From Falling to Loving

by alexaprilgarden

Summary

During a case, John gets a blow on his head. He sees everything that has happened from Sherlock's fall to his abandoned Serbia-mission and to the present day in his mind. And then, things change.

A lot of angst, hurt and comfort, but there will be a happy end.

Notes

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English isn't my first language. If you spot any mistakes, please let me know!
John rushes behind Sherlock through the old warehouse – as good as you can rush when you don't want to make a sound. There are shelves, twelve feet high, with boxes and containers. Even though it was abandoned years ago, it is still stuffed with things.

"You'll take this aisle, I'll search the other one," Sherlock whispers.

He moves to the second aisle. John can see him quickly walk forwards between the boxes. Sherlock is faster than he. John's aisle is blocked with things that were thrown off the shelves. It takes him a few moments to climb over them in silence. No sign of Jonathan Miller.

Fuck, why haven't I brought my gun? Because I didn't know I'd end up chasing smugglers instead of finishing my shift. Fuck it.

Sherlock is unarmed, too. John can't see him anymore, can't even hear his steps. With a loud noise, the lights turn off. It is pitch black. John walks on cautiously, his hands stretched out to make sure he doesn't run into anything. He hears his own breathing, feels the adrenaline pumping through his veins. A shot breaks the silence at the other end of the warehouse. A pause. Two more shots, quickly fired after one another.

SHERLOCK.

John runs blindly, hands in front of him. He stumbles, but manages to run on.

SHERLOCK! Oh God, don't let him be dead!

He runs along the aisle, until his head brutally collides with something hard and there is sudden, massive pain. Everything turns white and then black and there is only PAIN and something wet and hot on his face. His legs go numb and he falls.

This is the moment when he sees it all again in his mind.
Falling

When Greg arrived at the street outside St Bart's, John sat on the pavement, pale and absorbed in shock. There was a dark spot next to him, glistening red. Sherlock's blood. Molly was right beside John, holding him. She looked up at Greg.


“Oh God, Sherlock, Christ, Sherlock…,” John kept saying. “Oh God, this can’t be true, it just can’t…”

“John. You can’t stay here. Come on, mate. I’ll take you home.”

“No, wait, Greg, wait…”

“John, there’s nothing you can do. Let me take you home. Come with me.”

He helped him get up slowly and gently guided him to the car. At Baker Street, he asked John for his keys and opened the door. When they were halfway up the stairs, Mrs Hudson peeked out of her door.

“John! Mr Lestrade! Oh dear, what happened?”

“I'll just take John upstairs. Talk to you in a minute.”

He took John to the living room and guided him to his chair. He was trembling and still muttering something. And shaking his head vehemently.

“John, I’ll be right back.”

John neither heard hurry down the stairs to inform their landlady in a low voice about Sherlock’s suicide. Nor did he hear how she started to sob or the gentle words Greg tried to find. He sat in his chair. He felt numb and everything was so… absurd. Sherlock, standing on the roof, with a sound of desperation in his voice John could even hear through the phone. Sherlock, dead on the pavement. Still so warm, but no pulse. Sherlock. Oh God.

“It can’t be true, oh God, it just can’t…,” John kept whispering, not really at Greg, not really to himself either. Greg sat down on the chair that usually stood by the desk. Sitting in Sherlock’s chair would have felt more than wrong.

“John. I’m here, mate, take your time. I’ll stay with you.”

“Yeah. God, Greg, what was that? I can’t believe it.”

“I know, John.” He swallowed hard. “Me neither.”

Greg just sat and listened to John’s whispers. After a long time, he made tea and searched the kitchen for something edible. He found a few biscuits and took them to the living room.

“I… I bought these for Sherlock, just a few days ago, he likes them. Fucking Christ, Sherlock… what has he done? What has he done?”

As time passed, John stammering changed from “It can’t be true” to “I saw him, Greg, I saw him. There was nothing I could do. I saw him jump. I saw him fall down, I saw him fall…”
And so his whispers turned into sobs, voiceless at first and later on, tearful and mourning. When there were no more words to say, they sat together in the living room. Greg was simply there, witnessing John’s tears and crying. Dusk set in and when Greg was about to get up and switch on the light, he heard someone climb the stairs. Mrs Hudson brought a pie, her eyes red and swollen. She handed it to Greg without a word, turning away immediately and going back down the stairs.

“You need to eat something, John.”

He handed John a plate with a piece of the pie which John put on his lap without even looking at it.

“Fuck, everything looks so normal,” he said soundlessly. “Everything looks as if he’ll enter the flat in a minute… It can’t be true, Greg, that he’s never coming back. It can’t.” Tears were running down his cheeks. Greg was lost. He had never been good at informing people of the death of a friend, a family member, a wife or a husband. And it was worse when he knew the people he had to talk to. But it had never been as bad as this.

“God, what is this? I have been in Afghanistan. I’ve seen people die, I’ve seen friends and comrades die… I’ve seen so many people die. But I never thought I’d see Sherlock…” John swallowed the rest of the sentence in a sob.

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After Sherlock’s funeral, John went home immediately. Mycroft had told him something about gathering in a restaurant or a club afterwards. But he hadn’t listened and he did not want to go. John did his best to give a short speech at the funeral. Feeling empty and lost and knowing that his words weren’t anywhere close to what he felt. Back home, their flat seemed even more silent than usual. And suddenly, when John had just closed the living room door behind him, a realization set in: Sherlock would never be here again. Never sit here again. Never sulk on the sofa again. Never do experiments in the kitchen again. Never talk to him again. He could never talk to Sherlock again. Never never never. John felt his knees go weak. He leaned against the door and slowly slid down until he sat on his feet. The tears came back and he cried.

Days passed. John went to bed, but he didn’t sleep. He got up, eventually, when he couldn’t stand being in his bed anymore. He lost track of what time it was or what day of the week. Mrs Hudson looked after him, but he didn’t notice. The day after Sherlock jumped, he somehow managed to call Sarah at the clinic. He told her what happened and asked for two weeks off. The phone rang from time to time, but he never answered it. He didn’t read his e-mails or texts. Mycroft showed up. Talked. He didn’t listen. Greg was there, not saying much. Making tea, supplying him with biscuits. Harry was there, hugging him. She hadn’t done that since he was twelve and their parents had had an exceptionally bad fight. The next time that happened, when his father slapped his mother across her face, he was fourteen. No more hiding in his sister’s arms. Just as he couldn’t hide now. The pain was always with him. It was there when he fell asleep on the sofa. It was there when he awoke with his shoulder burning like fire.

He didn’t leave the flat for almost a week. A small crowd of journalists had gathered in front of the house. When the last of them had vanished, he forced himself to go out. It took all his energy to shower and to get dressed. It felt so pointless. When he walked out of the black door, he saw Sherlock in front of him, rushing to the street and hailing a cab. He felt like turning around and running back to the flat and hide. But instead he forced himself to go to that new supermarket. It had opened a few days before Sherlock’s death. They hadn’t been there together, no memories haunting him in that place. No memories except for Sherlock’s voice in his head and the light shade of his body moving, walking, breathing next to him. At the supermarket, John wondered what he even wanted to buy. He grabbed some random stuff from the shelves. And a bottle of
whisky. Two bottles. Three, just to be sure. The weight of the shopping bag almost pulled him down on his way back to Baker Street. He didn’t remember how he made it to the flat and was grateful he didn’t meet anyone he knew.

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The weeks passed. The three bottles had only lasted a ridiculously short time. He went back to work, just for one or two shifts a week. And bought new bottles on his way home. It was difficult to be awake enough to work, since he hadn’t found his daytime rhythm yet. But he was sober when we went to work, at the very least. Sherlock was still with him, every day and everywhere he went. It had shifted from feeling haunted by his memories with every tiny thing he did to just feeling his presence. John started talking to him.

*You know Sherlock, I feel like I’m going mad. Not only when I’m drunk. All the time. I’m talking to you. Because I can’t stop thinking of you. Bloody git.*

He didn’t cry all that much anymore. The tears had just run dry.

*A bit like throwing up until nothing’s left in your stomach and all you spit is yellow bile.*

One Friday night, he came home with his obligatory bag from the supermarket. It was already dark in the flat. He put the bag on the kitchen table. For the first time in weeks, he realized Sherlock’s tea cup was still standing in the corner next to the sink. The cup he had drunk tea from when he was home for the last time. Suddenly John felt sick. The cup seemed to be mocking him, the dried remains of the tea all brown and flaking off the white porcelain. Everything was mocking him.

*What’s the use of all this fucking stuff, Sherlock? What’s the use? What am I supposed to do with your things? Your microscope? Your petri dishes? Your laptop? Your violin? I can’t touch your violin. I don’t even know how to hold it. You always handled it so delicately.*

He didn’t make any plans these days, he just tried to show up for his shifts and not to smell or act like the alcoholic he was about to become. When he was at the supermarket, he got his whisky. Drinking until everything went numb was better than feeling the loneliness, the despair and the uselessness. But when he saw Sherlock’s cup, feeling sick and tired, he knew he couldn’t drink. He sat down and looked at the cup for a long time.

