his arms, catching him close.

Their clothes fell away, and they lay entwined on a pallet on the floor. John, beautiful John, so trusting, laid out before him. “Prophets, Sherlock, fuck me.” John whispered urgent, and low.

“Yes, yes.” Sherlock pushed into his warm, welcoming body, shivering at the enveloping heat. It was perfect, it was . . .

“It’s disgusting.” Mycroft stood beside him as they watched the servants setting up the house for Mummy’s party.

“What is?” Sherlock bristled.

“You can’t develop feelings for them, brother mine.” Mycroft curled his upper lip.

“What the hell are you talking about?” Sherlock shook his head. “I love John.”

“They’re like animals, Sherlock. They aren’t the same as you or me.”

“Thank the Prophets for that,” Sherlock spat.

“About that.” Mycroft sighed. “You know they aren’t your Prophets, brother. You aren’t actually Bajoran.”

“I’m fighting for Bajor, isn’t that enough?” Sherlock felt desperate, like something was slipping away from him.

“Is it?”

“Mycroft, you can just sod right . . .” Sherlock turned to his brother and found himself on a city street, squinting into the sudden brightness. The buildings looked new, well kept, the street tidy, filled with pedestrians. Bajorans going about their business, laughing, talking, their family crest earrings swinging brazenly from their ears passed by him. Sherlock stood and gaped a moment. It was so . . . normal, except there wasn’t another Cardassian in sight. What . . .

“Sherlock! Hey!”

He turned to see John coming up the street, smiling, hand raised in greeting. He walked a little stiffly, his sandy hair looked as much grey as blond in the afternoon sun.

Sherlock’s heart leapt to see John’s own earrings hanging where they belonged in his right ear. He raised his own hand, ready to call back when a terrible wrongness washed over him, an agony blossoming across his chest. Sherlock curled over the hurt, falling into noise, someone screaming, and pain, so much pain. Time ceased to mean anything. John’s face appeared to block out the blue of the sky over him, his dark eyes gone wide, his hands reaching to pat over him.
“Sherlock, fuck, SHERLOCK! Hang on. The medics are coming.” A sob bubbled up from John’s throat and he clasped a hand soaked in violet over his mouth. Blood. Cardassian blood.

“What . . .” Sherlock couldn’t push the words past the pain.

“You’ll be alright. It was a sniper . . . some crazy old fucker from the hills. You’re going to be okay. Just . . .”

A shift, and Sherlock found himself standing a few meters away looking down at his own body twitching on the pavement, John crouched over him, the center of a storm of chaos around them. Others were running forward, shouting. Farther down the pavement, another man lay face down on the pavement, an old Bajoran, his grey head at an odd angle to his neck, an ancient projectile pistol lying by his open hand.

“Curious.” The Kai stood by Sherlock’s elbow, frowning at the scene.

“Is it?” Sherlock asked, bewildered.

“I think we’ve gone into the future . . . oh no.” She looked down.

Sherlock followed her gaze.

His body had gone still. John grabbed at him, pulling him up, howling. “Noooooo! Prophets, please, NOOO!”

Sherlock shuddered, and he was back, standing in the Kai’s little smoky room.

“Well.” The Kai looked as dazed as he felt.

Sherlock took a deep breath, willing his voice to work. “Was that real?” he croaked. “Those . . . visions . . . is it real?”

“What is real? The artifacts, we call them tears of the Prophet, they exist outside of time as we know it. They show us probabilities of what may be.” The Kai stepped forward to close the box, shutting the light off from the energy field, plunging them back into darkness.

“So, this might not come true?”

“It’s hard to say. Some of what we see is metaphor, symbols our brains create, but it is a possibility if you stay on your current path, this will come to pass.” She turned to fix Sherlock with a steady gaze.

“I have a question for you now. With everything you’ve seen here today, do you still want to help Bajor?”

Sherlock swallowed, his mouth gone suddenly dry. There wasn’t any way to turn back now. It wasn’t really a question. “Yes, Kai, of course.”

“Thank you.” She reached out to clasp his arm. “You are a brave man, Sherlock Holmes, and Bajor owes you a debt. I owe you a debt.”

“Will you . . .” Sherlock faltered. “Will you tell anyone what you saw here?”

“No. What is seen before the Prophets stays between us and the Prophets.”

“Good, I don’t want John to know.”

Things were a bit of a blur after that. The Kai led Sherlock back to the outer chamber. John leapt to his feet from a perch on a bench by the fountain, his whole face a question. The Kai said something, and John smiled, reaching out to embrace Sherlock.

“Come on.” John tugged at his hand, pulling Sherlock back through the corridors until they burst out into a room that held more Bajorans than Sherlock had seen gathered in one place since he’d returned to the planet. Here was the Peldor Festival finally as it should be welcomed. The walls of the large room were hung with purple bunting, banners with festive greetings, strings of lights and a few prisms throwing rainbows around the room.

Shaakar appeared to greet them. He announced Sherlock to the gathering as a welcomed guest, slapping him on the back as he presented him loudly to the crowd. Others came forward then to shake his hand, and John introduced him but it was a muddle in Sherlock’s head, so many faces, so many names. Musicians struck up a merry tune, and people cheered their approval. Some leapt up to join in a dance, swirling each other around in pairs.

“Dance with me?” John grinned and Sherlock nodded, still feeling half stunned. John pulled Sherlock in to the moving bodies, and he went willingly, letting John lead him through the simple steps.

Not all the Bajorans looked pleased to see him, many shot him sour looks when John’s head was turned, but nothing was said as John hugged him to one of the bonfires set in braziers around the room. Together they found nearby scrolls of paper and pens to write what they wished to release for the coming year.

Sherlock thought a moment. So much, so much swirling around his head. He ended up writing one word, *fear*. John took longer, writing something like an essay over his paper before Sherlock nudged him. Together they stepped up to drop their papers into the fire. Sherlock did feel a sense of relief as he watched his paper curl and burn, the yellow flames devouring the scroll until nothing remained.

John moved them next to a table with food and drink. He poured them each a cup from bowl of punch, passing one to Sherlock.

“*Peldor joi*, love.” John tipped his glass to touch the rim against Sherlock’s.

“*Peldor joi*, John.” Sherlock couldn’t help the smile that he knew was splitting his face in two.

“John, we’re getting a circle dance going, join us?” Kira swung into view, grinning, half breathless.

“Sorry, Nerys, I think I’ll sit this one out.” John reached out to catch up Sherlock’s hand with his free one.

Her eyes dropped briefly to their joined fingers, and a quick shadow passed over her eyes. “Of course. *Peldor joi*.” She smiled tightly before moving on.

Something clicked for Sherlock. He turned to John, surprised.

“It was Kira Nerys, wasn’t it?”

“Sorry?” John’s brows knit together.

“The person you were sleeping with before we got together. It was her, wasn’t it?”

John flushed a bright red. His mouth opened and closed a few times. “Well . . . I . . . yes. It was
her.”

Sherlock glanced away, finding Kira as she moved through the crowd. “I can see why she dislikes me so much. I stole you away from her.” Sherlock watched as she convinced another man, one with strapping arms and a patch over one eye, to join her. They laughed as they moved toward the forming circle.

“It’s not like that.” John shook his head. “I told you, there’s lots of sleeping around in the ranks. You have to grab life while you can. It’s harmless.”

“Harmless?” Sherlock lifted their joined hands to drop a kiss to the back of John’s. “You, Watson John, are anything but harmless.”

John’s eyes went dark as his gaze dropped to Sherlock’s mouth. “Come with me.” He led Sherlock through bustle, past some jugglers, and a large game with dice, away from the loud noise to a hallway with a different sort of noise going on. They moved past a line of alcoves set in the walls, sectioned off by curtains with giggles and soft sounds leaking through until they found one unoccupied.

John pulled Sherlock inside, tugging the curtain shut behind. It was a small space, barely big enough for the pallet that covered the floor. They toppled down to it, tugging at their clothes as they rolled together. Sherlock couldn’t get his fingers and his mouth on John’s bare skin fast enough.

“Peldor joi,” John breathed as they came together at last, clutching hungrily, not a sliver of space left between them. John had left the pendant from the market on, and it felt sharp pressed against Sherlock’s chest, warm from John’s body.

“Peldor joi,” Sherlock gasped as John began to move, and the world and everything in it fell away leaving nothing but the two of them, John against him, John.

Chapter End Notes

The Gratitude Festival, or Peldor Festival is one of the few Bajoran holidays shown being celebrated on Deep Space Nine. The main activity was the burning of scrolls that listed things you wished to get rid of in bonfires. Since I couldn't find any information on when it was observed, I decided that it must be a winter holiday as it involves standing around a hot fire. It made sense to me also to make it part of a New Year celebration. The proper greeting for the day is "Peldor joi" which wasn't translated on the show. One can assume it means something like "Happy Gratitude Festival" but I like to image it also hold the connotation of "Grateful for all" as the good things bring us pleasure, and the bad things bring us lessons.
Everyone's a Spy

Chapter Summary

Sherlock deals with Bajorans, and Cardassian officers, and wishes for more time with John, always, always.

%%%

Sherlock blinked his eyes open into the gloom of the small room to find John, a nearby warmth, propped up on one arm watching him.

“Good morning, gorgeous.”

A dim light in the hallway filtered in through the curtained doorway barely illuminating John’s face as he smiled down.

“Mmmm.” Sherlock returned the smile. He felt stiff after sleeping on such a thin mattress, and he stretched, enjoying how it brought him in greater contact with John.

“Look at that bedhead. I should wake up with you more often.” John pushed away the hair that flopped into Sherlock’s face, following it with a soft kiss to his forehead.

“John.” Sherlock cleared his throat. His brain was muddled with sleep and he could hardly think of anything beyond the joy of John pressed against his side. He gave up trying to think, and just burrowed into the softness of his lover, pulling him down into his arms. John came willingly, letting Sherlock wrap them tightly together. John smelled of sleep, and warmth, and all things right in the world. Sherlock sighed a bone-deep whoosh of air, melting into him. If only he could always wake this way.

“Mmm, love you.” John stroked down his back. Their mouths met in a lazy snog, tongues and lips dipping together languidly again and again in no hurry.

When Sherlock’s brain finally came on line, he jolted half upright, looking about. “John, what time is it?” There were no windows in the Resistance stronghold and it could have been anywhere from midnight to midday with the lack of ambient light.

“It’s still pretty early.” John peered at his wrist chrono on the ground beside them. “Do you need to be back any time in particular?”

“I’m always being watched.” Sherlock sighed. “I’ll need to get back sooner rather than later.”

“All right. Stay for breakfast at least, and I’ll have someone drive you back. I’m sorry, you’ll have to be blindfolded again for the journey.” John frowned. “It’s for the best.”

“I understand.” Sherlock sat up to root through the tangle of clothes on the floor by the pallet, pulling out his own things, and yanking them on quickly. John followed suit behind him.
“Is there anywhere...”

“...there’s a bathroom down the hall,” John said, tugging on his second boot. “Come on.”

He led Sherlock past the sleeping cubicles around a bend in the stone corridor to a large echoey space. A line of roughly-made stalls held chemical toilets while a sheet of spacecraft skin bolted to the wall divided off what seemed to be a shower area. Sherlock wanted to better examine how it was suspended off the floor. He stepped back though at the sounds of female voices chattering amidst the patter of running water, and moved on to find an unoccupied toilet.

After relieving himself, Sherlock emerged to see John having a quick wash at a long trough made of scrap metal welded together. John had taken off his shirt to splash from a spigot jutting out from the wall. Sherlock paused to watch the play of muscle over John’s broad back as he lathered suds between his hands, running it across his body before leaning over the sink to splash off. He grinned when Sherlock came to stand beside him, passing him the sliver of homemade soap.

“Do you fancy a real shower?” John cupped a palmful of water to his face, tipping a wet chin toward the showers. The water had cut off, and the women would be appearing at any moment.

“No, it’s fine.” Sherlock washed his hands quickly under the thin stream of cold water. His eyes flicked back toward the showers as a high-pitched giggle trilled from that direction. “We should probably go.”

“Oh, right.” John flushed. “I’m sorry Sherlock. It’s a co-ed bathroom, and I forget you aren’t Bajoran sometimes.” John reached up to shut off the tap.

“You’ll be the only one,” Sherlock muttered as they used bits of cloth hanging from a rack to dry off.

John pulled his shirt back on as they moved to the doorway. They passed a Bajoran man with a towel around his neck coming in, and it wasn’t simply Sherlock’s imagination that his lip curled in a sneer as they moved by.

“John, I don’t have to stay for breakfast,” Sherlock said quietly.

“Naw, it’ll take a few minutes to get the car sorted. You might as well eat while we wait.”

“Alright.”

They made their way back to the large main room where the banners of the Peldor festival still hung, but the bonfires had gone out, and the braziers pushed aside. A huddle of people looked to be sleeping along the walls where they had dropped the night before. John led them past the sleeping revelers to a queue forming at some folding tables where food was being dished out.

Hangovers seemed to be the order of the day after a night of festivities if the quiet shuffling about the room was any indication. John and Sherlock joined the end of the line, grabbing a divided tray from a stack as they neared the serving area. Sherlock flipped over the back to see the stamp of the Cardassian empire on the bottom, and had to smile. He’d probably diverted these to the Resistance himself.

“Here now, what’s this?” The tired woman ladling out porridge snapped to alertness when her eyes landed on Sherlock. “What’s one of them doing here?”

“He’s with me,” John clipped. “He’s a friend.”

“This is food for the fighters of the Resistance!” The woman scowled, gesturing with her spoon.
“We don’t need to be feeding the likes of him.”

The other two servers turned their way. They looked if not hostile, at least very surprised to see a Cardassian among them.

“It’s fine. I’m not really hungry.” Sherlock made to move away.

“No. It’s not fine,” John bristled laying a hand to his arm. “He’s just as much a fighter for the Resistance as anyone here. The very idea . . .”

“Hey, can you move it along up there?” someone called from the line behind them. “Some of us want to eat before next year.”

“John, leave it.” Sherlock set his tray down. “They’re right. I don’t need to be using your resources.” He turned and crossed the room, finding a bench not currently occupied by anyone passed out snoring.

John was fuming when he joined him with a tray holding a number of rolls, and two cups of something steaming invitingly.

“Here.” John thrust one of the cups his way. “The nerve of some people, honestly.”

“Thank you.” Sherlock accepted the drink to sip what turned out to be cheap, but thankfully strong tea. He could feel it reviving his system as it slid down his throat. “It’s okay, really. I don’t have to eat here. I have food in my flat.”

“That’s not the point.” John settled beside him. “We can spare a doza, and a cup of tea. Sherlock, half the stuff we have here is because of you. They’re just being bigots.” John took a large swallow from his cup and winced at the heat of it.

“It’s better we don’t advertise all that,” Sherlock muttered. “The less who know my involvement, the better.”

“Yeah, yeah. Here have a sweet roll. I nearly had to arm wrestle to get it for you.”

Sherlock huffed a laugh, and took the pastry John held out. It was dry, days past its expiry date, but Sherlock dutifully bit into it, washing it down with the over-boiled tea.

As they ate, more of the revelers groaned themselves awake and joined the line for breakfast or staggered off for the washroom. Sherlock choked down the rest of the roll as John methodically polished off his small stack. After draining his mug of tea, John stood up.

“There’s Barrow. I can ask him about a ride back to town. You’ll be alright alone for a minute?”

“Of course.”

With a reassuring pat to his shoulder, John darted off to catch the man. Sherlock sipped the last of his cooling tea, idly watching the Bajorans still in line. Some took their trays to open benches but many simply folded to the floor to eat their meal. Sherlock briefly considered asking John to get him a second cup when he returned, but quickly squashed the idea. He had several boxes of tea in his pantry to chose from when he got home. No need to use up what the Resistance had.

Sherlock’s head swiveled as a louder group of voices entered the room. A knot of men who didn’t seem to have finished their drinking from the night before swaggered up to the food queue. The tall one, a heavy fellow with a beard spotted Sherlock and frowned deeply. *Uh oh, trouble.* Sherlock set
down his cup, and calmly made for the nearest door. Sadly, a quiet escape wasn’t possible as the man and his friend moved to intercept him.

“Hey there, spoonhead. What the hell?” Beardy snarled into Sherlock’s face, his sour breath washing over him. “Bad enough I have to see you cold-blooded bastards everywhere else I go. Who the fuck let you in here?”

“I don’t want any trouble.” Sherlock ducked his head, and tried to sidle past. “Excuse me.”

“Damnit, there’s no excusing your kind.” The man’s buddy, a lean scarred man moved in to jab an accusing finger into Sherlock’s chest. “Fucking ruined my whole fucking planet, you damn tossrag . . . how dare you . . .”

“Hey, mates, lay off.” Another man stepped closer, hands up. “Shakaar said he was okay.”

“Yeah, come on, it’s Peldor.” A woman in grubby fieldwear called over. “It’s a time for peace.”

“Peldor was yesterday,” the bearded man sneered, “which thanks to these fucking lizardskins I had to celebrate in some shithole in the mountains. I’ll be damned if I sit down and have breakfast with one of them.”

“I’m done. I was just leaving,” Sherlock said quietly.

“Yeah, you are done, you and your whole fucking empire.” Beardy reached in to grab Sherlock by the throat, and Sherlock instantly rocked his weight back onto his heels, deflecting the attack with the side of his arm.

“Why you . . .” The lean one with the scar leapt forward. Sherlock quickly sidestepped, grabbing the man to lead him to the ground using his own momentum. The tall man snarled and reared back to throw a punch when John whirled in between them looking madder than a wet Hara cat.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing? Sherlock is a guest here!” John spat. “Do you dishonor hospitality given at our house?” He was half the size of Beardy, but the man took a step backwards at the ire radiating off of John. Beautiful John, so big in spirit.

“That’s just it though, isn’t it?” The big man showed off discolored teeth as he leered at John. “We don’t have a house anymore, do we? Look at us, living off scraps.” He swept a hand out to indicate the crowd that had drifted over to watch the ruckus. “Most of us have lost everything, jobs, families, homes. Everything!”

An answering murmur ran through the crowd.

“We haven’t lost our honor.” John said, quiet and low, both fists curled at his sides.


“Match, match, match . . .” the people around them gleefully took up the chant.

“Oh, Prophets, I don’t have time for this.” John groaned, dropping his forehead into his palm.

“What . . .” Sherlock looked at John, confused.

“Alright, someone explain to me what the hell is going on here.” The crowd parted to allow a striding Shakaar to join them.
“This spoo... Cardassian tripped me. Knocked me to the floor.” The lean man drew himself up indignantly. “I demand recompense. I want a match.”

“It’s not true,” John sputtered. “Reese attacked Sherlock. He was only defending himself!”

The leader crossed his arms, looking back and forth between the men. “Sherlock is a guest here. Under my protection, I might add. He is under no obligation to enter into a match, though it sounds like he might have as much right to call one as Reese does. It’s his choice.” Shakaar raised an eyebrow Sherlock’s way.

“A match?” Sherlock flashed a look at John again.

“Hand to hand combat in a ring to first blood or tap out,” John said, shaking his head. “It’s a matter of honor.”

Sherlock glanced around the ring of Bajorans surrounding him. They looked hungry, avid for some entertainment this morning before the grind of daily life swallowed them up again. He flicked his eyes to the lean man with the scar running along his chin almost like a Cardassian facial ridge, Reese. He glared superciliously at Sherlock as if he truly were in the right, and not some schoolyard bully.


“Let it be done then.” Shakaar clapped his hands, and in a matter of moments, the crowd had moved back and a space was being marked across the floor with a bit of chalk.

John leaned in close to hiss advice. “Look, don’t be clever. Just stick to the basics and defend yourself. Reese is a hothead. He won’t play long game, and you can just wear him down.”

Sherlock listened with half an ear as he tugged off his boots, watching the man across the room bouncing on the balls of his feet as friends wrapped his knuckles. The Bajoran was definitely agitated, hopped up. That was a weakness, one Sherlock could exploit.

“Do you want me to wrap your hands?”

Sherlock turned back to John. His lips were pressed into a straight line.

“No, relax, John. Cardassian skin is tough. I’ll be fine.”

“You don’t have to do this, you know. Reese is an idiot.”

“I know. That’s why I have to do this.”

“Okay, madman.” John let the side of his mouth twitch up slightly. “Go make me proud. Watch your face though. I happen to like it just as it is.” John reached out to cup Sherlock’s jaw, his thumb brushing along his cheek.

“Yes, John.” Sherlock searched John’s expression, committing that look to memory. Concern. It was nice to be the recipient of John’s attention, though he didn’t like the lines of worry marring his forehead.

“Ah, hell.” John tugged Sherlock down for a quick kiss, a loud smack on the lips regardless of who was watching. “For luck.” He smiled tightly, stepping back.

Sherlock nodded. He pulled off his tunic, and handed it to John along with his socks to stand barefoot on the cold stone floor. For just a moment, Sherlock felt the embarrassment of standing half
naked before so many critical eyes. Then he took a deep breath, focused his thoughts to let the chatter of the crowd fall away, and stepped into the circle.

Shakaar moved between Sherlock and the Bajoran, Reese, giving some obviously rote speech, for the honor of their people . . . blah, blah. Sherlock let the words wash over him as he watched his opponent twitching with impatience. Finally, Shakaar called the start and stepped aside. The men circled each other for a moment, each getting the measure of his opponent. Sherlock remained cool, watching, waiting for the man to do something foolish.

He was rewarded when the Bajoran lashed out, the twist of his body blaring his intent as he swung a fist Sherlock’s way. Sherlock easily deflected the punch and landed a jab to the man’s ribs. With a grunt, his opponent pulled away. The crowd booed its displeasure at Sherlock’s first hit. Of course John was in the crowd watching too, no doubt worrying, but Sherlock let that information slip to the side while he concentrated on watching his opponent’s feet.

The Bajoran dived in again and again, and each time Sherlock knocked him easily aside. The man had stamina, and some training, but no discipline, and no way to stop his body from telegraphing each move before he made it. It seemed an easy win, the Bajoran landing no substantial strikes, his chest heaving for breath, when Sherlock wrenched his shoulder deflecting a punch. Damn his desk job - he simply wasn’t used to this level of activity. Sherlock cried out in pain as his opponent’s foot connected with the soft spot under his chest ridge.

“That’s it, beat his arse!”
“Mark that lizardskin up!”
“Send the spoonhead home in a bucket!”

Time seemed to puddle and lengthen. The jeering faces catcalling around them, the Bajoran’s spreading grin at his small victory, and the beat of Sherlock’s own circulatory system all slowed to an impossible glacially-paced moment.

It occurred to Sherlock in this ocean of time between one blink and the next, that he would do himself no favors if he beat this man today. He could see it almost like a diagram laid over his opponent, all the places he could hit to disable or maim, the knees, the groin, the vulnerable throat, the nose that could be easily broken. He let it go. When the man, Reese, threw the next punch at Sherlock’s face, he leaned into the blow, letting it catch him in the mouth, the pain whiting out his thoughts as he dropped to his knees. As his dark Cardassian blood dripped from his split lip onto the stone floor, the crowd exploded into cheers.

“Alright, alright, it’s over. That’s enough.” John appeared at Sherlock’s side, firm hands helping him to his feet. They moved quickly through the crowd that had turned to cheer the Bajoran victor now leaping about the circle, arms over his head.

John led Sherlock down a corridor to a mercifully quiet room, and set him on a bench as he searched through some supplies stacked on a shelf. He grunted a bit, rifling through several boxes before he was satisfied, returning with a few first aid things.

“You threw that match, didn’t you?” John peeled open an antibacterial square.

Sherlock winced as John ran it over his lip. “Wha’ make oo say ‘at?’”

“You had him. You absolutely could have wiped Reese all over the floor. You chose to get your face bashed in instead, didn’t you?” John pressed a strip of plastiskin neatly over the cut, sealing the
“It was the only way to win in the long run.” Sherlock tried to shrug and winced as his pulled muscles protested.

“Okay, what else did you hurt?”

Sherlock showed John the line along his shoulder blade that felt on fire. John nodded and located a pulse wand, flipping it on to run over Sherlock’s back.

“I don’t need all this, John. I’ll be fine.” Sherlock tried to pull away.

“Don’t be a baby. Hold still. It’ll just be a moment.” One of John’s hands gripped his neck ridge to keep him in place. As the soothing heat flowed over him, Sherlock relaxed, dropping his head.

“John I’m sorry if you’re disappointed . . .”

John sighed. “I am disappointed, but not in you, sweetheart.” He clicked off the wand and returned it to its place on the shelf. “I’m sorry you came out here to offer help, and had to deal with the likes of Reese.”

“It was inevitable. If not him, someone else would have thrown a punch. I’m the face of the enemy.”

“Oh, that face.” John reached up to run a finger along the untouched lower part of his lip. “I love this face.”

“You’re the only one,” Sherlock said quietly.

“Come here.” John bent down to drop an impossibly tender kiss to his mouth. Sherlock tried to deepen the kiss, and cried out when it smarted.

“None of that for a few days.” Kira Nerys had slipped into the room behind them. “Well, a girl sleeps in one morning, and all hell breaks loose when she isn’t watching.”

“Yeah, we had quite the show this morning,” John said wryly.

“So I heard.” Kira pushed off from the doorway to stalk into the room proper. “Looks like you took quite a hit.”

“Sherlock went easy on him.” John grumbled, tidying up the wrappers around them.

“He was a worthy opponent,” Sherlock said simply.

Kira snorted. “Reese is an idiot. He’s lucky you let him win.”

Sherlock shrugged more easily that time, and said nothing more.

“So, I also heard that the Kai cleared you for upper level status.” Kira fixed him with a keen look.

“Yes, we had a good . . . talk,” Sherlock said.

“Talk? Last time I saw the Kai, she showed me visions that could have curled my hair.” She chuckled.

John frowned looking back and forth between them. “Did you do a vision quest? I didn’t know that was happening.”
“Relax, John, it was fine.”

“Whatever it was, it was enough to convince the Kai that you were the real deal. Congratulations. Welcome to the club, such as it is.” Kira stuck out her hand.

“Thank you.” Sherlock shook it solemnly.

“Now we can get serious. Maybe you could find us some fighter ships and some runabouts. Can you get us some long-range spacecraft?” Kira leaned forward eagerly.

“I can do my best.”

“Sherlock, really, that sounds dangerous…” John shook his head.

“War is dangerous, soldier.” Kira clapped John on the back. “Surely you’re used to it by now? Sherlock, do you have time to meet with Shakaar before you go? We need to talk some details.”

“Of course, commander.” Sherlock dipped his head.

After meeting with several high-ranking Bajorans in what looked to be a cobbled-together war room, Sherlock and John were finally escorted downstairs to the garage. A different but equally shabby groundcar with tinted windows waited to ferry them back to town.

“I am sorry about this,” John said as he secured a dark bag over Sherlock’s head.

“It’s okay, John.” Sherlock reached out blindly to squeeze John’s leg in reassurance.

Despite the bumpiness of the ride and the stifling hood, Sherlock enjoyed the chance to sit pressed against John’s side if only for a short while longer. Too soon, the car was pulling to a stop.

“I’ll contact you when I can,” John whispered. He pulled the covering carefully from Sherlock’s head.

“Alright.” Sherlock blinked, adjusting to the light.

“May the Prophets bless you.” John clutched at his arm. He looked like he wanted to do more, but the burly guards at the front of the car watching them seemed impatient to go.

“And you as well, John.” Sherlock stepped out onto the pavement noting they were parked under a transit station bridge. He made certain not to turn around and watch the car go as he made his way up the steps to the trains.

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“Sherlock!” Molly waved him over to her table at the restaurant.

Sherlock worked his way through the other diners to join her. It was a nice place with real silverware, and thick cream-colored tablecloths. It wasn’t a spot he would have chosen on his own.

“How are you? I haven’t seen you in forever!” Molly greeted him with a smile.

“Not too bad.” Sherlock took the empty seat across from her.
“Oh, you did something to your lip.” Molly frowned, tapping the same spot on her own mouth.

“Slipped on some stairs. Clumsy of me.” Sherlock shrugged, and opened the menu before him. He thought the wound had healed quite nicely. There was bit of a mark that he could get removed, but he felt it lent his face a rather rakish air. Besides, it remained a souvenir of his last night spent with John. He reached up and smoothed a finger over it without thinking.

“Poor thing. I’m sorry to hear that.”

“No matter. So, how are things with you, dear lady?” Sherlock locked up to focus on Molly. She had her hair up in a new hairstyle. It looked good on her.

Molly laughed a tinkling sound. “Lady? Well, I’ve moved up in the world, haven’t I?”

“The daughter and wife of a Glinn can hardly be said to be common. Irene told me you were knee-deep in some planning committee for a spring soiree with a flock of other officers’ wives?”

“Oh that.” Molly waved a hand carelessly. “Just something I got roped into. I prefer time spent with the college crowd to be honest. Speaking of Irene, how are you enjoying her company? She seems pleased with you.”

“Very much,” Sherlock said in spite of himself. He and Irene had gone to a popular play just last week, making sure to be seen arm in arm by the upper-class crowd there. “She’s not your average idiot.”

“See, I knew the two of you had things in common.”

The conversation stopped as a waiter appeared for the the fuss and bother of pouring out water, and taking orders.

“Sherlock, I’m glad you and Irene are friends, but, well . . . Irene has Kate to go home to. Are you looking for anyone? A sweetie? I mean I know it isn’t approved of, but . . . I worry about you.”

Sherlock shifted nervously on his seat, and reached for his water glass. “Thank you, Molly, but I’m fine. I’m not . . . looking for anyone.” He took a swallow.

“If I meet anyone that seems likely, should I get their number for you?” Molly’s eyes were wide as she leaned forward.

“Certainly not.” Sherlock snapped. “Molly, please.” Sherlock reached over to pat her hand to soften his outburst. “I appreciate the concern, but don’t worry about me. I’m fine.”

“Alright, alright. I guess we marrieds want to see everyone happily paired up. I’ll leave you be.” Molly leaned back and reached for her wine glass though a contemplative look had settled over her face all the same.

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After lunch and farewells with Molly, Sherlock headed back to work. He settled in at his desk for what was certain to be another long, dull afternoon of data pushing.

The sound of voices talking in the front room caught his attention. Someone new had arrived to the
office. Well, perhaps it was not to be such a boring day after all. Sherlock listened to a loud, booming voice that sounded familiar, and the softer tones of the clerk answering. In a heartbeat, his fingers had flown to shut down all the windows on his screen, and replace them with a nice, safe diagnostic tool.

Damn. Why was his superior in the office today? In person? Sherlock quickly tidied a stack of papers on his desk. Perhaps the man wasn’t here to see him specifically.

“Holmes, there you are.” The older man blocked the light from the hallway filling Sherlock’s door. “Well, lieutenant, it looks like we need to talk.” He moved his bulk into Sherlock’s office, sighing as he settled himself into the guest chair.

“Good morning, Glinn Tarlek. How are you?” Sherlock kept his face neutral while he cataloged all the exits to the building and how fast he could reach each one.

“Can’t complain. How about yourself?”

“Good, sir. Can I get you something? Tea?”

“No, no, I can’t stay long.” The Glinn waved him off.

Sherlock glanced toward the hall, but no goons seemed to have accompanied the officer on his visit. The sounds from the front room all pointed to normal activity. He allowed himself to relax slightly.

“To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit, sir?”

“I’ve been hearing things about you, Holmes.” The man leaned in, frowning slightly.

“Oh? Good I hope?” Sherlock felt his shoulders rising again.

Glinn Tarlek pulled a small reader pad from his pocket, thumbing it on to consult the screen. “Efficiency ratings up, margins of error down, glowing reports from key staff. You’ve managed to completely revamp the net security division in a matter of weeks. Impressive work, son.” A wide smile split his lined face.

“Ah, thank you, sir. I saw some older systems that looked like they needed updating.” Sherlock shrugged. It was true. The net security in place had been atrocious. Sherlock would have updated it simply to stop himself from going mad regardless of needing cover for his thefts for the Resistance.

“I’m not the only one who’s taken notice of your accomplishments.”

“No?”

“No, Gul Dukat himself wanted me to congratulate you on your good work.”

“Me? The Prefect is interested in me?” Sherlock blinked. Attention from the ruling head of Bajor was not exactly something Sherlock was hoping for.

“Oh, don’t sell yourself short, soldier. It’s vital what you do here. An army crawls on its belly, and survives by its security.”

“Yes, sir, of course, sir.” Sherlock licked his lips, trying to stop himself from giving off any more nervous tells.

“Indeed, in fact Dukat, himself, wanted me to invite you to an officer’s retreat weekend. There’s a spa outside of town. Here…” Tarlek punched a few buttons on his device. “I’ve sent you the particulars. I’m sure I don’t need me to tell you what an honour this is.”
“No, sir.”

“Clear your calendar for it, and bring a date. It’s a couples gathering.”

“Of course, sir, thank you.”

The man made his goodbyes, wishing Sherlock well. Sherlock smiled and nodded while wheels raced in his mind.

“Oh, and soldier.” The Glinn paused at his door.

“Yes, sir?”

“You’ll put in a good word for me, won’t you, with the Prefect?”

“Of course, sir.”

With a last nod, he was gone. Sherlock sagged against his chair when he heard the outer door whooshing closed. He felt exhausted as if he’d just run a few kilometers around the block. Prophets. He opened a comm link, and called the front desk.

“Jenna? Please take any messages I receive. I’m going out for a moment.”

“Yes, sir.”

Once he was safely ensconced in the corner of a busy shop, Sherlock took out his phone and called Irene.

“Hello, this is Professor Adler.”

“Irene, I have a proposition for you.”

“Oh, I hope it’s a naughty one.” He could hear her smile through the link.

“More like best behavior, but it brings somewhere idyllic in the country. Are you free next weekend?”

“This sounds intriguing. I could be. What’s up?”

When Sherlock explained, Irene was delighted with the offer, and readily agreed to come.

“Good, Irene, thank you.”

“I should be thanking you. Poor Kate will be so jealous. Still, needs must. I’ll have to let you go, must dash, so much to do.” Irene purred.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to keep you from your work.”

“Oh, silly man. Who does work with an invitation like this? I’ll need something to wear,” Irene purred. “Time to go shopping!”

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Sherlock glanced about the lobby as a porter followed them in with their bags. The retreat center was all stone floors, natural fibers and indirect lighting, looking nearly unbearably posh. The hired car that had ferried Sherlock and Irene from town had also been equally upscale.

“Well, a girl could get used to this.” Irene whispered, taking his arm, laughing a bit to hide her nervousness.

“Yes, it’s very . . . clean, isn’t it?” Sherlock said, glancing about.

Irene looked as if she might say something more, but the porter interrupted them to show them to the desk to check in for their rooms. The polished Cardassian woman at the desk gave them their key cards, and let them know an introductory drinks party would be in a few hours.

Sherlock and Irene were shown to adjoining rooms. Sherlock gave his accommodations a quick search after the porter dropped off his case, leaving Irene to settle in next door. A small sitting area led to a large cushy-looking bed behind a sliding partition. A door lay beyond that opened into a tiled bathroom with an in-ground tub. As far as he could see, it was snooping-device free, but he could be wrong.

Irene bustled into Sherlock’s room after unpacking her things, and declared it to be the same as hers only set up backwards.

A small replicator unit sat in the wall in the sitting area, and Irene swept over to it. “Tea, hot,” she commanded. She took the cup that materialized, and tucked herself onto the overstuffed settee with it.

“Well, it’s nice hobnobbing with the elite, isn’t it?” She took a careful sip of the steaming drink. “Even if it is just for a weekend.”

“I don’t know. It can be a bit of a gilded cage,” Sherlock said, moving to the replicator. “Deka Tea, sweet,” he ordered.

“Oh, pooh. Don’t be a spoilsport.” Irene stretched her legs out over the sofa, making herself more comfortable.

Sherlock took his cup, and settled into a facing armchair. “No status comes without responsibilities, and of course the judgment of others.” He flicked his eyes meaningfully around the room.

“Oh.” Irene sat up straighter. “And are others concerned with us, right now?”

“Hard to tell.” Sherlock shrugged. “But there are always those around, paying attention. Best to keep that in mind at all times.”

“Yes, I’m sure you’re right.” Irene nodded. Message received. Just because Sherlock hadn’t detected any spycams on his first walk through, didn’t mean there wasn’t something in the room somewhere.

“Ah, well.” Irene sighed. “At least the replicator works well here.”

%%%

“Hello, lieutenant. Holmes is it?” Gul Dukat smiled Sherlock’s way.
“Yes, sir.” Sherlock shook the hand of the most powerful man in the room, the reigning Prefect of Bajor.

“I’ve heard good things about you, son. Quite the promising young man, aren’t you?”

