His thoughts keep going in circles. Speculating is fruitless and frustrating. He has thought, often, of how to broach the subject with John:

Notes

Note: I don't own any of the characters from the Sherlock BBC television series, nor any of the characters created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Trigger warning: Please don't read if you are triggered or bothered by descriptions of feeling depressed, past suicidal ideation, mention of considering future drug use, self harm, suicide.

Should you feel like hurting or killing yourself, please speak with someone! You don’t have to be in imminent crisis to call a crisis line!

See the end of the work for more notes.

He loves me, he loves me not... He loves me, he loves me not... Sherlock has been around these two questions many times in the past while now. He does not know the answer. He knows he loves John.

The status quo, them being friends-only, John going out with women, seeking to have a relationship with members of the female sex, has become less and less acceptable to Sherlock. John's latest prospective girlfriend, Jamiebel, is so nice, and sweet, and attractive, he can understand that John,
being hetero-/very-likely-bisexual, wants to spend more time with her, most likely, given the opportunity, would have sex with her.

Lying on the couch, facing the back of it, Sherlock grimaces at the thought. He is homosexual himself, does not find women sexually attractive. At all. Full stop. Period. What other people do and find attractive is their business. He finds John attractive, wants to have a relationship and be intimate with him.

He already knows that he would find it very hard to bear if John went out with, wanted to have a relationship with, had sex with another man. Would it make a difference if John loved the other man? He does not want John to love another man. He wants John to love him!

His thoughts keep going in circles. Speculating is fruitless and frustrating. He has thought, often, of how to broach the subject with John:

'John, can I ask you a question?'

'What do you think, would you be interested...?'

'Oh, in case it does not work out with your current love interest, I'm available.'

'Why are you looking elsewhere? I'm right here!'

'Do you know how much I suffer every time you go out with someone else?'

'Please, John, have you given some thought to us...?'

'John, I love you. Will you be mine?'

If John would not agree right away, Sherlock can see that he might try to plead with him, to see the advantages of having Sherlock as a partner. He does not want to consider winding up pleading, because he finds pleading pathetic. Frustrated, he rubs his forehead, runs his hand through his hair. He is beginning to feel restless, not quite agitated, yet, moves his feet to get rid of some pent up energy, his breathing is picking up.

In his armchair, John is reading a medical journal, now notices Sherlock's movements. He clears his throat. Sherlock can hear a vertebra crack in his neck, as it sometimes does when he turns his head. John is looking at him! Sherlock stills immediately, squeezes his eyes shut. After a few seconds, there's the crack again, meaning John is likely resuming reading.

Another question Sherlock has thought about, at times, is how he might react if John were to turn him down. It's a sobering question, because it would likely bring him face to face with very intense negative feelings. Wanting to use drugs again to escape the resulting emotional pain, hurting himself, thinking of trying to kill himself, are options he might consider in that case. Come to think of it, he might want to die then. Probably? He cannot know the answer.

While he can be a very good actor, pretend, even lie with a straight face most of the time, when it comes to the pain he thinks he would feel if John said 'no', he is not sure whether he would be able to hide it, control it, bear it, be able to carry on as before.

'Oops, I must have slipped with that razor blade...'

'My hands are shaking? No. Why would I be using drugs?'

'Really, I haven't moved off the couch, except to use the bathroom, in how many days?'

'The last time I ate a proper meal was...?'

'What do you mean, personal hygiene?'

'No, of course I'm not depressed.'

'What? Thoughts of suicide? Let me check...?' (theatrical eye roll)

Realizing how the now meaningless sexual encounters and couple of shallow 'relationships' he has had in the past have not prepared him for this, how his affection for John is affecting him, he blinks.
John would want him to live, to go on, to 'be happy' eventually. He would want him to have a fulfilled life, even though Sherlock would argue that his life is not complete and cannot be fulfilled without John. Sherlock wonders how he would be able to survive, to live, if he felt like dying and wanted to act on it.