*There’s so much of you here, Sherlock. So much. This is your place. You are supposed to be here.*

Without consciously deciding to do so, he rose and walked to the hallway. Every time he went to the bathroom, he avoided looking at Sherlock’s bedroom door. He hadn’t been in there a lot before Sherlock had jumped. And so far he hadn’t been able to make himself do it. He stood in front of the door, carefully put his hand on the knob and took a deep breath. And opened the door. It still hit him like a bullet. He wanted to go into his room, to be there. As if it was the essence of Sherlock’s being. And, in a way, it was. The wardrobe was half opened, the bed still tousled from the last night Sherlock had slept there. It smelled like Sherlock. *God, it’s you… oh Sherlock.* John took a few hesitant steps towards his wardrobe. He saw his suits and shirts, still wrapped in plastic after the last dry cleaning. A pile of t-shirts on a shelf in the wardrobe. The socks. Indexed, apparently. *Christ, Sherlock.* John heard himself sobbing. He sat down on the edge of his bed. He couldn’t help touching his cushion, knowing that this would only make it worse. He cried and cried, tears running down his cheeks, his chin and down his neck. Soaking the collar of his shirt. *Sherlock, Sherlock, Sherlock. Oh, Sherlock.* He sat there, crying and whispering his name.

After an eternity his sobbing ebbed away, his voice was hoarse and gone and he got up. He couldn’t look at the other things in Sherlock’s room. The picture of the bee. The periodical table.
The things on the shelf, he never knew what they were about. John walked out of the room, knowing this would be the last time he had set foot into it. He walked up the stairs to his room, found his bag under the bed and packed his clothes, only the most necessary ones. He grabbed a few things from the flat, his cup, his laptop. He fetched his tooth brush and his sanitary products, almost feeling guilty for leaving Sherlock's orphaned things behind.

*I can't stay, Sherlock. I'm so sorry.*

He walked to the kitchen one last time, making sure everything was switched off. He saw his shopping bag still packed on the table. He took the whisky bottle, his coat and his bag, the very one he came here with eighteen months ago. And then he left, without looking back.

When he almost had reached the black door, he heard Mrs Hudson's voice behind him.

“John? You're going out?“

John stopped, not turning to her.

“I… I can’t stay.”

He felt tears rise in his throat again.

“I’ll give you a call. I’m so sorry,” he whispered. And he left without another word, hailing a cab outside. He usually avoided cabs, they were Sherlock’s thing and they’re so damn expensive. But that day he knew he would fall apart again in a few minutes and he couldn't do that on the tube.

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He gave the cabbie Harry's address. He hadn't called her beforehand, but she was at home, already in her pyjamas when she opened the door. John looked at her. She saw his red and swollen eyes.

“Can I stay here, Harry?“

He didn’t say much at first, he only cried. Then he put the bottle of whisky on the table, asking bluntly, “Are you off or can we drink?”

He had always been quite frank about her alcoholism, but he had never confronted her like that.

“I am not,“ Harry answered, looking at him sternly. She fetched two glasses from the cupboard and put them on the kitchen table. “Let’s drink.“

They did and after a while, John talked. For the first time. About how he saw him jump. About the days before. The months. All the time he spent with Sherlock. What he had meant to him and still meant. And then, as he realized, about how he loved Sherlock. And still did. This realization set in slowly. It was so startling that the ground seemed to shake under his feet. And yet it explained everything he felt.

“Oh God. Oh God, Harry. Sherlock... He was the fucking love of my life. Oh God... I never saw that. Never told him. I should've protected him.” He could hardly say these words. Harry put her hand on his, her eyes full of tears, too.

“I don't know how to carry on. Christ, I really don't.“

They sat in the kitchen until the early hours of the morning. They drank and they talked and they cried, both of them. When the bottle was almost empty, Harry got up.
"John, sleep now. You'll find everything you need on the sofa. And stay as long as you need to."

John stayed eleven days. He found himself a new place soon, just an apartment for the beginning. Grey, small and impersonal. More like a cheap hotel room. But mercifully free from things that Sherlock had touched, tossed in the air and caught again with his long hands. Nothing he had messed up, hid his cigarettes in or spoiled with coffee stains. Nothing he had laid his bare feet on. Nothing he had liked or that had made him smile.

John had been in love with him and he still was.

*How could that happen? Why didn't I see that? When he was still there.*

He called Ella and went back to therapy. After he had moved into the apartment, he tried very hard to stop drinking on his own at night. It drove him mad and the lonely, long evenings were killing him. He forced himself to go for a pint or two with Greg once a month. Initially it was just a means to get out and talk to someone, he didn't enjoy it and badly wanted to be on his own in his flat. But as the months went by, it became less of a self-induced obligation.

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Seven months after Sherlock's death, he woke from a dream that felt so real it took him a few moments to figure out where he was. In this dream, he hadn't been standing in front of St Bart's trying to stop Sherlock from jumping in every possible way. And failing, each and every time. Kneeling beside his corpse and his shattered skull again and again and again. This time, Sherlock was alive. And naked, kissing him, slowly and teasingly and gently. Even though he had known that he had loved Sherlock for a couple of months by now, the idea of having sex with him had never really crossed his mind. There had been too much sadness to want sex or to even think about sex. Even if it was sex with Sherlock. But in this dream, he felt Sherlock's hands on his body and his tongue in his mouth. He was aroused and happy when he woke. His cock was hard and so desperate for touch and friction. He started stroking it. He couldn't stop, he was too far gone already. But desperation took over what happiness had filled him just moments before. During his dream. *Sherlock, what are you doing to me?* He was ashamed of wanking while he thought of the dead man he loved. And *craved*, actually. But he couldn't stop that fantasy. Sherlock panting, kissing him, his naked body.

*What would it have been like to have sex with him? What would he have felt like? Smelled like? Sounded like? What would have turned him on?*

John came hard, gasping for air. From the heights of his climax he dived into sadness. Drowning in an endless, infinitely deep and dark sea of sadness. He felt more alone than ever before, in his narrow, cold bed.

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That fantasy stayed with him, making him feel guilty and ashamed. He missed Sherlock more than ever. Maybe it was less desperate and less threatening to suffocate him. But it was angry. He missed Sherlock in an angry, rough way. He was angry at himself for being so blind. He was being angry at anyone else. He even got into fights when he went out drinking with Greg.

One night he went home with a bleeding nose (his opponent looked far worse, after all he was a soldier, he had *killed* people) for the third time in a row. Greg said, „You’d better find another way to handle your aggression. I don’t want to have to arrest you one day.”

And so he started rugby again. Another reason to leave his dark and alien room twice a week. He
rarely talked to the guys from his team and they didn’t ask. He played and fought until every muscle in his body ached more than his soul did. He was often so exhausted afterwards that he slept for several hours in a row.

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The fantasy lasted, though. After a year, Sherlock’s face started to blur in his dreams. His voice got lower. More distant. But his kisses and touches were as intense as they were during that first night. He couldn’t make that fantasy go away and he was afraid it might stay with him, keep him in its ban until the end of his life. So he was thankful when one of the nurses from the clinic asked him out for dinner one day. She seemed to be nice, but he didn’t know her well, even though she must have been working at there for quite some time then.

*What’s her name again? Yeah. Mary.*
Seeing I

Sherlock.

John woke up, all of a sudden immensely startled. Within the blink of an eye he was wide awake. His heart hammered in his chest the way it had last night. When he punched Sherlock’s nose with his head.

*You fucking madman. You bloody idiot.*

He was so angry. If he had only known.

*One word, Sherlock. Just one word to let me know you were alive. I’d have waited forever if I’d just known you were coming back one day.*

*Fuck, Sherlock. You can’t just come back now and mess me up like that, mess up my whole life.*

Sherlock intruded into his carefully rearranged life, not giving a fucking damn how John felt. How he felt now and what he had been feeling during the past two years.

*I grieved you in a way I have never grieved someone before. And you didn’t even care to tell me you were alive. I never believed in that ‘sociopath’ act of ours. But maybe you are one, after all. I can’t rely on you, Sherlock. I never know what you’re up to. Marrying Mary is the best thing I can do.*

John tried to relax, unclenched his fists, and let go of the tension in his body.

*Calm down. Breathe. I’ve got everything under control.*

Inhale. Exhale.

He looked at his life now. Everything he had accomplished since Sherlock had died. *Well, bloody faked his own death.* He had managed to survive the loss of the man he loved. He had managed not to drown in alcohol and depression. It had been one hell of a struggle and he hadn't always been sure he would win.

*I’ve proposed to Mary. I’ve made a promise to her. And I am not the kind of man who breaks his promises.*

Inhale. Exhale.

*And yet. Sherlock.*

Dancing back into John's life with his old disrespect for boundaries. Changing everything. Again. It had been easier to love Sherlock when he was dead. It had been *safe* somehow. Even though it had broken his heart.

*I will give no further thought to this thing, he promised himself. No. It’s over. Very over.*

Inhale. Exhale.

A calmness, like a ceasefire, spread inside him. He was still anxious, but hopeful and determined. He took a few breaths until he felt better. He tried to doze off again.
John. You know it isn't over, a rebellious voice in his head insisted calmly.