“Yes, sir, erm, thank you, sir.”

“Holmes, Holmes. I know I’ve heard that name before. You’ve a relative in the Obsidian Order, don’t you?” Dukat’s sharp gaze bore down on him as he squeezed Sherlock’s hand.

“Yes, sir, that’s true. My older brother.” Sherlock tried not to wince at the pressure on his fingers nor the invoking of Mycroft’s name. “Prefect, may I introduce Professor Irene Adler?” Sherlock nodded her way.

“Well, I’m always happy to be introduced to a beautiful woman.” Dukat’s smile deepened as he faced her.

“How do you do, sir?” Irene said as the two exchanged air kisses by their pressed cheeks.

“Much better at having made your acquaintance, dear lady.” The man’s eyes dropped to sweep over the length of Irene.

“Thank you, sir. I do appreciate the invitation to the weekend.” Irene took the opportunity to thread her arm through Sherlock’s, pulling him close beside her as she smiled tightly. “Sherlock and I both appreciate it.”

“Of course. We need some younger people here to liven up the weekend.” He winked broadly before moving on to greet others.

“Well, he’s one to watch out for, isn’t he?” Irene took a drink from a passing tray.

“Yes, I’d say that’s a fair assessment,” Sherlock agreed watching the prefect.

Dukat wasn’t a big man, but he had a certain presence about him. Sherlock could see the charm nearly oozing off him as he worked his way around the room. He could also see that the pretty, young Cardassian woman Dukat eventually returned to was not his wife. He wrapped an arm absently about her waist as he spoke to a knot of men hanging on his every word.

Irene looked up as a new couple entered the room, and broke out in a genuine smile.

“Is that? Oh, it can’t be . . . it is! It’s Molly and that officer she married. Well, thank all that is good, I’ll actually have someone to talk to here.”

Sherlock might have been offended if he hadn’t also felt a shot of relief at seeing a familiar face in the crowd of uniforms. Molly made a beeline for them as her husband peeled off to speak to someone else.

“Sherlock, Irene!” Molly brought in the smell of fresh air with her. “I didn’t know you two were coming this weekend.”

“I should have guessed you’d be here.” Sherlock smiled.

“Hello, lovely girl.” Irene patted her arm.

“I’m so glad to have someone I actually know here!” Molly said. “It’s meant to be relaxing, but these things can be so tedious. You’ve no idea.”
Sherlock glanced across the room to find Gul Dukat’s gaze lingering on him. Sherlock nodded, and Dukat smiled, nodding in reply before turning back to his conversation.

“Oh, I think I’ve an idea.” Sherlock sighed.

%%% 

With both Irene and Molly as buffers, Sherlock found that he could keep his need for small talk down to a minimum. A few judicious hellos and handshakes seemed to grease the social wheels sufficiently before he could lapse into silence between the women.

A joint dinner in a large private room was made bearable by the charming tales Irene and Molly told of their students at the Polytechnic college. Sadly, a Gul’s wife sat next to Molly was also lured into the conversation, and eventually butted in.

“Yes, our youth can be such an inspiration. Not like the Bajoran scum you run in to.” The woman paused to shudder delicately. “I need to have my maid go ahead to clear the sidewalks when I go shopping now. You see the little urchins out begging on the pavement all the time. It’s just awful.”

Molly bristled as she rounded on the woman. “Well, it’s not their fault if they’ve lost their parents. What else are they meant to do? There’s no state schools for them anymore even.”

The woman’s eyes went round with shock.

“It’s true,” Sherlock jumped in, glancing at the Bajoran wait staff gliding around them. “There aren’t nearly enough orphanages around to deal with the numbers of abandoned children. With Bajoran families being broken up and shipped to work camps, there aren’t even nearby relatives to take them in.”

“Well, something should be done about it. It’s a disgrace.” The Gul’s wife pursed her lips.

“I agree.” Sherlock nodded. “Something should be done. Aren’t the officers’ wives holding charity balls every other week?”

“Well, yes . . .”

“I think a ball to raise fund for some new Bajoran orphanages would be a smashing idea.” Sherlock dropped his voice as he leaned in to drape his long fingers over the woman’s hand on the table. “It’s so good of you to address the problem. You’ll be quite the hero when you make the streets safe again.”

The woman flushed with pleasure. “Yes, you’re quite right. It IS a good idea. Ooh, I have to tell Camilla and Murelle.”

“Yes, of course,” Sherlock murmured as the woman moved to speak to some jewel-bedecked women sitting farther down.

“Sherlock, you minx.” Irene swatted at his leg.

“That was brilliant.” Molly beamed. “You made her think it was her idea. The old biddy.” Her eyes flashed down the table.

“With any luck, she’ll actually follow through, and some real good will come of it.” Sherlock
reached for his glass.

“I hope so too. I hate seeing the little ones begging. I always give them anything in my pockets.” Molly bit at her lip.

“Hear, hear.” Irene raised her wine glass in toast. “To better times.”

“Better times,” Sherlock echoed taking a swallow of his drink.

When the interminable dinner finally drew to a close, Dukat made a point to move about, wishing a good night to all. Sherlock tried to make a break for it, but the Gul intercepted them before they cleared the door.

“Oh, my delightful young people.” Dukat clapped a hand to Sherlock’s back. “I hope you’ll join us in the saunas tomorrow morning? It’s the best thing about these places, a chance to get the chill of Bajor out of your bones.”

“Yes, sir.” Sherlock winced slightly. “Wouldn’t miss it.”

“Sadly, it’s not co-ed.” He looked to Irene. “I’m sure you’ll miss your lovely companion as she goes to the ladies’ area.” Dukat lifted Irene’s hand, smoothly dropping a kiss to the back of it. “Such a beauty.”

“You’re too kind,” Irene demurred.

“Though I’m certain you can make your absence up to her over the weekend.” He winked at Sherlock as he kept Irene’s hand clasped in his own. “This is an excellent place to kick back . . . unwind together.”

“Yes, sir, of course.” Sherlock nodded.

“Well, I won’t keep you two lovebirds.” Dukat finally released them as he moved on to another couple. Sherlock lost no time in spiriting them away down the corridor before anyone else had a notion to chat with them.

“Odious man.” Irene sniffed as they made their way to their rooms past a line of potted grasses.

“Powerful man,” Sherlock countered.

“Yes, that too,” Irene said. “I feel like I need a wash after that. Fortunately I’ve signed us up for a couples’ massage and a soak in the hot tub. Come on, we just have time to get changed.”

“Ugh.” Sherlock pulled a face. “Must we?”

“YES. Don't be a spoilsport. I think you’ll like this part.”

“All right, fine. I do need to be a good escort after all.”

Sherlock had to admit that Irene had been right. The massage was fantastic. Sherlock sighed as strong hands pushed away the nearly-permanent tension from his shoulders. Irene, on the table
beside him made an appreciative hum as the woman kneaded her way determinedly to her derriere. When the masseuses finished, they left them to relax a few minutes more, drowsing in the candlelight as they tidied up.

“Darling.” Irene turned her head languidly toward Sherlock. “I feel exquisite. I’m so glad you agreed to this.” She reached out across the small divide between them to trail a finger down Sherlock’s cheek.

“Of course.” Sherlock smiled, enjoying playing the game. It didn’t mean anything. He propped himself up on one elbow, to reach up and catch her hand, bringing it to his lips to press a kiss to her fingertips. “Anything for you, sweetheart.”

A quick intake of breath over his shoulder caught Sherlock’s attention. He’d noticed a servant, a Bajoran entering the room earlier carrying supplies, but he’d dismissed the man as unimportant. He glanced over at the noise, and felt his stomach drop out. The man stood across the room clutching a stack of towels to his chest looking gobsmacked was . . . John.

Sherlock went rigid.

“Darling, what is it?” Irene said, concerned.

Sherlock’s mouth opened and closed wordlessly several times like a gormless fish.

“What? What is it?” Irene pushed up to look over her shoulder where Sherlock stared, but John had dropped his towels and already fled.

“Nothing, I thought I saw someone I knew. I was mistaken.” Sherlock shook his head slightly trying to clear his racing thoughts. JOHN? Why here? Now?

“Someone you owed money to? You look a fright, love.” Irene frowned.

“No, just an old friend from the past. It wasn’t him.” Sherlock tried for a reassuring smile. “I think it must be a drop in blood sugar.” He’d spoken to Irene about John in the broadest of terms before, but he’d never shared the secret that his lover was Bajoran. It wasn’t something most Cardassians accepted.

“Well, you hardly touched your dinner. Perhaps a drink in the hot tub next? Something with a lot of fruit,” Irene said thoughtfully. “You can get your nutrition and a buzz at the same time.”

“Yes, that sounds just the ticket.” Sherlock sat up, pulling the sheet around him. “If you’ll pardon me, I need to use the loo. I’ll meet you in a few minutes.”

“Of course. Are you sure you’re alright?”

“Fine, fine.” Sherlock waved her off. “I’ll be right back.”

Sherlock tucked the sheet more securely around himself as he trailed into the men’s changing area, searching for signs of John. It was relatively deserted this late in the evening. He nodded to the only other occupant, an older Cardassian man, as he passed Sherlock on his way out.

Sherlock stalked past the lockers and benches to a row of showers and toilets until he found a door marked “staff only.” He lost no time palming it open to explore the corridor behind. He surprised a young Bajoran woman pushing a cart of linens.

“Oh, are you lost, sir?”
“Actually I’m looking for someone.” Sherlock let his voice go higher, trying to look as befuddled as possible. “Nice Bajoran chap. We were talking earlier about a special tea his mother used to make. He was going to write the recipe down for me. Perhaps you’ve seen him, sandy-haired, about this tall. I think his name might be John?”

Relief flashed over the young woman’s face. “Certainly, sir. Why don’t you go back to the men’s lounge. I’ll find him for you. Guests aren’t meant to be back here.”

“Of course. Thank you so much . . .” His eyes dropped to her name tag “Seera.”

Sherlock returned to the locker room to a corner set with padded seats and low tables and dropped into a chair to wait. He hadn’t seen John in weeks, and finding him here at this ridiculous retreat center was beyond unsettling. He tapped a foot impatiently.

After a near eternity, the staff door slid open, and wonder of wonders, John stepped in. He wore the dark blue uniform of the center, and newly acquired creases lined his face, but it was John, his John, all the same. Sherlock popped upright immediately.

“John.” He could think of nothing more eloquent to say when actually faced with his dear one.

“Not here,” John said glancing about. “Come on.” He led Sherlock to a small door set unobtrusively into the wall. He produced a card that he waved over a panel and the door slid opened on what like a storage space. John pulled Sherlock in with him, palming the door shut behind them.

“For the love of the Prophets, what are you doing here, Sherlock?” John rounded angrily on him.

“I could ask the same of you.” Sherlock drew himself up, wrapping the sheet, if not his dignity, a bit tighter. “What are you doing working at a spa? I thought you were off on Resistance work.”

“I am, and it’s not safe here. You need to go.”

“What?”

“There’s an attack planned on this center, this weekend. You need to get away as soon as possible.”

“Wait, what . . . your date? That woman in the massage room . . .”

“Yes.” Sherlock ducked his head. “I’m sorry. I know I didn’t tell you about Irene before. . .”

“Damn right you didn’t tell me about Irene before. So you’re dating now?” John growled. He advanced on Sherlock crowding him against the door, completely forgetting about the Resistance for the moment.

“Well, we aren’t really dating.” Sherlock tried to shrug without dislodging the sheet. “It’s all a sham. Irene has a girlfriend and didn’t want it known, and I . . .” Sherlock trailed off as John reached up to
place a hand on the door behind him, boxing him in.

“You’re mine,” John said, advancing relentlessly closer. Sherlock nearly squeaked as John pressed in, rocking his hips against Sherlock’s quickly-filling erection. “You know that right? Mine.” John reached up to grab a handful of Sherlock’s hair, hauling him down to meet his lips.

“Mmm, yours,” Sherlock agreed against John’s mouth, letting his lover sweep him away in a tide of drugging kisses.

“Prophets, what are you wearing?” John murmured, his hands quickly finding their way under Sherlock’s draping sheet.

“Nothing,” Sherlock whispered as the fabric fell away to pool around his feet.

“Fuck, come here.” John’s hands reached for him, smoothing down Sherlock’s sides to grasp handfuls of his arse cheeks, dragging him even closer. “Mmm, want you, missed you,” John muttered, smearing kisses over Sherlock’s jaw and throat.

“Yes, oh, yes,” Sherlock breathed, tipping his head back to let John’s mouth go where it would as John rocked against him.

Eventually, Sherlock worked a hand between them to deal with the frustrating barrier of John’s clothes, scrabbling at it to free his lover’s insistent erection. John groaned and moved back in, rutting shamelessly against Sherlock thigh as his hands and mouth mapped his body in liquid strokes. Sherlock clung to John’s shoulders for dear life as the tremors coursed over him. Nothing else seemed to exist but the two of them here, now, together.

Prophets, it had been too long.

Sherlock shivered and bit his lip as John nipped at a particularly sensitive place along a neck ridge. He couldn’t help the needy sound of loss when John pulled back from their tiny universe of two to fumble at a nearby shelf. When he returned to slick up Sherlock’s cock with a palm full of massage oil, he forgave the brief absence.

“There, you go, beautiful man. There you are.” John’s voice dipped into pure gravel as he growled against Sherlock’s ear, his hand playing magic on his body below.

“Joooohn.” Sherlock’s voice went reedy, near breathless as John stroked him, sending fire through his veins. It was exquisite, building over him in relentless pulses. He gripped at John, struggling to stay upright as John pulled steady strokes over him.

“Yes, yes, love.” He could hear John crooning as his consciousness spun out like a thin thread drowning in the warmth of touch, and good, and yes.

“Ah!” Bliss crested behind Sherlock’s eyelids as he climaxed, the waves of pleasure obliterating all else. He sucked in a good lungful of air as he collapsed, only the weight of John pinning him to the wall keeping him upright.

“Love, oh, love.” John stroked his hair as he held him.

The feeling of John’s steely erection, still hot and ramrod stiff against his hip eventually roused him from his stupor.

“You . . .” Sherlock trailed off, letting his fingers snake under John’s half-open uniform to smooth down his ribs, petting over his smooth skin.
“Me?” John smiled softly, his eyes heavy lidded, looking near drunk.

“You,” Sherlock continued, trailing fingers along John’s hip until they bumped into his shaft standing hard against his belly “. . . are magnificent.” He gathered him up, the weight of John’s erection solid in his hand, and slid a stroke experimentally along it. John whimpered quietly as his eyes fluttered closed.

Outside the door, Sherlock could hear the murmur of voices. Someone else had entered the changing room. He could hear them moving about, banging cabinet doors.

“You are amazing, beautiful, fantastic,” Sherlock whispered, letting his grip slide John’s foreskin down the length of him. He could use more slick, but he wasn’t willing to leave John to go find it.

“Here.” Sherlock shifted them until John was the one pushed against the wall.

“Wha . . ?” John roused at the loss of contact as Sherlock sank down, the discarded sheet on the floor cushioning his knees. All questions were forgotten as Sherlock opened his mouth and swallowed down the leaking tip of John’s cock.

Sherlock relaxed his jaw to take in as much of John’s length as he could, wrapping his hand around the base that he couldn’t reach.

“Mmm,” John bit his lip, trying to stay quiet.

Sherlock sighed around him, welcoming the heft of John’s shaft on his tongue, the musky smell of him filling his senses. He let himself drift as he pleasured John, falling into the rhythm of his sliding mouth. John’s hand reached out for purchase sinking into his hair as he quivered, nearly shaking under Sherlock’s attentions. Sherlock quickened his pace, twisting his hand up to meet each bob of his mouth.

“Aaaaaah.” John choked off a sound in warning, throwing his head back as he spilled his release. Sherlock winced at the first rush of bitter fluid, but he rode out the pulses, keeping John safely in his mouth until he had finished. Only when his he had softened completely did Sherlock release him, pulling up a fold of the sheet to spitting discreetly into a corner of the fabric.

“Come here, you . . . come,” John panted as he plucked at Sherlock with nerveless fingers trying to draw him to his feet. Sherlock complied, rising to join him.

“I think I already did, John,” Sherlock rumbled, smiling.

John pulled Sherlock against him, cocooning Sherlock tenderly in his arms. “Prophets, Sherlock, I missed you.” John pulled him into a deep kiss.

“I missed you more.” Sherlock sighed as they came up for air. He couldn’t help the smile taking over his face. He felt punch-drunk, high on John in his arms. “You’ve been so busy lately with the Resistance.”

“The Resistance, fuck, Sherlock, you make me forget everything.” John blew out a breath. “You need to get out of here. This place is going up at dawn.”

“What?” Sherlock blinked rapidly.

“There are bombs planted simply everywhere,” John growled. “You need to leave as soon as possible.”
“Prophets.” Sherlock blew out a breath. “I can’t, John. I can’t just leave in the middle of the night before an attack happens. I might as well have ‘Resistance sympathizer’ tattooed on my face.”

“Damn, you’re right.”

“I need more time. I can get out by tomorrow afternoon without it looking suspicious.”

“Right, fine. I can delay things for a day.” John licked his lips nervously. “But I mean it, you have to get out of here. This place is going sky-high when everything is set off.”

“My friends . . .”

“Sherlock, you can’t tell anyone.”

“I know, I won’t. I’ll think of some way to get them out. I won’t tell them why.”

“Keep it small. We can’t have a mass exodus.”

“John, the civilians . . .”

“Fuck, Sherlock, I know.” John pulled away from him, to move, agitated. He shoved a hand back into his hair. Sherlock missed the warmth of him instantly. “Don’t think I don’t. I hate this, but we have to hit where we can, and we have to hit hard.”

“It’s war.” Sherlock said quietly. “I understand. Many top officers are gathered here this weekend.” He suddenly felt more naked than he had all night, standing unclothed, watching John pace.

“You’re shivering.” John stopped in his tracks.

“It’s colder in here.” Sherlock shrugged a shoulder. Though the center was kept at a temperature good for its Cardassian guests, the building didn’t seem to waste energy heating supply rooms.

“Here, we need to get you out of the cupboard. Put this back on at least.” John bent down to scoop up the sheet, opening it to drape around Sherlock’s shoulders.

Sherlock pulled the fabric around himself thinking he preferred John against his body to the soft, cool cloth.

“Damn, I’ve got to go, warn the others we need to wait on the mission,” John hissed.

“So who else is working on this?” Sherlock asked, unable to stop his curiosity. “Who else is a spy?”

“Oh, Sherlock, everyone’s a spy.” John sighed. “It’s best I don’t tell you any more than you need to know.”

“Of course.” Sherlock felt his lips twist. “Don’t ask, don’t tell.”

“It’s better. If you get caught, you don’t know anything.”

“What if you get caught?” Sherlock worried the edge of his lip. The thought of John being dragged off in manacles, or worse yet, blasted on sight sent a sliver of cold through his heart.

“Well, that’s the trick. Don’t get caught.” John tried to smile, though it failed to reach his eyes.

“When will I see you again?”
“I’ll text you.”

“When will you get out?”

“Sherlock, I can’t tell you anything.”

“Alright, alright. Kiss me before you go at least.”

“Prophets, yes, come here.” John dragged Sherlock into his arms again. Sherlock let the sheet slide down as he wound his arms around John, hanging on as they all but devoured each other, kissing their goodbye, deeply, frantically.

“I have to go.” John pulled away reluctantly. “I have to get the word out.”

“Yes.” Sherlock stared at John’s mouth, missing its loss already.

“If something goes wrong, you’re getting hell out immediately, no questions asked.”

“Alright.”

“Keep your phone on.”

“I will.”

It was an agony watching John tuck his clothes back together, and leave once the locker room was silent. He sent Sherlock a melting look before he slipped out of the closet, and away. Sherlock emerged a few minutes later feeling quite undone as if half of him had already left with John. He used the toilet, and washed his hands before returning to where Irene waited in the hot tub.

“Well, there you are.” Irene sat up from her place lounging against the side of the small pool. “I thought you’d fallen in!”

“To be honest, Irene. I’m not feeling well.” Sherlock knelt beside the edge of the water.

“What’s wrong? We could still get you that drink.”

“No, it’s not low blood sugar. I think I’m coming down with something. I was thinking of leaving a bit early, going home tomorrow. I hope you don’t mind.”

“Not if you’re ill, pet.” Irene frowned slightly. “Do you fancy the hot tub now? The warm water might do you some good.”

“No, thank you. Really I have a head ache. Think I’ll just head to bed.” Sherlock managed a small cough, trying his best to look infirmed.

“You do look a bit off. You might feel better in morning, but if you do still want to go home early, it’s fine. I know Kate will be happy to see me.”

“Thanks, Irene, you’re a brick.” Sherlock mustered up a wan smile.

After slipping on the long robes the center provided, Sherlock walked Irene back to her room. He returned to his own try to get some sleep, but rest remained elusive. He couldn’t get the idea that John was somewhere nearby, accessible, out of his mind. He wanted desperately to find him again, but it was just too dangerous. If he blew either of their covers, it would be disastrous. Sherlock worried over the bombs, and who he might warn, going round and round in his head about it all.
Finally, after several hours of tossing and turning on expensive sheets, and punching his too-soft pillow into shape, he managed a doze, waking with a start at dawn. He reunited with Irene, looking fresh and well-turned out in another new dress, and the two of them made their way to breakfast with the others. Prefect Dukat was in fine form circulating through the gathering, chatting with everyone.

Sherlock grabbed a plate and sidled up to Molly as she helped herself to a Regova egg on the buffet line.

“Molly, I can’t tell you why, but you’re going to feel ill after breakfast and let your husband know you both need to go home.”

“What?” Molly looked at the egg on her plate with trepidation. “Is there something wrong with the food?”

“No, it’s not the food. Look, Molly, as your friend, do you trust me?”

“Yes, of course, Sherlock.” Her eyes widened.

“I heard something. I can’t tell you specifics.” Sherlock reached over to spoon up some fried vegetables onto his plate to look busy. “You can’t breathe a word of this to anyone not even your husband, but you need to get out of here. As soon as possible, head back to town.”

“Alright.”

“I’ll explain later, okay? Just act natural. As best as you can.”

“Okay, sick but natural.” Molly nodded tightly.

Sherlock took a plate filled with he hardly knew what, and found a place next to Irene at the tables.

“Someone’s hungry this morning.” Irene smiled at his many selections.

“No, I’m really not hungry at all. I got it for you.” Sherlock pushed the food her way.

“Darling, you’re too sweet.”

Sherlock hoped to leave with Irene as soon as they reasonably could, but of course Dukat found them before they managed to slip off.

“Well, young Sherlock. I’m looking forward to talking with you in the hot room. I find people are always such better conversationalists when they’re relaxed.”

“Yes, sir. Of course.” Sherlock winced, watching his window of escape time narrowing.

He allowed himself to be swept along with the others to the saunas. When Irene parted ways to go off with the women, Sherlock squeezed her arm. “We’ll meet back by noon, alright? Be ready to go then.”

“Alright, dear. I do hope you’ll be feeling better soon. Perhaps the hot room will help.”

“Yes, I hope so too. Noon, don’t forget.”

The officers stripped down in the changing room, talking and laughing as they wrapping towels around their waists. Sherlock was pleased to note that Molly’s husband wasn’t among them. Hoping that the couple were already making their way back home, Sherlock wrapped a towel around himself, and followed the queue into the hot room.
The blazing temperature of the sauna roared over him. It was a dim, intimate room filled with platforms around a central fire pit of red-hot stones. The heat radiating outward was pleasant, but Sherlock wanted to do anything but let down his guard. As the other men found places to stretch out to warm themselves, Sherlock looked for a perch near the door.

“Ah, Sherlock, come, join us!” Dukat called out.

Sherlock sighed as he moved to join several high-ranking officers around the Prefect.

“Our up and coming young officer, Lt. Holmes,” Dukat introduced him as Sherlock found a spot to settle.

“You’re too kind, sir.”

“Nonsense, the Cardassian empire needs more like you.” Dukat beamed.

Sherlock was grateful when his attentions moved elsewhere, as the men reclined, chatting of mundane things. He averted his eyes as several spread out their towels to lie nude, and let his attention drift watching the patterns of the coals of the firepit. He perked back up when talk turned to the Bajorans though.

“Savages, the lot of them,” a Glinn Sherlock didn’t know huffed.

“We’ll need to step up our discipline,” another officer said. “The filthy animals are getting too bold. We’ve lost two armories in the area just last month. We need to squash this unrest now.”

“What do you suggest?” Dukat leaned in.

“Executions. Ten of the Bajoran scum to every Cardassian lost should do it.”


“Me, sir? I’m in network security. What do I know?”

“Of course, son, but you’re a trained officer. Surely you have ideas.”

“Well, it seems to me, many of the Bajorans are in work camps.” Sherlock chose his words carefully. “Even those in the cities do much of the necessary labor. If they are executed, we have less of a labor force available.”

“Ah, I told you he was a bright one,” Dukat said with a smile. “Fine we can execute one Bajoran for each Cardassian killed. We’ll draw from those on the streets who don’t have work papers, and we’ll skim the labor camps for those who aren’t producing well. It will weed out the weak ones, and still strike fear in the heart of the enemy, this Resistance nonsense. I like it.”

Sherlock bit his tongue, suppressing the shiver that wanted to run through him. A few minutes later, he excused himself, intimating he needed the toilet. He redressed as fast as he could, and returned to his room to throw the few things he had unpacked into his bag. When Irene finally returned, Sherlock was keeping vigil from his cracked door. He pounced on her, urging her to get ready to go as soon as possible.

“Yes, yes, alright, just give me a moment, Sherlock,” Irene said, sweeping inside her room.

Sherlock was nearly biting his nails when Irene finally emerged with her suitcases in tow. At the front desk, Sherlock requested a car, and asked after Molly and her husband, Dov Vorlem. Relief
flooded over him when he heard they had already checked out. Sherlock joined Irene on one of the
couches in the lobby to wait, nearly bouncing out of his skin with impatience.

“Sherlock, love, calm down,” Irene said, touching his arm. “We’ll be going soon. I’ve never seen
you like this.”

“Well, you know how it is when you’re ill. You just want your own bed. I . . .” Sherlock’s heart
sank when a familiar voice hailed them.

“Lt. Holmes, Professor Adler, surely you aren’t leaving us already?” Gul Dukat crossed the lobby to
join them looking radiant from his time in the heat.

Irene rose to greet him prettily. “Prefect, I am sorry. We’d gladly stay all weekend, but I wasn’t
feeling well, and Sherlock offered to escort me home. Woman troubles, you know.” She batted her
eyelashes.

“Of course, my dear.” Dukat clucked his tongue. “Sadly our little gathering seems to be dropping
like flies. Several have already checked out this morning I hear.” He smiled kindly at the two of
them. “I think I may join the trend, and get back into town. Always so much to do waiting on my
desk. You don’t mind sharing your car do you?”

“No sir, of course not,” Sherlock croaked.

“Good, I won’t be but a moment. Just hold the car until I return.”

“Yes, sir.” Sherlock nodded weakly as Dukat strode away.

“Shit.” Sherlock dropped his forehead into his palm. “All the way back into town with the Prefect.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll distract him,” Irene said, tucking at her hair. “He won’t even look at you. Just try
not to vomit on his feet. You look terrible.”

“I feel terrible. I’ll owe you one, Irene.”

“Oh sweetie, I owe you so much. Don’t worry. We’ll call it even.” Irene smiled, and tugged the
neckline of her dress down an extra centimeter.
Chapter Summary

Plans pull tighter as Sherlock tries to navigate the forces buffeting him along.

Chapter Notes

So, I should probably leave a note of condolence to anyone who's been following along with this fic as I write it. I think it was 3 months between the last chapter and this one. Sadly S4 happened, and it really kicked my butt. It's taken me a little while to have the energy to come back to this story. I love these space boys too much to leave them hanging though, and I am back on the job now, wrapping up their tale of love, loss, and redemption. Hopefully updates will happen much more regularly. ^._~

%%%" Sherlock collapsed across his sofa, throwing an arm over his face. The ride back in to town had been exhausting to the nth degree. Irene had been fantastic keeping the Prefect occupied with amusing tales, and entertaining flashes of cleavage. He definitely owed her. Sherlock thought briefly of sending some wine to her flat in thanks, and decided he wasn’t up for it at the moment. He made a mental note to see to it first thing tomorrow.

After they’d dropped Dukat off, smiling and patting their shoulders before he climbed out, the driver had swung by Irene’s flat.

“I’d invite you up, love, but I expect Kate and I will be busy . . . cleaning. Since I haven’t been home all weekend.” Irene’s gaze flickered to the driver as he exited to get the bags out of the back.

“No, it’s fine, I understand. Thank you . . . for everything.”

“No, it’s fine, I understand. Thank you . . . for everything.”

“Of course. What are friends for?” Irene kissed his cheek, and in a rush of cold air, she was gone.

Sherlock eventually roused himself for a trip to the bathroom, and something from the kitchen. He turned on the wall vid, and ordered the computer to relay any messages. Molly’s round face flickered onto the screen telling him that she and her husband had returned home safely, and urging him to call her back. Sherlock sighed in relief. The next message was a terse voice-only recording from Mycroft. He was planning a trip into town next week and hoped to meet Sherlock for dinner. Sherlock skipped ahead.

The next two messages were ads for a dating service and a home remodeling company respectively. Sherlock ordered the computer to erase all messages before switching to the broadcast feed. It was far too early to hear anything about the retreat center, but he couldn’t stop himself from cycling through the channels, looking for news reports all the same. He eventually chose a show on farm life...
to pass the time, his eyelids growing heavy as the narrator droned on about likely cattle diseases.

Sherlock blinked awake, disoriented. His eyes found the chrono display on the wall confirming he’d managed to sleep straight through to the next morning. It was only two hours until he needed to report to work. The vid screen had turned itself off sometime in the night, and he ordered it back on as he pushed himself upright from the sofa. The first news channel was filled with images of the carnage. Staff members from the retreat covered in blood and ashes relayed their panicked stories of escape from the center, as firefighters worked in the background to battle the flames. Photos of missing officers though to be at the center appeared over the screen.

Sherlock felt a shudder run over him. He grabbed his phone from a side table, and flicked the messages to life, hunting through for any word that might be from John. How many of the people he had spoken to over the weekend were dead now? The man who had done wonders massaging his back? An officer’s wife who had been surprisingly knowledgeable about the local bird population? And John? Prophets, he had to believe that John had gotten out alright. He’d go mad otherwise. Molly had left a panicked message, and he texted her back a quick reply. Irene had left a note too, and he cycled past it. Finding nothing else important on his phone, Sherlock cast it to the sofa cushions with a curse. Dragging his hands through his already rumpled hair he ordered the screen off, and stumbled to the bathroom for a bracing shower.

When Sherlock arrived at work, the place was abuzz with talk of the latest terrorist attack. Sherlock couldn’t bear to hear another word about it, and stalked off quickly to the quiet of his office. He emerged for tea, angry to see that several people had shifted their work screens to broadcast channels. Sherlock exploded. He tongue lashed the entire office, promising the next person to shirk their duties with watching newsfeeds would receive a double shift, back to back. People thankfully settled down to business after that.

Sherlock couldn’t thumb his phone on fast enough when an arriving message beeped in the afternoon. An anonymous text, sender blocked, appeared on the screen.

*Back safe. No worries. Love you.*

Sherlock sucked in a shuddering breath. He had an overwhelming urge to cry from relief, but quickly blinked his eyes clear as a knock sounded at his door.

“Come.”

The portal slid open to reveal the clerk hovering nervously outside. “Sir, you’ve an urgent message coming through from high command?”

“Yes, alright, send it through,” Sherlock snapped, waving the young woman off.

Sherlock’s spine straightened as the face of Gul Dukat appeared on his console.

“Lieutenant Holmes, it seems I need to have words with you.”

Sherlock’s veins turned icy. “Good afternoon, Gul Dukat.” He forced his face to calmness as the man cleared his throat, shifting to lean closer to the screen. Sherlock strained to listen for any activity in the corridor beyond his room. Were guards already gathering to come for him?

Miraculously, Dukat broke into a huge grin. “I have to say, I believe I owe you a debt, soldier. If you hadn’t inspired me to come back early, I dare say I’d be another statistic on the news today.”

“Yes . . . sir,” Sherlock faltered. “I saw the reports. Horrible business. It was really due to my friend, Miss Adler, she was ill . . .”
“Ah yes, the lovely Irene,” the prefect cut in. “I hope she’s improved. I so enjoyed talking with her over the weekend, delightful woman. I called to express my gratitude, but I also wanted to invite you to a gathering I’m having at my estate next week. You’ll come and bring the lovely Miss Adler with you?”

It was hardly a request. “Yes, sir, of course. I’ll ask her.” Sherlock nodded.

“Good, good, you do that. I’ll have my secretary forward you the details. I look forward to seeing you both.”

“Yes, thank you, sir.” Sherlock kept his tone light, even managing a faint smile. When the call ended, he dropped his forehead into his palm with a groan. Damn. Blazing buggering hell.

Sherlock remembered his mental note to gift Irene with some wine and contacted a local shop, making the arrangements to have several of its best off-world vintages sent to Irene’s flat. When he received the information on Dukat’s party, he forwarded it to Irene along with a personal note begging her to attend.

That taken care of, Sherlock turned his attention to his data stream work until mercifully it was time to clock out. He swept out of the office, finding a bustling café to grab a table, ordering a tea and buns as he lost no time in texting the contact number he had for John.

*Are you hurt? What can you tell me? When can we meet?*

He was beyond relieved when an answer appeared as he fiddled with his empty cup.

*I’m fine, don’t worry.*

Sherlock fumbled the phone a moment in his haste before tapping out a reply.

*I need to see you. Please.*

It was some minutes before an answer lit up his screen. *We can talk at Gizelle’s on Fifth-day next week. 9 pm. Are you free?*

*Of course. Who is Gizelle?*

*It’s a bar. Dress civvie.*

*Got it. See you then.* Sherlock would have typed more but John’s reply cut things off.

*Have to go. Love you.*

*Love you too. Stay safe, please.*

When an address and a password appeared on the screen, Sherlock memorized them, and deleted the thread.

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Sherlock ghosted through his days. Restless nights had him downing cup after cup of tea to make it through the work week. Irene called him, thanking him for the wine, and agreed to the party at Gul
Dukat’s with only a minimum of teasing. Mycroft left several more messages urging Sherlock to contact him, and he deleted them all unwatched after the first.

When the day for Dukat’s party arrived, Sherlock hired a car, and went to pick up Irene. The driver waited in front of the building, as Sherlock took the lift up to Irene’s flat. A short Cardassian woman with her hair tinted red on the ends answered the door.

“Kate, how are you?”

“Good, Sherlock, come in. Irene’s still in the bathroom getting ready.” Kate tipped her head to indicate the back of the flat. “She’ll be out in a minute. Why don’t you sit down and wait?”

“Alright.” Sherlock entered the tidy living room, choosing one of the overstuffed armchairs to sink into.

Kate sat on the nearby white sofa covered in small pillows. She lifted one into her lap and hugged it to her.

“Would you like something to drink?”

“No, thank you. I’m fine.”

“We really appreciated the wine you sent. It was lovely. I meant to send a note.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed it.” Sherlock glanced nervously down the hall. He hoped that Irene would appear soon, and put an end to this regrettable small talk.

“So, can we be reasonably assured that the party tonight won’t be targeted by a terrorist attack?” Kate said breezily. The comment seemed to be meant to be a joke, but the look on her face made it fall somewhat flat.

“I’m so sorry, I had no idea when I invited Irene to the retreat center . . .”

“No, I know,” Kate continued on. “You can’t actually predict where troubles are going to happen.” She twisted the plump cushion between her hands. “I just worry.”

“I think the private residence of Gul Dukat will have sufficient security that we won’t have to fear for anyone’s safety tonight.” Sherlock put on his most reassuring smile.

“I’m sure you’re right,” Kate said. “Still . . .”

“Oh, love, don’t fret.” Irene appeared in the doorway looking utterly stunning in an off-the-shoulder gown. “One doesn’t refuse an invitation to dine with the Prefect of Bajor. We’ll be right as rain tonight.” She clicked over the wood floor, bending down to kiss Kate on the forehead.

Kate turned into the touch like a flower following the sun. They mumbled something together, making Sherlock feel as though he were intruding being in the room. He glanced at the polished floor until they’d finished. Kate looked somewhat mollified when Irene straightened.

“Don’t wait up, alright? We’ll be home late.” Irene glided across the room to fetch a wrap and bag from a cupboard. “Ready?” She turned to face Sherlock with a bright grin.