He has empathy for John now, who has experienced loss himself: loss of comrades, patients, health, career due to injury. The latter caused him to suffer serious depression, to the point of often contemplating suicide, regarding his life as worth nothing, sitting alone in his bedsit, handling his gun, thinking he might prefer death over that permeating grey numbness... Would John's survival have been more likely if he had had a safety plan, in case he had not met Sherlock?

Moved by the realization of how close John must have come God knows how often to pull that trigger, Sherlock wipes at his eyes. Was there at least one reason that enabled him to resist, stay strong, when something in him must have felt broken? What preserved and saved him from losing hope, giving up? Did it afford courage to go on, to put the gun down, to go on living despite the pain he probably couldn't feel anymore because of the numbness, but that was there nonetheless?

John's phone rings on the coffee table. He puts the journal down, answers.

"Hello?"

"Let me check." John covers the microphone while he asks Sherlock. "It's Jamiebel, suggesting to go out for supper. - Do we have anything happening here tonight?"

Absorbed in his thoughts and feelings, Sherlock has not noticed that the atmosphere in their apartment has become increasingly heavy. The last case wrapped up three days ago. It is quite normal for him to lie on the couch, to be perceived as sulking. He does not bother replying, shrugs his shoulders.

"I'll pass. - How are you keeping?"

"We'll see... Thanks for having called, Jamiebel. Take care!"

"Bye." John ends the call, puts his phone back down on the coffee table.

Hearing "I'll pass," Sherlock felt his shoulders relax, some tension leave his body. He is, of course, relieved that John is not going out, but also slightly surprised that he forewent the company of an attractive woman.

"Is something bothering you, Sherlock? You've been very quiet these past few hours." John asks after a minute, letting the fact that he genuinely cares and wants to know, shine through.

Having lain close to four hours on the couch, thinking of his situation with John, Sherlock feels emotionally drained. The various scenarios and outcomes he has run in his mind can only suggest how things may go if he says and/or does this or that. He cannot know for sure. Is letting John know how he really feels about him worth the risk of possibly getting terribly hurt? He thinks of John again, putting the gun down. It must have taken courage to not follow through, to face going on living with pain, instead.
He finds it hard to bring himself to turn around, to face John, feels stiff from the lack of movement. Though his heart is beginning to beat faster with anticipation, he thinks he should feel more excited, or nervous. By this time, he just wants to get it over with, because he does not want things to go on like this.

The minute it takes him to finally sit up appears to last at least two. He is sure he does not even look happy right now. John musters his face, patiently quiet.

"John, I think you should know that I love you," Sherlock states plainly, not even smiling. Somehow this having debated whether or not to tell John has changed him, he feels older.

John's face softens, he licks his lips. After getting out of his armchair, he kneels down in the space between the side of the coffee table and the couch, close to Sherlock, who is pursing his lips.

"Thank you for letting me know, Sherlock. I've been waiting to hear you say this."

Sherlock blinks, his eyes widen. Surprised, he licks his lips as well.

"You mean...?"

"Yes, I love you too."

Sherlock exhales deeply, he feels stunned. Did he consider that John might say 'yes,' just like that? He smiles, shakes his head. By now his fingers are beginning to tremble, he covers his face with one hand.

"May I touch you?" John asks in an effort to not overwhelm Sherlock further at this time. When Sherlock nods, he takes his free hand, kisses it gently several times, then places it against his own cheek.

Sherlock can feel John's smile under his hand, the slight stubble of his beard prickling against his skin.

"Hmmm," Sherlock marvels, lost for words. His body is beginning to react to being so physically close to John.

As John gets up, he keeps hold of Sherlock's hand, tugs on it, indicating he wants Sherlock to get up as well.

"Can we lie down somewhere? I really want to hold you." John's face looks intense, serious and gentle, all at the same time.

"Certainly..." Sherlock leads them to his bedroom. The tiredness he felt earlier is gone, he has energy, eager to get to know John better and more intimately. Having divested each other of their clothes, lying in bed, they smile at each other, happy. ...

Yes, this, loving each other, is a reason to live!

End Notes

In case you wonder, you can read how John experienced the time described in this story:
"Love: What I did not Expect" (part 2 of the Love: series, see link)

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