Behind his closed eyes the fantasy came back. Sherlock, panting and naked, his body faintly glistening with sweat. Now he was so real. He was there. Living and breathing, just a few miles from him. No cold ash in an urn, buried six feet under. John tried to think of something else. Mary. Women. Any woman. It didn’t work. Concentrate. Watson. Now. But Sherlock sneaked into his mind again and again. And worse than that, John hated to make him go. Frustrated, he finally got up and went to the bathroom. He stripped off his clothes, stepped into the shower and opened the tap. Took care of it. In a hard and rough way. And, Oh God, how good this still felt.

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A couple of days later, John was on his way home. To Mary, to the bigger, brighter flat he had found in the suburbs, where Mary had moved in a few months ago. He stopped. No tube. Not after tonight, when he had feared he would be blown up in a tube compartment that turned out be a giant bomb. Cab, then.

Sherlock had fooled him into forgiving him. And he did.

Christ, if Sherlock hadn’t mentioned Mary, I’d have been close to making a bloody love confession.

But still, hadn’t he just done that?

He was still angry about being fooled. And at the same time relieved he had told Sherlock something after all. It was as close to the truth as he could bear to tell him. Maybe he’d just manage to keep Sherlock as his best and closest friend. He could neither let go of him, nor could he be angry at him for the rest of his life.

I’ll just go on playing the fool for him.

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After a couple of weeks, John walked up the stairs to Harry’s flat. He hadn’t seen her in a while. He was going to pick her up and go out with her to have a coffee. If she was in a fit state to do so. He wanted to give her the wedding invitation in person. Felt like the right thing to do… after everything she had gone through with him. When she opened the door, she looked quite well. Sober. Almost cheerful.

“Hey John, come in. I just need a second.”

“Yeah, hi. Fine.”

“Have a drink! There’s orange juice on the kitchen table,” Harry called from the bathroom.

“So. What is it you want to tell me?” she asked, when she came to the kitchen two minutes later.

“Right.” Christ, how does she always know these things? “Well. I’ve got something for you.”

John handed her the envelope with the invitation. Harry opened it and read it. She stared at it for a long time. When she looked up at him, there was no joy in her eyes.

“You are marrying her? John, are you kidding?”

“No. I am not. I have never been more sure in my whole life.”
“What? Sherlock’s back, John, haven’t you noticed?”

“Yes, he is. And I am happy about that. He is my best friend.”

“He is the bloody fucking love of your life, as you told me two fucking years ago!”

“No, Harry, he isn’t. I’ve moved on.”

“Oh fuck yourself, John. I don’t believe a word you say.”

“Harry, come on. Calm down, please.”

“I won’t calm down. You were about to die from sorrow, because you loved that man. And never told him. I don’t believe all this is over.”

“Harry, it is. I’ve had a lot of time to think. It’s over. It’s fine now.”

John felt upset. Harry was getting far too close to that point he had decided to not ever look at again.

“Oh no, John, no. I don’t believe you. Let me tell you what I think –“

“No, Harry, I don’t want to hear it.”

“Oh, you will have to. Fuck, John, I think you’re a bloody coward. You are afraid to love Sherlock. You’ve built up this little normal life in the suburbs with Mary. And you really think this will keep you from getting into trouble again. Keep you safe and calm. No bothering about loving a man. About living with a man. And especially a challenging man like Sherlock. No bothering about how to live your life with the person you love so much that it tears you apart.”

Tears ran down Harry’s face and her voice was shaking. From anger, from memories of Clara, from the pain she had seen in John’s eyes when he came to her when he had come to her two years ago.

“You’re a fucking coward. Fucking. Coward. Leave, John. I’m sick of this.”

John couldn’t say anything. He couldn’t even deny it. He got up, grabbed his coat and left.

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The music played. Another happy song, people were dancing and singing along. John had left the dance floor, padding Mary on her back and saying, „Just need a drink, alright?”. He stood at the bar, looking at their wedding guests, dancing in purple, yellow and blue light.

“Sir? What can I do for you?” the bartender asked.

“Ah, whisky, please.”

Molly and her boyfriend were there. Mrs Hudson. Janine danced with some guy he only knew vaguely. He took a sip from his glass. It felt good. What a day. He was glad James was safe after all. He actually sat at one of the tables, talking to Lestrade. He even smiled. Sherlock had been amazing.

He heard the words from Sherlock’s speech over and over in his head. They touched something deep down inside him that left him unsettled. Before he could give it any further thought, Mary approached him.
“Everything alright, husband?”

“Yeah, sure. Just need a moment to let everything… sink in.”

“Of course you do. I’ll go over to Janine and see whom she has found herself there.”

And off she went. Mary. Expecting a child. Their child.

Of course I’m nervous, he told himself. Never thought I’d be a father one day. Why did Sherlock see it and I didn’t? Really should have a word with him. Where is he, anyway?

He looked around. When he didn’t find him, he went to the other rooms. The Gents. Nothing.

“Excuse me, have you seen my best man? Tall guy, dark hair? The one… with the speech?” he asked one of the waitresses that passed by him.

“Oh, yes. I think he left half an hour ago.”

Sherlock was gone. After today, John thought that he was further out of reach than he was when he had been dead.
“She’s very, very small. There’ll be a neonatologist checking her health in a minute. Do you want to hold her until he’s here?” the nurse asked.

John was handed his daughter, wrapped in a warm towel. Mary was still sedated. She had had an emergency c-section after the baby’s life signs had gotten weaker and weaker. The girl was born a few weeks too early. She was far too small. But she was wide awake and glimpsing at John. She let out a small moan. John drew her closer, mumbling gentle words into her tiny ears.

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The girl had to stay in hospital, on the neonatology ward. She wasn’t healthy. She didn’t put on as much weight as she was supposed to and she grew very little. When the doctors there couldn’t do anything to improve her situation, they consulted a special hospital for newborns. Tests were run. They proved nothing.

Things weren’t good between Mary and John. Neither of them slept well or even enough. Even before the birth, things had been more than tense. The Magnussen case still lingered heavily between them. John didn’t know how to handle Sherlock’s shooting Magnussen, his drugs on the abandoned mission to Eastern Europe. He didn’t know how to handle any of what had happened since Mary had been revealed to be an assassin. After Leinster Gardens and Sherlock’s breakdown in 221b, he moved out of their shared flat and lived at Baker Street again.

He hadn’t known what to do. He hadn’t been sure how to carry on with his marriage. Or how to be a father of a child whose mother he didn’t trust. Or how to deal with the fact that apparently his best friend had just bloody sacrificed himself to save the woman who shot him. As long as he hadn’t been able to figure out these things, he simply had tried to manage one day after another.

So Sherlock was in hospital after his heart had failed when he confronted Mary. Ok, let’s go to the hospital. Make sure he’s ok there.

So Mary called to ask if he was coming home. Let’s just send her a text saying “No. Not now. I’ll give you a call.”

So Sherlock was released from hospital, but he is in no state. Ok, let’s take care of him at home while he recovers.

The months back at 221b had been very different from their first living together. The air had been filled with questions unasked(Why did you do that, Sherlock? Did you really do that to save Mary? To save me? Why?) and truths untold (if you just knew what I felt all those months you were gone. If you had just come back earlier). Finally, just before Christmas, John had decided to go back to Mary. There was a child about to be born. No matter what its mother had done and how things were going between its parents, it still needed to have a father. He had a responsibility, a duty to fulfill. And so he had gone back to the flat in the suburbs. Their reconciliation at the house of
Sherlock’s parents had been relieving, if only because he had made a decision and now knew what to do. Even though it had felt like receiving marching orders and preparing for an attack that was unlikely to be victorious.

After the girl was born, John and Mary had hardly any time to themselves. They didn’t talk about what had happened. They were busy being at the hospital in shifts, talking to the doctors, deciding on which further tests should be run. For a few weeks, no one found a reason why the little girl was so weak. Mary and John finally agreed on some expensive DNA tests. The results were devastating. First, there was a genetic problem. John checked his medical journals and databases. Mary calculated the options at her professional speed. They both came to the same conclusion as the doctors: There was nothing that could be done for the girl. Second, with a 92% probability, John wasn’t her father.

While it had been difficult to cope with the situation earlier, this left John stunned. His daughter (his? For God’s sakes!) was about to die and there was nothing, nothing he could do. He, who had sewn wounded comrades back together. Who had survived being shot and hurt and betrayed. Betrayed by Mary. He was too tired to ask her who the girl’s father was or to even shout at her.

“So. We’ll deal with this later,” was all he could say.

He saw Sherlock a lot less those days, even though Sherlock tried to be in the hospital whenever possible. John presumed he or Mycroft had sped up the evaluation of the DNA tests. They had received the results much quicker than John would have expected.

Sherlock’s presence was comforting. He didn't say much. Sometimes he just sat with him in the same companionate silence they used to have at Baker Street. Sometimes, when he saw that John had neither slept nor eaten, he brought a coffee or something to eat. John felt his eyes on him. He didn't dare to look him in the eyes then, fearing that Sherlock would just see it all there.

During the last days of the little girl, John and Mary made sure she was never alone. They had given up on the incubator and the parenteral nutrition. They just held her, all the time. One night, when John had been home, trying to get some sleep after being in hospital for twelve hours, Mary called him at four in the morning. “Come. She won’t last much longer.” And so the little girl died. John and Mary both cried, and they did so in each other’s arms. Maybe their marriage was a failure and maybe their lives were a mess, but they were in this together.