“Yes.” Sherlock pushed out of the puffy chair to standing. “Kate, thank you for lending me Irene for the evening.”

“Oh, right, of course. It helps us all, doesn’t it?” Kate shrugged. She watched somewhat forlornly
from the door as they moved into the lift.

Irene blew her a kiss before the doors closed, sealing them off.

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Their car passed multiple checkpoints before being allowed into the compound of the Prefect’s private residence. Irene proved herself a worthy companion along the way, discussing some recent studies done on climate change and seasonal mood disorder. Sherlock was surprised that they’d arrived at their final destination already.

The driver let them off at the front steps where security officers scanned them before a servant escorted them indoors. The building was two stories, covered in a warm-colored stucco in the Bajoran style outside, but once they’d entered, the heavy furniture, potted plants, and dark wall-hangings were instantly Cardassia.

A long corridor brought them to an open living space where other guests had already gathered, chatting with drinks in hand. The Gul’s wife, a formidable woman with a bright smile welcomed them, exclaiming over Irene’s dress, and commiserating over the attack on the center the week before.

“It was shocking news, just shocking.” Her mouth tightened as she shook her head.

“Yes, ma’am, it was.” Sherlock murmured. “We were lucky to escape it.”

“We thought about canceling the party, but we didn’t want to play to filthy savages. You have to go on with your lives, don’t you?”

“Yes, of course, ma’am.” Irene smiled prettily. “What a lovely home you have. I was just noticing that gorgeous fountain.”

An object d’art graced the side of one wall, water trickling down the twisting side of it to fall into the pool below.

“Isn’t it nice? We had it made on Cardassia and shipped in. Come, let me show you, there are lights and a vibration you can turn on.”

Irene graced Sherlock with a parting smile before following their hostess for a closer view of the sculpture. Sherlock grabbed a drink from a passing server and tried not to look like a lone shoe in the midst of the circulating crowd. Sadly, he didn’t see Molly and her husband in the mix. He was mentally calculating how many minutes until they could politely leave when Gul Dukat swanned into view.

“Lieutenant Holmes, Sherlock, you made it.” He clasped Sherlock’s arm warmly.

“Yes, of course, sir. Thank you for inviting me.”

“Come, come, I have someone you need to meet.” Sherlock was thrust into a group of high-ranking officials, a mix of civilian and military, as Dukat sang his praises for ‘rescuing’ him the week before. Sherlock nodded politely as he was introduced, and commiserations were made on the Cardassians lost in the attack.
“Bloody barbarians.” A gruff older man Sherlock recognized from the retreat center bared his teeth. “I wouldn’t be standing here today if my wife and I hadn’t been taking a constitutional in the gardens.”

“We need to crack down,” a woman Sherlock didn’t know insisted. “Even if it is just a splinter group causing trouble, we’re only showing weakness if we don’t make the civilian population pay.”

As the group nattered on with their idea on how the Bajorans could be better whipped into shape, Sherlock took the chance to slip away. He found Irene chatting with a couple near the fountain, and slotted in by her side.

“Oh, love, have you met the Rukashans?” Irene smiled at him.

Sherlock made polite noises and allowed the conversation to flow around him.

Finally, the dinner was announced, and the group moved toward a dining area farther in. Irene took Sherlock’s arm as they followed in behind.

“What’s got you in such a twist?” Irene murmured in his ear. “You’re as sour as a Taspar egg tonight.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I hate these things.”

“Well, there are some deep pockets here tonight, and I for one, am happy to discuss the funding that the Polytechnic College could still use.”

“Ah, that’s good.” Sherlock nodded.

“Perhaps you could look a little less like you were off to the gallows, hmm?”

“I’ll try.” Sherlock stretched his mouth into the approximation of a smile.

“No, never mind. Just be yourself.” Irene patted his arm.

Sherlock sighed. He felt about thirteen again with Mummy telling him to hurry and get dressed for the latest tea party.

“Well, Sherlock, fancy meeting you here.” An oily voice slid its way down Sherlock’s spine making his horror complete. Oh, Prophets no. He turned reluctantly to find his brother, Mycroft, spit and polished in his dark uniform, moving his way.

“What are you doing here, Mycroft?” Sherlock hissed.

“I was invited the same as you. And who is your lovely companion? Introduce us, won’t you?”

Protocol had him grudgingly introducing Irene to his smug lump of a brother.

“Enchanted, dear lady.” Mycroft lifted Irene’s hand for a kiss.

“You are too kind, sir.” Irene’s eyes glittered over her smiling red mouth.

Sherlock rolled his eyes, grateful when the way cleared and they were able to find seats at the absurdly long table. Sherlock made certainly to find places as far from Mycroft as possible. The courses were interminable, and Sherlock found himself drinking more wine than was wise as Irene chatted amiably with the people around her. Sherlock noticed that no Bajoran servants waited on them, it was Cardassians, and few off-world species only.
When finally the dinner was over, the guests were free to move about before a concert of some sort was to occur. Sherlock took Irene toward the elbow and was moving them toward a corridor lined with art, hoping to make a getaway when Mycroft intercepted.

“Ah, brother dear, I was hoping to have a moment of your time. We have some things to discuss.”

“I’m busy, Mycroft.” Sherlock narrowed his eyes, the “piss off” not spoken, but heavily implied.

“I’m afraid it’s quite necessary. I’m certainly the lovely Miss Adler can spare your scintillating company for a few minutes time.”

“Oh, I’ll be fine, Sherlock, go on.” Irene smiled as she untangled herself. “I see a woman I’ve been simply dying to speak with.”

Finding no allies, Sherlock allowed himself grudgingly to be pulled away by his insufferable brother.

“Come, let’s step outside.” Mycroft motioned toward some tall glass doors that opened to a terrace. A number of guests had drifted outside to enjoy the mild weather of the evening, and they moved past them to walk deeper into the large sculpted garden behind the residence.

Mycroft led the way in silence into the maze of trimmed bushes. Only the crunch of their feet on gravel and the distant sound of laughter reached them until they neared a bubbling fountain. A few small lights set into the ground broke the dark of the evening, showing them a wooden bench that Mycroft motioned toward with a sweep of his arm.

“So how are things going, brother mine? The new job is working out alright?”

“It’s fine.” Sherlock flung himself down with a huff. “I’ve done all that you asked, Mycroft. What do you want? I’m assuming this isn’t just a friendly fraternal visit.”

“I’m hurt.” Mycroft took a seat next to him with elegant poise. “Can’t I simply want to see my baby brother?”

“Tell me, or I’m going back inside.” Sherlock made to rise.

“Fine.” Mycroft put out an arm. “I have something for you.” He pulled a data cube from a pocket, handing it over. “In here you will find all the information you need to pass onto your friends. A number of weapons and small aircraft will be at this armory. You will also note the date and time of an upgrade to the security system when the facility will be vulnerable to an attack from an outside force.”

“Alright, and you had to give me this in person, because . . .” Sherlock fingered the smooth of the metal.

“Well,” Mycroft cleared his throat as he looked down at the path. “There is a bit of an irregularity with this opportunity. I will also be informing the local garrison of a discovered Bajoran attack for that night.”

“You want me to double cross the Resistance.” Sherlock frowned. “Why would I do that?”

“Because,” Mycroft swung his penetrating gaze upward, “we need a substantial victory on our side or the high command is going to wonder why the Imperial Army and the Obsidian Order are failing so spectacularly to keep Bajor secure.”

“I can’t do it.” Sherlock pushed the cube back toward him, but Mycroft refused to take it.
“Oh, Sherlock, grow up. We can’t simply hand Bajor over without a fight without raising any suspicions. Even you can see the necessity for this. You’re letting sentiment cloud your judgment.”

“But John...”

“Of course you can tell your special friend not to be there that evening.”

“I can’t tell him why.”

“I’ll leave it up to your discretion.”

“They’ll be like fish trapped in a barrel.” Sherlock closed his fist around the data cube feeling its corners bite into his flesh.

“In a game of chess, pawns are often sacrificed for the overall good of the game.” Mycroft sniffed.

“It’s not a game,” Sherlock hissed.

“Not so, brother mine. Games of strategy, games of power. All of life boils down to a game of one sort or another. Didn’t they teach you anything at the academy?”

“I must have missed the class where selling out your closest friend was a good idea.”

Mycroft sat for a moment, contemplating the play of the water falling from the fountain. “It might interest you to know that I’ve managed to locate the whereabouts of a certain Watson Harriet.”

“You did? Where is she?” Sherlock couldn’t help snapping to attention.

“She is currently working on a labor farm in the Huskane province.”

“Is she alright?”

“She is as well as one can expect in such circumstances. It is possible that I could arrange to have Miss Watson transferred to another facility. Who’s to say if something might go awry during the transition? One Bajoran wouldn’t be terribly missed if she might find her way to, say, a refugee camp on the planet Ourbous in the Magellan system.”

“You know where John’s mother is.” Sherlock felt a shiver roll up his spine.

“We know a great many things in the Obsidian order.” Mycroft smiled tightly.

“And if I don’t do this thing? Send people into a trap?”

“Then I’m afraid your friend’s sister might find herself being placed on the list for elimination. She doesn’t possess the most sparkling record, I’m afraid.”

“You’d have an innocent woman put to death if I don’t comply?”

“She’ll most likely die in the labor camp if she isn’t relocated soon. A quick death might be a favor really.”

“Bastard.” Sherlock felt a muscle jump in his jaw. “Fine, I’ll do it.”

“There’s a bigger prize here, Sherlock. Do try to keep that in mind, won’t you?”

“Fuck you, Mycroft.” Sherlock hung his head as Mycroft took to his feet.
“All lives are lost eventually, Sherlock. Caring is not an advantage.” Mycroft hesitated, pausing in the midst of turning. "Oh, and Sherlock. I'd be careful of your new friend, Gul Dukat, hmm? Let's just say I doubt he has your best interests at heart.”

Sherlock didn't dignify that with an answer. He waited until the sound of Mycroft’s footsteps had faded before jamming the data cube into his pocket, and rising to make his own way back to the house.

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Sherlock pulled a cap low over his head and tied a scarf about his neck before leaving his flat. He walked several blocks before hailing a taxi, giving the driver the address John had texted him. Sherlock had waited forever for this night to come. Anticipation skittered over his skin. *Finally.*

“Don’t like to go on that side of town,” the man complained.

“I’ll pay double your usual fare.”

The man agreed, reluctantly, and pulled the cab back into the flow of traffic. Sherlock was let off close to the Bajoran quarter. The bar was next to a number of businesses closed for the day, and only a small, discreetly lit pink sign by the door reading “Gizelle’s” announced its presence.

A rough-looking Cardassian in the foyer unfolded from his stool to block the way. He stared at Sherlock’s face for a moment. “Haven’t seen you here before.”

“I’m new,” Sherlock said shortly. “Jumja fruit.” He gave the password John had sent him.

The man grunted, still looking a bit skeptical, but moved to punch a code into a keypad by the door. He stepped aside to let Sherlock pass as the door opened.

“Thank you.” Sherlock nodded.

He entered the main room, and was instantly assaulted by the noise and energy within. It was dimly-lit, smoke-laced, smelling of sweat and spirits. A thumping pop tune wound its way behind the laughter and chatter as Cardassians and Bajorans alike relaxed around the small tables filling the place.

Sherlock made his way to an unoccupied spot on the side, and sat back, observing those around him more closely. The Cardassians were dressed in civilian clothes to a man, and he realized then that it was only men, while the Bajoran males wore bright, flashy things looking like tropical birds in the dark of the bar. Sherlock watched, entranced as a Bajoran leaned in and kissed the Cardassian next to him quite openly. Casting about, Sherlock saw another Bajoran male dressed in barely-there scraps of sliver cloth leading a leering Cardassian off down a corridor.

Prophets, this wasn’t a bar, it was a brothel, and a gay one at that. Sherlock swallowed, hard, feeling a sudden heat rise over him.

A Bajoran waiter dressed in a tight white tunic and leggings sashayed up to his table. “Well, good evening, sweetheart. What are you drinking? We’ve a special on galactic sunrises tonight.”

“Yes, that’s fine.” Sherlock jerked a nod feeling horribly out of his element.
Sherlock continued scanning the crowd after the waiter moved on, drumming his fingers on the table as he waited. He scowled at a Bajoran youth bedecked in gold cuffs and pink bits of fluff who looked about to join him. The boy squeaked before scampering off.

The waiter returned to deposit something purple and frothy topped with a variety of fruit before him. “There you go sir, twelve leks.” Sherlock handed him his credit chip and watched as the man scanned it on a handheld device. “So, is there something you’re looking for in particular tonight, sir? I could suggest a few things on the menu.” He winked and Sherlock realized the man wasn’t talking about food.

“No, thank you . . . I’m waiting for someone.”

“No problem, gorgeous. Just let me know if I can help you with anything.”

Sherlock was grateful when the server moved on, leaving him to deal with his ridiculous drink in peace. He methodically worked his way through the fruit before tackling the drink itself. It was overly sweet, and very strong. He pushed it away after one sip.

On the other side of the room in a cleared space, a few couples had gotten up to dance. Sherlock glanced over feeling his heart rise to his throat. He had never seen men alone dancing before, and Cardassians and Bajorans together . . . well. The Cardassians were generally taller than the Bajorans, though one couple was of equal height.

It was pretty watching them sway together, the dark somber wear paired with the flashy bright. One of the Cardassians reached out and swatted the arse of another man’s Bajoran partner, and they all laughed. It struck Sherlock then how wrong this was, a perversion of affection bought and paid for. Who knew what the Bajorans really thought about all this. Sickened, Sherlock took a long pull off his drink, forgetting how awful it tasted. He grimaced.

“Is it that bad?” John slid into the chair beside him. Sherlock nearly choked.

When he’d gotten his breathing back under control, he feasted on the vision of John finally in front of him, live and in person. He was dressed in something dark and tight, with his hair combed back, and a necklace displayed nicely by his low-cut top. It made Sherlock’s heart clench to see it hanging below John’s throat.

“John. . .” Sherlock found the words he wanted to say tangling in his mouth.

“Hey.” John reached out to lay a hand over his forearm. His indigo eyes bore into his own. “It’s good to see you.”

“Yes, what . . .”

“Come on, let’s talk somewhere more private.”

Sherlock nodded, and John rose, taking his hand to tug him toward the back. A tall Cardassian man stepped in front of them.

“Well, hello there.” His eyes licked up and down John’s lovely compact shape.

Sherlock barely restrained himself from pushing John behind him, and punching the man’s lights out. *How dare he . . .*

“I wonder if you might be free later, lovely,” the man drawled.
“Sorry, he’s taken for the entire night. And every other night,” Sherlock snarled into the interloper’s face.

“Whoa, peace, friend.” The man raised his hands, placating, and backed away. “Didn’t realize he was taken.”

“Sherlock, come on.” John blushed, pulling at his hand, urging them onward.

John led them down a corridor lined with manual doors. He stopped at one that was partially cracked, opening it to lead Sherlock inside. It was a small, cheerless space with a mattress on a platform covered in something waterproof, a set of shelves holding various supplies, and little else. John locked the door behind him, and then they were in each other’s arms and the dingy room ceased to matter.

John was warm, solid, pressed against him, his hands gripping Sherlock, pulling him close. Sherlock buried his face in John’s hair. It smelled oddly of some floral scent, but underneath was the reassuring scent of John himself, so achingly familiar. He breathed it in as deeply as he could. Their mouths found each other, lips seeking blindly. They kissed wildly, frantically, as if trying to consume each other whole. Sherlock felt a sob bubbling out of his throat.

“John, I was so worried. I thought . . .”

“Shhhhh. It’s alright. I’m fine, I’m fine.” John’s hands soothed over him, stroking along his back as he moved them to the bed.

They toppled over onto the mattress. Sherlock was suddenly desperate to have them skin to skin, reassuring himself that John was really here, and whole. They moved apart for just a moment to strip bare, coming back together in a rush. It was an explosion of bliss to seal himself over John, pressing them tightly together.

“Love, oh love.” John kissed over his neck, along his throat, and Sherlock shivered. He felt John’s cock like a line of steel along his belly. Sherlock moved back to align them together. When their erections brushed, a jolt went through him. It felt like being electrocuted.

“Hnnnggg,” Sherlock choked, nearly overwhelmed.

“Shhh, it’s alright.” John patted his side. “Here, budge up.”

Sherlock moved, and John leaned off the bed to grab a bottle. He returned to squirt something slippery over his hand.

Sherlock wanted nothing to do with the room and its contents, but it was handy to have lube, and John used it to slick up their cocks. They slid together brilliantly then. Sherlock kept his weight on both palms on either side of John, leaning over him, giving him room to work his hand between them.

“Beautiful, you’re so beautiful,” John crooned, soft and low, his other hand curved around Sherlock’s thigh, anchoring them.

Sherlock watched through hooded eyes as a flush stole over John’s chest and cheeks, and thought surely the most stunning thing he’d ever seen was the man laid out before him. The soft look on John’s face utterly undid him. With some reluctance, Sherlock let his eyes close, gasping as his climax took control. John came soon after, pumping wetness to add to the mess already between them.
“Prophets, John.” Sherlock rolled to the side when it was over, pulling John half over him. “I missed you.”

“I missed you too.” John allowed himself to be manhandled into place, burying his face in Sherlock’s neck.

They lay, just breathing, feeling the pump of their heartbeats slowing, almost gliding into synch. Finally, John moved to grab a box of wipes to clean them up.

They’d barely finished wiping off before Sherlock had his arms around John again, kissing him, dragging him in. They twined together instinctively, letting their kisses slow and deepen, stretching time into long, languid moments. Sherlock’s hands slipped down to grab John’s arse, kneading it almost reverently. He was gratified to feel the faintest twitch from John’s spent member, impressive even in repose.

When they finally drew back for a breath, John huffed a laugh. “Sweet, you’re going to kill me.”

“Never.” Sherlock moved in to nip at John’s lower lip. “Keep you safe.”

“I know.” John sighed. “I want you safe too.”

John still had his necklace on, the pendant slipped to the side. Sherlock threaded his fingers around the cord to pull it back around to the front. “You kept it.”

“Of course I kept it. You gave it to me. Besides it’s a good luck charm. I need all the luck I can get.”

Awareness of their situation returned to Sherlock in the form of noises filtering in through the walls, moaning and thumping, the coarse sounds of sex being bought and sold in the rooms around them.

“Do we need to go soon?” Sherlock glanced at the door.

“No, I paid for the room all night. You could pay me back though. It wasn’t cheap.” John yawned widely, putting a hand over his mouth.

“Yes, of course.” Sherlock rolled to his feet, squatting down to pat through his clothes.

“Well, I don’t mean right now.” John rolled to his side, propping his hand up over a fist to smile indulgently at him.

Sherlock already had a handful of bills in his hand. “Is this enough?”

“Prophets, Sherlock.” John’s face dropped. “It’s a bit like you’re actually paying me.”

“No.” Sherlock dropped the money to the ground, horrified, to crawl back over the bed. He curled up against John, pressing his face against him. “Never. John, I love you.”

“I love you, too.” John gathered him close, dropping a kiss to his forehead like a blessing. “I’m sorry I had to bring you here.”

“How do you even know this place?” Sherlock’s voice came muffled against John’s chest.

A movement rippled through John, a shrug. “It’s a contact point for the Resistance. People come and go here easily enough.”

“Is it bugged?”
John pulled back to look at him incredulously. “It’s a whorehouse for homosexual sex between Cardassians and Bajorans. Do you think they’d stay open if it were bugged?”

“No, I suppose not.”

“No, it’s safe.” John carded his fingers through Sherlock’s hair, smoothing it back over and over. Sherlock almost purred at the wonderful feel of John’s fingertips over his scalp.

“John, I have some news.” Sherlock licked his lips, struggling to think clearly. “There’s a place I found, it has weapons, and aircraft. They’ll be doing maintenance on the security next Eighth-day. I have a schemata of the building . . .”

“Prophets, that’s fantastic.” John’s eyes danced. “This sounds like a break we’ve been looking for. Wait until I tell Kira and Shakaar. Oh, Sherlock. You’re amazing!” He swooped in to drop a kiss to Sherlock’s face, “brave,” another kiss, “clever . . .”

“John,” Sherlock moved back, struggling upright to sit on the edge of the bed. “I’m sorry.” An overly loud thump hit the wall from the room next door, rattling the shelves. “How can you stand it? What’s being done to your planet? To your people?” Sherlock shivered. “How can you possibly love me when it’s my people doing this to you?” He dropped his face into his hands.

“Sherlock, love.” John knelt behind him. “What the Cardassian Empire does is not your fault.” A warm hand curled over Sherlock’s shoulder. “We just put one foot in front of the other. We do what needs to be done. You’re invaluable to the Resistance, but more importantly, you’re invaluable to me. I love you.”

Secrets rolled thick and dark inside Sherlock. He opened his mouth to spill some of them, say something, but his throat clogged. Nothing would come out.

“Come back to bed. We don’t have that long, and I don’t want to talk about the Resistance or the Empire anymore. I want to hold you.”


John found a blanket that didn’t smell too awful, and he tucked it around them pulling Sherlock close, wrapping them together.

“John,” Sherlock mumbled before they drifted into a doze. “I don’t want you going on the run to the armory.” He reached out to grip John’s arm. “I want you to be safe. Promise me you won’t go.”

“Alright, love, alright.” John petted a hand across his back. “I promise.”

%%%
Sherlock blinked awake to daylight filtering in through the small shuttered window. John lay passed out next to him, looking about ten years old with his face sweetly slack. Sherlock reached out to brush back the silky fringe that has fallen over his forehead. He smiled. He’d been fascinated with John’s golden hair since the moment he’d first layed eyes on him.

A fist rapping on the door startled him. “Alright, fun’s over. Everyone clear out!” someone called in Bajoran.

John snorted, jolting to life beside him. “Wha . . .?”

“It’s alright.” Sherlock lay a hand to his chest. “They’re just throwing us out.”

They stumbled upright, searching for clothes on the floor. Sherlock had his trousers half on when he looked over at John in his pants, sleep rumpled trying to figure out the holes on his shirt.

“John . . .”

They were on each other in an instant, arms wrapped tightly, breathing each other in, then sharing blazing kisses. Finally, they pulled back for a breath, arms still looped tightly around each other.

“I hate saying good-bye to you,” Sherlock said. “You think I’d be used to it by now. We’ve had so much practice.”

“I know, I can’t stand it. I feel like my skin goes with you when you leave.”

“My heart follows you wherever you go.” Sherlock reached up to cradle the side of John’s face.

“Which one?” John smiled.

“You know what I mean.” Sherlock sighed. It was a Bajoran expression that didn’t translate well into Cardassian.

Another knock at the door, and a call to hurry up broke them apart. They dressed quickly.

“John, here.” Sherlock handed him a wad of folded bills. “And this is the information I told you about yesterday, the times, the maps.” He passed John a small envelope. He’d copied all of the information out carefully by hand from the data cube, crushing it in a garbage compactor after. You never knew what sort of tracers might be on it.
“Prophets, thank you.” John kissed him quickly, securing it all inside the jacket he pulled over his skimpy outfit. Sherlock was grateful John wouldn’t have to leave the place looking like a common street walker.

They left the room, availing themselves of a toilet down the hall. Sherlock splashed at the sink while John used the toilet behind a screen. Sherlock dried off, listening to the sound of John voiding his bladder, smiling at the domesticity of it. If only he could share a bathroom every morning, listening to John piss, he’d be a happy man. When they were both finished, John opened the door to someone waiting outside.

“Hey new boy, move your arse . . .” a Bajoran man in smeared face paint trailed off as he caught sight of Sherlock. “Oh, excuse me, sir.” He backed up, fear flickering through his eyes.

“No, it’s fine,” Sherlock mumbled. “We’re done.”

The man darted past them to claim the bathroom as they moved down the corridor. A terrible thought occurred to Sherlock then. He didn’t want to ask, but it tumbled out anyway.

“John, have you ever come here before?”

John stopped, blinking up at him. “What, worked here like one of the rent boys?”

“Yes . . . no . . . I . . . ”

“Relax,” John whispered. “You’re the only one I’ve ever bedded here.”

“Oh, alright.”

“Look, I’m sorry, but I have to go now.” John shifted his weight nervously. “You need to use the front door, and I need to use the back.”

“Right.” Sherlock tried to steel himself. “Good-bye, John.”

“Bye, Sherlock.” John’s voice cracked slightly as he put out a hand to shake. Sherlock reached out meaning to clasp it, but suddenly they were in each other’s arms again, one last desperate embrace. They clung to each other, pressing tightly almost as if they hoped to make an imprint of the other across their bodies to carry away.

“When will I see you again?” Sherlock whispered fiercely by John’s ear.

“I don’t know,” John gulped, “I’ll text . . .”

“Alright, let’s move things along here, we’ve cleaning to do . . .” An old Bajoran woman with a ring of keys bustled into the corridor. She stopped, surprised at finding John and Sherlock in their impassioned clench. They pulled apart quickly, embarrassed.

“I’m sorry sir, visiting hours are over.” She switched neatly to Cardassian. “You’ll need to leave, please.” Her wrinkled face creased into a perfunctory smile.

“Yes, of course.” Sherlock managed a brisk nod toward John as he finally turned and stalked toward the door. He could hear the bibi giving John advice behind, muttering in Bajoran.

“Oh, honey, you can’t let yourself get involved like that. It never ends well.”

Whatever similar words of wisdom she had to impart were lost to Sherlock as he moved through the foyer, and back onto the street.
Sherlock stood patiently by the cab, waiting for Molly to join him on the pavement. He glanced up at the grey sky. It would probably rain soon, but they’d be in the opera house by then. When Molly had called yesterday, begging Sherlock to come see a concert with her, he hadn’t the heart to say no. The group performing was from off-world, a people called the Bolians, and their experimental fusion sound had been bandied about as the “thing” to see. Molly told him her husband had agreed to attend with her, but had been called into work at the last minute. She didn’t want to waste the tickets. It was painless enough to play her escort.

“Ooh, looks like we’ll just beat the rain.” Molly glanced up too, pulling her wrap tighter around her shoulders.

“Yes, come on, we don’t want to miss the beginning.” Sherlock offered his arm, and Molly slipped her hand into the crook of his elbow.

They joined the queue at the door, had their tickets scanned, and found their seats easily enough. Molly’s status as a Glinn’s wife had garnered her a special box, and Sherlock stretched out, glad to not be sandwiched in cheek to jowl with the masses below. Molly touched a button on her chair, and a small holo projection leapt to life, giving information about the performance and stats on the musicians.

“Sherlock, you have to tell me.” Molly leaned in to whisper. “You never really explained.”

“Hmmm?”

“The retreat center, how you knew to leave. We’d have been killed if you hadn’t insisted we go home early. How did you know?” Molly’s eyes narrowed.

“Premonition. Gut feeling, you know.” Sherlock waved a hand about.

Molly didn’t look completely satisfied, but the house lights dimmed as someone walked out to introduce the performers, and her attention was pulled to the stage.

The Bolians entered soon after, five short, blue-colored beings in a silvery formal wear. They bowed respectfully to the audience before settling themselves in with their respective instruments. With a gong slap and a cry, they launched into their first piece. Sherlock found himself enjoying the performance more than he’d expected, losing himself in the music until intermission arrived.

“Ooh, that was just lovely, wasn’t it?” Molly turned to him, eyes shining.

“Fantastic!” Sherlock said. “Did you notice how well they shifted between major and minor chords, and the syncopated rhythm? It was subtle, but such a backbone to the music.”

“I’m actually rather glad you came with me today.” Molly smiled. “I don’t think Dov would have enjoyed it half as much as you.”

“Yes, I’m rather indebted to your husband working overtime. I doubt I would have come to this concert otherwise . . . thank you.”

“Are you still playing? Your violin?” Molly asked.
“No.” Sherlock shifted uncomfortably on his seat. “No, I haven’t played in years.”

“Oh, you were so good. I still think of that concert your mother made you give. You were fantastic.”

“You know I hadn’t really thought about it. I guess it was one of the things that got left behind when . . . I left for the academy.”

“Oh, you should pick it back up. I’d love to hear you play again.”

“Thank you, Molly, I’ll think about it.”

“Ah, I think the crowd’s cleared a bit.” Molly craned her neck looking about. “Let me just pop off to the ladies. Won’t be a minute.”

“Of course.” Sherlock stood slightly to let her pass.

Sherlock turned the hologram back on and flipped through the information on the band’s past performances. When he found a link to purchase some of their music, he punched his code in, and had it sent to his console at home. Sitting back, he watched idly as two Bajorans dressed in black appeared in front to clean up. During a more rousing section of the performance, glittery confetti had swirled down around the players, and it had left piles around the stage.

A youth in the front row suddenly darted forward, grabbing the ankle of one of the stage hands sweeping by the edge. The Bajoran came down with a whump, the vacuum-broom he’d been holding clattering away. The Cardassian laughed, grabbing up a handful of glitter to toss over him as his friends jeered. No one did anything to stop them. When the Bajoran lay quietly, offering no resistance, the teen finally lost interest and sat down. The other worker came over to help the fallen man stand. Quietly, staying farther away from the lip of the stage, they finished their task. Sherlock clenched his hands so hard, he could feel his nails digging into his palms. 

Bastards He wanted to intervene, but it was already over.

Molly returned like a fresh breeze, smiling as she took her seat. “Want one?” She rattled a box of boiled sweets his way.

“No, thank you.” He shook his head.

She asked again a few minutes later. “Oh come on, I can’t eat them all.”

Sherlock relented and chose a red one.

“So, are you seeing anyone? Besides Irene. I know that’s not real.”

“No. There’s really not time. I’m busy with work. Besides . . . it’s hard, you know . . .” he let his words trail off.

“I know.” Molly nodded sagely. “Still, I don’t like to think of you alone. There’s a man at the college I know called Ballin. He’s . . . like you.” Molly dropped her voice slightly. “I thought maybe I could introduce you.”

“No, please, no.” Sherlock waved her off. Bleeding Prophets save him from married people. He paused a moment, then taking a deep breath, decided to plunge in.

“Molly, do you remember the friend I had when we were younger, John?”

“Oh, the Bajoran boy, yes. The one you were in love with.”
“Well, I met him again.”


“Yes.” Sherlock looked down at his hands that had wound themselves together. “The thing of it is, we’re . . . together. At least as often as we can be.”

“But, that’s fantastic!”

Sherlock allowed a smile to creep over his face as he glanced back up at her. “It is fantastic, it really is.”

“Oh, Sherlock. I’m so glad for you.”

“It’s dangerous,” he added.

“I know. I’m sorry for that.” Molly reached over to squeeze his arm.

“I worry for him. It isn’t fair, the whole occupation . . .” Sherlock suddenly realized he was talking to the wife of a Glinn, and shut his mouth.

“No, it’s not,” Molly said softly, “but it’s how things are, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Sherlock sighed, “it is.”

The lights flickered and then dimmed as the musicians reappeared for the second half of the show. Sherlock directed his attention to the celestial sounds, grateful for the distraction, however brief.

%%% 

Sherlock altered his gait to pass the dawdling pair of women with shopping bags on the pavement. Tourists. Bah. When he had reached a quiet stretch, he pulled his phone from his pocket and checked his messages again. Nothing. It had been five days, and he still hadn’t heard back from John. He wanted to crawl out of his skin. Rambling on long walks around the city when he wasn’t working had been his only means of coping. He supposed he could make use of a gym, but the idea of having to talk to anyone on a regular basis curdled his stomach.

Angry voices coming from a small crowd ahead snapped his attention back to his surroundings. A group of Cardassians had gathered around two cowering Bajoran boys pressed against a wall. Sherlock quickly found his insignia badge and clipped it to his jacket before shouldering his way to the front.

“Here now, what’s going on, citizen?” He addressed the scowling man closest.

The Cardassian rounded on him, seemingly happy to transfer his anger to the newcomer, but a glance over Sherlock’s badge slowed him down.

“Nothing to concern you, sir,” he growled. “Just seeing to these two freaks who need a lesson.”

Sherlock flicked his eyes over the thin, pale Bajoran boys, boxes they must have been carrying scattered on the pavement at their feet. The teens looked frightened enough to pass out.
“And why do they need a lesson taught to them?” He let his coolest gaze drag over the gathered Cardassians.

“Two boys kissing. It’s disgusting,” the angry man spat. “Faggot Bajoran scum.”

“It’s illegal,” someone added.

“While it might be illegal for Cardassians, Bajorans do recognize same-sex unions.” Sherlock faced the crowd, raking his best officer’s glare over them. “Regardless, it isn’t up to ordinary citizens to mete out ad hoc justice on street corners. I’ll kindly ask you all to disperse now. Fun’s over. Move along.”

After some residual grumbling, the group did finally go. Sherlock turned to consider the boys, still looking completely done in. “Here, now, you should know better than to kiss on public streets.” Sherlock gentled his voice. “What were you thinking?”

“I’m . . . sorry, sir,” the brown-haired one managed to stutter. “It’s just I hadn’t seen Nander in months. I thought he was dead.”

“It won’t happen again, sir. We promise.” The other boy had tears in his eyes. His hair was darker than John’s, but it had the same golden sheen to it. Sherlock felt a pang run through him.

“Fine. Get your things and get out of here. Be more careful in the future.”

“Yes, sir, thank you, sir.” The boys scrambled to gather their dropped belongings, scampering off.

Sherlock followed at a distance until he was sure the boys were out of harm’s way before peeling off and continuing down another street. When he passed a Bajoran woman with two small children begging in the street, he slipped them several bills, and decided to head home. He’d had enough excitement for one day.

%%%

Sherlock’s work console alerted him to an incoming message. He reached up and tapped it on. His superior, Glinn Tarlek, appeared to fill the screen.

“Good morning, sir.” Sherlock straightened up unconsciously. “What can I do for you?”

“Good morning, lieutenant. We’ve got a little problem brewing. Something up your alley, I think.”

“What’s that, sir?”

“Some HQ nerds have uncovered a few anomalies in the databases. Some equipment and supplies seem to have been moved without proper authorization. We need double checking of all relevant records. I’m sending you the information now.”

“Yes, sir.” Sherlock nodded carefully.

“We might have some midnight requisitioning going on here,” the Glinn said. “I’ll need your discretion in investigating this, soldier. Your office may be compromised. You have to keep this inquiry completely under wraps.”

“Yes, sir. Of course. I’ll see to it personally.”
“Good man.” Tarlek relaxed back. “I knew I could count on you. I don’t mind telling you, Holmes. Command is breathing down my neck on this one.”

“I understand, sir. I’ll get back to you as soon as I know something.”

Damn. Sherlock blew out a breath when the call ended. Bloody damn it to hell.

%%%%

John’s text alert beeped on Sherlock’s phone as he stepped out of his morning shower. Quickly Sherlock dressed, and headed down to a nearby café. He found a small unoccupied table before even looking at the messages on his phone.

Still alive. How are you? The screen read.

Sherlock smiled. Still alive. When can I see you again?

A waitress came to take Sherlock’s order, and he agreed to the special of the day distractedly.

I don’t know. Just got back in, but things are crazy. John’s reply arrived.

The thing we talked about. The run on the eighth. You aren’t going?

We need all the hands we can get.

Please. You promised. I want you safe.

I picked the wrong job for that.

Sherlock could almost see the half-smile on John’s face.

Promise. Sherlock punched in the single word.

Alright. Love you. Have to go.

Love you too. Contact me when you can.

OK, bye.

Bye. Be well.

%%%%

Sherlock ground the heels of his hands into his eyes and leaned back from his desk. He’d been up most of the night surfing data streams. Falsifying reports, and covering his tracks hadn’t been too hard, but he wanted to be thorough. It was one thing to juggle records, but it was of course another to account for missing items. Sherlock knew his shell game wouldn’t last forever if people went out to physical warehouses and counted inventory, but if he could just keep them off his trail for awhile longer . . . He was startled when his phone rang. John’s alert sounded preternaturally loud in the
quiet of the office. He never called though. Sherlock whipped his mobile out and thumbed it on.

“Hello?”

“Spoonhead . . . Sherlock, whatever your name is,” a panicked female voice said. “They have John, and some others. You need to get them out before . . .”

“What? Who is this?” Sherlock sat up, gripping his phone tighter.

“It’s Kira Nerys. We need your help. NOW. They were waiting for us, the cursed bastards, at the Riverside Armory. The ones in front never had a chance before the back-ups arrived. . .”

Sherlock’s tired mind snapped into razor-sharp focus. “Slow down, tell me everything.”

The Bajoran commander relayed the mission the Resistance had gone on a few hours earlier to the armory on the east side of town, and the sizeable Cardassian force waiting to greet them there. Many had been killed instantly, but a number of Bajorans were captured, and taken away, John among them. Sherlock squeezed his eyes closed, willing his lungs to continue sucking in air. He needed to think, and he needed to breathe, but mostly he needed to think.

“Do you know where they took them?”

“Well, sadly they didn’t tell us that before they took off,” Kira sneered. “The Spoonheads were heading west though when they left.”

“Alright, I can track that. I’ll do my best”

“I hope your best gets them back before it’s too late. Prophets, know I didn’t want to call you, but you’re my last fucking hope.”

“Yes, of course. Thank you.” Sherlock ended the call, still in a daze.

Sherlock allowed himself one moment of blind panic, letting the phone slip through his fingers to the desktop. Prophets, no. He’d begged John not to go. After letting a tremor course over him, Sherlock focused, gathering his feelings into a small ball and set them aside to deal with later. They had no place in what he needed to do. He woke his idling console screen with a voice command, and got to work.

A quick strafing of the net identified four possible sites in the area that the Bajoran detainees might have been transported to. Sherlock quickly broke into the databases, searching for signs of recent activity. When he found a military building that listed five new undocumented inhabitants several hours earlier, Sherlock’s blood ran cold. It wasn’t even a regular prison, listed instead as a medical research facility. Sherlock could almost feel his mind cycling up to a faster speed as he began to plan.

%%%%

Chiiirp. Chiiirp. The access console at the heavy metal door chimed its displeasure at being activated incorrectly.

“Yes, who’s there? State your name and business.” A disembodied voice demanded tetchily from the speaker in the vestibule.
“This is Officer Halverk, identity code alpha 2993-1267. My business is none of your concern, but your position will be MY concern, if this door isn’t opened immediately.”

Sherlock stood impassive in his tight-fitting black clothes, chin up, shoulders back as he listened to the clerk shuffling around. A drop of sweat formed on the back of his neck and trickled down to land between his shoulder blades. He ignored it completely.

“Yes, sir, sorry, sir. We weren’t informed you were coming.” The voice was much more accommodating this time.

“The Obsidian Order has no reason to make its business known to underlings,” Sherlock snapped.

“Yes, sir, of course, sir.”

The door slid open with a slight hiss. Sherlock didn’t allow the relief he felt to register as he stepped inside, the sharp antiseptic odor of the too-bright corridor assaulting his nose. It was easy to bluff his way past the guards at the front desk, flashing his concocted ID badge. They hardly looked past the intimidating black uniform or the haughty sneer on his face. Sherlock silently thanked his brother for the template of his arch airs as he ordered the staff about, demanding reports on all the prisoners taken several hours earlier.

“Regrettably, two of the five expired after initial interrogations. Such delicate creatures,” the captain in before him explained, spreading his hands apologetically, “but none of them were of much political value. No leaders among them.”

“IDIOTS.” Sherlock shut his eyes for a moment, gathering himself, trying not to shake visibly.

“Do you know how much valuable information you’ve lost?” Sherlock forced out each word out hot and charged like a phaser burst. “I will be transferring the remaining detainees to a more secure facility where the physiology of those being questioned can be better taken into account.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Make the prisoners ready to travel. If any of them die in transit, I’ll be holding everyone here personally responsible.”

“Of course, sir.”

Sherlock watched impassively as the soldiers scurried to comply with his order. He paced the office, hands clasped behind his back, waving off the cup of tea that was brought to him.

Finally, after an eternity had passed in which Sherlock had died a thousand deaths, a door opened, and three Bajorans were escorted into the room. They were dressed in hospital scrubs with force field manacles holding their wrists before them. Sherlock almost fell to the floor. The middle one was John. His left eye was swollen shut, a split marred his mouth, and he held himself stiffly as if it hurt to move, but he was at least walking normally. The first one, just a boy really, limped horribly despite the cast that had been hastily placed over his foot, and the last one, a female with red hair in messy braids looked nearly untouched though her wide, terrified eyes belied any calm.

John glanced up and almost collapsed himself when he spotted Sherlock. He turned the movement into a jerk of his head. “Here, now? What’s this? Where are you taking us?”

The guard nearest raised a hand to backhand him on reflex.

“HOLD,” Sherlock barked. “No one is to harm these prisoners.” He glared hotly around at all
assembled lest they dare question his august authority.

“Where you are going is none of your concern, Bajoran.” Sherlock turned toward John, letting the last word drawl out like an insult. “All you need know is that as of now, you are guests of the Obsidian Order.”

The teenager with the cast looked as if he might faint, but John nudged up against him reassuringly.

“Escort the prisoners outside. I have transport waiting.” Sherlock snapped his fingers arrogantly, and turned on his heel to stalk toward the outer door. He didn’t look back to see that his orders were being followed though he could hear the others moving along behind.

Sherlock continued his confident stride as he led the way from the building to the long black groundcar idling just out of the range of the street lights in the parking lot.

One of the guards frowned at the vehicle. “Are you certain, sir? We have transport vans available if you need . . .”

“This will be more than adequate for three puny Bajorans,” Sherlock spat. “You need not concern yourself with Obsidian Order business, soldier.” Sherlock narrowed his eyes menacingly, and the man recoiled slightly.

“No sir, of course not.”

One of the back doors rose open to admit them. Sherlock stood to the side, watching as the guards pushed the Bajorans roughly inside. He wanted to chastise them, but it wasn’t worth quibbling at this point. They were almost free. Just a few more minutes . . .

The driver, wearing a low cap pulled over her face, glanced back nervously. Sherlock glared at Molly, and she swiveled back around, punching a button to activate the barrier between the front and back seats.

“That will be all, private,” Sherlock sneered at the man closest, waiting until he backed away, before opening the front door. “The Obsidian Order thanks you for your service.”

“Can we go?” Molly whispered from the side of her mouth as Sherlock settled beside her.

“Yes, just program a normal speed though. We don’t want to trip any concerns.”

With a nod, Molly set the windows to opaque, and typed in the coordinates that Sherlock gave her. The car navigated its way smoothly through the complex of buildings, but neither of them took a deep breath until they had turned back onto a main road. It was nearly deserted at this hour, the sky just starting to lighten as dawn approached.

“Open the screen,” Sherlock gasped when they were well free of the government buildings.

Molly punched a button, and Sherlock all but dived into the rear of the car, scrambling onto the back-facing seats.

The three Bajorans were on the opposite bench, the boy passed out in the middle while the woman on the end seemed to be trying to short-circuit her manacles with the hairpin in her mouth despite the fact that John seemed to be reassuring her.

“Sherlock,” John looked up, a grin lighting up his poor, hurt face. “How did you . . .”
“John.” Sherlock cut him off, pulling him into his arms.

Words babbled from Sherlock’s mouth as he patted over John, checking to see that he was whole and really here. “AreyoualrightwhatdidtheydotoyouIwassoworried Ithoughtyouweredead . . .”

John laughed breathlessly, turning his face toward the hurried kisses that Sherlock pressed over his unbroken skin until Sherlock reached his lips.

Sherlock kissed him gently, mindful of his sore mouth, his fingers twisting into the back of John’s thin top. John shivered against him. Sherlock pulled back. “Are you cold? You must be cold. Computer, raise temperature.”

The heat clicked on as Sherlock glanced over to find the woman staring open-mouthed at them, her hairpin lost somewhere in the car’s interior. Realizing the loss, she looked down and cursed.

“Oh, right, sorry. Here, let me.” Sherlock fished out a data cube that he slotted into the side of her manacles. The device deactivated and popped open. He repeated it with John, then moved to free the hands of the unconscious boy as well.

“What the ever-loving fuck?” The woman narrowed her eyes as she rubbed at her wrists.

“It’s alright, he’s a friend. He’s part of the Resistance,” John nearly bubbled, high on the good fortune of their escape. “We’re safe now.”

“We’re not quite out of the woods yet,” Sherlock cautioned. “We need to lay low for a few days. I’ve got a friend we can stay with until things have settled a bit.”

“I’m sorry.” Molly called from the front. “I’d let you come to mine, but my husband is a Glinn. It isn’t safe.”

The Bajoran woman frowned in confusion. She shot a look toward Sherlock as if he were something akin to as a sea-slug. John reached across the aisle to pat her leg. “It’s alright. Really. I grew up with these people.”

“Do you think he’ll be able to walk?” Sherlock nodded to the unconscious boy who was had started to snore slightly.

“Naavi? Yeah, he’s tough. He’ll be okay,” John said. “This is Lupaza by the way. Lupaza, this is Sherlock. He’s my lakayha.” John said it like it was the most natural thing in the world.

“Nice to meet you,” the woman nodded cautiously, her face not quite sure what expression to settle on.

“I’m sorry to have met you under such terrible circumstances,” Sherlock said. “Are you hurt, do you require medical assistance of any sort?”

“No, I’m fine,” she snorted, flipping a braid over her shoulder. “I just acted catatonic, and they pretty much left me alone.”

“John, how are you, and the boy?”

“He needs proper medical care. I could use some pain meds, but I’ll be alright.”

“Oh, Prophets, right. I’m sorry.” Sherlock reached around to the front of the car, and pulled up a bag.

He quickly found bottles of water that he passed to John and Lupaza, and a blister pack of pain pills
that he gave John. Sherlock was pleased to note that John seemed to relax better after he’d taken them. He closed his eyes, and lay his head on Sherlock’s shoulder, dozing off. Even the woman, Lupaza, stopped glaring at him long enough to lean back and close her eyes. Sherlock promised himself that he’d get a scan on John’s internal stats once they were settled. He didn’t think he’d fall asleep, but he jolted up, surprised as Molly called his name.

“Sherlock, we’re here.”

“Oh, right.” Sherlock carefully shifted a sleeping John away from his side, and climbed back up to the front. He thumbed a button on the dash, opened the comm system, and called Irene.

The system trilled a few bells before Irene appeared on the screen. She seemed just out of bed, hair pulled back in a mess knot, wrapped in a floral dressing gown.

“Sherlock, Good morning. It’s a bit early.”

“Oh, sorry, I didn’t wake you, did I?”

“No, I always get up a little early. Gives me some quiet time before the day starts. What can I do for you, lovey?”

“Irene, I need a favor. You remember my sweetheart, John? Well, I need a place for him and a couple of his friends to stay. I know it’s a lot . . .”

“Where are you?” Irene had snapped to attention, her eyes narrowing.

“Actually, outside your building in a black groundcar.”

“Don’t move, I’m coming down.” Irene cut the connection.

“You know this IS a lot to spring on someone.” Molly shot Sherlock an apologetic glance.

“I couldn’t think of another place to take them.” Sherlock shrugged. “Hotels are too well watched, and most of the Bajoran safe houses in the city have been raided. We’ll find somewhere more permanent to go once I can see to their injuries.”

“Alright. Irene’s a good sort.” Molly nodded.

It was only a few minutes before Irene appeared, hastily dressed, her hair pulled back more tidily. Sherlock got out of the car to meet her.

“Sherlock what is all this?” Irene looked none too pleased.

“Irene, I’m sorry I didn’t tell you this earlier, but John is Bajoran. He and two friends got into a bit of trouble, and I need somewhere for them to stay, just until they’re well enough to travel. Just a day or so.”

“They’re here, now?” Irene bent to peer into the darkened windows of the car.

Molly obligingly lightened the windows for a moment to wave. Irene sucked in a breath at the sight of the three Bajorans passed out over the back seats. Molly set the windows dark again as a woman walking a pet approached them on the pavement. She glanced at Sherlock’s black uniform, and averted her eyes, hurrying past.

“Sherlock, for all that is good . . .” Irene chewed on her lip. “You can’t bring them to my place! I’m being watched.”
“What, by who?”

“Take your pick.” Irene shrugged wryly. “First your brother, and then Gul Dukat. I’ve got cameras on my front door, and regular reports I need to make.”

“Irene.” Sherlock felt waves of hot and cold run over him at the same time.

“Oh don’t look at me like that. Mycroft threatened to expose my relationship with Kate, and Dukat just gave me money.” Irene pulled her jacket more firmly around her. “I don’t tell them anything important, but this . . .” She waved a hand toward the car. “Well, I can’t just hide three injured members of the Bajoran Resistance in the airing cupboard, can I? I’m sorry, lovey. If it’s any consolation, I really *did* enjoy our time together.”

“For a number of reasons, I see.” Sherlock felt his mouth twist up.

“You’d best go.” Irene’s eyes had gone sombre. “And I’d switch cars if I were you.” She darted forward to drop a kiss to Sherlock’s cheek before turning, making her way back to her building.

Sherlock opened the front door and slid into the front beside Molly.

“Well, what did she say?” She widened her eyes.

“Irene’s . . . she’s no longer part of the picture. It’s time for plan B, I need a place to take them, somewhere safe . . .”

“I know a place outside of the city.” John’s voice, croaky, came from the back. He cleared his throat. “It takes awhile to get there, but I think it’s still okay to use.”

“Sherlock, I have to get the car home before Dov realizes it’s missing. I can’t drive out of town,” Molly exploded.

“I know. You’ve done more than enough. Just drive a moment. I’ll think of something.”

In the end, Sherlock chose an unassuming groundcar on a side street, asking Molly to park nearby. Making sure no one was about when got out, he slipped a device from his pocket, using it to pop the locks and start the transmission.

“Sherlock, it’s illegal,” Molly hissed from the side of her mouth when he returned.

“And aiding the Resistance isn’t?”

Molly bit her lip, but said no more as she and the Bajoran woman helped Sherlock transfer things from the trunk to the new vehicle. John moved stiffly, but walked on his own to the front passenger seat. Between the three standing, they were able to get the half-conscious boy into the back without jostling him too badly. Lupaza managed to get him to take some pain pills with water before he went under again.

“Sherlock, be careful, alright?” Molly said when there was nothing more to do but make farewells.

Sherlock turned to regard her, standing so bravely, a few tendrils of hair escaping to fall into her face. A wave of affection washed over him.

“Mols. Thank you. For everything. I don’t know when I’ll see you again. I’m going to have to go underground.”

“I understand. I’m sorry I married a Glinn.”
“Don’t be. He’s a good sort.”

Molly threw her arms around him, squeezing him tightly for just an instant.

“Here, I’ve one last favor.” Sherlock handed her his phone. “Toss this into a rubbish incinerator, will you?”

Molly took it, nodding tightly. “Okay. Good-bye, Sherlock.”

“Bye.” Sherlock raised a hand before opening the door to climb into the driver’s seat of their newly-acquired transport.

John looked up from the console panel he’d managed to take apart.

“Been busy?”

“Found a tracking system. No worries, I disabled it.” Even through the puffy, bruised skin, John’s smile was cheeky.

“Good work,” Sherlock said. He peeled off his uniform jacket revealing a nondescript woven shirt underneath. “Where are we going, then?”

“I don’t have the coordinates.” John snapped the cover to the panel back in place. “Just get on the 340 Parkway going west, and I’ll manage direction as we get closer in.”

“Alright.” Sherlock stuffed the jacket under his seat, and set the car in motion.

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Several uncomfortable hours later, they finally turned down the unmarked country road that John indicated. They’d only stopped twice, once for Sherlock to dart into a store, returning with bags of supplies, and another brief pause by the side of the road for everyone to take a piss in the bushes. John had roused the boy, Naavi, to relieve himself into a bottle. Sherlock was impressed how unceremoniously Lupaza squatted behind a clump of weeds and did her business. He’d always known women to be a bit more fussy in their toilette.

“Like what you see, Cardassian?” she asked on the way back, spitting out the last as if it were an insult.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean . . .” Sherlock stammered.

“Oh Lupaza, leave off,” John cut in. “Sherlock doesn’t even like girls. Besides he’s saving our arses if you hadn’t noticed.”

The long rutted roadway ran through a tunnel of tall grasses, finally breaking out into an open, bare field with a one-story farmhouse waiting ahead.

Sherlock stopped the car on the parking pad out front, and those who could walk climbed out, grateful to stretch their legs. John moved to the entryway, placing a palm over the lock pad set flush with the stucco wall. The door slid open instantly.

“Here, we’d better check it out first before we bring him in.” John tipped his head back toward their
“Wait a minute.” Sherlock moved to the rear of the groundcar, fetching something from the trunk.

Lupaza eyed him warily, standing back as he returned with a disruptor pistol.

“Got anymore of those?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Sorry, just the one.”

Together, the three entered the farmhouse cautiously, peering about. It had a stale, dusty smell of a place not recently used. A large main room where kitchen, dining room, and sitting room blended together led to a hallway where bedrooms and a bathroom lay. Thankfully besides the wooden furniture, hooked rugs, and pottery stacked on the walls, there wasn’t much to see. John insisted on giving the storage cubbies a quick inspection though before declaring the space safe to use.

The house boasted four bedrooms, so they had their choice of sleeping arrangements. They helped the injured boy into a small room just off the main space, while Lupaza declared a yellow-painted room closest to the bathroom her own. Sherlock was certain one of the other rooms would be fine for John and him to choose later.

John eased himself into a padded armchair, his face looking grey as Sherlock and Lupaza moved to unload the supplies still waiting in the back of the car.

“So, what’s your story?” The Bajoran woman leered at him on their second trip outside. “I can’t recall ever having one of your kind worried about our kind.”

“Bajor is the only home I’ve ever known.” Sherlock shrugged, answering her in Bajoran. “The land and the people are one.”

“Huh. Pretty fancy talk for a spoonhead,” Lupaza snorted, switching to Bajoran as well.

“Here, take this.” Sherlock handed her a large box to carry. Shouldering the last of the bags, he pushed the button to seal the trunk door closed.

Once inside, Sherlock set to unpacking the things he needed. Medical supplies were first. He wanted to scan John immediately, but the man waved him off.

“Naw, it takes a lot to bring a Watson down.” John forced a smile. “Go see to Naavi first. He needs it more.”

Sherlock’s hand-held scanner confirmed that they youth had sustained internal injuries as well as several fractured bones in his bound foot. Sherlock used a tissue regenerator, passing it over Naavi’s sleeping form for several minutes before selecting a hypo-spray to inject him with a combo of immuno-boosters, and a stronger pain-killer. Lupaza hung around watching over his shoulder as if he were about to kill the boy he’d just worked so hard to get into the quilt-swathed bed.

“There, that’s all I can do with what I’ve got. He’s young though. He’s got a chance.” Sherlock gathered his things to move back to the front room to see to John.

Lupaza followed him like a black storm cloud hovering on the horizon, watching as he turned the scanner over John. Thankfully, it didn’t turn up anything more serious than a few cracked ribs. Even that made Sherlock see red though. John wasn’t supposed to be on that run. He’d promised. Sherlock’s stomach still hadn’t quite righted itself. They’d be talking about it later.
“There, see I told you we Watsons are tough.” John smiled at the pronouncement.

“If by tough you mean hard-headed, I agree,” Lupaza teased.

John started to laugh, and caught himself when it jarred his ribs. Sherlock frowned Lupaza’s way, wishing there were some way she could be made to leave.

He insisted John take a similar injection, even though the man argued they should save the medicine for more dire things. In the end Sherlock won out. John did sit willingly enough for the tissue regenerator to be used over his chest and face. It was a relief to see the angry swelling around his eye and mouth go down.

After that, Sherlock got out some of the food he’d brought with Lupaza’s help, covering the old solid table with ready-meals, fruit, juice, and several packages of crisp breads and sweets. Later when Naavi woke, Lupaza carried food to him in the bedroom. Sherlock could hear their voices, a patter in the background. He managed to hear “watch yourself, he speaks Bajoran” before he realized he was eavesdropping, and made himself tune it out.

“So, what is this place exactly?” Sherlock swung back to John who had risen to drop his empty packages into the kitchen’s recycler bin.

“Oh, didn’t I say? It’s my grandmother’s old farm.”

“I should have realized.” Sherlock glanced around the main room with new eyes. It was a place John and his mother had retreated to for several weeks every summer. It had been awful. Each year Sherlock railed at the injustice of having John gone for so long. The staff made terrible food in Mrs. Watson’s absence, and the long, hot days devoid of John dragged on interminably. Finally after days and days where Sherlock was only allowed to call John a few times on the vidphone, John would reappear, browner than usual, and brimming with stories of his holiday away. Sherlock had loathed the farm.

“I always wondered what it looked like. I could only see the wall behind you when I called.”

“Well, it looked a lot better before,” John said. “It was always good to come out and see everyone, but I always missed you.” He stood contemplating the space himself. “We came here for a bit when we had to leave town . . . back then.”

John wandered over to slide open a cabinet. “Prophets, look at this.” John pulled out a several brightly-colored shapes that he brought back to the sitting area. He dropped them onto the low table next to the armchairs.

Sherlock picked up one of the plush things. It was orange, twisted into a spiral with large googly eyes and a smile on one side. “Haro virus.” Sherlock smiled.

“Yeah, and here’s Summer Flu, and Stomach Rot.” John lifted the fuzzy shapes fondly. “I used to love the giant microbes.”

“I remember having a few of these too.”

“Yeah, right.” John nodded. “Damn. We lost so much when we went into hiding. I’m amazed to find these still here.”

“John . . .”

“We just lost touch with folks,” John went on, squeezing the purple blob in his hand. “I’d heard my
bibi died, and my Uncle Sam took over the farm, but then things got bad. The authorities poisoned all the farmland around here. They were rounding people up for work camps, and everyone just scattered. I’ve no idea where all the cousins went.”

“John. I’m so sorry.” Sherlock reached over to lay a hand to his arm. The words seemed so inadequate against the enormity of things.

“It’s alright, Sherlock. It’s not your fault.” John looked up with a smile that hurts Sherlock’s heart. “Hey, at least we’ve got a place off the radar to hole up for a few days. So there’s that.”

Sherlock would have struggled to say something more comforting, but Lupaza called him to help her carry Naavi down the hallway to the bathroom. Once the boy had been settled again, the three of them spent the afternoon getting the place more habitable. John focused on things he could do while seated. He booted up the power system run from solar panels on the roof, and got the old computer console working. Sherlock and Lupaza cleaned, and searched for any supplies that might be useful. There wasn’t any food in the house, but Sherlock proudly unpacked the small replicator he’d gotten and installed it in the kitchen. At least they wouldn’t go hungry.

“There’s an electric fence that runs around the property. It’s got a few shorts in it though.” John pointed to a diagram he’d pulled up on screen. “Maybe you can go out and look at it tomorrow. If we can get that running again, it would be a good perimeter defense.”

“So of course, John.” Sherlock nodded.

“Yeah, I’d like to do a bit of a walkabout anyway. See what’s around,” Lupaza added.

They were able to replicate a number of interesting things for dinner that didn’t taste half bad. Lupaza told amusing stories, and with a couple of lit candles on the table, it was almost festive. Dark was just settling in when they decided to make an early night of it. John took the first shower. Sherlock busied himself unpacking the several clothing items that he’d managed to grab on his shopping trip, passing some to Lupaza before she bathed.

“Well, it’s not the height of fashion,” she said, holding the baggy tunic up to herself, “but it’ll do. Thanks, Caradassian.” Oddly the way she said it didn’t sound so bad this time.

John chose the smaller of the two rooms left. “This was mine when I visited,” he said. The bed was large enough to fit the two of them easily, but Sherlock lingered in the doorway.

“John, if you’re not feeling well, and want to be alone . . .”

“No! Prophets, get in here.”

Sherlock settled them carefully, mindful of John’s injuries. It was sweet beyond belief to lie next to John, pressed along his side. Sherlock inhaled the scent of his cleaning products, and under that the comforting scent of John. Cautiously, he slipped an arm around John’s waist.

“Sherlock, I can’t thank you enough.” John’s voice was quiet in the dark room. “I really thought we were done for. To see you there . . . in that awful place. I just . . .” he trailed off, swallowing deeply.

“I wish I’d gotten there sooner. I’m sorry about the other two.” Sherlock tightened his hold around John’s middle slightly. “John, I asked you not to go. You promised.”

“I know you don’t want me to get hurt, but this is war. You know this, right? I can’t just sit back and let others take the heat. It’s for Bajor. It’s all for Bajor.”
“I know, John, I just wish . . .” Sherlock embarrassed himself by beginning to cry.

“Oh, love, don’t. Shhh. It’s alright. We’re okay.” John reached up and threaded fingers into Sherlock’s hair, combing through, soothing him. At length Sherlock settled, utter exhaustion seeping over him.

“I love you,” Sherlock murmured next to John’s ear before sleep claimed him.

“Love you too,” John rumbled in the dark.

They woke the next morning to Naavi screaming. Lupaza was in his room first to calm him. John struggled to sit up grimly, his muscles having stiffened in the night.

“John, what did they do to you in the center?” Sherlock asked.

“They didn’t get a chance to do much to me,” John winced, swinging his legs over the side of the bed. “I just got roughed up a bit when they hauled us in. They took Naavi and the other two to be questioned first. Whatever they did, it wasn’t good.”

“No.”

“You learn not to ask people questions about things like interrogations.”

“Right.”

Sherlock helped John to standing, and then went to fetch the medical gear. He found that Lupaza already had it out, using the regenerator on Naavi. “I saw what you did yesterday,” she snorted.

“Of course.” Sherlock said, watching her. “Just make sure you vary the angle, and don’t stay too long in one spot.”

“Yeah, yeah, I got this.”

“Thanks, Lupie, you’re an angel.” The boy looked up at her with such devotion, Sherlock almost laughed.

“I’ll go see about breakfast,” Sherlock said, excusing himself from the room.

After they’d eaten, and cleaned up, Sherlock and Lupaza kitted up to go work on the fence around the farm. It was a gorgeous day, full of sun. John found straw hats for the both of them to wear, and a scarf for Sherlock to wrap around his face.

“No offense, but they don’t get too many Cardassians around here.” John said. “I’d rather they didn’t shoot first and ask questions later if you run into any of the neighbors. Honestly, I have no idea who’s still out here.”

They found some basic tools in a work shed behind the house, and thus armed, set off to check on the spots John had identified along the fence.

The sky was so clear, they could see the nearby mountains etched in detail. It almost looked as if you could reach out and pluck them up like a model off a child’s play table.

“I grew up on the other side of those mountains,” Lupaza said as they stumped along, their feet kicking up dust from the barren field. “Most of the resistance started with the mountain folk. We’re used to doing for ourselves.”
“I was a city boy, myself,” Sherlock offered. “Grew up in Dahkur City in fact.”

“I heard they have good hasperat there.”

“They do. The dozas were to die for too. Of course John’s mother always made the best I ever had. She was our cook.”

“Ah, your cook.” Lupaza’s tone had gone a bit chilly, and Sherlock wanted to kick himself. They’d been getting along so well before he reminded her that the Bajorans in his life growing up had all been servants. Except John, of course. John had always just been himself.

Thankfully the problem areas in the fence were easy to find, places where it had ripped apart. They were able to solder wires back together easily enough with the maintenance wand they’d found. Lupaza had been helpful if not friendly holding the ends together, and they walked back to the house in a reasonably companionable mood.

John had something running on the console screen when they stepped into the cool dim of the farmhouse. Sherlock heard a high-pitched, imperious voice squeaking from the speakers. When he moved closer, he realized it was himself at about aged nine nattering away about soil samples. His face looked even more narrow than it did now. The only redeeming thing about the image was the split screen showing John’s earnest, slightly sunburned ten-year-old self grinning and nodding along with him.

Sherlock stopped, embarrassed as Lupaza crowded in to watch.

“John, did you get a clay sample from the riverbed? I want to add it to my collection.”

“No, but we’re going on a picnic tomorrow and I’ll get it then. My cousin Ralt is going to teach us fishing. I have to . . .”

“Jooohn, are you still talking. I want to call my friend Marrie.” Harry’s face butted into the image on John’s side.

“Ow, Get off Harry! I’m not done yet.”

“You’ve been on all morning! It’s my turn. Besides, Bibi says she needs you to help pick some podpeas.”

“Harry, you lump. Give me a minute, okay?” John shoved at her.

After a bit more scuffle, Harry finally flounced off screen, and John turned his scrunched face back toward the camera. “Sorry, Sherlock, I gotta go.”

“Can you call me tomorrow?” Sherlock’s younger self looked painfully worried.

“Of course.”

“Same time?”

“Yeah, course. Bye Sherlock.”

John cut the vid, swiveling around in his chair. “Oh, hi. Isn’t this funny? I found that my bibi had saved some of my old vidcalls.”

“Hilarious.” Sherlock sank into a nearby seat. Seeing Watson Harry brought some things back up he’d been trying hard not to think about.
“Oh, how sweet!” Lupaza declared, hands on her hips.

“Hey, how did the fence repair go?” John smiled between them.

Sherlock pass a hand over his face and let Lupaza give John a cheerful run-down over their progress for the morning.

“John, there’s something I’ve been meaning to tell you,” Sherlock blurted.

“Yeah?” John looked his way.

“We found Harry, or rather my brother did, and he might have gotten her off world where your mother is. If everything went to plan.”

“Good Prophets.” John’s mouth fell open. “Really? Why didn’t you tell me earlier! This is fantastic.”

Heedless of who might hear, tired of hiding, Sherlock started talking. It came spilling out in a rush like floodgates bursting open.

“It was a deal. If I led the Resistance to the armory where armed forces were waiting, Mycroft would give us Harry.”

“What?”

“It was a trap, John.” Sherlock flapped a hand. “Harry’s life in exchange for a few nameless Bajorans making a run on the facility. At least they were supposed to be nameless. I begged you not to go.”

“I don’t understand.”

“It’s simple, John. I’ve been working undercover for the Obsidian Order all this time, since the promotion. Mycroft found out what I was doing. He gave me a choice, face court martial or continue helping the Resistance, but to his specifications. What could I do? I was finally able to get my hands on some real supplies, real weapons . . . aircraft.”

“But why would Mycroft do that?” John frowned.

“Because the Obsidian Order wants this over,” Sherlock nearly cried. “They want out of Bajor, but the High Council doesn’t agree. Mycroft told me all they needed was some time, time for the Resistance to gain the lead, make it unprofitable to stay, and the planet would be free. All I had to do was give them a little information here and there. It’s why the safehouses have fallen in Illria. I had to give them something, play the game.”

“You don’t get something for nothing in this world,” Lupaza said wryly. Sherlock had almost forgotten she was there.

“The punishment for impersonating a member of the Obsidian Order is death.” Sherlock laughed mirthlessly. “When I broke you out of the research center, I was well within my rights to wear the black uniform. I just borrowed the name and rank of someone higher in the order to get you out, no questions asked.”

“Fuck.” John’s face had gone white. “Sherlock, I can’t . . .”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you, John. I’m sorry.” Sherlock hung his head. “I wanted to help Bajor. I needed to help you.”
“Right, I have to . . .” John stood stiffly. He moved to the entryway, stuffed his feet into some shoes there, and palmed the door open. “I need some air.” He disappeared into the bright midday light.

“I . . .” Sherlock started after him, but Lupaza put a hand to his shoulder.

“I’d let him go for a bit. He’ll be alright.”

“I don’t know what you must think of me.” Sherlock felt like vomiting.

Lupaza shrugged. “Hey, you got us out of certain death. We’ve got a place to stay, food to eat, and another day to make a difference. From where I’m standing, things look pretty good.”

“I meant what I said. I care about the Resistance. I care about Bajor.” Sherlock raised terrible eyes her way.

“Prophets save us, I believe you, Cardassian.” Lupaza dared a smile.

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Chapter End Notes

Lupaza is a wonderful character who made a brief appearance on DS9 - on Season: 3 Ep. 24, Shakaar. Kira Nerys takes a walk down memory lane as she is sent on a diplomatic mission on Bajor, and meets up with old comrades from her time in the Resistance. Lupaza was a fiesty, no-nonsense redhead who stole my heart. No worries - in this timeline, she has a long and happy retirement. ;)

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It was nearing dark when John finally returned to the house. Sherlock had spent the afternoon getting the console up to current specs, downloading patches, and his own spyware programs. Now that he had unmonitored access to the net again, some real work could begin. Lupaza had spend part of the day taking a walk of her own though she reported no sighting of John. It made sense that he knew the area well enough to disappear if he wanted to.

Sherlock passed on the offer of dinner, telling Lupaza he wasn’t hungry when she asked. She shrugged and made some food to eat with Naavi, retiring to her own room after. Sherlock was left alone with the quiet and his own thoughts in the main room. He was curled on the sofa, flipping through a bound copy of “Best Farming Practices” when the front door slid open. John appeared looking tired, but thankfully otherwise unharmed.

“John.” Sherlock sat up, the book falling from his fingers.

“Hi.” John hesitated a moment before moving to the kitchen. Sherlock watched as he found a glass, and filled it from the sink. After emptying it with several long pulls, John left it on the counter, returning to the sitting area.

“So, how was your day?” Sherlock tried to keep his voice light. “Lupaza went out and didn’t see you anywhere.”

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to worry you.” John winced, rubbing at his side as he lowered himself to the sofa beside him. “At first, I just needed to walk around, blow off some steam. Then I decided to check on the neighbors. There used to be a family down the road. Sadly, the place was just rubble. Then I went down to the river. Thankfully that was still there.”

“John.” Sherlock pushed past the lump that had formed in his throat. “I’m sorry. I wanted to tell you earlier, about everything . . .”

“Sherlock.” John reached down to scoop up Sherlock’s hand on the cushion between them, threading their fingers together. “I was hurt. I can’t say I wasn’t . . . to hear you were working for them. It feels like a betrayal.”

“I didn't want to.” Sherlock shook his head. "I was always on the side of the Resistance. I had no choice. You need to believe me.”

“I know, love. I do believe you and I forgive you. It doesn't mean I won't still be pissed off about it for awhile, but I get it.”

"John, I'm so sorry. I don't know what else to say."

There are losses to be mourned, but victories to be celebrated. Life goes on.
“Tell me that we're going to have nothing but the truth between us now. No more secrets, okay?”

“Yes, of course. No more lies. I’m done working for the Obsidian Order,” Sherlock's voice shook with the depth of his feeling. “I can’t go back to my old life though. I’m going to have to stay in hiding.”

“I understand. I suppose we can just stay here for awhile. Make this a base.” John glanced around at the cozily-lit room. “No reason not to.”

“John, if I’m going to slow you down, you can go, leave me here.”

“Hey.” John reached up, cupping the side of Sherlock’s jaw. He couldn’t help leaning into the warmth of it. “No one’s leaving anyone. We’re a team, you and me. Together.”

“Yes.” Sherlock turned his head to lay a kiss to John’s palm, grateful.

John watched, his pupils widening. “Did you eat?”

“No. I was waiting for you.”

“Good, let’s get something together. I’m starving.” John pulled away, moving back to the kitchen, as Sherlock rose to follow.

Later, in bed, John lay in Sherlock’s arms, his head pillowed on his shoulder. They’d made love carefully, Sherlock taking John into his mouth, then bringing himself off as John whispered encouragement his hand stroking down and over his arse.

“I shot a Cardassian soldier while he was napping once. Blew him away before he even knew what hit him.” John’s voice rose from somewhere near Sherlock’s chest. “I’m not proud of it, but I did what I had to do. It was me or him.”

“I understand, John.” Sherlock pressed his cheek to the top of John’s head.

“I don’t ever want to get to where it doesn’t bother me though.”

Sherlock nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

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Gradually, over the next few days, with continued medical treatment, Naavi grew well enough to join them at the table for meals. John was almost back to good, and along with Lupaza and Sherlock’s help started to set the farm back to rights.

“You know, we could use the land here. If we’re going to stay. Try growing something,” Lupaza said, spooning up a bite of the stew they’d gotten from the replicator. “The Resistance could use a source for fresh food.”

“We’d need a soil reclaimator,” John said. “The ground needs some work to get it clean enough to support anything.”

“I can get one.” Sherlock reached for a bun from the platter on the table. “If there’s one in inventory somewhere nearby, I can find it. We’ve got a groundcar. There’s nothing stopping us.”
“My people have been farmers for generations.” Lupaza nodded. “I think it’s in my blood. If we can get the ground settled, I can get something growing.”

“Can we grow rekja?” Naavi asked, his mouth full of stew. “I haven’t had fresh rekja in years.”

“Yeah, don’t see why not,” John said, smiling.

After their repast, Sherlock got on the console, hoping to work his magic to find the things they needed for the farm. A news bulletin caught his eye and he moved to enlarge it.

“Prophets, no.” Sherlock scanned over the text of the story, a hand flying to cover his mouth.

“Hey, what is it?” John came to stand behind him.

Sherlock unmuted the accompanying vid, letting it play out as Naavi and Lupaza crowded in to watch as well.

“This just in. The High Council has issued an edict. In light of recent terrorist attacks, fifty Bajoran citizens are to be chosen by lottery in each district for immediate execution in recompense for Cardassian lives lost. This number will be repeated each time an act of terrorism is perpetrated anywhere on Bajor. There is no word yet if key staff or children will be exempted from the selection . . .”