The next few days were like a numb, grey, cold cloud. Papers had to be signed and arrangements to be made. They did what had to be done, although it was an immense effort. If it hadn’t been for all these obligations, John would have just sat on the sofa, staring at the wall. Even getting up and eating cost too much energy. One evening that week, John realized that if he didn’t make himself get out of this situation now, he might never do it.

“Mary. I don’t think it makes any sense for me to stay here. I am leaving.”

“Yes, I thought you would.”

“I will arrange for a divorce.”

“Yes.”

And so he went, once again, to pack his things. Two bags, this time. He took his time. When he had just said good bye to Mary for the last time and was putting on his coat, the door bell rang. He opened the door to a man in a black suit.
“Are you Dr John Watson?”

“Yes, I am. What’s—“

Behind the man, he saw a few men in combat suits with rifles.

“Is your wife, Mary Watson née Morstan, in the house?”

“Yes—“

“Go!” the man ordered the men in the combat suits. They stormed past John and when they found Mary in the living room, he could hear the man talk.

“Mrs Watson, on behalf of the…”

John didn’t listen. He stared into the night, at their delusively calm street. Suddenly he was out of breath.

So her past catches up with her after all.

A minute later, the man took Mary out. The armed men followed. As Mary passed him, John could see red laser lights dancing on her head and chest. She was being brought to a black van and taken away. John couldn’t move. Half an eternity later, a black limousine that had parked close to the house slowly drove away. It looked a lot like Mycroft’s car, although he couldn’t recognize him through the dark windows.

He waited until we’ve had our things sorted out. Christ.

There was nothing left for John but to take his bags and leave as well. He took a cab and went to Harry’s place.

---

They hadn’t talked since the wedding invitation disaster, although she had sent him an e-mail a few weeks ago. She was sober and had been to rehab. John replied and he briefly informed her of what had happened since the wedding and about the girl’s illness. So when he was standing in front of her door once again, she just gave him a hug. And he did feel like hiding in her arms again.

“How are you, John?”

“So tired. Exhausted, really. It’s been too much the past weeks.” He swallows hard. “Sad. So sad. She’s dead. Mary’s gone.”

Harry comforted him without many words. „Oh John, oh John.”

They sat in the kitchen. With a broken voice John told her about the last days. Finally she asked, “Where are you going now?”

“Baker Street, I think. I am not sure. I am a bit afraid.“

“Well, really, you should be. If I were Sherlock, I wouldn’t know if I’d try to be the one person you need or if I’d kick your ass.“

A moment of silence.

“Yeah, me neither.“
“But I guess he's just an idiot like you and he might take you back without a single word.”

“God, I hope so.”

“Try not to mess it up this time, John. It would be nice if one of us managed to be happy after all.”

“Thanks, Harry.”

He kissed her on the cheek.

“Can I stay here for the night? Just need a break before I go on.”
Drifting

Chapter Notes

Just one chapter today, because this one is longer.
John comes home. And then - off to Scotland, Boys.

That night at Harry’s, John slept very little, even though he was exhausted as he never had been before. He tossed and turned on her sofa. Finally he got up, opened the living room window and looked at the dark street. He heard a few voices, shouting and laughing. Maybe just some men coming home from the pub. A car drove past. A night like any other, for most people. But his life had just fallen apart.

He took his phone.

_Sherlock, can I come home tomorrow?_ he typed and then deleted it immediately.

Could he come home? Was Sherlock’s flat still his home? Could he text him at three a.m., after all?

_Bullshit,_ he thought. _Of course I can. Who knows what he’s doing at this hour of the night. Mycroft will have informed him about everything anyway._

He got himself a glass of water. That fantasy of Sherlock was far away now. He had been dreaming about it a lot during the first weeks of his marriage, leaving him restless and yearning and desperate. And even when he was back at 221b, after Sherlock had collapsed, he couldn’t help but surrender to it. But since he had bid Sherlock farewell on the tarmac, it was gone. He didn’t know how or why. Maybe it had been something in those strange last words of Sherlock’s. He never dared to figure out what they might have been about. And the fantasy hadn’t come back ever since.

_Sherlock. I would like to come home,_ he typed anew and hit the ‘send’ button. He took a deep breath. When he exhaled, the phone pinged with Sherlock’s reply.

_Yes. Come. Now?_ –SH

_Tomorrow._

_That would be convenient. Your room is as you left it._ –SH

John’s heart was beating quickly with relief.

_Thank you._

_Sleep now, John._ –SH

_You too. Thanks again._

And he did fall asleep. For a few hours in a row, the first time since he moved out of Baker Street.

---
After having a shower and just a cup of tea, he packed his things. John and Harry stood in her narrow hallway for a minute.

“John. Do take care. Take it slowly.”

“Yes. Yes, I will.”

“I’ll call you. We should have coffee together next week.”

“Yeah, we should, probably.”

She hugged him.

“All the best, little brother.”

John swallowed and replied “Thank you,” with a broken voice.

---

The way from Baker Street tube station to 221b wasn’t long. But John drew it out. When he saw the red retractable roof of Speedy’s, there was a lump in his throat. He was coming back. He stopped for a moment and took in the familiar noises of central London. The humming of cars and buses on Marylebone Road overlaid by hooting cabs. The chatter of people passing by him. This was the sound that sneaked through open windows into their flat, the background noise to their everyday life. He had missed it, the quietness in the suburbs had been deafening. As had been the silence between Mary and him. He looked at the windows above Speedy’s café. And walked on.

He opened the door, wondering when Sherlock would recognize it was him. When he heard his steps climbing the stairs or now, already giving himself away by how he had turned the key in the keyhole? On the stairs, he heard Sherlock playing the violin. When he entered the flat, Sherlock didn’t stop, he just swayed around slowly and looked at him. John put down his bags, took off his coat and shoes. There was a cup of tea on the little table next to his chair.

Neither of them said a word for a very long time. Sherlock played. John sat in his chair, lost in the melody, not thinking anything at all. When Sherlock finally put down the violin, he said, “You’re back then.”

“Yes.”

“I know you’re wondering if it is ok for me if you come back here. And you probably want to stay.”

John was glad that he didn’t have to ask these questions.

“Yes.”

“Stay.”

Sherlock was taking him back without a word. Trying to be the one person he needed.

---

After a few days, the hospital where his daughter had died called John. She could be buried now. It was only John, Sherlock and Mrs Hudson at the funeral. John wouldn’t have known how to deal with anyone else. Mary was gone, he had received a thick manila envelope from Mycroft. It contained papers of the annulment of their marriage. He signed them and had them sent back
without a word. He chose a small white tombstone for the little girl, with just her name carved in.

After the funeral, John spent a lot of time sitting in his chair. Actually, he did little else. He slept occasionally and he ate when Sherlock reminded him. He stared at something only he could see. He didn’t talk very much. Half a week later, Sherlock intervened.

“John. I think it might help you if you just left London for a while.”

“What? I’ve just come back… Do you want me to leave?”

John was lost. As if Sherlock had just pulled the rug out from under John.

“No. I thought you could just spend some time in another place. Get some distance between you and… everything that has happened. Scotland maybe. At the sea. If you want to, I could join you.”

John didn’t really know what to say. He felt incapable of deciding anything these days. He had no idea what Sherlock was up to.

“Well, if you think so. Sure.”

“I can arrange for something.”

Later that day Sherlock told him to get his things packed. There would be a train from King’s Cross at nine the next morning. And there would be car in Glasgow. And a cottage by the sea, rented for three weeks.

Most of their way up to Scotland was wiped off John’s memory or left in a blur. He was so exhausted, so completely bereft of his energy that he mainly slept on the train. They had lunch in Glasgow. Afterwards, Sherlock got their hire car and drove out of the city and through what seemed to be all of bloody Scotland. The road was endless and seamed by green hills with sheep. John dozed off again, lulled to sleep by the constant noise of the engine. It was a bit like their trip to Dartmoor, even the car resembled the one Sherlock had hired back then. John thought of their innocent excitement in anticipation of the case and somehow, it seemed almost ridiculous to him. Everything that had all gone wrong since then.

When he opened his eyes, the car was silent. Sherlock had parked on a car park next to a loch. The scenery had changed completely: The green hills were rougher and rockier, the landscape was wilder and less tamed. Sherlock was leaning against the car facing the lake and smoking a cigarette. The clouds were hanging over the grey-blueish water, dark and deep. It was colder than it had been in Glasgow. Sherlock had pulled his coat closely around him. John took the bottle of water from the bag in the back seat and drank, suddenly thirsty and aware of how dry his mouth felt from all his sleeping.

When Sherlock opened the door and got back into the car, he said, “John. Did I wake you up?”

“No. Think I woke up because the car stopped.”

Sherlock started the car and drove to the road. It was the A82, the signpost said, but John had no idea where they were. He must have been thinking out loud, because Sherlock answered his unspoken questions.

“Loch Lomond. I think. And we will drive for almost another two hours. We’re going to the west coast, a tiny place on the mainland opposite the islands of Jura and Islay.”

“Right.”
These names didn’t mean anything to John.

*Oh. Islay rings a bell. There’s nice whisky. But isn’t there nice whisky everywhere in Scotland?*

He leaned back into his seat again and shut his eyes. Images from the last weeks came back to his mind. The hospital, mainly. Mary. The girl. It hurt. It hurt so much. He opened his eyes again. He was just as tense as he had been ever since the girl had been born. He could feel the stress lingering in his hands, trembling slightly. Even though it was all over now, he couldn’t let go of it, he was still in combat mode. Or at least in a very wrecked and tired rip-off of his combat mode.

They arrived at the cottage in the late afternoon. Dusk had already set in and the setting sun cast a beautiful, warm light. The heavy clouds had vanished on the way. The house was nothing short of spectacular. A white little cottage, ever so picturesquely located close to the beach, against the scenery of the open sea and the mountains on Jura. Sherlock produced the key out of some secret hiding place. Inside the cottage it was just as beautiful: It had large windows allowing a lot of light into the house. There were two bedrooms. Sherlock told him to take the smaller, but brighter one. It had a large window and amazing view of the sea. The cottage was tastefully (and probably quite expensively) furnished and decorated. Sherlock’s bedroom had an open fire, as had the living room.

*With two sofas, one for each of us,* John thought, even though he missed his chair in 221b a bit.

Despite all his sleeping, John felt groggy. After he had taken his luggage upstairs, he sat on his bed, looking out of the window. He fought the impulse to just lie down and sleep some more. Instead, he got up and went downstairs. Sherlock was in the living room, doing his best to set up a fire in the fireplace.

“I’ll go to the beach. You want to come?”

“No, I think I’ll stay here and make sure this chilly place gets a bit warmer.”

“Right.”

“We could have dinner at the pub we passed in the village earlier.”

“Yeah.”

John didn’t feel a lot like eating, but it was probably a good idea. It just took him two minutes until he was at a sandy beach. The waves rolled in, crashing softly. John walked towards the west, where the sun was just setting behind the sea. Walking in the sand was more strenuous than walking on London pavement, but it felt good. He went on for twenty minutes, taking in the view as he marched around the tip of the small peninsula. The tension in his body eased a little. He was slightly out of breath, sweating a bit, but he felt the breeze in his face. He felt alive. The sun was gone. He should probably go back now, it was getting dark and he didn’t know the area. He took a few more breaths before he turned around.

*Going to Scotland was a good idea,* he thought. *I really should thank Sherlock.*

On his way back, he saw that the cottage was illuminated. It lit the night and his way back like a lighthouse, a safe harbour. He found Sherlock sitting on one of the sofas with his laptop in the living room.

“Oh? Wifi’s working?”

“Of course it is, John. Lestrade promised to send me some PDF files on cold cases. I might think it
would be helpful to spend some time away from London, but I certainly won’t allow getting bored to death out here.”

“I like it here. Maybe it will be nice. Thanks for making me come, Sherlock.”

“Anytime, John.”

He paused and then shut the laptop.

“So? Dinner?”

The food in the pub was quite nice. Nothing fancy, but good. They both had a glass of whisky afterwards, but as neither of them was very talkative, they went back soon. In the cottage, John found that the electric heating in his room wasn’t working. He tried to fix it (mainly by pushing different buttons and switching it on and off several times). In the end he got himself a heavy woolen plaid from the living room to put it atop his blanket. He hoped this would get him through the night.

---

And this was how they set up a little routine. John went out a lot, walking on the beach, marching against the storm for hours. It felt as if he could use all the tension in his body to derive some kind of energy from it. It was the only time of the day when the apathy wasn’t weighing on him heavily: He couldn’t decide on what to eat or what to do apart from walking. He felt completely adrift and followed Sherlock’s suggestions without any opinion of his own. When Sherlock said they needed to get some groceries, he went with him, incapable of making up his mind about something like shopping lists. Sherlock, he dimly realized, was a lot better at this than he thought. When they had lived together, it was usually John who organized their household and made sure they didn’t run out of the most important things (milk, for instance). But as he couldn’t do it now, Sherlock took his part and was surprisingly good at it. In the evenings, they would have dinner at the pub. After a few days, the guy who ran the pub started bringing them their preferred drinks without waiting for their orders. There were no other tourists, just a few locals with grim Scot accents, who didn’t take much notice of John and Sherlock. Apart from these small daily activities, John slept and slept. He went to bed with limbs feeling heavy from the glass of whisky he had in the evening. He often woke up in the middle of the night with nightmarish images of the little girl in his arms or Mary walking out of the flat, her arms held by soldiers. He never really allowed himself to wonder where she was now or what had happened to her afterwards.

*The problems of your past are your business. The problems of your future are my privilege. Well. There never really had been a future for us. Mary has... destroyed it.*

And he didn’t have the strength to care about what problems her past caused her. He was too deeply disappointed. There were so many things she had done that had hurt him in a way he couldn’t express. He was so tired of it and glad that this thing was over.

The little girl’s death had torn a hole in his heart. It was like the gun shot in his shoulder in the first months: Aching with every breath he drew into his lungs, with every muscle he moved. He knew there hadn’t been anything he could have done. And he still felt like an utter failure. The pain was different from the pain after Sherlock’s death and yet, it melted into the same feeling. Leaving him in a black and desperate pit of his soul where only the walking on the beach seemed to help, stomping in the sand against the strong wind, fighting its icy force with the whole of his body.

He saw that Sherlock cared for him, to let it get to him. Or to really appreciate it or even realise the extent of his care. The pain inside him killed every other feeling besides itself. So Sherlock
remained at a distance, the gentleness in his words unheard and his implicit offers of his help unnoticed.

---

During the first week, it got colder every day. It was still the middle of March and the weather was a lot rougher than it had been in London. On the fourth day of their stay, John decided to walk to the ruins of an old fortress, he had seen it from the car on their way to the village.

*Shouldn't take me much longer than an hour to get there.*

It was situated close to the sea, looking over the shore. He went after lunch. There were a few clouds in the sky, but he didn't really notice. And if he had, he probably wouldn't have cared. The castle was beautiful, broken grey walls on a green lawn scattered with rocks. It was a dramatic scenery. John felt oddly peaceful in the broken building. The wind grew stronger and the clouds were hanging so low that they covered the hill tops at Jura. It started to rain when John was about to return to the cottage. Quickly the wind and the rain turned into a strong storm. It was rather blowing heavy wet snowflakes in his face instead of the light raindrops he had encountered here so far. Walking got more and more difficult and it took him almost twice as long to get back to the cottage. It was completely dark when he finally arrived there, soaking and his shoes making squishy sounds as he walked.

“Sherlock?“ he called with clattering teeth as he peeled his wet clothes off in the hallway.

“Can you get me a towel?“

Sherlock went upstairs and got him two large bathing towels. John shivered with coldness. It was difficult to undress with icy, numb fingers, but when he finally had gotten rid of his pants as well, he wrapped himself in the towels and left a wet bunch of clothes in hallway.

“It’s... bloody cold. Just... going to have a hot shower.“

“Yes. Fine. Dinner afterwards?“

John nodded and went up the stairs to the bathroom. The shower was good. The water was so hot that his skin turned red after a few moments and the small room filled with steam. He stood in the shower for long minutes, doing nothing. He felt his head getting heavy and his whole body ache. The hot water seemed to rinse all strength from him. Suddenly his knees were dangerously weak and he felt his field of vision narrow down...


He stopped the water, tried to dry himself a bit and had to sit down on the floor. He took a few deep breaths and stumbled to his room, put on a pair of pants and a t-shirt and went straight to bed. His head was spinning with pain and his throat felt thick.

*Fuck. I'm going to get a cold. A bad one.*

But before he could try to get up and fetch some paracetamol, he fell asleep.

“John! Wake up.“

A voice drilled through his head.

“John! Come on. You can't stay here, your room is freezing. Get up.“
Sherlock pulled away his blanket and tried to lift him up.

“God, you've got a fever. And your heating doesn't work. Why didn't you say anything? Come on now, John.”

John gave in reluctantly and tried to get up. Sherlock supported him and guided him to his own bedroom. A low fire was burning in the fireplace. Sherlock took him to his bed. When John wanted to ask if he really should stay here, his voice croaked and he couldn't speak.

“Shhhhh. Don't speak. Sleep, John.”

John slept. Eventually, Sherlock woke him again and made him take two paracetamols and drink some water. He gave him tea (sage, as John dimly realized). He put his hand on John’s forehead and raised his eyebrows as he felt the heat. John drifted off again.

In the middle of the night John woke up from feverish dreams. He couldn't recall what they were about, but they were frightening and left him scared. He stared into the dark, disorientated and breathing heavily. He heard the sheets rustling beside him and felt Sherlock’s large hand on his lower arm.

“It's alright, John. I'm here. You're safe.”

---

The next day was awful. John felt horrible. His physical pain added to the pain he felt inside. He was completely miserable and spent most of his little waking time staring at the sea he could see through Sherlock's bedroom window. He didn't even have the strength to notice that he had, in fact, slept in Sherlock's bed. And that apparently Sherlock had slept there too.

He ate very little and only because Sherlock insisted.

“John, you've got to eat something. Here are biscuits and a cup of soup. Come on. Just a bite.”

With his throat as sore as this, he didn't even try to protest.

He took a few more paracetamol throughout the day. When it was getting dark outside again, his head felt a bit better and he tried to get up. He sat on the bed for a long time. After having taken a few careful steps towards the window, he opened it. He heard Sherlock enter the room behind him.