John found a chair and sank into it. “Good Prophets.”

“Hell,” Lupaza said simply.


Sherlock muted the rest of the vid, feeling ill. “I didn’t think they’d go through with it.”

“Of course they will. How else are they going to crush the Resistance?” Lupaza flung herself into another chair. “It won’t stop us though. If anything the Resistance will gain more support. The moderates will have to get off their arses if they don’t want their friends and families killed.”

“Fuck, it’s going to be a bloodbath.” John dropped his head into his hands. “Fuck.”

“It’s going to be war,” Sherlock said grimly. “Full on civil war.”

%%%

Although he wasn’t sure it would do any good, Sherlock had to try. Later, after the others had gone to sleep, he crept back to the console, and punched in a code, calling a private line.

“Sherlock,” Mycroft answered, surprised, wearing something pale, and soft, obviously on his way to bed. It seemed strange to see him out of his usual tight, black uniform. Sherlock had almost fancied that it had become part of him like a second skin. “Where are you?”

“It doesn’t matter. Somewhere safe.” Sherlock could see Mycroft’s eyes flicking down to a display by the screen. “I’m using blocking programs. You won’t be able to trace me.”

“I don’t have to trace you, Sherlock.” Mycroft looked annoyed. “Anyway, it doesn’t matter. I need you back. That was foolish what you did, but not unexpected. I’ve cleared the way for you to return to your position. All you need to do . . .”
“I’m not going back. I’m done with that.” Sherlock felt his throat growing tight, but he pushed the words past it anyway. “Mycroft, the executions. You have to do something. This is madness. You can’t let them start slaughtering the populous . . .”

“What would you have me do? Stage a coup over the High Council itself? The odd are low for any reasonable rate of success.”

“You have influences,” Sherlock spat. “There must be something you can do. It’s unconscionable! Barbaric! You can’t let them drag innocent civilians to death.”

“It’s out of my hands, little brother.” Mycroft spread his hands wide in display. “I understand your distress, of course. It’s a horrible business. If you were to able to return to your posting though, it’s possible . . .”

“Mycroft, damnit, I’m through playing games for the Obsidian Order. Can you do something or not?”

Mycroft deflated slightly. “I can’t, and even if I could, I wouldn’t.”

“What?”

“I know this seems . . . cruel, but the executions are actually just what we need. Think about it. There are many moderates who will oppose such drastic measures. Yes, some lives will be lost, but in the grand scheme of things, it will tip the balance. It will sway popular opinion, and Cardassia will have to let Bajor go. If you’ll just be patient . . .”

“I can’t be patient while people are being killed en masse.” Sherlock stabbed a finger to cut the call. Sherlock stared at the blank screen in horror for several minutes as the reality of the situation sunk in before folding down over the console. He lay his head into his arms, defeated, and let the tears come.

%%% They were dry-eyed the morning of the executions, though no one had much appetite for breakfast. Only Naavi managed to eat something while the rest clutched grimly at cups of cooling tea. Sherlock had hacked into the Disciplinary Office’s network and found the names of those slated to be killed in their district. Lupaza had found an uncle on the list, and all three of the Bajorans knew several of the names in passing. The executions were to be televised, death by gas chamber. Even though the desire to search for familiar faces in the crowd was strong, they’d decided not to watch, gathering for a vigil at the family shrine instead.

It lay undisturbed in the corner of the main room where it had obviously sat for many years. A flat, metal disc hung on the wall, a phrase in Bajoran from the Book of the Prophets embossed around the edges, “Although there be flow and change, in time, all things are one.” The low brazier surrounded by mats for kneeling greeted them as they settled in. John lit the fire in the metal bowl. He wasn’t the oldest gathered, Lupaza had several years on him, but Sherlock supposed he was the rightful head of household as owner of the farm. Once the fire died down, John threw a handful of incense he’d found in a nearby cupboard nearby across the burning coals. Sweet smoke rose to wreath around their heads.

They bowed heads in silence for a long moment until John started a prayer for the dead, and the others followed suit. Sherlock was surprised at how many of the words he knew. It wasn’t much
though, it didn’t stop the murder of innocents, but it was a comfort, their voices rising together, the old words repeated, a soothing flow of sibilants. Naavi read out the list of names they had, so many, too many, and a pause for the others across Bajor that they didn’t know.

A pall hung over them thick as fog as the day continued, despite the aggressively cheerful weather outside. Sherlock couldn’t shake the pain that had gathered inside his chest, and John kept a hard silence, answering questions in clipped monosyllables if at all. Naavi lay back down to rest as the other three spent the afternoon clearing out the barn. There were rotted sacks of feed to clear out, the cattle intended for them long gone. Sherlock and Lupaza hauled them outside into a midden pit while John swept behind. It kept them too busy to think for awhile. Lupaza insisted they eat something for dinner, and they forced themselves to comply, not wanting to waste the replicated supplies, though no one had much heart for it.

Sherlock made no comment as he watched Lupaza following Naavi to his room that night. He’d missed the change in their status. When he settled in bed next to John, they lay stiff as boards, side by side for a moment before John rolled into him, gripping Sherlock tightly.

“Sherlock. I think the Prophets have deserted us,” he whispered hotly, face pressed against Sherlock’s thin undershirt.

“No, never.” Sherlock gathered him close, smoothing a hand over John’s back. “Sometimes the way is unclear, but the Prophet’s path is always there,” he dredged up an old line of scripture.

John huffed a sad laugh. “I wish I could believe that.”

“It will get better. We’re going to make it better. We will. Together,” Sherlock whispered fiercely. He wanted to reach in and pull the terrible pain out of John. He’d bear it all if he could.

John turned his face up to find Sherlock’s mouth blindly. Their lips met in a crash, needy, devouring as they surged together. They pulled back just long enough to strip their few clothes away desperately, working to meet skin on skin as soon as possible. Hands reaching, mouths seeking, they made love as if they hadn’t touched each other properly in years. Sherlock fumbled for the clear pot of gel he’d replicated earlier. Scooping out a handful, he slicked himself and John up, dragging a wet palm over their cocks side by side. He cupped them together, letting his hand warm over them before starting a rhythm.

John shuddered, groaning until he reached out to grip Sherlock’s forearm. “No, don’t want to come . . . like this. Want you inside me.”

“Yes.” Sherlock needed no second invitation. As John parted his willing thighs, Sherlock slicked him up with more gel, fingers sliding deep into his welcoming heat before he followed quickly with his cock.

“John,” Sherlock near sobbed, sinking into him until they were flush, pressed together.

“Fuck me, please . . .”

Sherlock obeyed, retreated slightly, only to plunge back in. He pumped his hips, losing himself in the looping motion as John made fantastic bitten-off noises, his hands scrabbling to grip Sherlock’s arsecheeks, urging him on, harder, faster. John was good and warm, and everything that could possibly be right in the world. Sherlock lost himself in the moment, in the movement, vaguely aware of John working a hand between their sweat-slicked bodies to grasp himself, John gulping in air as his body tensed. Just the feel of John’s muscles pulled taught for his impending release tipped Sherlock over. He came in a flash of blinding light, barely registering John jerking beneath him.
Done, done in, he collapsed in a boneless heap over John’s limp form.

John managed to lift a hand, brushing back the hair that had flopped into Sherlock’s face.

“I fucking love you. You know that, don’t you?” he rasped.

“I love you too, John, so much.”

They parted only long enough to find something to wipe off with, then tumbled back together, sated, drifting off as their bodies melted against each other.

%%%

Sherlock woke to the bedroom door banging loudly open. “Alright, enough fucking off.”

Sherlock’s hand moved automatically toward the disruptor he’d stashed under the bed. He made himself pause as he focused on the figure in the doorway. It was only a rumpled Lupaza silhouetted by the light in the corridor.

“The fuck?” John blinked awake beside him, his hair sticking up charmingly in a dozen directions. He struggled up onto his elbows to better peer at the woman glowering at them from the doorway. “We were sleeping, Lupaza.”

“It’s daylight,” Lupaza stated flatly. “Come on, there’s a soil reclaimator that you found a few kilometers away from here. Let’s go get it. If we’re going to grow food for the Resistance, let’s start growing food.”

“Prophets.” John passed a hand over his face. “Can I get some pants on first?”

“Of course.” Lupaza looked a bit embarrassed at barging in on them. “I’m sorry. I just can’t sit around doing nothing. Not while . . . everything is going on.”

John nodded. “Yeah, I know. Give us a few minutes, alright Lupie?”

Her eyes roved over the two of them, and Sherlock felt very aware of his nudity beneath the blanket only half covering them. His chest ridges were on full display, and while he knew he wasn’t an unattractive Cardassian, it gave him pause to have a Bajoran woman staring at him unclothed.

“I’m not sure how you can stand it, John, sleeping with one of them.” Lupaza scowled. "And a traitor at that. Fucking spoonhead."

Sherlock wanted to sink into the ground.

“Fuck sake, Lupaza. Naavi is half your age, and I didn’t say anything. Sherlock’s not one of them!” John growled. “He’s a PERSON just like you or me, and he’s fucking helping us. Without him, we’d be hard pressed to GET a reclaimator.”

“We could steal one.”

“Yeah, and risk another round of executions? No thank you. Look, get the hell out. You’ve said enough.”
“Right.” Lupaza retreated, closing the door more quietly behind her.

John rolled out of bed, scrabbling along the floor to find his underwear. “She’s just upset.”

“I know,” Sherlock said quietly.

“Hey, give me a few minutes. I’ll talk to her, okay? What she said, that wasn’t right.”

“Okay.” Sherlock watched as John pulled on some clothes and stalked out the door.

Sherlock took his time getting up, making his way to the bathroom to take a shower, and dress fully in clean things before braving the common room. He fiddled with brushing his hair back in place before realizing he needed to face everyone sooner or later, and he might as well get it over with.

John, Naavi and Lupaza, were grouped around the table set for breakfast. They looked up as he entered. John stood, moving to Sherlock’s side instantly. He went up on the balls of his feet to press a quick kiss to Sherlock’s mouth.

“Alright?” John smiled.

“Yes, of course.” Sherlock tried for a return smile and botched it only slightly. He could feel the other Bajorans’ gazes boring holes into the side of head.

“Good.” John turned to face his friends, a fierce expression settling over his face.

“So listen up. I’m only going to say this once. Sherlock is not the enemy. He’s helping the Resistance, but more than that, he is my lakayha.” John slipped his arm around Sherlock’s waist, tugging him slightly closer. “If you have a problem with him, you have a problem with me. The Resistance needs everyone to set their differences aside to work together. That’s first day shit. Are you two in or out? If you’re in, I don’t want to hear another word about Sherlock unless it’s about how great he is. Got it?”


As it was, they didn’t manage to get the soil reclaimator that day, but they did get things ready for their scavenger mission. They decided it was too risky to continue using the stolen groundcar. An old broken farm truck sat in the back of the garage, and Sherlock suggested trying to cannibalize parts from the newer car to fix it.

Naavi turned out to have some practical mechanical knowledge from his father who’d worked at a fix-it shop. Sherlock left him directing John and Lupaza, as he returned indoors to the computer console to take care of the net side of things. The reclaimator was still at the nearby storage facility as he’d hoped. Once he was satisfied that he had work orders with a data trail good enough to fool even a thorough investigation, he saved it all to a data cube, and wandered out to see how the repairs were going.

“I said turn LEFT, not RIGHT,” Lupaza grunted as she and John worked to shift a heavy part into the engine of the truck.

“Don’t drop it, that’s the only capacitor we have.” Naavi hovered nervously nearby.

“John, you weren’t meant to be doing any heavy lifting,” Sherlock chided as he darted in to take John’s place. “Your ribs are still healing.”
“I’m not fragile,” John snapped, but he rubbed at his side all the same as he stepped back.

Sherlock stayed and assisted with the rest of the operation. It helped once they got the truck’s onboard computer working and it could tell them what needed to be done further to get the vehicle functioning. It was approaching the dinner hour by the time they’d gotten all the repairs done so they knocked off for the day. Sherlock still felt a bit touchy around the Bajorans and went to bed early pleading tiredness when the others suggested a card game.

“You alright, babe?” John poked his head into the bedroom.

“Just a bit of a headache.” Sherlock lay back on the bed, stacking the pillows behind him.

“Do you need anything?” John came all the way inside.

“No, I’m okay. I thought I’d read a bit and go to sleep.” Sherlock held up the book he’d grabbed from the shelf, a collection of Bajoran folk tales, in answer.

“Oh, if you’re sure. You do look a bit tired.”

“Thanks.” Sherlock grimaced.

“You also look beautiful.” John dropped one knee to the mattress, leaning in to drop a kiss to Sherlock’s forehead.

“Mmmm.” Sherlock tipped his head back, presenting his lips, and John smiled, moving back in to kiss his mouth.

“Sure you don’t want me to stay?”

“Actually, I thought I might need a bit of quiet.”

“Okay. I could replicate some pain pills.” John frowned.

“I’m fine, John. Go join your friends.” Sherlock waved him off.

“Alright. We won’t stay up late. Big day tomorrow.”

“Yes. I know.”

With a final kiss, John left, pulling the door behind him, leaving Sherlock to stew in peace over the story of how the sea-tiger got his stripes.

Sherlock could still hear the others laughing and exclaiming loudly over their game when he turned out the light, and pulled the covers up. He was awake when John finally tiptoed into the dark room, finding his way to the empty side of the bed. John lay a hand to his shoulder, but Sherlock didn’t fancy talking at the moment. He feigned sleep as John settled in beside him. Only when John’s breathing had slipped into a slow, regular pattern did Sherlock relax enough to drop off himself.

%%% 

“So, ya want a soil reclaimator, huh?” The Cardassian man asked somewhat incredulously.
“Hey, mate, I just deliver what they ask me to.” Sherlock shrugged one shoulder as he leaned against the counter, affecting his best "average bloke" stance.

The employee at the storage facility squinted at his reader pad. He reread the orders that had come up when he’d inserted Sherlock’s data cube. “Yeah, okay, I think we’ve got one in the back.”

“Oh, good. I won’t have to make this trip twice,” Sherlock drawled in a bored fashion.

“Hey, Ruzo, I need you to check . . .” the man called behind him to another employee in the back. Sherlock shifted his stance to face the window. He nodded toward John and Lupaza who waited outside in the farm truck. So far, so good.

It took a few minutes for the right equipment to be located, hoops to be jumped through, forms to be filled out. Every tick of the chrono on the wall felt like insects crawling up the back of Sherlock’s neck, but everything proceeded smoothly enough. Sherlock chatted aimlessly about the warm weather with the idiot behind the counter. He was a paunchy, out of shape fellow who had to tug his clothes back into place when he stood up.

“I didn’t think they were doing any farming around here,” The idiot scratched the back of his head.

“They aren’t. This is a new project in the Jantiza province.” Sherlock named the district to the south. “Some initiative. I dunno. Like I said, I just do what they tell me.”

“Don’t we all?” the man chortled.

Sherlock stopped himself from giving an eye roll, and managed a terse smile in return.

Finally, it was time to move the truck back to a loading dock, and pick up what was hopefully a functioning soil reclaimator. Sherlock sauntered casually back to the truck, opening the door to swing back into the front passenger seat. John being the most familiar with the vehicle’s controls was driving, with Lupaza in the back.

“Well, Cardassian, how’d it go?” Lupaza leaned forward to stick her head in between them. She had her curls stuffed under a cap, and both she and John were dressed in baggy work coveralls they’d found at the farm, but she was still quite clearly female.

They’d debated leaving her home that morning, really he and John could have covered things, but Lupaza had flatly refused to be ditched, “cooling her heels at base like a precious daylily” as she put it.

“Besides, you’ll need all hand on deck if a fight goes down, and I’m in top form,” Lupaza boasted, flexing her biceps.

“There will be NO fighting.” Sherlock insisted. “If any fighting goes down, we will draw attention to our taking a soil reclaimator, and attention is the LAST thing we need. John.” Sherlock turned to John for back-up.

“Oh, come on, Sherlock.” John said instead. “Lupie can keep it low-key. Besides, she knows the roads around here better than I do.”

In the end, Sherlock had been persuaded to make it a three-person mission, though he’d personally maintained that fewer would have been safer.

“It went fine,” Sherlock said over his shoulder to Lupaza, “but we’re not out of here yet. We need to go to dock five. It’s in the back.”
“Alright, let’s go.” John nodded, and set the truck in motion. He navigated to the rear of the building, turning the vehicle smoothly to back up to the right docking bay.

The three of them got out to assist the proceedings. Sherlock clutched the all important print-out in his hand he’d gotten from the front desk while John and Lupaza hung behind, heads down. The three Cardassians at the dock roused into motion were a low-breed, teeth stained with katterpod chewing. As Sherlock feared, the thin one had started eyeing Lupaza up. He did it after getting a good eyeful of John first though, and Sherlock groaned inwardly. Damn. Closeted gay. He might just decide to make some big show to impress his fellows. If only they could move this along quickly before anything happened . . . .

“We’re picking up the soil reclaimator.” Sherlock stepped briskly forward, extending the invoice. “In a bit of a hurry, if you don’t mind.”

“Yeah, alright.” The bulky one who seemed to be in charge took the paper, motioned the other two to see to the machinery. It was nearly as large as the farm truck, but once its anti-gravity coasters were activated, it wasn’t too difficult to maneuver. Lupaza helped the two lunks get it into place while John readied the tractor beam on the back of the truck. Sherlock stood next to the manager as if they were somehow helping the proceedings simply by watching.

“Huh, I didn’t know they were doing farming around here,” the big man said.

Sherlock suppressed yet another eye roll, and went through his song and dance about the “new farming project” in the neighboring district. He breathed a sigh of relief when the beam clicked on, securing the thing behind their truck.

“Well, thanks so much for your help. Guess we can get back on the road.” Sherlock clapped his hands, ready to depart as soon as possible.

“What’s your hurry? Surely you could take a quick break. We’ve got a canteen inside.” The skinny man tipped his head back toward the warehouse. He’d advanced on Lupaza, close enough to reach out and place a hand along her hip. “How about it, girlie? Maybe if you all took a short break, we could spend a few minutes together.” He let his hand slide down her flank, caressing the muscle. Lupaza had gone stock still. Sherlock could see the need to lash out being held barely in check by his orders to keep her head down. John looked thunderous, jaw set, ready to intervene, mission or no.

“Leave her alone.” Sherlock moved in as quickly as he could. “This one works for me, and she’s got a job to do!”

“Easy, friend, way I see it, a few extra minutes break wouldn’t matter that much,” the man leered, letting his hand move around to squeeze Lupaza’s rump. She squeaked and jumped, something like murder brewing in her eyes. The other Cardassians laughed.

Before it could escalate further, Sherlock stepped between them.

“Enough. I’ve got a long drive and a schedule to keep. We don’t have time for this.”

“Alright, alright. Just trying to have a little fun.” The man backed off, holding his hands up in mock surrender.

Sherlock snorted, herding Lupaza and John ahead of him back to the truck. He supposed he was lucky the idiot who only wanted to make a show of going after the Bajoran woman was the one who had stepped forward. Thankfully nothing more untoward happened as they climbed into their vehicle. The workers had already drifted back inside now that the excitement for the day was over.
“Damn.” John blew out a breath, and started the truck.

“Mother-loving Cardassians!” Lupaza hissed as John moved them through the parking lot. “Fuck them all.”

“I’m sorry,” Sherlock said. He hoped Lupaza wasn’t including him in her curse, but he would understand if she did.

“Thanks for helping,” John said once they had made it back onto open road.

“Of course. That guy wasn’t serious though, you know. You were the one he really wanted to go after. Lupaza was smokescreen.”

“What?” John burst out.

“He was drinking in your arse the whole time you were behind the truck.” Sherlock admitted. “I wanted to relocate his head straight up his.”

A gale of laughter greeted them from the backseat. “Good one, Cardassian,” she chortled.

Lupaza reached forward to clap Sherlock’s shoulder in a friendly way. It almost knocked him from his chair. It seemed he’d been forgiven for his race for the moment though.

Despite the slight unpleasantness as the loading bay, they had what they’d come for, and spirits ran high on the trip home. Lupaza started up a lewd Bajoran drinking song that Sherlock didn’t know, but Lupaza was happy to teach him the lyrics. John joined on with the chorus a few times, but kept his eye on the road, checking the rear-view cameras often. All in all, it had been a most productive day Sherlock thought when they reached the gates to the farmstead.

Naavi was relieved to see them, and exclaimed proudly over the new equipment. It was an older model, nothing to write sonnets over, but Sherlock hoped it would do the job they needed it for.

Once they’d parked it in the garage behind the house, Sherlock thought they might go relax indoors together, get something to eat, but John waved them off.

“Look, go on. I just want to make sure all the tools are secured. I’ll be inside in a minute.”


“John, are you alright?” He trailed after John to the rear of the garage where they’d worked on the engine earlier. He was fairly certain they’d already put everything away, but John squatted down to retrieve a sonic screwdriver that had obviously fallen to the ground and rolled to the wall.

“Yeah, never better.” John wrenched open a cabinet to fling the tool inside. He slammed the door shut, leaning in to press his forehead against it.

“John.” Sherlock lay a hand tentatively to his back. It still amazed him sometimes that he was taller than John. The man had such a presence about him. Sherlock felt that surely they must be the same height, or John the taller one.

“I’m fine.”

“You don’t look fine,” Sherlock said.

“Alright, I’m not fine.” John huffed out a breath.
Sherlock waited patiently, certain John would tell him more when he was ready and not before.

Finally John pushed away from the cabinet, and turned around. “I couldn’t do anything today when that fuckhead grabbed Lupaza. Nothing. I was useless. If he’d gone after me, I wouldn’t have been able to do anything either.”

“John . . .”

“He could have bent me over the back of the farm truck, and if I said anything, fought back, they’d be in their rights to have me killed.”

“I’d have killed him if he’d laid a hand on you,” Sherlock growled.

“Yeah? If there were any Bajorans on hand, they could call it an act of terrorism, and a whole new batch of us could be rounded up for execution.”

“I’m sorry,” Sherlock didn’t know what to say. Tears were welling up in his eyes. “John, it’s not right. I know it’s not. It’s why we’re fighting in the best ways we can, fighting to support the Resistance. It’s going to happen. You just have to hold on . . .”

“I don’t know if I can hold on.” John hung his head.

Sherlock squinted toward the doors at the warm midday light outside. “How far is it to the river?”

“Not far, half hour walk.”

“Good, let’s go. Show it to me.”

“What, now?”

“Do you have anything more pressing planned?” Sherlock let the head cock to the side.

“No, I think my schedule’s clear enough.” John reached out to take Sherlock’s hand, lacing their fingers together.

They walked behind the outbuildings, making their way across the empty field to a line of trees. The sun beat down overhead, and Sherlock wished briefly that he’d though to grab a hat before they’d left. John led Sherlock to a gate in the wire fence where his palm over the sensor quickly opened it.

“I can key this for everyone,” John said thoughtfully.

“Sure, we can do that later.”

It was cooler in the shade of the trees, and they fell into single file, John leading the way along a small dirt path worn into the ground by countless feet that had come before. The sunlight dappled down through the leaves painting bright and dark alternately over John’s golden hair. They finally broke free from the cover to find the river, a wide expanse of water glittering like a live thing as it wound its way past sandy banks.

“Come on, there’s a swimming area.” John’s teeth flashed white in his face as he glanced back, his step quickening as he moved ahead.

They reached the right place soon enough, a spot where the river widened and slowed, caught between wide flat rocks. A rope swing hung overhead from a sturdy tree branch over the deeper water. Sherlock had but a moment to admire the idyllic view before a more-compelling sight caught his eye, that of John stripping away his clothes.
“Last one in is a rotten regova egg.” John grinned.

“Ha!” Sherlock shucked his top before starting on his trousers, but John was quicker, down to his tan skin and running bare-arsed to the water’s edge before he’d even got his boots off.

With a whoop, John plunged into the water, the splash sending droplets high into the air. Sherlock made short work of his remaining clothes, glad to be free of the hot things, and jumped in after. The water was cold, a shock after the heat of the day, but a welcome one.

Sherlock rose to the surface, shaking wet hair out of his face. With a few strokes, he made it back to a shallower area where his toes touched the muddy bottom. He watched John swimming laps across the deeper pool, his arms swinging in an arc as they cut through the water. John looked as if he might be at it for awhile. The chill of the water had started to reach his bones, damn physiology. Sherlock waded over to the rocks. He pulled himself up onto a wide flat shelf, staining the surface dark with the water sluicing from his body. The stone was deliciously warm after the cool of the water. Sherlock stretched out, luxuriating in the feel of the sun shining down on his chilled flesh. He closed his eyes, a happy rumble in his throat. Bliss.

Cold drops of water startled him, and Sherlock opened his eyes to find a wet John standing over him, his chest heaving as he caught his breath. His hair hung dark and heavy, dripping water that slid over his shoulders past brown nipples standing peaked. Sherlock’s gaze dropped lower, following the sparse trail of hair to his cock and balls nestled in close to his body. Even soft, John was magnificent. Sherlock’s mouth went dry with sudden want.

“Hello, gorgeous, come here often?” John waggled his eyebrows somewhat comically, and Sherlock had to laugh.

“No, but I’d like to.” Sherlock sat upright, making more space. He patted the rock beside him. “Why don’t you pull up a chair and join me, handsome?”

“No mind if I do.” John dropped carefully to the rock, stretching out beside him.

“This is beautiful.” Sherlock looked about at the green shifting in the slight breeze. It was so peaceful with only the occasional squawk of birdsong, and the sound of the water rippling about the rocks as it flowed downstream. “I can understand wanting to leave Dahkur City for this every summer.”

“Yeah, I love this spot.” John sat up wrapping his arms loosely around his knees. “I forgot how much. We had a lot of good times here.”

“I’m glad I got to see it with you.” Sherlock smiled.

“Had my first kiss here actually.” John rubbed his chin, meditatively.

“What?” Sherlock almost fell off the rock. “You never told me about that.”

“Prophets, of course I wasn’t going to tell you about that.”

“When? Who was it? How old were you? Why didn’t I figure it out?” Sherlock felt hot indignation rising through him.

“Falten Bella. She was a friend of my cousin’s. I was sixteen, and you couldn’t tell just by looking at me.” John tilted his head to better regard him, a smile dancing over lips. “You don’t get a red light over your head after someone’s kissed you.”

“So she kissed you.”
“She did.” John nodded. “She acted like she was drowning, came off the rope swing, and started thrashing around like she was in trouble. I didn’t realize at the time that she was an expert swimmer. Everyone else was in on it. Like a numpty, I jumped in to save her. She grabbed me, thanked me over and over, and as soon as we got to the shallows, she tried to suck my face off.”

“What did you do?”

“Dropped her arse and got out of the water. Everyone laughed and we just played it off like a big joke. She apologized later.”

“And . . . you didn’t . . . kiss her again?”

“Of course not. It was like being attacked by a sucker-fish.” John regarded him coyly from under his eyelashes. “It did get me thinking about who I DID want to be kissing though.”

“Really, who?” Sherlock narrowed his eyes.

“Prophets save me. YOU, you idiot.”

“You didn’t say a thing.” Sherlock shook his head in wonder.

“Well, of course not. I’d gone and fallen in love with my best friend. I had no idea how you felt about things, and I was too terrified to ask.”

"You did kiss me though, the night of my birthday party."

"I couldn't stop myself." John almost blushed. "You looked gorgeous that night."

“John.” Sherlock felt a wave of something swell over him, and couldn’t say anymore. If only they’d had more time together after they’d shared their first kiss.

“Hey, come here.” John leaned in, reaching out to steady Sherlock’s chin as he covered his mouth with his own.

The kiss was sweet as summer sunshine. It went on and on, filling him up, burning all the shadows away.

“Come in the water with me.” John slipped back into the river. He beckoned Sherlock like some debauched water spirit, holding his arms out.

Almost in a trance, Sherlock dropped in beside him. John pulled him close, urging Sherlock to lift up and wrap his legs around his waist. John’s hands moved to hold him in place, comfortably cradling his arse. “Mmmm, can’t hold you like this on land.”

“No,” Sherlock agreed, nuzzling in close, bending to find John’s lips again.

They kissed and kissed, twining together, embracing as tightly as possible. Sherlock’s erection dragged across John’s belly as his lover’s own sizable girth rubbed against his arse. It was lovely, but not enough friction to get off. Eventually, even with the heat of John’s body against him, the cold water had him shivering.

“You’re cold. Let’s get out.” John released him, and Sherlock unwound his legs to touch bottom again. They waded unsteadily back to shore, dropping to the sandy beach. John was on him in an instant, pulling him close. The sand was gritty, but Sherlock could have cared less.

“Want you, Prophets, I always want you.”
“Want you too.” Sherlock stared at the water droplets clinging to John’s eyelashes.

John spat in his hand, and gathered their cocks together, side by side. It felt exquisite, the heat of John against him like a live coal. John moved his fist, and Sherlock gasped, arched his back as lightning zinged up his spine.

“You, it’s always you. Every time I wanked that summer, and every time after, it was always you in my mind.” John’s eyes were half closed, his words tumbling out like a chant.

“Fuck, John.”

“Yes, fuck me, come on me,” John crooned, urging him on.

Sherlock came with a cry, letting John pump the last quakes of pleasure from him until he became too sensitive. When he could see straight, Sherlock pushed John’s hand away from his own, still-hard erection and moved to suck the tip into his mouth. He wrapped his hand around the base he couldn’t reach, sliding it up to reach his taut lips. It was bliss to feel John fall apart because of him.

“Sherl . . . fuck . . . yes . . .” John shuddered, finally emptying himself into Sherlock’s mouth.

They lay quietly afterwards, catching their breath, Sherlock half on top of John.

“What did I do to deserve you, love?” John sighed, his hand petting patterns over Sherlock’s back. “You get me soil reclaimators, and make me see stars with that pretty mouth. I’m a blessed man.”

“Happy to do it.” Sherlock smiled lazily, happy. “You could thank me with some food though.”

“Prophets, yes. I’m starving. Let’s get back.”

It was chilly work cleaning off the sand that had gotten simply everywhere, splashing in the river. They found clothes, and redressed, despite being still damp, the cloth clinging to wet skin. Looking decent enough, they headed back to the house, much calmer than they had set out.

%%%
Home is where they have to take you in

Chapter Summary

Life at the farm gets increasingly interesting as more people arrive to join them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Naavi took to the soil reclaimator like a water fowl to a lake, figuring out the remote controls, and how to set it running. They put the big machine to work on the nearest barren field that day, watching as it hummed, skimming over the dirt, eliminating toxins. Over the next few days, they took turns overseeing the running of it, making sure it ran in straight lines as it covered the fields. It gave Sherlock a warm feeling in the pit of his stomach just to see the progress being made, something good from the ruin.

It was on Lupaza and Naavi’s watch that the two little girls were found. They had come up from the river to huddle in some weeds to watch the machine work, scrawny, terrible, hollow-eyed little birds. Lupaza spotted them and of course brought them right to the house for something to eat and drink. Sherlock and John had sneaked off to their room for a quiet afternoon kip together. It felt horribly indulgent, but pure bliss to lie next to John in the heat of the day, an arm slung over his belly, cool air from the vents blowing over them as they dozed. Of course when they woke, it had been only natural to roll together, and trade lazy kisses that led to soft love making.

Sherlock was still smiling, loose and relaxed when he left the bedroom, stepping into the shock of two shrieking Bajoran girls. John was hot on his heels, tugging on his trousers to see what the commotion was.

The Bajorans calmed their guests down while Sherlock retreated back to the bedroom.

“He’s a friend, see? It’s okay, sweetheart,” Lupaza crooned as Sherlock warily tried entering the main room later.

“Hey, love.” John smiled apologetically. He made a point of kissing Sherlock hello.

The, girls wrinkled their faces, but soon went back to devouring a plate of sweet rolls, and cups of milk from the replicator. Gradually once their hunger and thirst had been filled, their story came out. The girls’ family had been one of the last to stay in the area. When their parents were rounded up for a work camp, the two had escaped into the woods. They’d been on their own for months, scavenging what they could find to survive.

Lupaza made them head to the tub next for a well-needed bath.

“Poor tykes. At least I was older then they took my Da.” Naavi shook his head.

The adults met in the common room after the girls were settled into bed. Lupaza had readily agreed to share her room with the girls.
“Can they stay, Watson?” Lupaza turned worried eyes John’s way.

“Prophets, Lupaza, of course. Where the hell else would they go?” John rubbed a hand over his face. “Sherlock?” John turned a weary glance his way.

“What? John it’s your farm.”

“No, it’s our farm. All four of us have a stake here.” John spread his hands out to include the four of them. “What’s the vote?”

“Stay,” Lupaza clipped.

“I vote they should stay,” Naavi said solemnly, looking pleased at being asked.

“Of course they should stay,” Sherlock huffed. “It would be barbaric to send them away.”

“Good, then it’s decided. Stay.” John nodded. “They’ll need some kind of schedule, and we’ll have to figure out something for schooling . . .”

“Watson, relax.” Lupaza rose to put a hand to his shoulder. “We just need to start with food and a place to sleep. We’ll figure out the rest later.”

The girls were only the beginning. Just when Sherlock thought he’d gotten used to having them around, following after Lupaza like little hatchlings, a whole family with a baby showed up asking for shelter. A few days later, a couple of young men trickled in. They quickly set up the barn as a place for people to bed down, the girls naturally gravitating to the family that already had small ones with them.

“Where the fuck are all these people coming from?” John pulled at his hair. They’d gathered in the common room to discuss things after taking dinner out to their guests.

“I’m sorry.” Naavi looked sheepish. “I logged on and told a few friends we had safe space here.”

“You WHAT?” John cried.

“Relax, it was encrypted. Only the Resistance can find it.” Naavi snorted.

“AArrrrrr . . . you might have asked first,” John sputtered.

“Sorry,” Naavi mumbled.

“Watson, it makes sense though. We’re set up here to take people in.” Lupaza turned serious eyes John’s way. “We could use help on the farm. Why not make it a refugee camp?”

“It would be one people can get to without having to go interstellar,” Sherlock added.

“It raises the risk,” John said. “We’ll draw more attention with more activity out here.”

“Everything’s a damn risk,” Naavi grumbled. “We need to help people if we can.”

“We’ll need to think big,” Sherlock said, letting the images form in his mind. “We could build some new structures, dormitories, and make them look like greenhouses. If I could get my hands on a cloaking device, we could even use that on the farm, make it so people couldn’t see most of the fields from the road.”

“It could work.” John licked his lips, excitement rising in his face. “Prophets, let’s do this. I’m in.”
John stuck his hand out, and one by one, the other three stacked their hands on top, Bajoran, Cardassian, Bajoran, Bajoran. With a cheer, they broke apart.

Lupaza moved to the replicator to get some wine to celebrate. They took it out to the barn to inform the rest of the crew of their decision, and a few toasts turned into an evening of singing and drinking around a bonfire before everyone finally dragged off to bed in the wee hours.

“Sherlock, we’ll need to put the farm in your name,” John said the next morning when they were sipping water, and nursing sore heads. “It’s safer that way. It’ll keep the property from being seized if it’s not owned by a Bajoran.”

“You’re right.” Sherlock felt vaguely guilty, but John had a point.

It wasn’t hard. Sherlock got on the net, and sifted through the records until he found the ownership entry for the farm. John’s grandmother was still listed as the nominal owner for the property. John got a bit teary-eyed just seeing her name on the screen, but sniffed it away.

Sherlock’s fingers flew as he altered the records, backdating the transaction to several years ago where it wouldn’t catch much interest.

“There,” he pushed the final key with a flourish. He was now the proud owner of a farm in Dahkur province.

“Thank you.” John’s eyes shone.

“John, I’m sorry this is necessary. I know I’m not really the owner of your family’s farm. It’s yours. It will always be yours.”

“Hey, hey. It’s okay, love.” John stood beside Sherlock’s chair, wrapping an arm around his shoulder. “It’s OUR farm. You’re my lahkaya. What’s mine is yours.”

Sherlock turned to press his face into John’s belly. It felt like something big, something permanent even if John was playing it off.

“Hey, let’s go take a shower.” John smiled.

Sherlock nodded and let John lead him to the bathroom where they might have some privacy together before everyone else stirred to life.

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“Prophets, the fucking irrigation system is crap,” John groaned where he hunkered down by the equipment that had been rolled out over the field. Metal structures held up the sprinklers, but the hoses that connected them were in sad shape. He reached out to poke his fingers into the hole in the piping. “The tubes have rotted out. We’ll need to replace them all.”

“I can find something.” Sherlock nodded. “Just let me pop online.”

“I know you can.” John squinted up at him. You really are Father Winter, love. It’s just going to be a pain in the arse to replace all these pipes.”