“Feeling better?”

John nodded slowly, trying not to move his head too much.

“I’ve got tea downstairs. Do you want me to get you some?”

John carefully shook his head.

“You want to go downstairs?”

He nodded.

In the kitchen, Sherlock handed him a cup of tea. John drank. The first sip was painful, but with the second and third the heat soothed his throat.

“I've made soup. Hungry?”
Oh yes, John was. The soup smelled great. At first, he didn't believe that a bowl of soup would be enough, but when he had almost finished it, he was tired and full.

“Thanks,” he tried to whisper. It didn't work, but Sherlock understood and smiled one of his crooked half-smiles.

“You'd better go back to bed now.”

John didn't object and feebly went back upstairs. Sherlock followed him half an hour later. He brought his laptop and sat in the armchair next to window, typing and reading, working on his cold cases. John fell asleep.

The fever returned that night. John woke up shivering, having had another nightmare. He felt miserable, his throat hurt and the headache hammered against his skull. He knew it was just a bloody cold, but at that moment, it was as if his body had decided to release all the pain stored inside him. To turn it into real, physical pain. In his dream, he had been in the hospital again, useless, not being able to help that tiny newborn. He lost the last bit of control that had kept him from falling apart. He started sobbing. The girl. Mary. All these months, everything was lost and gone. And this fucking cold, rendering him into a helpless, crying mess.

Sherlock woke up and switched on the light on the nightstand. He fetched another paracetamol and a glass of water and handed it to John.

“Here. Take this.”

John was too exhausted to sit up and just buried his face in his hands.

“Come on, John. Just for a moment.”

Finally John managed to rise a few inches and took both the painkiller and water. Sherlock put the glass back on the nightstand and switched the lights off.

John felt ashamed. A grown man, crying like a child. He was relieved when the darkness swallowed him again, hiding his tears. He cried without a voice. He felt Sherlock move on the mattress and hands stroke his arms.

“Come here,” Sherlock whispered and crawled closer towards John. He took John carefully in his arms, holding him. And Sherlock's gentle but firm touch and the fact that John wasn't bloody frightening alone actually... helped. After a while, when there was nothing left but emptiness and exhaustion, his crying ebbed off. He fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

---

After that night, John got a little better every day. On the fourth day, he went down to the sea again. As the days passed, he withdrew into solitude a bit less. He sometimes asked Sherlock to join him. They had dinner at the pub again, which was quite nice. And they talked some more. Despair and apathy very slightly loosened their clenching grip around John's heart.

John kept on sleeping in Sherlock's bedroom. They didn't touch – that one fever night had been a bit of an exception. Which was ok. Only when John woke from another one of his bad dreams, he would feel Sherlock's hand on his arm in a caring and reassuring manner.

---

After three weeks at the cottage, John felt a bit better. He was still hurt and sad, but when they
headed back home the exhaustion wasn't as bad as it was when they had arrived.

*I should call Sarah and tell her I'll be working at the clinic again.*

For the first time in a long while, he actually felt up to it.
Slightly less angst for John. Slightly more for Sherlock. They're taking turns in falling apart.

Even though he had enjoyed their stay in Scotland, John was glad to be back in London. He had spent just about a week at Baker Street before they had left. So this was the actual home coming. The day they came back from Scotland John entered Sherlock’s bedroom for the first time after moving back in. It felt… special. On the kitchen table Sherlock’s phone was ringing. Loudly. And for a long time.

“Sherlock. Answer it?”

“How?”

“Why?”

“Lying on my bed.”

*This utter madman,* John thought, grabbed the ringing phone and went to Sherlock’s room. He found him stretched across his bed, staring at the ceiling. John tossed the phone onto the bed. And with that, he could have left again. Even though he had been living in 221b for a few months last year, being in Sherlock’s room was different this time. Because things had been reset, he didn’t have to leave again. So he stayed. Sherlock answered the phone, talking to Lestrade. John looked around and thought of the night he had collapsed in here, when Sherlock had been dead. Being here now was unexpectedly good. With Sherlock lying there, talking, very alive and probably ignorant of what this meant to John. It actually was the first time since his daughter’s death that John felt something faintly resembling happiness. And it was the first time he realized that the pain he felt now might weigh less heavy on him one day.

---

John slept in his room. It had been one thing to sleep in Sherlock’s bed in Scotland. But it was something completely different in 221b. John regretted it sleeping on his own again, yes, but he didn’t know how to talk about it. Or how to ask for it.

The nightmares and the restless sleep returned. He missed Sherlock’s presence, the comforting knowledge that he would be there when John woke up, haunted by his memories. The days got worse again. He was lacking sleep and the nightmares left him irritated and thin-skinned all day. On the fourth night, he had a nightmare so bad that he sat in his bed at half past two in the morning. His skin was damp with sweat and he was breathing heavily. His pulse wouldn’t slow down and he was close to panicking. He heard steps on the stairs and after a moment, there was a knock on the door.

“Yeah?” His voice was shaking.

Sherlock was in his pyjamas, his curls untidy, obviously he had been asleep already.
“Want to come down?” he whispered. “My bedroom?”

John closed his eyes and exhaled. He was grateful. Downstairs, Sherlock got into his bed, shifting over to the other side and making room for John. Sherlock’s bed was still warm. John lay down. He was calming down, but he couldn’t fall asleep for a long time. He could hear from Sherlock’s breathing that he was still awake, too.

“You want to tell me what you’re dreaming about?”

John sighed.

“The baby at the hospital. Sometimes you at the hospital. Or on the pavement. Mary. Afghanistan, but not very much. People being shot and there’s nothing I can do about it. It’s a horrible, surrealistic mess. Sometimes I don’t even remember. Difficult to explain.”

“I know.”

“Do you ever have nightmares?”

“Sometimes.”

“About what?”

“About… when I jumped. Getting it wrong and dying for real. Getting shot again. And… prison. But it’s been a while.”

Now it was John who reached out for Sherlock’s arm. He held him for the duration of a breath. He didn’t dare to touch him longer. He took a few deep breaths and felt Sherlock’s gaze on him. Watching over him. He fell asleep.

---

Falling asleep and waking up next to Sherlock became a comforting routine. His assurance for a less painful night. After a few weeks, a few of John’s things found their way into Sherlock’s bedroom, even though he still kept his clothes in his wardrobe upstairs. His pyjamas. A cardigan he forgot to take upstairs the other night. A small pile of books and magazines he was reading before going to sleep. Sherlock’s room took on the scent of both of them, mixing into an essence of what they were.

They didn’t talk about it and they only touched when one of them had had a nightmare. Which was mainly John. But sometimes, very rarely, Sherlock woke up. Then he was choking, with a muffled cry as if he had been in pain or with his hands in front of his face, like holding someone off. It was a secret parallel world neither of them dared to mention as if this would break the spell.

---

John was working at the clinic again. One late Thursday afternoon, when he was just about to pack his things and leave, his phone pinged.


John actually liked the idea. He had seen Greg only once or twice since they had returned from Scotland.

*Sure. The pub at 7?*
The first few moments with Greg were a bit awkward. Obviously, he didn't know how to start a conversation. But John was glad to see him. Greg had been there after Sherlock's death. Well, they had been through a couple of things together.

“So,” Greg finally asked. “So you’re back to work?”

“Yes, it was about time.”

“How's it going?”

“Well. It's good to be there again. It keeps me occupied, even though I am only doing three shifts a week. But it's bloody exhausting. Apparently I can't take very much at the moment.”

“I think it's amazing you're back at work after all. I've got no idea how I'd handle all that. With your girl. And Mary."

“Honestly, I don't know either. A lot of days are still quite bad. But not as bad as a few weeks ago."

“How's Sherlock then?”

“Well, quite ok, I’d say.”

“Haven’t seen him in ages. He keeps turning cases down, you know.”

“Sherlock? Turning cases down? Really?”

Actually, he has been hanging around at the flat an alarming amount of time recently, John thought.

“Yes, quite a number. Mostly cases involving families or couples… even though some of them were pretty fascinating. Bloody homicides and everything.”

John tried to figure out what this was about. He stared at his empty pint, shaking his head.

“Maybe he’s doing that for you,” Greg added.

“What?”

“Yeah. Think of it. He doesn’t want to get you involved in anything that might remind you of your baby and your marriage. So he sticks to fraud and other stuff that’s on the safe side.”

John wanted to object, but he had to admit that Greg had a point there.

---

John was surprised to hear Sherlock and Mrs Hudson talking when he came back to the flat.

Sounds like an argument or something.

“No, Sherlock, dear, I won’t take it. I absolutely won’t.”

“Mrs Hudson. You’ve been doing this for months. If I have calculated correctly – and I always do – we owe you about £ 900.”

We are owing Mrs Hudson? What the--
“Sherlock, no. I really can’t. I’ve seen the state both of you have been in and I really had to do something.”

“Right, and thank you, but that doesn’t mean you have to pay for the groceries all the time! It is enough if you go and get them!”

“Sherlock Holmes. Stop it now. I will have a word with your mother.”

A moment’s silence.

“And I will have a word with Mr Chatterjee about how you don’t like the earrings he bought you.”

An even longer silence.

“Just this one time, Sherlock. One time.”