“We’ll get it done. We’ve enough hands now.”
“Yeah, we do.” John wiped his hands off on his trousers as he stood. “That’s the good news.”

Sherlock looked over at the new buildings lined up in neat rows by the barn. They’d worked hard over the last few months, bringing in people, setting up the greenhouse dorms, and converting the barn into a community center with a dining hall, bathrooms, and a nursery and school room. Things weren’t finished, but Sherlock was proud of what they’d accomplished in so short a time. Already a scrim of green covered a once barren field, but of course if they didn’t fix the irrigation system in a timely manner, much of it would soon wither.

Sherlock took his hat off to wipe the sweat from his brow before jamming it back on. The heat of summer had settled over them in full force. If it was bothering him with his Cardassian physiology, he knew the Bajorans were suffering. Few were complaining though.

“Truck’s coming in.” Sherlock jerked his chin toward the drive, watching the plume of dust as the vehicle turned in from the main road.

“Right, let’s go.” John nodded, leading the way.

Sherlock glanced over at John as they moved to meet the truck. John had gone brown as a kava nut from so much time outside, a sheen of sweat making him glisten. He looked radiant. John felt Sherlock’s eyes on him, and looked over with a smile, this teeth even whiter against his browned skin.

Sherlock tensed a bit as the truck shuddered to a stop before the house, and someone got out to open the back.

Every week, they brought in refugees gathered up from check points around the area. There were always Bajorans needing somewhere safe to go. John and Sherlock made a point of greeting the new people before passing them off to others to get settled. John wanted to make it abundantly clear to all at the farm that they were all here by the good graces of Sherlock, and even if he was a Cardassian, he was to be treated with respect.

“Nerys!” John called as a familiar face tumbled from the back of the truck with the newest arrivals.

Kira Nerys looked weary, but her face lit up with her smile. “Watson John, you bastard. I had no idea you were out here.”

“Yeah, this is our farm.” John motioned toward Sherlock before pulling Kira into a bear hug.

“Mmm, John, it’s good to see you.” Kira shut her eyes as they embraced.

“Prophets, you too.”

Sherlock couldn’t help the shiver of jealousy that shimmied up his spine at the two of them wrapped together. They were of a height, and looked so much as if they belonged together. John squeezed the woman a final time before stepping away.

“Alright, listen up you lot!” John addessed the small crowd, falling into his usual spiel. There were rules for everyone at the farm. No stealing, no fighting, enforced curfew, and only sex with people of age who said yes. There was a duty roster and an expected amount of volunteer time each week. For those who wanted to work on missions for the Resistance, there was a list for that too. No one was allowed off the property without permission, but there were regular trips down to the river, and all the food, medicine, and clothing people needed. Also there was a Cardassian who owned the farm and was working with them. If anyone had a problem with that, they could leave now.
Wary eyes cut Sherlock’s way, but they were eyes filled with hope. Sherlock stood quietly bearing the weight of their stares until John moved on to something else. Thankfully no one had left yet in protest to his presence. Sherlock sighed when the group had finally been assigned to their guides, and filtered off toward the barn for processing.

“Do you mind if I offer Kira room at the house?” John turned to ask Sherlock.

Lupaza and Naavi seemed to have split amicably several weeks ago, when an old friend of Lupaza’s blew into camp, a big, burly, one-armed man named Furel. He’d moved in with Lupaza immediately. Naavi, back to peak health, had bunked off to join his mates in the dorms.

“No, that’s fine of course. We’ve got the spare room.” Sherlock forced a smile.

“Yeah, good, thanks. I’ll just go ask her.” John reached out to squeeze his shoulder before jogging off to catch up.

Dismissed from greeter duties, Sherlock drifted back in to the welcome cool of the house, trying not to brood, and doing it anyway.

Furel was in the main room, making repairs on a shirt with a needle and thread, somehow navigating it all easily enough with only one hand.

“Sherlock, come pull up a chair,” he boomed. “I was just about to knock off and have some tea.”

Sherlock put off a sulk in his bedroom to ask Furel what he wanted and fetched two sweet Deka teas from the replicator after his answer. Of all the reactions he’d gotten upon meeting new Bajorans at the farm, Furel’s one-armed hug had been the warmest.

“Ah, thanks so much.” Furel grinned widely as Sherlock placed the cup on the table by his elbow.

“So what has this fine day brought you, my friend?”

Sherlock generally spent his mornings online, surfing the net, looking for information or supplies that might help them, He’d also begun leading a computer tech class in the evenings for those interested. Between the two, his time was mostly his own, though he generally did whatever John needed of him.

“Truck arrived.” Sherlock shrugged. “Just got some newbies in.”

“Splendid. New hands are always good.” Furel took a swallow of his tea.

“John . . . and I . . . know one of them, Kira Nerys?”

“Oh bleeding Prophets, Kira’s here?” The man bounced out of his seat and was out the door before Sherlock could say another word.

Sherlock sighed and took his tea into his room to continue his bad mood in peace. He had managed to locate a reader pad on one of their forays for supplies, and had it heavily blocked and encrypted. Setting his tea to the bedside table, Sherlock settled in and began his search for the irrigation tubes they’d need to fix the water problem.

John called a Council of Elders meeting before bedtime that night to listen to news Kira brought with her. John, Sherlock, and Lupaza had fallen into being in charge as instigators of the farm project, but others with good skills had joined them as time went on. They had an elderly woman who had been trained as a doctor before the occupation, and a jovial man with engineering knowhow who seemed to have naturally risen as a problem solver around the farm.
The six met in the common room of the house once Sherlock’s tech students had cleared out. He had a number of very talented men and women of varying ages eager to learn what he could teach him. Sherlock was certain that very soon, they’d be ready to unleash their formidable cyber hacking skills against the Cardassian government.

“The spoonheads found the stronghold in the hills,” Kira leaned onto her elbows braced on the table. “They captured so many. We only just managed to get the Kai out. They got Shakaar, and a number of others though.”

“Shit.” Lupaza grimaced.

“We think they took most of the hostages to labor camps. Thankfully we only lost a few to disruptor fire.” Kira blew out a breath. “We had to scatter though. The Dahkur Province cell of the Resistance is no more.”

“That’s not good. We need to reorganize,” John said frowning.

“This could be a base of operations.” Lupaza had a gleam in her eye.

“I’m not sure that’s such a good idea. This is a refugee camp,” Sito, the elderly doctor cut in. “We run the risk of bringing more attention on ourselves if we have too much activity going on here.” Brin, the engineer shook his head. “We need to do something. We were making progress against the Empire. We can’t just let the momentum go.”

“There are other unused properties in the area that could be used as a Resistance base,” Sherlock suggested. “We could funnel them supplies.”

“We could perhaps build some underground facilities,” Brin suggested.

“Yes!” Kira slapped a palm on the table. “I like it.”

“Let’s do it.” John’s grin was bright, almost incandescent.

Sherlock nodded as a shiver went over his spine. He wondered what new dangers they would be drawing closer.

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A pounding on the bedroom door woke Sherlock from a sound sleep.

“Hey, wot . . .” John struggled upright beside him.

“There’s trouble. Someone sounded the alarm.” Lupaza stuck her head in.

“We’re on our way.” Sherlock flipped back the blankets, crouching to find the clothes he’d dropped on the floor earlier.

He found his disruptor, and stuck it down the back of his waistband. John moved about nearby, quickly gathering his own things.

“Prophets, we should be better prepared for emergencies,” John growled, hopping into his pants.
They left the house in various stages of undress, only Kira was still fully clothed as they stumbled toward the barn where the commotion seemed to be thickest.

“In the dining hall!” Someone pointed them.

Sherlock was especially proud of the two industrial grade replicators they’d managed to lift from a storage facility. Installed in the dining hall, they were perfect to feed the lot of them before the harvest came due. Sherlock realized instantly their downside when they skidded into the room thick with the stench of spilled synth-ale, and the group of teenagers engaged in a vicious brawl. Several broken tables and chairs already littered the area, as terrified onlookers hugged the walls.

Kira, John, Furel and Lupaza charged in first trying to restore order, but things were out of control. Someone smacked Lupaza over the back of the head, and she collapsed. Furel cried out, and punched the boy responsible, the fight simply getting worse. Sherlock whipped out his disruptor, made sure it was set to stun, and shot it into the whirling mass. As those in the center dropped insensate, the fighters on the edges finally stopped, looking up, blinking.

“Fucking SPOONHEAD!” someone from the sides called out. “NO RIGHT . . .”

It looked as if things might start back up again with Sherlock at the focus, when Kira pushed in front of him, murder in her expression.

“Just what the HELL is going on here?” Kira roared at those still standing. “Can SOMEONE explain how valuable resources were wasted today over some BULLSHIT fight?!”

Tempers evaporated as the crowd turned sheepish, caught out like the naughty children they were.

“This is unacceptable.” John stepped forward, his face a rictus of anger. “We stick together, or the Empire has already won. YOU KNOW THIS.”

A few were of course still scowling at the Cardassian that had just phasered a room full of unarmed Bajorans. Sherlock quietly slipped back to the house as soon as he could, leaving the capable adults to mop up. When John dragged wearily back to bed a few hours later, Sherlock pulled him into his arms, and got the full story.

Someone had stolen the lock code to get alcohol from the replicators when the adults were asleep. The after-hours party might have continued unknown had it not devolved into a fight over a love affair gone wrong. A girl had jilted one boy for another, and simmering tensions between groups had sparked to the surface.

It had been years since the caste system had been truly in effect on Bajor but a squad of teens born in the lower caste had grown weary of teasing from those from the upper class. The argument between them had escalated quickly to violence. Sherlock had sadly noted several of his students caught up in the fray. Some of the troublemakers had needed medical attention, but the rest had been sent back to their parents with the understanding that punishment would be forthcoming.

“I’m sorry, I left, but it seemed better to make myself scarce.” Sherlock kissed John’s forehead.

“Yeah, of course. I’m sorry about all that spoonhead stuff. You were fantastic.” John squeezed him tighter.

“I’m just glad it didn’t get any worse.”

“They need more to do. I know how it is at that age, all the hormones, the energy.” John sighed. “They need to harness it better.”
“I remember you at that age.” Sherlock smiled into John’s hair. “You were devastatingly handsome. I was dying for you.”

“Oh, and now?” John shifted in his arms, pulling back to look at him.

“Now you are incandescent in your attractiveness.”

John snorted a laugh. It warmed Sherlock to hear it.

“Well, you’re pretty hot yourself, love.” John leaned in for a soft kiss.

“We’ll have to call the Council of Elders together,” John said, “Decide on a punishment . . .”

“Pipe replacement.” They both said at the same time, and snickered.

“Yeah, but we need more long-term solutions too,” John said, thinking. “Hey, what about that martial art you used to study?”

“What mok’bara?”

“Yeah, what do you think about teaching a class in that? Maybe we could get a few others to lead some Bajoran defense classes, set up a ranking system. Give them something to work toward.”

“I think that’s a fantastic idea. Mok’bara is very disciplined. It would give them a focus.”

“Yes, good.” John yawned wide enough to crack his jaw.

“Alright, we can talk details tomorrow. It’s close to dawn. You need more sleep.”

“Mmm . . . sleep.” John burrowed in closer to Sherlock’s chest. “Yeah. G’ idea.”

Sherlock rubbed circles over John’s back, feeling him go sweetly slack as sleep overtook him. He lay for awhile listening to the steady rhythm of John’s breathing before he too finally relaxed enough to drift off.

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They stood in a row in the courtyard before the barn, a ragtag group of Bajoran teens, almost half girls as well as boys. Kira had insisted, both genders. Everyone’s work was needed in the Resistance. A few of them still sported lingering bruises from the fight of the earlier week.

Sherlock had dressed casually in a loose tunic and leggings, Bajoran style. He stood quietly, observing, letting the silence stretch out. They had a number of observers on the edges, adults, some hoping for progress. Some, perhaps curious if he would fail. Sherlock knew Kira and John were watching somewhere behind as well if he needed back up. That helped. A baby wailed off in the distance, and was hushed.

Sherlock walked slowly along the line, hands behind his back. He paused before each person to see if they would hold his gaze, or look away. Five of them he already knew well from his computer classes. He nodded silently to them. One girl staring at her feet trembled slightly as he passed. Sherlock made a special note to himself. He would make her fierce before she left his instruction. A boy toward the end, one with stitches along the side of his face leered at him, cocky thing. Sherlock
kept his face impassive, continuing to the end of the line, acknowledging each of them in turn before returning to his spot facing them some distance away. Sherlock cleared his throat.

“In case we haven’t been introduced, my name is Sherlock Holmes. Holmes is my last name. You may address me as ‘sir’, ‘teacher’, or ‘Mr. Holmes.’ I have been asked to instruct you in the ways of mok’bara. This is an ancient and respected art in the form of warfare. It uses hands, feet, and in a more advanced state, poles and knives. Many of you if asked who your greatest enemy is, might say the Cardassian Empire, and I would agree with you that the Empire is a formidable force, but not your greatest enemy.”

Sherlock paused for effect, eyes sweeping over his charges. They were rapt.

“No, the greatest enemy is yourself. Your doubt, your fear, and your ego will always trip you up faster than any external foe.”

He watched as the cocky boy on the far end rolled his eyes.

“You, there.” Sherlock pointed to him. “What’s your name?”

“What me?” The boy rocked back on his heels, looking unsure at being singled out.

“Yes, you.”

“Ro Anton.”

“Well, Mr. Ro. Come here, please.”

Hesitantly the boy took a step forward.

“No, all the way over here.”

The boy walked over, a hint of his earlier cheek in his rolling gait as he stepped out in front of his friends. Fancies himself a big man, Sherlock thought.

“Alright, I want you attack me.”

“Sir?” the boy looked around for support.

“You heard what I said. I want you to punch me in the face. Go on. Give it all you’ve got.”

“And I won’t get in trouble?” the boy frowned, unsure.

Sherlock resisted the impulse to roll his own eyes. “This is a martial arts class. It will hardly be effective if we do not engage one another.”

“Okay.”

Sherlock could see what the boy planned to do even before he had fully moved, the minute shifting of his weight, the flick of his eyes, and the twitch of his muscles all radiated his intent. Almost in slow motion he watched as the boy pulled an arm back, ready to swing it in an arch toward his jaw. Sherlock shifted so that he was now to the side of the boy, plucked his wrist out of the air and used his attacker’s own momentum to invite him lie down on the ground. When time resumed its normal pace, Ro Anton had landed on his back in the dirt with a thud and a very indignant look on his face. A giggle ran through the other students. Sherlock brushed their reactions aside to focus on the boy.
“Get up. Try it again. Don’t punch me in the face this time. Go for another spot.”

The boy’s jaw was set in an angry line as he climbed to his feet. Again he charged, and again Sherlock read his body in an instant, countering his move with a quick redirection of his own. The boy landed sprawled on his stomach this time. Sherlock heard an angry rumble from the crowd behind him. He ignored it.

“I think that’s enough for now. You may take your place Mr. Ro.”

If the boy had a tail, it would have been tucked between his legs as he limped back into line. Sherlock tried not to gloat.

“What you just saw was the essence of mok’bara . . .” Sherlock pitched his voice to carry all around, “turning your opponent’s mind in on itself. In mok’bara you are not fighting your opponent. You are inviting your opponent to be their own downfall.”

Sherlock could see the confusion on his students’ faces, but that was alright. At least no one was looking smug any longer.

“However, to begin mok’bara, one must learn the basic forms, so we won’t be sparring anymore today. What we will be doing is some calisthenics to build strength, and then a run through of the first form of movements. Alright spread out, make sure you have space to swing your arms.” Sherlock clapped his hands and watched as the teens dutifully spread out to begin their practice.

Sherlock was tired by the end of class, but feeling reasonably satisfied with the way things had gone. All in all, it was an auspicious beginning. He bent to retrieve the bottle of water he had brought along as everyone dispersed. After a few good pulls to slake his thirst, he lowered the bottle to find John had appeared before him, smiling.

“Prophets, Sherlock, that was incredible.” John’s face was flushed.

“You really thought so?”

“Umm, yes, Wow.” John reached up to clasp his upper arm. “That was fantastic. In fact I was just thinking you might want to lead an adults’ class as well.” He looked at Sherlock’s mouth and licked his lips.

Sherlock couldn’t help grinning. He dropped his voice as he leaned in closer. “Oh, do you think I ought to lead a private session just for us as well?”

“Oh, hell, yes.” John’s hand squeezed tighter on his arm. “Do we have time to . . .”

“Mr. Watson, I hate to bother you . . .” a grey-haired woman bustled in to tap John’s shoulder. “You had said you’d have time to talk with us about the dining room schedule today. We have too many stragglers , and those working in the field . . .”

“Oh, yes, Ghenna, right.” John dropped his arm. “Rain check?” He squinted up at Sherlock.

“Of course.” Sherlock managed a smile.

“I’ll see you later.” John patted his side before turning to leave with the woman who had already started up a patter about the various problems the commune was having.

Sherlock sighed as he watched John go. Duty first.
Sherlock searched online until he located the tubing they needed to repair the irrigation system, picking a supply store a district away. It was a long drive, but the further away it was from the farm, the better. John had too many responsibilities to take the day off to come with him, and Sherlock decided it was safer to simply make the trip alone. It was strange to pull up to the facility and find himself surrounded by Cardassians. He hadn’t spoken anything but Bajoran for weeks. This purchase was coming out of his own private funds that he’d managed to transfer to an off-world bank. The transaction shouldn’t raise any concerns, and wouldn’t be traced back to him.

The man at the counter was pleasant enough, and Sherlock chatted with him as he waited for his items to be retrieved from the back.

“Hot enough for ya?” The man said glancing out the window. “I think it’s a record this week.”

Why did people insist on commenting endlessly about the weather? “Yup, pretty hot.” Sherlock agreed amiably enough, leaning against the counter.

“It’s good though, it keeps even the rubbish inside.”

Sherlock nodded, not trusting his tongue.

“Did you hear, there was an explosion this morning down in Theros Market? Some dirty Bajoran scum set off a bomb there. Bad business that. Can’t even go shopping in peace,” the man grumbled.

Sherlock felt the blood leaving his face. “How bad was the damage?”

“Oh, pretty bad. Took a building down. Poor sods. Didn’t stand a chance.”

Sherlock mumbled something. Smiling automatically, when the man arrived with his coiled tubing, he managed a farewell, making it back to the truck with his arms full. Damn.

It was inevitable. A few days later, the next round of executions were announced on the news feeds, Bajorans rounded up in the cities, another televised horror. The mood around the camp was palpably sad. Even the babies seemed to be crying more fretfully. Most work was abandoned as people gathered in vigil, and that evening, a communal ceremony was held around the fire pit that had been set up behind the barn. Sherlock appeared briefly for the main part of the ritual, but as soon as things devolved into singing and drinking around the fire, he quickly excused himself. He didn’t think people wanted to test their civility with his Cardassian features that evening. John nodded sorrowfully, letting him go. Many of those at the farm were losing people they knew.

Sherlock felt restless back at the house. He left the bedroom to get a cup of herbal tea from the replicator, unable to sleep. John and Kira were in the common room, John’s arms tight around her as she pressed her face to his shoulder. Sherlock cleared his throat, and John looked up. He patted Kira on the back and released her.

“Thanks.” She smiled a watery smile. Nodding wordlessly to Sherlock, she passed him, moving to
her room.

“Hey.” John came closer. He rocked up to drop a kiss to Sherlock’s cheek. “How are you?”

“Fine. How are things down at the fire ring?” Sherlock raked his eyes over John. He looked exhausted.

“Okay.” John pushed a hand back through his hair. “Everyone’s depressed of course, but I don’t think it will get out of hand. We’re lifting curfew for tonight, but we stopped the alcohol.”

“Wise decision.” Sherlock nodded.

“Hey, Kira’s in a bad way though. She found out her brother was in the round-up.”

“Oh, Prophets, I’m so sorry.” Sherlock winced.

“Yeah. I’m going to go sit with her for a bit. Do you mind?”

Sherlock hesitated, made himself smile. “No. No that’s fine. Of course.”

“Thanks. I’ll see you later.” John pulled him into his arms for just a moment, the briefest of connections. “Love you.”

“Love you, too.” Sherlock watched him disappear down the corridor.

Sherlock sighed, and moved to get his herbal tea from the replicator. Despite its soothing effects, he still tossed and turned, finally dropping off in the wee hours. He couldn’t get the image of how well John and Kira fit together out of his mind. When he blinked awake the next morning, he was disappointed to find himself still alone in the bed.

Lupaza and Furel were already at the breakfast table picking at some dozas when Sherlock made it to the common room. Furel slid one his way, and Sherlock took it even though he wasn’t particularly hungry.

“I’m sorry,” Sherlock said, not knowing what else to say. He ripped a pinch off the bun, and brought it to his mouth.

“Shit.” Lupaza took a sip from her cup. “I feel like we just can’t win. If we do nothing, Bajor loses. If we do something, people get slaughtered. I just . . . eeeeeerrr.” She slammed the cup back down. "I wonder who the hell set that bomb off? Idiots. It’s not like the spoonheads were going to ignore it. Prophets, what’s the point of it all. We’re never going to win.”

“Hey, don’t talk like that, Lupie.” Furel reached out to shake her shoulder. “What people do, the sacrifice, it matters. We’re getting there.”

“We’re getting the support of other planets,” Sherlock ventured. “Word on the net has it that the Federation is taking a greater interest in our situation.”

“Well, they better get here before there’s none of us left to save.” Lupaza snorted and reached for her tea again.

“Morning.” John breezed in, damp from a shower.

The others around the table greeted him as he moved to the replicator to get himself a cup. He returned with one for himself and another that he placed in front of Sherlock.
“Sorry, love, I fell asleep. I meant to come back.”

“No, it’s fine.” Sherlock shrugged, trying to mean it.

“Look, I don’t want us all moping around here endlessly. I’m going to get everyone working on the irrigation system this morning – those who aren’t too hungover. Do something positive,” John reached for a doza.

“Good idea, I’m up for it.” Sherlock managed a smile.

“Yeah, I’ll help.” Lupaza nodded.

“Great. Just let me finish breakfast, and we’ll head down to the barn.”

It took longer than they thought it would, but they managed to round up a good handful of workers to help with the replacing of the tubing. It was grubby, hot work under the sun, and John only let them take a short break for lunch, determined to finish that day. Finally in late afternoon, all seemed ready. John gave the signal, and the water was turned on.

They held their collective breaths, waiting. First a rumbling reached them, then a vibration until finally, yes, a trickle of water spurted up from sprinklers. Everyone looked about in wonder, almost not daring to believe it until Lupaza let out a war cry, dashing into the heaviest of the spray. No one needed more invitation than that. Soon they were all cheering and hollering, cavorting about like children at a fountain. More of the camp drifted in, enchanted by the spectacle, and the promise of sweet relief from the heat.

“Come on.” John grinned, pulling Sherlock into the artificial rain.

It was like a blessing, a benediction falling down on all their heads. Sherlock grinned at John. His golden hair had turned brown plastered to his forehead as his shirt clung to his shoulders and biceps, the cloth gone translucent with the wet. John whooped, turning around in the water, letting it soak him on all sides. Sherlock tipped his head back, opening his mouth to catch some of the sweet drops on his tongue. Delicious. When Sherlock righted himself, he found John was staring at him intently.

“What?” Sherlock asked, wondering how silly he looked. “What’s wrong.”

“You . . .” John stepped closer. “Prophets, just you.” He pulled Sherlock down against his wet shirt, and caught him in a searingly hot kiss. Sherlock wrapped John in his arms, holding on as John plundered his mouth.

People knew they were sleeping together. To some degree, it helped the Bajorans accept his presence here, but Sherlock didn’t like to push it into their faces. Under the cover of victorious rain, with John holding him like some water spirit risen from the river itself, Sherlock forgot himself. He melted into the embrace. When they finally parted, Sherlock glanced nervously about. No one was paying them a whit of attention, dancing about in the rain, some couples following their lead and kissing with abandon. He looked back at John, soaked, breathing heavily, water drops on his lashes catching the sun.

“John, thank you.”

“For what?” John cocked his head.

“For choosing me.”

“Oh, love, I don’t think there was a choice in the matter. I think I loved you from the first moment I
clapped eyes on you.”

“Me too.” Sherlock let a smile take over his face.

John flashed a grin and pulled him back down into another toe-curling kiss. Sherlock sighed, and forgot everything, but the wonder of John in his arms, loving him despite it all. John.

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Chapter End Notes

A reader left a wonderful note about a song that they thought of after reading this story.

Lovers in a Dangerous Time- I found this version done by the Bare Naked Ladies online that simply enchanted me. Go check it out if you want to hear the awesomeness! (*u*)
A True Victor Wins In His Mind

Chapter Summary

Life at the farm grows more complex as others join them, and Sherlock has personal news to contend with.

Chapter Notes

Howdy dear readers! I really want to thank the folks who have kept the faith, following this story and hoping for an update all this time. More thanks to both iamjohnlocked4life and D for some much needed beta help as I fell into the weeds of writer's block.

Finally, finally, I have something to share. I hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

%%%

Thwack, thwack, thwack.

The sound of wooden sticks smacking together, and the grunts of pain when knuckles were caught filled the otherwise quiet morning. Bare feet shuffled back and forth over the packed earth of the courtyard as the opponents squared off and lunged once more. Sherlock watched, arms folded, noting with some satisfaction at how far his mok’bara students had come. The one year anniversary of these classes had come and gone, and they were halfway through year two.

A whirl of motion caught Sherlock attention. Heera, the smallest in the lot, twisted and sent her much taller opponent sprawling to the dirt with a cry. She pinned him with the end of her pole, pressed to his throat, leaning in. The man gasped, and tapped his hand on the ground. Submission.

Heera stepped back, grinning, breathing heavily.

“Good job.” Sherlock stepped closer. “You saw an opening and you went for it.”

“Thank you, teacher.” Heera blushed with pride.

Sherlock’s own teachers had been much more sparring with their praise, but he was of the opinion that positive reinforcement inspired learning faster than simple correction. He moved to offer a hand to the young man still on the ground. With a pained look, the teen allowed himself to be pulled upright.

“You left your right flank completely open. Try to maintain an awareness of your entire body at all times.”

“Yes, teacher,” the boy muttered, eyes down as he brushed himself off.
“Five more minutes,” Sherlock called to the class.

The students returned to their efforts with renewed vigor until Sherlock clapped his hands and led them in the stretching exercises that ended their practice. With a final bow, he dismissed class, and headed for his bottle of water, rewarding himself with a long swig.

“Erm, teacher, sir?”

Sherlock looked down to find Heera hovering by his elbow.

“Yes, student?”

“Mr. Holmes. I was wondering,” Heera spoke in a rush. “A new patrol is forming soon, and I wondered if you could tell Mistress Kira that I’ve been progressing in class well. I’d like to be considered, to be included . . . in the patrol that is.”

He regarded the girl. Despite her short stature, she stood firmly, shoulders back. A twist of her hair had come loose from her braid to curl over her cheek. Prophets, she ought to be worried about school work, or excited about an upcoming dance, not begging to join a death squad. Still, she was the best student in his class . . .

“I’ll put in a word with Kira, if that’s your wish,” Sherlock said finally.

“Yes, thank you, teacher, thank you!” Heera dipped a quick bow before moving to gather her things.

Sherlock pressed his lips together, feeling about thousand years old as he watched her go. He blew a breath out his nose. It wasn’t right. But then what about their current situation was actually right? Sherlock checked his reader from his bag, and found that his schedule was rather light that day. He returned to the farmhouse to find it empty. After a shower and a change of clothes, Sherlock set off to see if he could locate either John or Kira Nerys about.

He ended up finding them both in the community room of the converted barn, bent together over cups of tea. Sherlock couldn’t hear their conversation, but Kira said something with a smile, leaning in to touch John’s forearm, and they both threw back their heads to laugh.

They looked good together. Where Kira was slight, John was stockier, and the darker tones of John’s sandy hair complemented the browns of Kira’s quite nicely. Kira had cut her long hair recently in mourning, but she’d had it shaped around her face, and the sleeker look suited her.  Not for the first time, Sherlock wondered how things could have gone if he hadn’t returned to Bajor, if Kira and John might have . . .

John turned his head and caught sight of Sherlock in the doorway. Instantly his expression changed, his face lighting up. He waved Sherlock over. Something like relief slid through him as he moved to join them.

“She looks, how’s it going?” Kira mock punched his shoulder as he sat, her good mood obviously expansive enough to include him.

“Fine,” Sherlock said, “So, what are you two conferring about?”

“We got word this morning that the River Caves project is going well,” John said. “They were able to find several naturally occurring caverns big enough for living quarters and storage, and people are already moving in.”

“That is good,” Sherlock said.
“Yeah, we’re months ahead of schedule,” Kira said. “It’s fantastic.”

“Soon enough the Resistance cell will be ready to start missions,” John added.

“From your mouth to the Prophets’ ears.” Kira smiled, pointing upward.

“Ha,” John snorted. “Best not to court bad luck.”

“Are there any things I should be rerouting to the cell?” Sherlock asked. “Blankets? Solar batteries? Medical items?”

“We’ll have a full report by tomorrow,” John said. “I can get any specific requests to you then.”

“Good.” Sherlock nodded.

“Well, some of us have work to do.” Kira lifted her cup to drain the last of it. “I can’t sit around, lollygagging with you slackers all day.”

“Sadly, I can’t stay long either,” John said. “I’ve got a meeting with the field supervisors in half an hour.”

“Kira, before you go . . .” Sherlock stopped her from rising.

“Yes?”

Kira sat back, listening as Sherlock described Heera, and her recent request.

“She’s a good student, the best I’ve got,” Sherlock added.

“Good, I’ll definitely consider her as we get the new cell up and running,” Kira said.

“She’s only seventeen though,” Sherlock said. “Practically still a child.”

“I was fifteen when I joined the Resistance.” Kira flashed a look toward John.

“Yeah, I wasn’t much older,” John said. “Sherlock, it can’t be helped. We all want what’s best for Bajor, but if someone isn’t fighting, they’re still at risk to be killed or enslaved in a sodding work camp.”

“I know, I know, still . . .” Sherlock shrugged helplessly.

“There’s no room for sentiment in war,” Kira said, “unless we’re celebrating victory.”

“It’s true. Heera will be honored to be able to serve the Resistance. It will be her own victory.” John reached out to touch his arm. “Let her have it, Sherlock.”

“You’re right, I know you’re right.”

“Well, on that note, I really must go.” Kira pushed away from the table. “I’ll see you gentlemen later.”

“Bye, Kira,” John said.

Sherlock nodded as Kira passed. He watched as she made her way through the room, depositing her mug in a bin. She seemed to have a word or a smile for everyone she passed.

“Hey, did you eat breakfast yet?” John nudged him, pulling his attention back.
“No, not yet.” Sherlock shook his head. "I was busy with mok’bara.”

“Sherlock, you need to eat.”

“Wasn’t hungry.”

“Hang on.” John rose from the table, returning shortly with a bowl that he deposited before Sherlock.

“Here you are, sunshine.”

A curl of steam unfurled from the bowl bringing with it a warm, tantalizing scent.

“Rekja porridge.” Sherlock smiled. “My favorite.”

“Yes, I know,” John said, pushing a spoon his way. “Eat it. You hardly had any dinner last night. I don’t want you wasting away on me.”

“Yes, mum,” Sherlock teased as John aimed a playful swat at him.

He dutifully scooped a spoonful of the mush to his mouth. It brought a burst of rich, spicy-sweet over his tongue, tasting like every morning of his childhood. Sherlock hummed approval, and scooped up a larger bite. John smiled somewhat triumphantly.

“Do you want tea? I’m off for another,” John asked.

“Yes, please.”

Sherlock glanced about the room as he ate. Bajoran artwork graced the walls, and glasses of flowers decorated the tables scattered about the room where a few other late diners still lingered. A small knitting class had already started in the corner, a number of adults and teens ready with their needles and colorful yarn. It was homely what they had accomplished.

Sherlock’s eye caught a small boy as he streaked across the room, followed by a woman in hot pursuit. He squealed as she caught him under the arms, swinging him up to her hip.

“Run fast! Don’t let the Spoonies get you! Don’t let ‘em get you!” the woman said, tickling the child’s belly to make him laugh. When they passed Sherlock’s table, and caught sight of him, the boy cried out, burying his face in his mother’s shirt.

“Oh, I’m so sorry.” The woman looked hotly embarrassed. “Hush now, love, you’re alright,” she soothed the child as they hurried by.

Sherlock sighed. It was best not to forget that the rest of the world was falling to ruin outside their safe walls. Just last night he’d read on the net of a refugee camp that had been discovered a province away, all dead from lack of adequate food or medicine. It all seemed so impossible sometimes. Could they really be making a difference with anything they were doing here? Was the Resistance really making headway against the occupation?

“Hey, you okay?”

John interrupted his woolgathering, appearing beside him with two mugs of tea.

“Me? Yes, fine, fine,” Sherlock said. “Perhaps I didn’t sleep as well as I should have last night.”

“I’m sorry I was already out when you came in.” John set a cup before Sherlock before sliding into his seat with the other. “I know I haven’t been much fun lately.”
“You’re busy, I understand,” Sherlock said. “We all have things to do.”

“Yeah, but I don’t want to neglect you.” John’s eyes were soft. “There’s a council meeting tonight. Meet me for dinner at the house before?”

“I think I can manage that.” Sherlock smiled.

They shared a few moments, talking of nothing more important than the weather as they sipped their tea, until John glanced at the chrono on his wrist.

“Sorry, love, have to dash. Meeting.”

“It’s alright. Go.”

“You could join me.” John looked hopeful.

“Ha. Hearing the gripes of the field crews is the last thing I need to do today.” Sherlock snorted. “Thankfully I’m teaching a computer class in the learning center soon.”

“Alright, I’ll see you later?”

“Of course.” Sherlock nodded.

“Bye, love.” John moved to press his lips to Sherlock’s cheek.

“Bye.” Sherlock leaned into the touch.

“Finish that, you!” John added, pointing toward Sherlock’s bowl as he rose.

“Yes, sir.” A smile tugged at the side of Sherlock’s mouth.

John leaned in for a final squeeze to his shoulder before turning to go.

Sherlock focused on finishing his food after John had left, purposely not glancing around at the other Bajorans in the room. They all tolerated his presence in the camp, John saw to that, but it didn’t stop the disapproving looks shot their way if they shared affection in public. When he’d finished his tea and porridge, he stacked his dishes in the dirties bin, and made his way upstairs to the learning center.

His morning class was basic computer coding for adults who wanted to learn a new skill. They met in a room above the dining hall that had been updated with a number of outdated, but functioning consoles that Sherlock had been able to scrounge together.

Sherlock greeted the students, and pulled open a hologram to begin class. He moved around later as the students worked, answering questions, checking their work. He leaned over to look at the coding of an older man in worn coveralls, Causta Bin.

“Bin, how did you manage with the compiling assignment?”

“Good, sir, good. I finished it last night.”

“Excellent. Why don't you show me?”

Bin had worked many years enslaved in a mining camp before he and a group of others had managed an escape. He had limited vision, a hunched back, and was missing three fingers on his right hand, but he had taken to the computer classes with a fierce passion.
There were a motley bunch, his tech students. One younger woman had been made to work as a sex slave for an army base before being liberated by the Resistance. She had yet to find word on what happened to the husband and children she’d been forced to leave behind. Another silver-haired man had served for years as a cook at an estate much like Mrs. Watson had done for the Holmes family. His employers had turned him out to beg on the streets for his retirement.

The others all had their own tales of being crushed under terrible suffering, and yet here they were, carrying on, and ready to learn something many struggled with in their uni years. It was humbling. He’d been trying to get them to simply call him *Sherlock*, but Bajor valued her teachers. The class refused to call him anything but *sir*, or . . .

“Mr. Holmes?” A young woman with a scar from one end of her face to the other, and hair dyed a rather alarming shade of green hailed him.

“Yes, Meni?”

“I’m having trouble with a command. It won’t work.”

“Let me see.” Sherlock moved easily to look over her thin shoulder. “Ah, here’s your problem, you reversed the order of these two lines.

“Oh, yes, of course.” The young woman’s fingers flew over the keyboard as she corrected her mistake.

“Much better.”

“Thank you, sir.” The woman’s smile lit up her ruined face.

Prophets. He wondered sometimes if he was doing enough for these people. If they would ever have a chance to actually use their skills at a real job.

“Mr. Holmes?”

Sherlock pushed the thought aside as he moved to help another student.

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“Do you want the bad news or the good news first?” Sherlock ran his gaze around the august circle gathered at the kitchen table.