John heard Mrs Hudson turn on her heel and descend the stairs a little furiously.

“Good evening, Mrs Hudson,” he offered, but she didn’t even look at him.

John frowned. He would have a word with Sherlock.

“Sherlock? What’s going on here?”

“Ahhhh, Mrs Hudson,” Sherlock made a vague gesture. “Being stubborn about paying for our groceries.”

“What? What does she have to do with our groceries?”

“Well… I’d say she went and got them since… February? Wait, I went once or twice as well. And then when we were in Scotland…”

“What?”

“What what?”

“You’re saying she has been buying and bloody paying for our food for sodding months now?”

“Well, yes.”

“This has got to stop. I’ll get the groceries again. And if I ever see her coming here with as much as a bottle of milk again…”

---

John didn’t only start buying their food and everyday stuff again. By June, he even joined Sherlock on cases again. Just sometimes, in the beginning. He had gotten used to the routine at the clinic again, the three shifts weren’t as exhausting anymore. He could even handle getting the groceries and seeing Greg quite regularly. His life felt a little normal again. At least as long as he didn’t see mothers with small children. The ones around four or five months were worst. And the blonde ones.

To prevent himself from getting lost in thoughts like these, he offered Sherlock some help while he was investigating a – rather tedious – case of art robbery. The culprit had a rare form of diabetes which required special medication. John was able to track the providers down even quicker than Sherlock would have done. They almost caught him when he went to his chemist’s. And they
surely did when John struck him down as he attempted to flee by hijacking a car.

“That felt… good,” John said as he had caught his breath again.

“Yes. I was wondering when you would need it again.” Sherlock smiled.

“Need? What?” John was a bit perplexed.

“This. Your kind of fix.”

Sherlock was still smiling, for some reason this seemed to be a good development of things. So. Anyway.

“Dinner?”

“Starving.”

---

John’s phone rang. Lestrade.

“Yes, hello, Greg?”

“John. Sherlock didn’t answer the phone. Can you come over to Richmond?”

“Well, yeah, sure…” He walked into the kitchen to see if Sherlock was still busy with his latest experiment. He turned to him, saying “Case, Sherlock. Come on.”

Sherlock nodded distractedly.

“Yes. My phone kept ringing.”

John shook his head and told Lestrade, “Greg, we’ll be in a cab in a minute. What happened?”

“Well, yeah, sure…” He walked into the kitchen to see if Sherlock was still busy with his latest experiment. He turned to him, saying “Case, Sherlock. Come on.”

Sherlock nodded distractedly.

“John. Sherlock didn’t answer the phone. Can you come over to Richmond?”

“Well, yeah, sure…” He walked into the kitchen to see if Sherlock was still busy with his latest experiment. He turned to him, saying “Case, Sherlock. Come on.”

Sherlock nodded distractedly.

“Yes. My phone kept ringing.”

John shook his head and told Lestrade, “Greg, we’ll be in a cab in a minute. What happened?”

“Young lad missing from uni. He doesn’t live with his parents, of course, but they’ve searched his room at the campus. Found some drugs. They’re worried madly and… well, I’d appreciate it if you’d have a look at it.”

John dragged Sherlock away from the kitchen table. Some forty minutes later, they arrived at the family’s house in Richmond. A very well-kept white terraced house not far from the banks of the Thames. Upper class, definitely, John thought. Greg introduced them to Mr and Mrs Kingsley, the parents of the young man who had gone missing. Jonathan was studying at some posh uni.

Yesterday, his parents found out that he had neither attended his lectures nor had he been seen by anyone in four days. Jonathan was a rather calm, unusually clever boy without many friends. Recently, he had neglected his studies quite a bit and seemed to be rather difficult to get in touch with. So this was the last straw. His father and the police had been to his room on the campus. The room had been abandoned, a little messier than usual. And traces of cocaine and heroin were found.

At first John wondered why Lestrade had asked them to come. This was a case for the drug squad or whatever. Certainly nothing like a locked-door homicide that left the New Scotland Yard so puzzled that they had to ask for Sherlock’s help. But when they had come to Richmond and talked to Jonathan’s parents, John got the idea that Greg might have called simply because Sherlock might empathise with the whole situation. A highly intelligent, solitary student gets lost in drugs and vanishes. Sherlock talked to Jonathan’s parents for a while. He refrained from insulting them or
putting them under an unnecessary amount of pressure just to get his information more quickly. When they were done, Sherlock wanted to see Jonathan’s room at the campus. Greg joined. Sherlock was silent on the ride.

*Probably wandering through his mind palace and figuring things out already,* John guessed.

In Jonathan’s room, they found several clues pointing at the fact that Jonathan must have had *some* friend at uni, studying the same subject. Maurice Redfern had not attended this morning’s lecture, either. Sherlock found out when he called their professor under some false pretences. And Sherlock got his room number from his secretary.

Sherlock was rather tense as they rushed to Maurice’s place. When no one opened the door, Sherlock picked the lock within a minute. The room was dark, the curtains were drawn. The air was stale and smelled very slightly… sour.

When their eyes got used to the dim light, they saw that there was no one in. John noticed a low humming… *like a ventilation. In a closed room… the things you find in bathrooms without a window.* He went to a narrow door at the end of the room and tried to open it. It didn’t work at first, it seemed like something was blocking. Alarmed, John pushed as careful as he could, finally managing to open it enough to let him slip through.

“Sherlock!”

Someone was lying on the floor. With the light switched on, they recognized Jonathan from the photos his parents had shown them. He was lying in his vomit, unconscious, ghastly pale and with an elastic strap loosely attached to his upper left arm. There was a syringe of the floor. *Probably heroin,* John thought. He tried to find Jonathan’s pulse. It took him ages and John’s tension grew. But finally, there it was – light and dangerously slow.

“Get an ambulance! Now! He’s od’ed!”

---

After the ambulance had left, Sherlock checked Maurice’s wardrobe, his desk and some folders. Greg went to hospital to meet Jonathan’s parents.

“A good part of Maurice’s clothes are missing. So are his laptop and several other things. I think he has left in a hurry and doesn’t plan to come back soon.”

“So. What do you think of it all?”

“Jonathan’s drug use has proceeded from occasional cocaine to a rather regular consumption of heroin. It suits with the amount of money he needed… and with how little he called his parents. Something got out of control…” Sherlock trailed off, looking lost and tired all of a sudden.

“Let’s go home, John. We’re done here.”

The ride home took a while. Neither of them spoke.

---

When John ordered dinner, Sherlock didn’t eat. He sat in his chair staring at his hands. Lestrade had called earlier, informing them that Jonathan was in a serious, but fairly stable condition. And that Maurice Redfern had been found. He had been around when Jonathan od’ed, but he panicked and left. He probably just didn’t want to have anything to do with it.
“Sherlock?” John tried to pull him back to reality.

“You alright?”

Well, he obviously wasn’t. John read a bit and when it was late, he changed and went to the bathroom. Having finished brushing his teeth, he went to the living room once more.

“Come to bed, Sherlock. Sitting there all night won’t do you any good.”

When Sherlock didn’t react, John took a few more steps towards him and tugged on his shirt.

“Sherlock. Come on.”

Startled, Sherlock looked up.

“Yes. Yes. Coming.”

And he slowly got up. In the bedroom, Sherlock unbuttoned his shirt, still thinking.

“You know, John…” Sherlock began.

John looked up from his book, listening to him.

 “…that boy. He was a bit like me. He was lucky he has made it today and will likely live to see tomorrow morning.”

He paused.

“I think Jonathan and Maurice were lovers. And Maurice just… left. Leaving him in that bathroom to die on his own.”

He took a deep breath.

“I’ve been there, John. I know exactly what all this is like.”

He looked at the shirt he had just taken off as if he wondered how the hell it got there. And went to the bathroom. When he came back, dressed in his pyjamas and smelling of tooth paste and soap, he sat down on the bed. John waited if he would say anything else.

“Sherlock? You… want to talk about this?”

Sherlock didn’t reply for a long time. When John thought he had gotten lost in thought again, Sherlock finally said, “I went through overdoses. I was just the same age as him. And I was lucky enough to have a brother who looked after me.”

John couldn’t recall hearing Sherlock ever say something positive about Mycroft.

“I have never been very afraid of dying. But I am now. Even when I was on the plane to Serbia in January, I didn't dare taking all the drugs I’ve had at once. Which would have made a proper overdose.”

“Why did you want to overdose, Sherlock? I never got it.”

It was a question, not an accusation.

“I was going to die in Serbia. It was a suicide mission Mycroft and I decided on instead of spending
the rest of my life in prison."

'Since it is unlikely we will ever meet again...' 

'Six months. He's never wrong.'

John swallowed hard. He didn't know what to say. He felt guilty. So guilty. Suddenly, all of the disaster with Mary threatened to crash into him again. But... there was something Sherlock has said earlier that has confused him. He cleared his throat.

"You said... you're afraid of dying now. Why? What happened?"

"Now I've got something other to lose than just my life;" Sherlock said in a calm and low voice.

Before John could ask any further questions, Sherlock lay down and switched off the lamp on his nightstand. John looked at his book without reading for a long time. What was all this about? It sounded as bloody mysterious as 'Sherlock is actually a girl’s name'. Why was Sherlock always being such a mystery? He was just about to ask Sherlock exactly this, when he saw he had fallen asleep with exhaustion.