It was good that more competent people had joined the camp to flesh out their Council of Elders, but it was getting harder to find any cheerful news for their weekly meetings.

“Rip the bandage off quickly,” Kira said. “Might as well get the bad out of the way.”

Sherlock glanced at his reader pad. “The Empire is opening three new labor camps in the mining district.”

“Shit.” Lupaza grimaced. “That means more workers being conscripted, more children left unattended.”

“Word is they’re tightening food rations in the cities too,” Kira added. “People won’t take that lying
“Hungry people do desperate things,” Dr. Sito Ren, their resident physician agreed.

“So, what’s the good news?” Kira asked, lifting her cup of tea.

“Crops are doing well,” John said brightly. “We’re already gathering the hasperat, and we’ll have moba, and klatterpods ready for harvest as early as next week. Another month on the rekja and kava probably.”

“We could get a good price on rekja if we could find a way to sell it offworld.” Gant Izar, their new engineering head, leaned in to grab a small cake from the plate in the center.

“No, we agreed,” Kira said. “We need food for the Resistance first.”

“But we could get funds that would buy more weapons,” Gant pushed. “That would help the Resistance more.”

“A little rekja goes a long way,” Sherlock said. “What about dividing the harvest? Half for food supplies, and half to sell?”

Rekja was a popular spice that sold well. Synth versions just didn’t do it justice, and Sherlock was certain he could find an offworld buyer who would pay a pretty price for a fresh source. After a bit of debate they thankfully managed to reach a consensus on the compromise.

“What’s the status on the new cloaking field?” John turned to Gant.

“Almost complete.” A proud smile stretched its way across the man’s lined face. “We should have it up and running in a fortnight. We’ll be doing tests over the next few days.”

“Excellent.” Sherlock nodded. “Air traffic is picking up over the area, and the more protection we have around the farm, the better.”

“What’s the report from the River Caves cell?” John glanced at Kira. “How are supplies holding up?”

“Good,” Kira said. “We’ve finally got enough beds for everyone sleeping there.”

“And the health of the Resistance members?” John asked, turning toward Dr. Sito. “Is that better?”

Unfortunately some unseasonable rains, while good for the crops, had left the caves rather damp. A nasty respiratory illness had spread its way through the tunnel dwellers.

“Better.” Sito nodded her silver head. “I managed to synthesize a new antibiotic that seems to be doing the trick.”

“Well, that is good news.” John risked a small smile.

After making their way through a few more personnel and scheduling issues, the group finally reached the end of things. John rang the chime that signaled the close of the meeting. Chairs scraped across the floor as people rose, the burble of conversation drifting past as they dispersed.

“Sherlock, are you off to bed?” John stood beside him, stretching, running a hand back to rumple his hair.

“I can’t just yet. I need to run a diagnostic check of the internal system while no one is using it. Need
to make sure all our firewalls and recognition programs are still in place.”

“Yeah, I don’t understand half of that.” John smiled. “Hey, don’t stay up too late, okay? You’ve been working really hard lately.”

“I know, I’ll try.” Sherlock leaned down to accept the kiss John pressed to his mouth.

“Night.”

“Night.”

Sherlock watched John amble away, stretching, until he turned the corner. He sighed. It was a shame. He wanted nothing more than to follow John to bed and curl around him, but the work never seemed to be done.

“Sherlock, do you have a moment?”

Sherlock turned, surprised to find Lupaza still lingering in the main room.

“Yes, of course, what is it?”

“I’m worried about Naavi. He’s acting like a complete fuckwad lately.”

It was one thing that Sherlock admired about the woman. She said what she meant, no beating around the bush.

“What’s the problem?” Sherlock motioned toward the now empty chairs around the table, and they both took a seat.

“He’s hanging out with some other idiots, and they’re drinking too much synth-ale at night, talking shit about how the Resistance isn’t doing enough.” Lupaza rubbed her forehead. “They’re saying we need to really shake things up, do something crazy.” She flailed her hand in emphasis. “They think burning cities down would move the revolution along faster.”

“That would certainly spur the Empire to make good on their threats of increased public executions.” Sherlock frowned.

“It’s just talk. Probably nothing will come of it, but I don’t like Naavi hanging out with that crowd. He’s better than that!” Lupaza said angrily. “I wondered if you could help?”

“Me? What do you think I can do?”

“I was wondering if you might take an assistant with your net security?” Lupaza turned the full wattage of her large green eyes his way. “He’s smart as a whip, good at fixing just about anything, but he needs something real to do. All this sitting around, and farming is driving him crazy.”

“Well, the farming is real work, but yes, I understand. He needs to use his brain. As it stands, I was thinking I could use some help with computer security.” Sherlock shrugged. “I could start Naavi on some simple things. I’ll talk it over with John.”

“Thanks, Sherlock. I knew you could help.” Lupaza patted Sherlock’s shoulder as she rose to leave.

Sherlock blew out a breath as the door slid closed behind her. Were they actually making headway against the Empire with their work at the farm? Were they doing all they could while people suffered across Bajor?
Sherlock glanced around the homey farmhouse, the patchwork throw over the back of the sofa, the ceramic spice jars on the kitchen’s worktop. He had to believe that they were doing something good here.

An old saying Mycroft had told him once flickered through his mind. *A true victor wins in his mind before even stepping onto the field of battle.* Sherlock had been maybe eight or nine at the time, and Mycroft had just beaten him at three dimensional chess for the third time in a row. Sherlock had knocked the game to the floor in disgust.

Sherlock shook himself mentally, casting the memories aside. There was no sense in making himself maudlin when he had work to do. He forced himself to rise, making a cup of tea to keep him company as he moved to the console.

Sherlock checked their security setup, then monitored some inventory they’d been trying to shift to some Resistance cells to the south. When he moved to stretch, a glance at the chrono on the wall told him he’d been at things longer than he’d meant to. He reached for the cooling cup of Deka tea by his side when a notice of an incoming communication flashed at the edge of his screen. An encrypted channel.

*Mycroft.*

It was almost as if the earlier thoughts had summoned the git. Sherlock sighed and hit a button to accept the call. Just as he expected, the window opened to the beaky nose of his older brother filling the screen. As Mycroft settled back, Sherlock could see he was still wearing the black uniform of the Obsidian Order, but the background of hanging tapestries, and a nearby sofa filled with cushions marked it as his private residence. The strangest thing by far though was the expression that had wiped away Mycroft’s usual bland smugness. Worried. Tense. Sherlock’s tiredness dropped away as a shiver of cold ran down his back.

“To what do I owe this pleasure, brother dear?”

“Sherlock, I . . .” Mycroft reached up to massage the bridge of his nose, obviously gathering himself before saying anything more.

The frisson of dread moved from Sherlock’s spine to pool in the pit of his stomach. It had to be something truly catastrophic to have unmoored Mycroft like this. More mass executions? The Federation abandoning their interest in Bajor? Or worse yet, had their camp been discovered?

“What is it? Speak up, Mycroft!” Sherlock snapped.

Mycroft dropped his hand away, finally looking Sherlock in the eye.

“It has come to me to inform you that Gul Ulric Holmes was killed last night during a routine transport trip between Cardassia and the moon on Bartok 9.”

Sherlock felt as though ice water had been dumped into his veins. *Father . . .*

“No . . .” Sherlock shook his head trying to process the shock. “Was it . . .”

“The warp coil blew when they were only a few lightyears out of dock,” Mycroft cut in. “The engine had received routine maintenance just the day before and no anomalies were reported. It was clearly sabotage.”

“Prophets.” Sherlock felt dizzy, the lights in the room suddenly too bright. “I see. Will there be a service?”
“Obviously there are no remains to inter, but a memorial will be held on Cardassia prime in a week’s
time.”

“Of course. Should I . . .”

“Since you are officially listed as deceased, it would be inopportune for you to make an appearance.”
Mycroft peered down his long nose with a sneer. Even in distress, he still managed to pull on the
mantle of the haughty, older brother.

“I could alter my appearance . . .” Sherlock began hotly.

“Not worth it.” Mycroft shook his head. “Your DNA would be picked up by any scanner during your trip.”

“How is Mummy?”

“Mummy is holding up,” Mycroft’s said briskly. “Aunt Kristel has come to stay with her. She is
grieving, but she is well cared for.”

“Does she think I’m dead too?”

“No. I’ve informed her that you are working on assignment for the Obsidian Order, deep
undercover. She understands the nature of duty.”

“I can’t just stay here, I can’t do . . . nothing.” Sherlock grabbed a handful of his hair, tugging in
frustration.

“You can say your farewells where you are,” Mycroft said. “It would be too dangerous for you to
travel off planet.”

“So, that’s it? A call in the night, and then just go about my business?”

“I’m afraid so. The empire needs you where you are, Sherlock.”

“Fuck . . . that old bastard.” Mortifyingly, Sherlock found himself blinking back tears.

“I am truly sorry to be the bearer of such bad news.” Mycroft’s voice softened slightly.
Sherlock nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

“If it’s any consolation, he was proud of your promotion.”

“You told him?”

“It was common enough news, but yes, I did.”
Sherlock pressed his lips together, unsure of what to say.

“Oh, I thought you might also like to know my contacts with the Federation tell me they are
weakening. An intervention may be coming soon.”

“And end to the war?” Sherlock could barely hope.

“And end of one thing, and the beginning of something else. Who knows what the outcome will be?”

“We need a new beginning.”
“So, speaking of beginnings. How fares your . . . enclave?” Mycroft lifted an eyebrow.

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“Sustainable.” Sherlock stiffened a bit at the prying, but Mycroft was working to keep them off the radar of the authorities. He deserved straight answers. “We’re working to upgrade to a cloaking shield around the perimeter.”

“That is progress,” Mycroft said. “Congratulations to you.”

“Well, it’s not all my doing.” Sherlock found himself feeling very protective of the farm and its inhabitants. “We have some real talent here.”

“I’m certain,” Mycroft said. “Sadly, I must leave you now. I do have other calls to make as you might imagine.”

“Yes, of course . . . thank you for contacting me, Mycroft.” The real reason for the call surged over Sherlock again. His father . . . gone.

“I didn’t want you to hear it from the news vids . . .” His brother’s expression melted into something even more despondent, sagging into a landscape of ridges and hollows. “Be safe, Sherlock.”

“You as well,” Sherlock managed before cutting the connection.

He sat for a moment, feeling adrift, staring at the wall but seeing nothing. Damn the old man. Sherlock hadn’t even been in a room with him for years. He powered down the console, setting everything to rights when a wave of something dark and heavy broke over him, stealing the very breath from his lungs. Somehow his legs carried him upright and stumbling toward his bedroom.

“Sherlock?” John sat up, looking sleep rumpled as the door snicked open.

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Sherlock tried to speak, but no words emerged.

“What is it, love?” John frowned, squinting into the light from the hall.

“My father . . . dead,” Sherlock choked out.

“Oh . . . no. Prophets, come here.”

John opened his arms, and Sherlock took the few steps to fall into them. The door swished closed behind him leaving them in the blessed dark.

“Love, I’m so sorry.” John’s lips pressed against his hair.

Sherlock gritted his teeth, reaching up to grab handfuls of the back of John’s soft sleep shirt.

“The bastard,” he choked out.

“I know, but he was still your father.” John’s hand smoothed a line down his back. “It still hurts.”

John urged him to lie down fully, tucking the covers around them before pulling Sherlock against his own body. Sherlock allowed himself to be coddled like a small child. If tears were shed in the depths of the night, it was too dark to see, and John said nothing but soothing murmurs as he kissed Sherlock’s face, crooning an old lullaby he hadn’t heard in years.
Sherlock made his way mechanically through the next few weeks, telling everyone who asked that he was fine, just a touch of flu. Sherlock asked John not to share his bad news. They held a simple, private ceremony in their bedroom to honor his father, and then got on with things.

The gloomy weather of the next month matched his hollow mood, raining almost continuously day and night. Sherlock showed up on time to teach his classes, ate when John sat with him and urged him to finish his plate, and started Naavi on some basic security on the console in the farmhouse. The younger man had been thrilled at the offer of more challenging work duties, and his enthusiasm had been a spot of bright in some otherwise very dull days.

While the crops had flourished from the clouds hanging over Dakhur province, tempers flared with everyone cramped together indoors. A new influx of refugees had outstripped their current housing, and a shanty town of hastily-made shelters and tents appeared the field past the dorms almost overnight. When the first clear day dawned, people stirred gratefully, welcoming the sun, small cook fires, and lines of colorful laundry popping up like the first Honeybell flowers of spring.

It caught Sherlock off guard that morning, seeing the swinging chains on the ear of a man carrying water out to the field workers. His earring flashed brightly, catching the early sun before he disappeared into a row of katterpods. After all the years of their ban on Bajor, it was a shock to see a Bajoran earring worn out in the open again. Sherlock had to shake his head to clear the memories cascading before his eyes. He’d never seen John without his when they were kids.

After that first sighting, the earrings seem to spread like wildfire through the encampment. When John entered the main house the next evening, a Watson crest earring dangled from his lobe. The breath caught in Sherlock’s throat.

“John.” Sherlock looked pointedly at the ear in question.

“Yeah, it’s nice, isn’t it?” John reached up to finger it self-consciously. “A family who used to make earrings before joined camp last week. When people found out what they could do, demand went through the roof. We’ve been gathering every bit of scrap metal we can find to keep them going.”

“I could do a run, find some more materials. There’s a dump in this quadrant that wouldn’t take long to get to.”

“Prophets, would you? It’s been so long since we’ve had them. Well . . . it’s a real morale boost for people.” A shaft of light coming in through the window caught the jewelry, limning the studs at the top and bottom of his ear, and the thin chain swinging between with a sparkle.

“I agree.” Sherlock smiled. It was good to see John looking like John again.

All through their evening meal around the table as Lupaza, Furel, John, and Kira chattered away, serving themselves from the plate of dozas and bowl of stew in the center, Sherlock found his attention wandering from his plate to the metal glinting at John’s ear. John looked up and caught his gaze lingering several times, a question in his raised brows. Sherlock had flushed and shook his head. It wasn’t something he could explain in the midst of everyone. Finally after they finished eating, and things were being tidied, John stood from wiping the table and pulled an exaggerated stretch.

“Well, something’s done me in today. I’m absolutely knackered.” He yawned.

“Oh, John, are you getting sick?” Lupaza turned from the sink, a soapy bowl in hand. “Sherlock’s
been dragging forever. You haven’t caught the bug too, have you?”

“No, no, just a bit tired.” John’s cheeks flushed as he studied the table, giving it a final swipe with the sponge.

*He’s lying about something.* Sherlock frowned, looking up from the broom he pushed across the floor.

“Thought I might turn in a bit early this evening,” John said casually.

“You don’t want to run yourself down, John,” Kira said, glancing over from where she was handing Furel plates to stack on the top shelves.

“Yeah, we’ve had such a run of illness around the camp lately,” Furel said. “Don’t need you to fall out too.”

“Alright, alright, nursemaids.” John chuckled, waving them off. “I just need to catch up on my sleep. Nothing lethal.”

When the others had returned to their tasks, John looked at Sherlock with a most innocent expression pasted over his face. “Sherlock? How are you feeling? Busy schedule this evening?”

“Not too bad, I was thinking of cross-correlating a list of stocked supply depots we identified earlier, seeing which ones were closest and less heavily guarded . . .” Sherlock trailed off at the look on John’s face.

John raised his brows and tipped his head meaningfully toward their bedroom . . .

“Oh . . . oh.” The coin finally dropped. “Yes, well, it’s nothing terribly pressing . . . nothing that couldn’t be attended to tomorrow morning,” Sherlock said. “I think I could benefit from an early night, myself.”

“Good, good.” John went to leave the sponge by the kitchen sink.

“Are you two old men certain?” Furel set a small box on the cleared table. “It’s Five-Card Duroga night. I need to win back all the dried moba Sherlock got from me last time.”

It had become something of a weekly tradition, their card game on Third night. Instead of betting money though, they’d taken to wagering small items they had on hand. Sherlock laughed and shook his head. Furel was a generous soul, but his ability to bluff at cards was abysmal.

“You can have my stash to play with tonight,” Sherlock said. “I don’t mind adding it to the pot.”

“Hardly sporting,” Furel grumbled.

“Naavi, and a few of his lads are coming over to play,” Lupaza said, joining them, drying her hands on a towel. “You can win back your loses from them.”

“Well then, you don’t need us,” John agreed, affecting another large yawn. “Alright, good night all!”

A slew of farewells followed him to the hallway.

“Coming?” John stopped beside Sherlock at the supply cupboard where he was stowing the broom and pan away.

“In a moment. I do need to check a few things quickly on the net.”
“Yeah, no worries.” John pressed a chaste kiss on his cheek as his hand snaked below, shielded from the view of the others, to squeeze a handful of his arse. “Don’t take too long.” He dropped his voice meaningfully.

“No, of course not,” Sherlock murmured, a warm feeling blooming low in his belly for the first time in ages.

John threw a look over his shoulder, waggling his eyebrows as he continued down the hall to the bedroom.

Sherlock returned to the main room, seating himself at the console. After waking the screen, he did a scan, making sure all his traps and shields were in place and still running smoothly. He’d meant it to be a quick diagnostic check, but a few knocks at their firewall had him tracing the source before he was satisfied it was random spamware.

When Sherlock looked up, the rising noise in the room took him by surprise. Quite a large group had gathered to play, laughing and drinking as cards were dealt. He recognized Kira, Naavi, and a few of the boys from the construction team around the table. Sherlock stood, stretching for a moment to take the crick out of his back.

“Hey, Sherlock, sure we can’t deal you in, friend?” Furel called over, gesturing with his one good arm toward the cards and dried fruit spread across the table.

“No, sorry. I need an early night,” Sherlock said. “Got a date with my bed I can’t break.”

“More like a date with John, yeah?” Naavi smirked as he nudged one of his friends. “Better not keep him waiting too long.”

“NAAVI.” Lupaza slugged the young man in the arm so hard he nearly lost his seat. “Prophets’ sake. We’re pretending not to notice. It’s called being subtle.”

“Ow, leave off, Lupie. That hurt.” Naavi rubbed his arm sulkily.

“Bet John’s hurting, waiting for some cold cock.” One of Navvi’s mates muttered, just loud enough for all to hear, and the three young men giggled.

“Idiots.” Furel reached across the table to smack at them all. “No more grog for you if you can’t be civil.”

It only made the snickering increase around the table.

“Ah, don’t pay them any mind, Sherlock, go see your man!” Lupaza waved him on.

Sherlock felt a blush claiming his face. Prophets, he was a grown man, he shouldn’t feel so rattled at a bit of teasing. He closed the console down.

“Ah, I wish my sex life were as vigorous as people seem to think. Honestly, we’re just tired.”

Sherlock ignored the resulting jeers, and good wishes as he made his timely exit. He caught the eyes of Kira as he passed the table, studying him intently over her hand of cards. She immediately dropped her gaze, but the image of those dark eyes boring into him followed him down the hall. Sherlock sighed. He hadn’t wanted to garner any enemies at the camp, but some rivals were inevitable.

After quick ablutions in the bathroom, Sherlock hurried to join John in the bedroom. The door slid
open to reveal the lights down low, and John still in his clothes sprawled over the mattress, fast asleep. The door whooshed quietly shut behind Sherlock as he moved to stand by the bed. One of John’s hands lay splayed over his belly, the other arm, thrown back carelessly over his head, his mouth open as he breathed deeply, not quite loud enough to be called a snore.

Sherlock couldn’t help the smile that crept across his lips. Poor John. He looked so peaceful. He'd been working hard lately, and spending too much time coddling his black moods. Sherlock didn’t have the heart to wake him. As quietly as possible, he stripped to his underwear, tossing his clothes halfheartedly toward a woven basket in the corner that John insisted they use as a hamper. "I'm tired of tripping over your pants, Sherlock," John had complained.

Sherlock snagged a blanket on the trunk at the end of the bed and unfolded it to lay over John’s sleeping form, then crawled as carefully as he could onto the bed to join him.

John snuffled as the mattress dipped, cracking his eyes open.

“Sherlock?” he mumbled sleepily.

“Sorry I woke you.” Sherlock reached out to push back the fringe that had fallen over John’s forehead. “I was trying to let you sleep.”

“Don’ wanna sleep,” John grumbled, sounding more like a petulant boy than the grown man he was. “Want you.”

“You have me.”

Sherlock let himself be drawn in as John arms stretched for him. He relaxed against his love, soaking up the warmth, feeling the beat of John’s heart. They lay close, simply content with each other’s proximity until John roused enough to press small kisses across Sherlock’s face. Soft pecks moved into something much more heady as his mouth landed on Sherlock’s and caught. John moved without hurry, sleep still making him heavy and slow as he kissed Sherlock languidly, pressing closer to slot a leg between Sherlock’s thighs. The slow rhythm of John’s warm lips and tongue devouring him as he rocked against Sherlock, kindled a heat that quickly swept over him. They undulated as if underwater, coming together unhurried and calm. Clothes were rucked aside as hands and mouths found sensitive places to suck and nip and stroke. Sherlock’s hand slid up to cradle the back of John’s head and he encountered the new chain and studs encasing John’s right ear.

“Oh, sorry, I forgot to take it off.” John reached up to remove the jewelry, but Sherlock stayed his hand.

“No, keep it on,” he whispered.

John’s breath stuttered as Sherlock moved closer to kiss over the curve of John’s ear, mouthing around each stud, and taking the chain connecting the earrings between his teeth to tug gently. John moaned from the back of his throat. Sherlock continued his ministration, licking and nibbling, until John pulled him into his arms again to plunder his mouth in deep, drugging kisses. They rocked together with more focus until need had them shucking the last of their clothing.

John found the bottle of lubricant in the bedside table, and slicked his palm, returning to draw Sherlock close again, his hand dipping to close around his length. He drew long, shuddery sighs from deep in Sherlock’s throat with each pass. When his orgasm finally rose to crest over him, it came as slow and dreamy as their kissing had been, waves of pleasure with no clear-cut beginning or end. When he could open his eyes, he returned the favor for John crooning endearments in John’s
ear as his hand pumped over his beautiful, stiff cock.

“That’s it sweetheart, come for me. Oh, you look so gorgeous . . .” *This man, Prophets, this man was everything, the whole universe encapsulated in this corded, strong, beautiful person.*

“Oh, yes, oooh . . . unnff.” John bit his lip as the pleasure shook through him.

After a cursory wipe with a nearby towel, they curled together, too tired to clean up properly. John’s hair stuck out every which way, and the slickness of salt and fluids on their skin mingled, smelling of the ocean. Sherlock lay his head on John chest, breathing him in as John’s arm slung around him. Sherlock sighed. It was home in John’s arms, the only home he’d ever need. He floated, close to slumber when a piercing thought popped into his mind, refusing to be ignored.

“John?” Sherlock lifted his head.

“Hmm?” John hummed, obviously halfway back to sleep.

“What would you have done, do you think, if things had been different?”

“What?” John struggled to awareness. “What do you mean, love?” His hand found its way to the top of Sherlock’s head, carding through his hair.

It nearly derailed Sherlock, the soothing touch, but he pressed on anyway.

“If the occupation had never happened.” Sherlock moved back, pushing up onto one elbow to better see John’s face. “What do you think would have happened to you?”


“Yes, I know,” Sherlock insisted. “But if you hadn’t been conscripted into the Resistance. If you’d been allowed to live a normal life on Bajor. What do you think you might have done?”

“I hardly remember my Da,” John said, “but he was a doctor. I suppose I might have followed in his footsteps.”

“Hmm. That makes sense.”

“Alright, how about you? What would you have done if there hadn’t been an occupation?”

Sherlock snorted. “That’s easy. Regardless of how things went on Bajor, my father would have packed me off to military school.”

“Yeah, but if that hadn’t happened,” John said, obviously getting into the spirit of the game, “what else might you have chosen?”

Sherlock paused a moment, allowing himself to truly consider a different path for himself.

“A scientist I think. I used to love keeping up with the technical journals. Or music maybe. Mummy always said I had the makings of a top violinist if we’d been back on Cardassia.”

“I’d never have met you then, if you’d grown up on Cardassia,” John said.

“Oh, that’s true,” Sherlock said with a shiver, suddenly sorry he’d started the whole fanciful conversation.

“But I did meet you. You’re my one true lahkaya, after all. It was fated.” John sounded so sure,
winding his arms around Sherlock.

“Of course,” Sherlock agreed, allowing himself to be pulled back into the welcoming embrace. “John, thank you, for everything. For being there for me. I know I haven’t been myself lately.”


“I know. I love you, too.”

“Get the light would you?”

Sherlock obligingly reached out and shut off the small bedside lamp. He settled down against the relaxed from of John again, allowing his steady breathing to lull him into his own peace, falling into a deeper sleep than he’d had in ages.

%%%

“We’re going live in one minute.” Naavi grinned at Sherlock from his seat at the console. “If nothing cocks up that is.”

“Good.” Sherlock nodded coolly. “Let’s hope all goes to plan.”

All eyes in the farmhouse’s main room fell to the console as the small group waited together. A diagram of the property displayed on its screen showed a dotted blue line flashing around the property line.


“Prophets’ balls, I hope this works.” John stood at Sherlock’s side, rubbing a hand nervously over his chin.

The last time they’d tried to engage the new cloaking field around the farm, the power system had shorted, plunging them into a blackout for four hours until it could be repaired. No one wanted to repeat that again.

“Prophets’ tit, cross my legs, and never spit!” Lupaza added, making a warding sign over her chest. She moved closer to peer over Naavi’s shoulder at the display. “We could use some good luck, eh?”

“We don’t need luck.” Gant Izar sounded almost hurt. “There’s no reason the shield shouldn’t perform as expected. We’ve been working on this solid for three days . . . run all the necessary tests . . .”

“Peace, friend.” John clapped a hand to the head engineer’s back. “We’re just adding some good will to the good work.”

“Gant, we have no reason to doubt your stalwart expertise on this,” Kira added, diplomatically.

The cobbled-together force field they’d installed when moving onto the farm was in danger of failing any day now. They’d needed something reliable to protect their expanding community for some time. When Sherlock had gotten his hands on some Klingon cloaking technology via the black market, it had seemed the perfect solution. There was no guarantee that it was going to mesh with the existing Bajoran systems, but all had hopes that it would.

“Cloaking field is activating,” the computer informed them as the line on the screen turned solid.
A collective breath was held as all the lights in the house dimmed.

“Perimeter is now secured,” the voice assured them as the lights returned to full brightness.

Outside, a loud cheer could be heard.

“YES!” Lupaza cried, grabbing Kira around the neck as everyone clapped, and congratulated Gant on his fine work.

“Come on.” John reached out for Sherlock’s hand, tugging him toward the front door.

They stumbled out, necks craned, eyes on at the achingly blue sky and bright noonday sun that spilled down over the farm. A slight sparkle could be seen against the bright azure backdrop where the shield held.

“Damn.” John’s face shone. “It’s holding. It’s actually working!”


A crowd had gathered outside to watch the unveiling. In celebration of success, an impromptu dance session had sprung up in the lanes between the buildings, people swinging each other by the arm. A few couples seemed to be marking the victory with some very impressive snogging.

“You beautiful man.” John rounded on Sherlock expectantly, gripping both of his arms. “Thank you, love, for finding the cloaking device.”

“Well, it wasn’t just me, the tech team . . .”

“I don’t care about the tech team!” John crowed, his dark blue eyes glowing as he pulled Sherlock closer, his hands sliding down Sherlock’s tunic to hold him low on the back. “You’re my brilliant man who made it happen. C’mere.”

“Well, when you put it that way.”

Sherlock leaned in as John pressed upward, his eyes soft, lips pursed when Kira suddenly appeared beside them.

“It’s a beautiful thing, isn’t it?” Kira said, tipping her head back to view the canopy overhead.

“Yeah, yeah,” John agreed, moving back to look up as well. “It’s incredible.”

Sherlock couldn’t help feeling disappointed as John stepped away.

“We really needed this kind of security.” Kira smiled broadly. “Now that we know we won’t have any breeches in our physical . . .”

Something sparked in the corner of Sherlock’s eye. He turned to study it as more bursts of light followed.

“I wouldn’t speak too soon,” Sherlock said, interrupting Kira’s nattering. He pointed toward the odd pattern of lights flashing close to where the shield met the ground, past the storage sheds.

“See that?”

“What in the world?” John squinted.
“Damn.” Kira’s hand flew to activate the small communication device clipped to her collar.

“Gant, this is Kira. We’re detecting an anomaly in the force field. Watson and Holmes and I are close enough to make a visual inspection. You might want to send a tech to follow up.”

“Affirmative, Kira.” Gant’s voice sounded through the device. “I’ll send your coordinates along.”

“Come on,” Kira said, leading the way as they jogged forward.

“Prophets, I hope this isn’t serious,” John muttered as they threaded their way through the gathered crowd already beginning to disperse, people returning reluctantly to their afternoon duties now that the fun was over.

“Let’s hope it’s something easy to repair if it is a malfunction,” Sherlock said as they neared the sheds. “Sometimes glitches arise when you combine alien technologies.”

John grunted in reply as they rounded the sheds to find a small huddle of giggling children hiding behind the out buildings.

“Almonz!” a girl cried out, her head whipping about as she spotted the three adults.

A boy beside her was too late to stop the momentum of the projectile in his hand, a stone flying to hit the side of the force field. The impact caused a ripple and spark in the shield before the stone fell harmlessly back to the ground. The four children stood frozen, eyes wide.

Sherlock wanted to laugh at their comically stricken faces, but pressed his lips together to keep the sound in. Kira and John looked similarly affected, John rubbing a hand over his mouth while Kira took a deep breath, hands on her hips.

“Alright. That’s enough of that!” John recovered first. “You should know better than to throw stones at a force field. What if one bounced back and hit someone?”

“We’re sorry, sir.” The boy called Almonz shuffled a toe over the ground. “We were only having fun.”

“Not much fun if you broke someone’s head,” John countered.

“Yes, and what if you damaged our new cloaking shield and the Empire found our camp?” Kira pushed forward frowning. “What then?”

“Sorry, mistress,” the group mumbled.

“We all need to do our part. If you’re not for the Resistance, you’re for the Cardassians,” Kira stared them all down in turn. “Do you want to work for the Cardassians?”

“NO!” The children looked properly horrified, their eyes sliding over to sneak glances at Sherlock’s face.

Sherlock stepped back, retreating until his back hit the shed wall, not wanting to scare the children with his alien features.

“Damn right we don’t want to do that,” Kira all but snarled.

“Please miss, are we going to get a beating?” The smallest boy asked timidly.

“No, no beatings.” John sighed. “Not this time anyway. But don’t let us catch you here again. You
need to leave the shield alone!”

The children agreed readily, relaxing with relief.

“Don’t you all have a class at the learning center to get to?” Kira raised her eyebrows.

“Yes, mistress.” The little girl nodded.

“Then GO!” Kira raised her arms, and the children scattered like small birds flying away.

“Prophets,” Kira let out a laugh then. “Kids.” She shook her head.

“Glad it wasn’t anything more serious.” John chuckled.

“Should we cancel the tech crew?” Sherlock moved forward to join them.

“Naw, might as well have the engineers make sure things are okay over here,” John said.

“John, I sincerely doubt that children with a pile of stones have damaged a state-of-the-art cloaking device . . .”

“Yeah, I know but the tech heads will be pissed at us if they don’t check up on any issue with the shield.”

“Fair enough.” Sherlock shrugged.

They waited until the tech crew member arrived with a bag of diagnostic tools. Kira quickly explaining the situation before they left the crime scene.

“Well, I think we can call Project Perimeter a success,” John said as they walked back to the main road. “Shall we go take a peek outside? I’m dying to see the cloaking technology.”

“Certainly, why not?” Sherlock agreed.

They followed the road to the front gate where a portal tunnel now stood to mark the exit. A few techies still fussied over the control panel, but readily agreed to let them out for a demonstration.

Kira punched in the code the Council of Elders had been given, and waited until a light turned green. A shimmer passed at the entrance as the force field parted. After they’d moved inside, Sherlock reached up to punch a button and the curtain of energy re-engaged behind them as the front of the tunnel opened up. They stepped through onto the dusty road outside.


Instantly the opening disappeared as if it had never been there. The group walked a few meters down the road before turning back to survey the farm.

“Wow,” John said, running a hand behind his neck.

“This is good.” Kira whistled.

“Agreed,” Sherlock said. “The cloaking technology seems to have melded well with the existing system.”

They could see the old wooden fence that skirted the edges of the farm, and beyond that, what appeared to be a deserted, barren field, and a slightly dilapidated farmhouse crouched in the center. A
bit of wind swirled some dust up from the ground as it passed. The illusion was perfect.

“Yeah, that’s just creepy.” John shook his head.

“It’s really weird, isn’t it?” Kira said quietly. “Like we just erased everyone.”

“Let’s go back in,” John said. “Please.”

“Computer, open portal,” Sherlock called out.

It was a relief to step back through the tunnel and see the complex of buildings, the leafy plants moving in the breeze, and the people bustling by, going about their day.

“That was good, but that sort of stuff always gets me,” John huffed a laugh.

“At least it should be good enough to fool anyone surveying the area,” Kira said.

“That’s what we need.” Sherlock said. “It should block any sensors as well as any visual targeting.”

“That was absolutely fantastic.” John reached out to grip Sherlock’s arm. “There’s another portal at the entrance to the river, yeah?”

“Yes, we could check that one out too if you like,” Sherlock said. “It should function much the same.”

“Another day, maybe,” John said.

“Yeah, I think Lupie has some celebratory drinks inside,” Kira said. “I’d like to get in there before it’s all gone.”

“Ugh. It’s not more of that Urgot is it?” Sherlock wrinkled his nose.

“Relax, Holmes.” Kira laughed. “I think it’s homemade wine.”

“Lead on then.” Sherlock motioned a hand forward.

He meant to walk in beside John, but Kira swooped in and gathered John’s arm in her own.

“Hey, I wanted to talk with you about some scheduling. What do you think . . .”

John shot a sympathetic look over his shoulder, but allowed Kira to tug him along. Sherlock sighed and fell into line behind them.

%%% Chapter End Notes

The title of this chapter and the quote that Mycroft teaches Sherlock is a paraphrase from Sun Tzu’s famous "The Art of War" treatise.

"Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first
and then seek to win.”
– Sun Tzu.
Whatever a man sows, this he shall reap

Chapter Summary

The Resistance continues to set up a new cell by the river, and holidays bring unexpected events to the farm.

Chapter Notes

To those who mark the Winter Solstice, a very happy Yule to you, and to those who don’t, happy holidays all the same!

~@~

Again many thanks to D and iamjohnlocked4life for their support and encouragement. Sometimes it takes a village!

%%%

“Coming by on the left,” someone called out.

“Oh, sorry.” Sherlock stepped back, pressing his shoulders into the rough stone wall behind him to let a man pushing an antigrav pack pass by.

The network of tunnels by the river had been widened to accommodate the space needed to house the new Resistance cell, but many of the connecting corridors were still rather tight. Sherlock waited until several people had trudged by, some with antigrav packs, and others hauling things manually on top of their shoulders. One of the boys on the end had been in his mok’bara classes last year, and he nodded respectfully as he passed. Sherlock returned the gesture, grateful for a familiar face after a day of new Bajoran faces scowling his way.

It was an ambitious project making these underground spaces habitable. Stuccoed walls, tapestries, and glow lights were making parts of the warren quite habitable, but it was still a cave, and the lingering damp, and sharp mineral scent in the air certainly reminded you where you were. Sherlock was on day two of working on making the net accessible to the settlement, and synching the relay nodes to work underground was continuing to be a formidable task.

Once the caravan of workers had passed, Sherlock turned to continue his diagnostic scan of the device affixed to the top of the corridor. When he realized it had been simply calibrated incorrectly, he typed in a quick line of code that soon had the relay lighting up, and beeping happily. Sherlock sighed. He’d be glad to finish this project and get back above ground as soon as possible. The cold had a way of slipping under even his heaviest padded jacket and making his joints protest.

He quickly packed his tools into his satchel, and headed down to the corridor past the hydroponic station where he’d left Naavi working. He found the young man leaning, one elbow against the wall chatting with an attractive female in a furry vest and leggings. She laughed at something Naavi said,
and Naavi smiled, leaning in even closer.

“Naavi,” Sherlock called out, perhaps a bit more sharply than he meant to.

“Sherlock.” The young man jolted upright.

“Did you finish checking the main hub?” Sherlock reached them in a few brisk steps.

“Yeah, yeah. It’s working fine. I just had to replace a bit of wiring.”

“You’re busy, I should go.” The pretty girl smiled.

“No, Leera wait, I’ll be done for the day soon.”


“Bye!” Naavi called to her retreating back. “I’ll catch you later, okay?”

The girl wiggled her fingers in farewell and turned the corner without replying.

“Damn.” Naavi blew out a breath, still staring after her.

“If you’re done socializing?” Sherlock raised an eyebrow. “Perhaps we can return to providing the Resistance with a functioning net connection?”

“Oh, Sherlock, come on, you know we’re almost done,” Naavi complained. “How else am I supposed to meet someone if I don’t talk to any new people?”

“There are meal times, social events . . .” Sherlock waved a hand.

“Yeah, and everyone’s too busy to come to them.” Naavi bent down to retrieve a tool he’d left on the ground. “We can’t all be married like you and Watson, you know? Some of us have to work a bit to keep our beds warm.”

Sherlock found himself sputtering unattractively.

“South corridor,” he finally blurted. “We need to check that router again.”

“Fine,” Naavi said, slinging his own bag over his shoulder. “Lead the way, boss.”

Sherlock wanted to protest that he and John certainly weren’t married, but they did share a bedroom. They did spend as much of their free time together as possible. Everything he did, he did with John in mind. They didn’t have anything official, but surely they were as committed to each other as people could be. But married? A Cardassian and a Bajoran?

Sherlock snorted softly to himself and focused on the task at hand that stretched out when the system refused to synch properly. Sherlock’s shoulders hunched up higher when he realized that two nights spent in the warren was about to become three. He and Naavi ate dinner again with the soldiers in the communal hall, simple but filling meals doled out in large glopped spoonfuls. Sherlock sat somewhat apart from the rest of the diners, keeping his questionable company away from those who only tolerated his Cardassian presence.

Naavi generally brought his own bowl over to join him at some point, but this evening he seemed to have found his way back to the side of Miss Furry Vest. She was watching him avidly as he talked, leaning over the table to touch his arm. Sherlock sighed, and finished his meal as quickly as decorum allowed.
He spent the rest of the evening walking the corridors, double checking that their net connection was truly working as it should. When he returned, tired but satisfied to the small supply room where he and Naavi had been sleeping on camp pads, he hesitated at the door. The sounds of scuffling, and a feminine giggle followed by a low moan could clearly be heard inside. Sherlock sighed, turned on his heel, and returned to the communal room. A group having a dice game looked up briefly and went back to ignoring him as Sherlock found a chair to lean against the wall. He settled in, pulling up a technical journal on his reader that he’d been meaning to finish.

“Hey, boyo, you don’t want to sleep here all night. Get a crick in your neck.”

Sherlock blinked awake to find the dice game gone, and an older woman smiling kindly down at him.

“Ah, well, it was the best option I could find.” Sherlock sat up, rubbing at the muscles under the base of his skull, finding that that did indeed feel knotted.

“Don’t you have a bed, love?”

“Sadly my roommate found someone more interesting to take it tonight.”

“Come on, you can bunk in the infirmary tonight.” She tipped her head toward the door. “No one’s using it yet.”

“Thank you. I appreciate it.”

Sherlock rose to follow the woman down a twist of corridors to a newly whitewashed room lined with several cheap fold-out beds.

“Here ya go. I can even throw in a blanket to sweeten the deal.” The woman winked as she moved to a cupboard to find him some bedding to spread over one of the mattresses.

Sherlock thanked her again, removing his shoes and outer jacket to slide under the covers after she had left. The lighting in the room automatically dimmed at the lack of movement in the room, retreating to a soft glow from the small lights around the base of the walls. Sherlock tossed and turned, trying to find a comfortable position on the thin mattress, feeling as if the bed were both too big and too small at once. He realized he missed the warmth of another body sleeping next to him with a bone deep, visceral ache.

He and John hadn’t been apart this long in years. For a moment, Sherlock felt as though he were a child again, back at his first night at the military academy, crying himself to sleep as quietly as he could in the crowded dormitory. The sound of footsteps and snatches of a conversation in Bajoran drifted in from the corridor beyond. Sherlock took a deep breath to calm himself. He wasn’t at some horrid military school, he was on Bajor, and he’d seen John tomorrow when he returned to the farm.

Finally, a troubled sleep filled with bad dreams rose to claim him, and he woke some hours later feeling more tetchy and out of sorts than actually rested. He used the nearby facilities for a cursory wash and piss, and found his way back to the mess hall. A small crowd had gathered near the pot of soup that seemed to be breakfast that morning. Sherlock circumnavigated it for the replicator, ordering a cup of steaming deka tea to hopefully clear his foggy brain. He was grateful that so many of the Bajorans routinely ignored him as he made a beeline for a quiet corner to enjoy his restoring drink in peace.

“Sherlock!”

He would have growled at someone calling his name if he hadn’t realized a nanosecond later that it
“What are you doing here?” Sherlock nearly spilled his tea whipping about to see John walking toward him.

“There was a shipment of grain coming down to the outpost. I decided it needed extra attention to make sure it got here safely.” John looked tired, but the grin that lit his face caused an answering bloom of warmth to grow inside Sherlock’s chest.

“Oh, and you were the only one qualified to do it?” He knew he was smiling as well. His face nearly hurt from the tug of it.

“That’s right. Plus I needed to see that a certain Net Tech was taking care of himself. Prophets, it’s good to see you. Come here.” John pulled Sherlock into his arms.

He did slosh some tea over his hand then, but it hardly registered with John holding him close, the smell of sun and fresh air in John’s hair pressed to his nose.

“Fuck, I missed you,” John muttered.

“John.” Sherlock could hardly speak for the lump in his throat as he slid his free arm around the solid weight of him.

Sherlock could feel eyes all around them, but then John pulled him down for a real kiss, and he couldn’t have cared less. It took a few minutes for them to untangle, find John some breakfast, and places to sit, but in that time, the mood of the whole room had shifted. People came over to shake John’s hand, and many who hadn’t talked to Sherlock the whole time he’d been there were suddenly thanking him profusely for his work on the net connection. He might have found it amusing, but he was too busy watching John talk, and accepting the bits of roll he kept pushing Sherlock’s way.

Naavi sauntered in, yawning, tell-tale marks along his neck. He found a bowl and a cup of tea, and sheepishly joined them at their table.

“Eh, Sherlock, sorry about last night, man,” Naavi scrubbed a hand over the stubble on his chin.

“Last night?” John raised an eyebrow as he looked between the two of them.

“Oh, nothing. Naavi just decided to find better company than mine last night.” Sherlock shrugged.

“Yeah, sorry to take the room . . .” Naavi mumbled over his bowl.

“Ah, young love.” John shook his head. “I trust you found somewhere to sleep?” He looked Sherlock’s way.

The inconvenience of the night before, in fact the whole pain and suffering of the last several days had evaporated like mist in the dawn with John’s arrival. Sherlock was more than happy to let bygones be bygones.

“Infirmary.”

“Good,” John said. “So, the networking job, are you two still working on that?”

“No, I gave everything a final check last night.” Sherlock reached for his tea. “It’s good to go.”

“Well, thank the Prophets for that,” John said. “We need you two back at the farm. Can’t have our best techs gone forever.”
John’s gaze moved to linger over Sherlock’s face, his eyes turning soft. It made something warm settle low in his belly. Suddenly Sherlock couldn’t wait to find a quiet room of their own.

“Actually, I was wondering if I might stay on a day or two longer?” Naavi piped up.

“Oh really?” Sherlock glanced his way.

“Yeah, they’re having some trouble with one of the hydroponics bays.” Naavi shrugged. “Some of the gardeners said the lights weren’t cycling correctly. I thought I could help them out with it.”

“What do you think, Sherlock?” John asked, frowning.

“I don’t think we have anything pressing going on at the farm,” Sherlock said. “You could stay here if you want. It’s your choice, Naavi.”

“Okay, great.” Naavi raised his soup bowl to drink the last of it when a familiar woman in a vest entered the room. “I’ll see you all later then.”

“Yeah. May the Prophets bless you.” John smiled at the boy.

“Blessings also upon you,” Naavi muttered, already moving to join the woman by the replicator.

“Were we ever that obvious?” John asked watching as Naavi and the young woman bent heads to murmur together.

“Says the man who just snogged me hello in front of the entire River Bank Resistance Cell.” Sherlock reached out to squeeze John’s thigh under the table.

“Oh, yeah, I guess so,” John chuckled a bit self-consciously, patting the back of his hand. “I just missed the hell out of you. Are you really free to come home?”

“As soon as I grab my gear, I can get out of here.”

“Good. It’s a lovely day out. We can walk if you want to.”

A tunnel with a running shuttle between the farm and the Resistance Cell had been set up, but it was only an hour walk by foot, all of it on a path by the river.

“Yes, please, I’m dying for some fresh air.” Sherlock nearly shivered at the notion of getting out of the caves and back into the light of day.

Sherlock made short work of leaving instructions with his contact if anything with the new system malfunctioned, and gathering up the few things he’d brought into his satchel. They would have said good-bye to Naavi, but he had already disappeared somewhere into the warren of chambers. Sherlock could hardly wait to take the lift the surface and step outside into the sunlight with John by his side.

They took their time, walking along the running water, Sherlock reveling in the vision of trees, and blue sky, and air not run through a ventilation system. When they reached John’s old swimming hole, John insisted they stop and rest for awhile. Sherlock hardly needed convincing as they found some large, flat rocks beside the water to lie on, and bask in the midday sun.

“Oh, yes.” Sherlock stretched back, using his pack as a pillow. “This is more like it.”

John hummed something in reply, settling beside him.
The sunlight lay behind Sherlock’s closed eyelids, a delicious heat settling over his skin. He could feel the tension seeping out of his muscles into the hot rock beneath him, finally feeling warm for the first time in days.

“You are so beautiful.”

Sherlock cracked his eye open to see John sitting up, watching him intently, arms looped over his knees.

“No, you are.” Sherlock smiled lazily.

The sun seemed to be dripping over John like liquid honey, coating his tan skin and golden hair with an ethereal glow. John moved closer, leaning over Sherlock to grin back at him. The sun caught the metal earrings on John’s ear in a burst of bright sparkles. Sherlock reached up to trace the shining chains swinging off his ear.

“I could get you one of your own, you know,” John said.

“I don’t have a family crest.”

All Bajoran earrings involved a design that announced their family lineage. Everyone knew that.

“Git!” John smiled wider. “I’d get you a Watson crest, of course.”

“John, are you asking me to marry you?” Sherlock meant it as a joke, but once he’d said it, the words fell heavy between them.

“What if I were?” John breathed, so close now that Sherlock could see every golden fleck and striation inside his gorgeous, deep blue eyes. They loomed over him, consuming him, swallowing up the whole world with their vastness.

“I can’t . . . we can’t. It isn’t allowed.”

John blew a rude noise. “Who cares about what’s allowed? We make our own rules. That’s the whole point about being in the Resistance.”

“John.” Sherlock rolled away, pushing himself to sitting as well. “You know that isn’t quite true. People accept me because of you, but if we broke tradition like that, it would be different. No Cardassian has ever married a Bajoran before. It just isn’t . . .” Sherlock waved his hand, unable to convey the completely impossible nature of John’s request.

“Well, bloody hell. Who cares if it’s been done before?” John frowned. “I want to be with you.”

“John, we ARE together. We don’t have to make a big deal about it.”

“What if I wanted to make a big deal about it?” John scrubbed his hand roughly back through his hair, frustrated. “Who’s to stop us if I wanted to marry you? Besides, you’re hardly any more Cardassian than I am.”

Sherlock smiled sadly. “I think there are a number of people who would disagree with you on that.”

He reached out to take John’s hand, looking down at the grayish pallor of his skin next to the warmer tones of John’s.

“Well, fuck them. Honestly. I love you.” John gripped his fingers tightly. “What’s more important than that?”
“I love you too, of course . . .”

“Sherlock,” John said quietly. “Your father’s gone. He can’t disapprove of you anymore. You know that, right?”

“I know, John. I know. It’s just . . . so much going on. All this.” Sherlock lifted a shoulder helplessly as if that explained the entirety of the Cardassian occupation on Bajor. “Ask me again later. When things are settled, when this war is over. Ask me then.”

“Alright.” John didn’t look happy, but he allowed Sherlock to crawl into his lap, hugging him tightly, bending to kiss him until they both forgot what they’d even been talking about.

The afternoon light shone gloriously down around them making everything warm, and soft, and beautiful as their hands traced over each other’s bodies, mapping the well-known curves and lines. Their mouths met gain and again, relearning the taste and feel of each other until nothing else existed but lips and sighs and skin hot from the sun pressed tightly together.

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The Twins, Bajor’s two moons hung full in the night sky looking like fat moba fruit, ready for the picking as Sherlock and John stepped out of the farmhouse. The light was nearly as bright as day, transforming the ordinarily dim landscape into a silvery faery land. The Autumn Twins ushered in the cooler weather, and more importantly a week of harvest celebrations to commemorate all the hard work in the fields.

“I love Autumn, don’t you?” John took a deep breath. “Smell that? Smells like life.”

Sherlock preferred the warmer weather, but there was something so compelling about the rich loamy smell paired with the crisp air of fall. He glanced over at John grinning in the dark. The moonlight limned his profile and tipped his hair in space dust.

“It’s lovely,” Sherlock agreed, pulling his warm scarf tighter about his neck.

“Come on, the bonfire’s about to be lit.” John urged him forward.

It seemed that most of the camp had turned out for the lighting of the Harvest Hearth, a huge bonfire in the courtyard beside the community center.

Sherlock glanced about at the talking, laughing, jostling crowd, the tamped-down excitement palpable in the air around them. Smaller bonfires were already lit around the property, and the smell of roasting food hung enticingly in the air.

John reached out to slide his fingers into Sherlock’s as they made their way to join the people gathered by of the massive tower of stacked wood. Two figures stepped forward holding torches that were soon lit, orange flames licking over the stout sticks. Sherlock recognized Dr. Sito, and Engineer Gant representing the Council of Elders.

Prayers rang out as the two tossed their flaming brands onto the stacked logs. The pile went up with an impressive whoosh, and the crowd cheered its approval. Bright flames of green and purple mingled with the usual yellow as the fire blazed over the chemical-soaked logs.
The recent upgrade to the new cloaking field around the farm had come just in time. Tonight with their bright harvest fires and lanterns hung all over camp, there would be no light escaping to the nearby road, no heat signature visible from above for any airships or satellites peering down. It was a relief to know.

Someone began singing a traditional song, and others picked it up as a group of drummers joined in. People drifted over to move around the flames, stamping their feet and throwing their hands into the air, grinning and laughing. The rhythm of the drums and the dancers surged over them all, connecting them, performers and watchers, one and the same celebrating together tonight.

Sherlock recognized Naavi with the drummers and raised a hand in greeting. It seemed his relationship with Miss Furry Vest had fizzled out fairly quickly. He’d returned to the farm, and hadn’t mentioned the River Bank Cell again. Sherlock didn’t want to rejoice in Naavi’s disappointment, but it was good to have his assistant back. Naavi spotted Sherlock and nodded in reply as his hands moved over his drum.

“Want a drink?” John tipped his head to the side where a food booth sat.

“Are you paying?” The corner of Sherlock’s lips twitched up.

“Git, yeah, I’m paying.” John’s grin was bright in the firelight.

Sherlock allowed John to lead him to where cooking pots of warm spiced punch were being ladled out to all and sundry. John darted past the queue toward the front of the table. Several people in the line shot Sherlock angry looks.

“Sodding Spoonhead.”

“We’d be better off getting rid of all of the fuckers.”

Sherlock pretended not to hear the muttered curses, but he moved back a judicious distance from the crowd, melting into the moon-tipped shadows. He leaned his head back to view the dark canopy spread above. Through the ripple of the cloaking device, the star-studded sky was a gem-strewn velvet cloth. Beautiful.

John returned shortly bearing two steaming cups.

“Being on the Council of Elders has its benefits, eh?” John extended one of the cups Sherlock’s way.

Mmmm, Sherlock agreed accepting the warm drink to cradle it between his palms.

A small knot of teenagers happened by, laughing, and giggling. One of the boys palmed the rear end of the girl ahead of him, and she turned to slap him, the moment halted when they spied Sherlock and John nearby.

“Oh, Mr. Holmes. Mr. Watson, Happy Harvest,” they called respectfully.

Sherlock and John returned the greeting, watching as the teens moved on and a family passed by with several children playing with glowing fiber optic wands, twirling them to make patterns of light in the dark.

“Ah, that’s lovely.” John touched Sherlock’s arm as he nodded toward the lights.

“It is,” Sherlock agreed, raising his mug for a careful sip.
The hot, sweet punch warmed him through to his toes, and he hummed in pleasure at not just the drink, but the whole night around him. The feeling running through the crisp air was electric as if something special, something magical might happen that night.

“A soul cake, a soul cake, a kiss for a soul cake!” An older woman wrapped in a headscarf came bustling up, hunched over a large basket in her arms.

“I thought it was a coin for a soul cake,” John teased.

“Well, coins are hard to come by, sonny, but perhaps you handsome men might give me a kiss for a cake instead.” She extended her basket for them to chose.

“Yeah, alright, Bibi,” John laughed, reaching in for a muffin.

There was something vaguely familiar about the old woman. Sherlock peered more closely at her as he took his own cake.

“Thank you so much, Bibi,” Sherlock intoned formally.

“And my payment?” the woman croaked.

“Of course.” John moved closer just as the woman stood upright, whipping off the scarf to reveal a grinning Lupaza standing before them.

“Lupie!” John exclaimed, falling back.

“I knew it was her,” Sherlock said.

“What, you didn’t!” Lupaza cried.

“Scar on your first finger.” Sherlock nodded toward her hand.


“Always.” Sherlock stepped back avoiding her reach. He bit into the muffin, enjoying the earthy burst of flavors over his tongue. “Mmm, this good.”

“Wow, yeah, these are delicious,” John said, swallowing a large bite.

“Thanks, I made them myself, my ma’s recipe. But someone owes me a kiss now.” Lupaza stuck out her cheek pointedly.

John and Sherlock both stepped up to bestow the payment of a kiss on either of her cheeks.

“I’ve been doubly blessed now,” Lupaza crowed. “Well, I’ll have to see if everyone else recognizes me so quickly.” She set her basket down as she pulled the scarf over her head, winding it back into place.

“Sherlock had a bit of an advantage in recognizing you, though.” John smirked.

“John, no . . .”

“He used dress up like a grandmother under a veil to sneak out of his parents’ house when we were kids.”

“He didn’t.” Lupaza paused in tucking the fabric.
“Swear on the Prophets.” John giggled. “Got me into all kinds of trouble.”

“If you two are done,” Sherlock huffed.

“I wish I’d seen that.” Lupaza laughed as she finished with her scarf.

“He looked lovely.” John smiled.

Sherlock made a humping noise in reply.

“Well, I’m off. Many more people to bless.” Lupanza bent over to retrieve her basket. “Happy Harvest!”

“Bye, Lupie. Happy Harvest,” John called as she hobbled away, an old woman once more.

“Sorry, love.” John bumped his hip against Sherlock’s companionably. “I couldn’t help myself. You did look quite fetching at the time, and I never told you.”

“I looked like an idiot.”

“Never.” John ate his cake with relish, polishing it off in a few bites.

Sherlock finished his own cake, enjoyed how it paired with the warm punch. They could hear Lupanza chanting her soul cake song to another group of people nearby.

“Why are they called soul cakes?” Sherlock asked John. “I never understood that.”

Harvest Fest wasn’t something they’d celebrated at Holmes Manor, but Sherlock had of course grown up with the celebrations around them.

“Oh, some old folk tale,” John said, taking a long drink to drain his cup. “You’re supposed to eat the cakes to bring good luck to your departed ancestors. If any of them haven’t moved on to the afterworld, eating the cakes is supposed to encourage them to pass through.”

“How would eating a cake do that?” Sherlock wrinkled his nose.

“Who knows? No one can call you a glutton if you eat a whole plate though. You’re just helping your ancestors.”

“Ha. Likely story.”

The strains of a band tuning up drifted over the general hubbub of conversation and laughter.

“Hey, hear that? Come on.” John grabbed Sherlock’s wrist without waiting for an answer and pulled him toward the sounds.

They dropped their empty cups at a food stand, and moved through the mingling people until they found a group of musicians with wooden flutes, and several battered old string instruments starting to play. People stopped to gather around them as they launched into a popular children’s song. Sherlock couldn’t help staring at the old man with a violin. It had been ages and ages since he’d held one, but his hands twitched in sympathetic positions as he watched the man play.

John obviously noticed him because a minute later, he had popped off to get another cup of warm punch that he presented to the musician, leaning in to speak to him as he glanced back at Sherlock. Sherlock tried to wave him off, but soon enough the old Bajoran man was cheerfully accepting the drink and passing his violin and bow to Sherlock to borrow.
It had been too long, but with hardly a thought, Sherlock tucked the instrument under his chin, adjusted it, and pulled the bow across the strings. He ran through a scale, familiarizing himself with the feel of things, and then satisfied, he started on a song. It was one that had stayed with him for years even after he’d left Bajor and his music practices far behind. It was an old Bajoran ballad, a lament for a lover lost. He had learned it on his own, and had thought to play it for John, but somehow he’d never gotten the chance. He’d hummed it to himself for years though.

Closing his eyes, Sherlock gave himself over to the music, letting the notes buoy him up as his fingers found the right positions. He was stiff at first, but as he played it all came back to him, the song sweeping him up, filling him right to the brim. Sherlock vaguely registered when the other musicians joined in, accompanying him, adding to the plaintive melody. It was so achingly beautiful, he played the refrain twice more before finally bringing the song to a close.

Sherlock opened his eyes to find that a crowd had gathered around them. A moment of silence hung in the air before everyone broke into wild applause. Sherlock tried to hand the violin back to its owner, but the man, refused.

“No, no, you make it sing, play something else!”

Sherlock looked about to find John standing nearby, blinking tears out of his eyes.

“Please, love, play another.”

Sherlock nodded and tucked the violin back under his chin. “Do you know Wind in the hollow?” he asked the rest of the band.

They did, and together they played through the cheery folk tune, following with another song that the band knew and Sherlock followed well enough. When they dove into a well-known call and response song, the crowd joined in, delighting in singing the slightly naughty lyrics loudly. Sherlock frowned at the double entendres, and John giggled, nearly doubling over.

A sudden, impossibly loud, discordant noise cut through the music, an alarm blaring. The band stumbled to a halt as a simulated female voice rang out over their heads

“Unauthorized perimeter shut down in one minute . . .”

“What the hell?” John snapped to attention.

Sherlock passed the violin back to its owner as he tapped the communication device attached to his collar. “Gant, what’s going on?”

“No idea,” the engineer returned. “I’m on my way to the central console.”

“thirty seconds . . .”

“Come on, John.” Sherlock pushed his way through the milling people toward the nearest building, the community center, John hot on his heels.

“Ten seconds, nine seconds, eight . . .”

A cry ran through the crowd as the countdown reached zero, and the cloaking field around the farm shimmered, and winked out. The sky looked even darker black, the scattering of stars piercing, unforgiving points of light. Sherlock couldn’t help glancing at the large central bonfire roaring in the central plaza. They were naked, exposed, throwing light and movement out to whoever might be watching.
“Damnit” Sherlock growled as they reached the center, bursting through the front door.

A group of children weaving a craft in the main room looked up, their shocked faces following them as they thundered up the stairs, making their way to the computer rooms.

Sherlock found his classroom and logged into the nearest machine.

“Computer, this is Holmes221B-099. Relay current situation with the perimeter field.”

“An unauthorized access code has shut down the perimeter cloaking field at 21:30 hours,” the female voice responded politely.

“What the hell?” John muttered behind him.

“Can you reinstate the cloaking field?” Sherlock asked.

“Negative,” the computer replied. “Commands must be reversed at the source.”

“Where was the code administered?” Sherlock growled.

The computer named coordinates and then showed them the location on a schematic of the farm.

“It’s in one of the dorms,” John said tightly. “What is this? Some kind of infiltration from the Empire?”

“I don’t know,” Sherlock muttered as he desperately pulled up routines and programs, holograms projected all around the room as he tried to get the shield back up. “Not enough data.”

John stepped away to tap on his communicator, obviously relaying the information to others.

“Can you fix it?” John returned to his side.

Sherlock growled in frustration as the computer told him “Access denied” for the third time.

“It’s no good, we have to get to the source of the breach.”

“Come on then. I’ve already sent a security team there.”

They pounded back down the stairs and through the community center, racing out the doors back into the night. People were actively trying to douse the fires blazing around the farm, worried voices calling out as buckets of water were thrown over the flames. Pushing through the crowds still milling about, agitated, Sherlock and John jogged down the lane that connected to the dormitories. It was quieter in this part of the compound, and they quickly found the building they needed.

The door opened into a long unlit hallway, rooms off each side of the corridor, mostly dark with everyone out for the evening’s celebrations. They prowled silently along, breath harsh, adrenalin making their pulse beat in their ears, listening. Sherlock stopped, putting an arm out to halt John when they heard voices from one of the rooms up ahead. Gleeful, young voices.

John raised his eyebrows, but Sherlock put his finger to his lips.

Let’s take this carefully. They crept even closer, pausing outside the half-open door to listen.

“Is it holding?” A male voice asked.

“Course it’s fucking holding, Em is on it,” another man said.
“Yeah, good job, mate!” Yet another male speaker.

“Fuckin’ hell. WOO!”

“Prophets, Buzi, keep it down.” A young woman’s voice chided.

Sherlock caught John’s gaze, tipping his head toward the door. John nodded, mouth set in a grim line. Together they burst through the door.

It was comic, the four teenagers in the room, shrieked, the ones standing, almost falling over. The three men, boys really were of no consequence, blowhards. Sherlock dismissed them with a glance. The young woman with the scar across her face, sitting cross-legged on a mattress with a reader pad in her hands was another story.

“Meni?” Sherlock couldn’t help the stab of hurt at seeing a student from his programming class at the heart of this. The girl looked slightly ashamed, but lifted her chin in defiance.

“Alright, what the hell’s going on?” John bellowed. “Did you all think this was funny? Some kind of joke?”

“Of course not,” The tallest boy spoke up. “It’s for the Resistance.”

“What?” John looked back and forth between the near children, incredulous. “In what way is jeopardizing the entire camp helping the Resistance? We need that force field working!”

“Yeah, well, that’s just it, innit?” A spotty faced lad spoke up. “Getting all fat and lazy here. No one’s caring about overthrowing the Spoonheads anymore. We’ve even GOT one of ‘em here.” He jerked a thumb toward Sherlock. “We need to remind people what’s really going on.”

“We’re providing a place for refugees, older people, children, growing food for the Resistance! What in bloody fuck gives you the right . . .” John lunged forward, nearly red in the face.

“John.” Sherlock put a hand to his arm to stop him. “Surely the first order of business is getting the cloaking field operational again.”

“Yes, yes of course.” John continued glaring at the teenagers while Sherlock sat on the bed next to Meni.

“You hacked into the security system with a reader pad.” He couldn’t quite keep the admiration out of his voice.

“It wasn’t that hard.” the girl lifted a shoulder.

“I disagree. I should have been giving you better marks in class.”

Sherlock watched the ghost of a smile that tugged at Meni’s mouth.

“You’ve made your point. Put the field back in place now.”

“Fuck the man!” One of the boys cried out. “Meni don’t . . .”

Sherlock wasn’t close enough to stop John leaping forward to knock the boy against a wall. He pinned him with a forearm pressed to his throat.

“Not another word,” John growled deep and low as the idiot gasped in his hold.
The other two boys sat down on the floor with a thump looking terrified.

“Meni, please.” Sherlock turned back to the young woman.

“Oh, alright.”

The cool light of the device fell over her face, highlighting the edges of the old scar that bisected her face as she activated the screen. Sherlock watched, following her every move as she brought up the backdoor program she’d written.

“Delete it please.”

With a small sigh, the girl complied.

The security detail arrived then, crashing through the doorway, several men and women armed with phasers to further crowd the small room. It was all a bit of a blur after that.

The teens were taken into custody, and thankfully the cloaking field restored to full capacity. The Harvest celebration continued in a much more subdued way, but Sherlock and John returned to the house for an emergency meeting of the Council of Elders. Despite the fact that they reached consensus quickly enough that the teens would all be transferred to the River Bank Cell, it was late when things broke up.

“Do you want to go back out?” John asked Sherlock, rubbing the back of his neck. “People are probably still celebrating.”

“I’d actually like to walk around, and make sure the field is functioning correctly.”

“I know people already checked it,” John smiled, “but sure, let’s give it a look. Maybe we can grab another cup of punch on our way.”

“Thank you, John.” Sherlock pushed his chair away from the table suddenly feeling infinitely weary.

“Of course, love.” John placed a hand to his shoulder squeezing, giving Sherlock the energy to stand and continue their duties.

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A strange tension seemed to hover over the compound after Harvest night. It was nothing Sherlock could put his finger on, but it lingered like an itch in the middle of the back that he couldn’t quite reach. People seemed more on edge, more twitchy than usual, the amount of dirty looks thrown his way when people thought he wasn’t looking increasing. At least a number of the restless young people had transferred to the nearby Resistance cell, and whatever missions they were planning were thankfully their own business. If Sherlock missed the students like Heera who had left his mok’bara classes, he kept it to himself. A new crop of students had joined his morning practices, and that alongside his tech classes kept him busy enough.

At a special request from the teachers for the younger students in the learning center, Sherlock had even made an appearance for a basic tutorial on computer safety. There were several consoles open in the community center, and though they were locked down with firewalls, adventurous souls could
trip through the safeguards in place if they were determined. Sherlock came in to teach the children of the camp how to access the net safely. It was nearly lunch by the time he headed back to main house.

He should have felt it before he stepped through the door he thought later. A buzz hung in the air like a storm brewing, the smell of ozone and the small hairs on the back of the neck rising, but no, he was whistling the simple tune the children had been singing in the nursery. As soon as the front door swished open, it hit him though. Danger. A group stood hunched over his console, Naavi at the chair raised his face looking pale in the screen’s light. Guilty, worried . . .

Sherlock stepped closer, frowning. “What’s all this . . .” He caught sight of a split screen and stopped, his own stony face and Mycroft’s peaky visage filled the display.

“. . . the Empire needs you where you are,” Mycroft’s recording said.

His first thought was how sad and old Mycroft looked. Had he noticed it the first time his brother had spoken with him? His second thought was fuck, the old software John’s gran had on the console. It recorded calls. He must not have deleted it completely.

“You filthy traitor.” Kira moved from the group, the fury radiating from her in almost palpable waves.

“No, Kira, it isn’t . . .” Sherlock didn’t get out a full sentence before Kira launched herself at him, outstretched hand moving toward his nose.

Instinct and muscle memory took over as Sherlock blocked the attack. Kira cried out and tried again, swinging a kick that Sherlock easily turned aside. She tried again, and things sped up or slowed down as Sherlock’s perception narrowed to nothing but the geometry of bodies moving in space, strike and counterstrike, heartbeats soaring as he fended off the storm of pure fury that was Kira Nerys. She was good, well-trained in a variety of techniques, and it seemed the fight would come down to a test of stamina as neither gained the upper hand in the blur of moving limbs.

Sherlock idly noted the impact as they crashed into the wall, the sound of broken crockery, and cries of dismay around them barely registering. A burst of pain blossomed along Sherlock’s cheek. Kira had managed to land a strike with a kick. Sherlock ignored it as he fended her off, countering with a shove that sent her sprawling back into the room. In an instant she had whirled to face him again, fists flying. Sherlock moved on autopilot, countering, striking. A grunt of pain broke the rhythm when Sherlock’s leg connected with Kira’s knee, and she went down with a cry. In an instant, she was up again, snarling . . .

“What in burning hells is going on here?”

John appeared in the doorway, his blazing face like the sun parting the clouds. People were on them, then, pulling them apart. Ragged breaths filled the air.

“He’s a traitor,” Kira cried, straining at the hands that held her back, looking nearly feral. “Look at the logs. He’s been communicating with the Obsidian Order all this time.” Kira jerked her chin toward the console where an image of Sherlock and Mycroft calmly discussing their father’s death sat frozen on display for the room.

“That’s Sherlock’s BROTHER, Kira. For fuck’s sake. I KNOW he talks with him.”

“But they’ve been plotting . . . the Empire . . . we heard . . .” Kira protested, still struggling.

“No. It’s not what you’re thinking. Prophets. Why didn’t you ASK me about this before you decided
to destroy the living room?” John snarled.

“I’m sorry.” Kira sagged back, the fight gone the truth washed over her. “I had no idea.”

Their helpers released them, stepping back as the fracas was clearly over.

“What the hell did you do to his FACE?” John growled as he stepped nearer to peer at Sherlock’s stinging cheek.

“I didn’t mean . . .” Kira stuttered.

“John, I’m fine . . .” Sherlock began. When he touched his cheek gingerly though, his hand came away wet, stained maroon. Damn.

“Hmmm, right.” John gave a dangerously low hum, his jaw clenched as he lay a finger to tilt Sherlock’s face to the light to better view the cut.

“Get out!” John turned to yell at Kira. “Take your things and go. You’re bunking somewhere else now.”

“John, I . . .” Kira spread her hands out in entreaty.

“Just. Go.” John turned his back on the woman to herd Sherlock toward the hall. “You, come with me to the bathroom.”

“John, we should have told the Council of Elders about my involvement . . .” Sherlock mumbled.

“Shhh.”

John maneuvered him into the small room at the end of the corridor. The lights powered up automatically as John shut the door.

“It wasn’t entirely Kira’s fault,” Sherlock said.

“Bollocks. Did you start that mess?”

“No, of course not.”

“Then don’t make excuses for her. Sit down and let me take a look at your face.”

“It’s nothing.”

“It isn’t nothing. You’re bleeding. For all I know, she cracked a bone.”

John opened the cupboard to rummage out a few supplies as Sherlock sank to perch on the closed toilet. He wanted to protest John making such a fuss, but now that the flight or fight chemicals were leaving his body, he could feel the aches settling in. Damn, his face hurt.

John bustled over him like a mother hen, checking over his injuries, and Sherlock let him, sighing as John ran a tissue regenerator over his cheek, and several sore areas across his ribs.

“Alright, nothing’s broken,” John finally declared, pushing pain pills and a cup of water into his hands.

“See, I told you it wasn’t serious.”
“In-fighting is always serious.” John scowled. “If we start taking each other down, the Empire’s already won. We can’t risk that kind of morale loss.”

“I know, but did you have to kick Kira out of the house?”

“Yes, I did. We need to send a strong message. We stand together or not at all.”

“Alright, it won’t be popular though.”

“See if I give a damn about being popular,” John said. “She had no right to take justice into her own hands. If someone has an issue, they need to bring it to the council.”

“Yes, you’re right.” Sherlock swallowed the pills down.

Thankfully they encountered no one in the hallway on the way to their room. Sherlock sank gratefully to the bed, allowing John to fuss over him more, helping him undress and settling into bed. When they lay under the blankets spooned together, nearly drifting to sleep, Sherlock ventured to suggest something that had been brewing in the back of his mind. Carefully he rolled onto his back to better face John.

“Hey, you alright there?” John murmured sleepily as Sherlock jostled him.

“Yes, fine.” Sherlock winced at bit at making his aching body obey his commands. “I’ve been thinking though.”

“Yeah, bout what?” John breathed in, clearly trying to wake himself.

“I think it might be a good time for me to make a supply run, a longer one. I could make a round through some depots and waste repositories in the neighboring provinces. We could use some materials, some scrap metals.”

“Really?” John scrubbed a hand over his face. “How long do you think you’ll be gone.”

“Possibly a week,” Sherlock said. “Two at the most.”

“That long?” John sighed.

“It would be better for me to hunt farther away, draw less attention, and . . . I think it might help things cool down if I were out of sight for awhile.”

“Look, fuck Kira . . .”

“No, it isn’t just Kira. The whole farm is on edge. I just thought . . . it would be a good time for me to leave for a bit.”

“Yeah, okay. I can come with you.”

“No you can’t. The Council of Elders needs you. The farm needs you. We can’t both go.”

“Prophets. Okay, you’re right.” John pushed up onto one elbow. “Take a couple of the kids from your mok’bara class though. You could use the muscle.”

“Yes, okay.”

“You don’t have to go right away though do you? Give yourself some time to heal.”
“Of course, John. I can wait a few days.”

“Okay, good.” John settled back down beside him, drawing Sherlock gently against him. “I’ll miss you though.”

“I know,” Sherlock said quietly into John’s impossibly warm chest. “I’ll miss you too.”

John made a snuffly sort of noise against his hair, and gradually relaxed as sleep took him. Sherlock spent several more minutes basking in the feeling of John next to him before the pain meds kicked in fully and he drifted off as well.

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