Later that night, John woke up because Sherlock sat in bed, choking with horror and covered in cold sweat.

"It’s alright, Sherlock,” John whispered.

This time it was John who held Sherlock in his arms.
“Sherlock, isn’t it Mrs Hudson’s birthday next Friday?”

Sherlock didn’t reply.

“Don’t tell me you’ve deleted that.”

“No, I haven’t. August 5th, it is her birthday indeed.”

“So. What do we get her?”

“Do we get her something?”

“Yes, Sherlock, we do. She’s our landlady, she cares for us and, if I may remind you, she made sure we didn’t starve for almost half a year. So. What do we get her?”

“Don’t know.”

John wasn’t expecting him to come up with something useful. He just rather didn’t want to decide on his own.

“We could invite her to Angelo’s. Properly take her out for dinner.”

“That’s a good idea, Sherlock.”

And so they told Mrs Hudson they would pick her up Friday night at 7. She was beaming, impatient, curious and so proud when they knocked on her door. Angelo was happy to see them and gave them Sherlock’s preferred table. He glimpsed at John and Sherlock cautiously as he lit the candle on the table.

*At least he doesn’t say anything about that date thing,* John thought.

Sherlock ordered for all of them. It was delicious. When they were just finishing their tiramisù and grappa, Mrs Hudson said, “This was so lovely, boys. Thank you so much. What a wonderful evening.”

They walked home, sated with good food and cheerful with the wine. In the hallway of 221, Mrs Hudson insisted they come to her kitchen for a nightcap.

“My sister gave me this wonderful sherry, boys! You have to try it!”

“Can I smoke?”
“Sherlock. Behave yourself. And I know you’re not smoking. So don’t be a git and do Mrs Hudson a favour,” John snarled.

The sherry was – given that it was sherry and thus a proper drink for elderly ladies – quite nice and unsurprisingly, it wasn’t just one. Mrs Hudson told them some frankly hair-raising stories about her time in Florida. And she didn’t spare them the juicy parts about her husband. Sherlock added some illustrious details about how he made sure Mr Hudson was sentenced to death. When Mrs Hudson got up to open a second bottle of sherry, John noticed that he had been laughing more in the past few hours than he had during the past year.

And he noticed something else: The more sherry Sherlock drank, the more there was something weird about his pronunciation. His sophisticated, public school accent was getting more and more infiltrated by something… quite… adorable. When he was in the middle of a longer monologue, John looked at Mrs Hudson questioningly. She grinned, she heard it, too. There was a tiny lisp. Not easy to hear and not every time there was an ‘s’. Once John had noticed it, he couldn’t pay attention to what Sherlock was saying, but just listen if he would get it wrong again. It was endearing. Mrs Hudson giggled a bit more than Sherlock’s stories would have justified. Around half past one, when the second bottle was half empty, John punched Sherlock gently on his arm.

“Sherlock. It’s late. I’d say I go to bed.”

“Yes… you go, I’ll help Mrs Hudthon.”

_God, there it is again_, John thought with a giggle.

“And bethides… I don’t want to get into a cold bed. Go warm it up,” Sherlock added, sounding slightly demanding and very drunk.

_Oh Fuck._

The next thing warming up were John’s ears. His face.

_I am fucking blushing._

“Oh boys, there’s no such thing as coming home to someone, isn’t it? Leave it, Sherlock, I’ll take care of this little mess tomorrow. Sleep well, boys!”

She kissed John and Sherlock on their cheeks and gently shoved them out of her kitchen.

In the hallway, John hissed, “Sherlock! Christ! Why did you tell her?”

“Tell her what?”

“That we’re sleeping together! Fuck, in the same bed, I mean.”

“Why shouldn’t I? She knowth anyway, John.”

_Oh, this lisp._

“How does she know that? Did you tell her before?”

“No, I didn’t, idiot. She just knowth. She’s like my mum.”

“Aaaaah, I don’t wanna know. Sherlock, watch out on the stairs, you’re pretty drunk.”

Sherlock went up first, swaying slightly. When he had almost made it upstairs, he tripped and got
dangerously close to falling over. John grabbed him, just to help. Accidentally, he didn’t manage to get hold of his lower back, but ended up with Sherlock’s rather firm and round behind. He felt himself blushing even more.

“Er… sorry.”

Sherlock turned to him.

“What?”

“Sorry, grabbed your ass. Accidentally.”

Sherlock stared at him in astonishment.

“Sherlock, what is it? Why are you staring at me?”

“Your father is turning red and… this is actually a good look on you.”

Sherlock looked at him as if he was a surprisingly fascinating specimen.

“Why doth it make you look so handsome? You’re not making any sense, John, ever.”

Saying that, he turned, opened the door and headed straight for the bathroom, leaving John standing in the hallway, confused and drunk.

---

It was a very early September morning. Outside on Baker Street it was still silent and dark. John didn’t want to open his eyes. He wanted the images to stay. He stretched a bit and almost let out a small groan. He still saw him, eyes closed, his chest heaving and coming completely undone. John was caressing his plush lips when he started sucking his fingertips. Now, John's exhale did in fact come out as a groan. The sound of his own voice woke him from that semi-somnolent dream. He felt his left hand on his cock and recognized a feeling he hadn't had in months. Want. Need. Lust. The fantasy was back. He went on stroking his hard cock, feeling a bit more complete again, reclaiming his old self a bit more. It felt good, all of this, Christ...

Sherlock moved besides him. His cushion rustled and he pulled the blanket away from John.

Oh my fucking God, Sherlock.

How could he have forgotten.

He had just dreamt of having sex with the man who was sleeping next to him. Who had been allowing him into his bed to protect him from his nightmares. John was torn, he felt almost as guilty as he had felt when Sherlock had been dead. At the same time, the sensation of being this alive and himself again was so good. And Oh God yes, he wanted this. It had been such a long time. He rearranged his pyjama bottoms and got up as silently as he could. He went to the dark bathroom and closed the door. He didn’t switch on the light in order not to wake up Sherlock. He sat down, leaning against the cold tiles. And even though it seemed to be more than a bit wrong, he let all the images come back as he took his cock in his hand.

In his mind, he would undress Sherlock and take in all of his beautiful body. He would kiss him. He craved him, his body, his mouth, everything. He would hear him panting and see how aroused he was. He would take his cock in his hand, wondering what it would feel like, just as he always used to wonder. And he would touch him, yes, like that. He would stroke his shaft, caress the head
of his cock, feel his precome on his fingertips. He would gently graze his balls. And then… speed up a bit. Touch him more firmly, leave him panting hard.

*Oh fuck, this feels so good, so good, yes, fuck. .. Oh God, oh God, SHERLOCK…*

He came. This was the most silent way he had ever climaxed. Biting his lip, trying hard not to let any sound escape his mouth. And he had come *a lot* quicker than he usually did.

*Christ, I still want him*, John thought as he sat in their bathroom. He was still breathing heavily and his heart was beating fast.

*Of course I do. I want Sherlock. God. I want to have sex with him.*

He huffed a laugh. It felt so good to admit this. He tried to savour this feeling.

*I want to have sex with Sherlock Holmes.*

His soundless giggling ebbed off when a second realization set in:

*I'm still in love with him. I love him. I LOVE SHERLOCK.*

His heart ached as he understood how much more this was about love than about mere sexual desire. It ached at the sheer immensity of what he felt for him. And it was as if his grief and his pain were kindly, but firmly pushed aside a little to make room for *this*.

He closed his eyes and sat there for another minute, just trying to grasp all of this. Sighing, he grabbed a towel, cleaned himself up a bit and washed his hands. He sneaked back into Sherlock’s bedroom and crawled into bed. Sherlock had turned around and slept there, facing him, his head resting on his right arm. His left hand, however, was lying in front of him.

John desperately wanted to touch him, but he didn’t dare waking him up. Carefully, he slipped two fingers under Sherlock’s hand. Just feeling its warmth, being a little closer to him than he usually was. In the dawning morning light, Sherlock’s face became more and more visible. It was so familiar to John.

He resisted the urge to stroke his cheek bones. Or the spot between his eyebrows he sometimes crinkled so fucking adorably. Actually, Sherlock’s face was the most beautiful thing John could think of. And with that he fell asleep again.

When his phone beeped with the alarm to wake him, he disentangled his fingers from Sherlock’s hand. He wasn’t sure how Sherlock would react to this. What if he… didn’t feel like this at all? A wave of worries swept over John.

*Let’s just take this slowly.*

He was something between happy and enthusiastic about his epiphany, but also anxious. He had a great deal of experience with being in love with a Sherlock that was dead or out of reach. He had no idea how to be in love with a Sherlock who was living with him and, theoretically, available for him. Or how to court Sherlock.

*Let’s take this slowly. Very slowly.*

---

The cold, really cold nights started around the last days of October. Sherlock and John had been out on a case, trying to get hold of a group of burglars around Clapham. They had searched several places where the burglars might have hidden their quarry. For some reason, this was mainly outside
or in some deserted, draughty houses. It had been windy and bloody freezing. Even on the ride back to Baker Street, John’s hands wouldn’t get warm again and Sherlock was in an exceptionally bad mood.

“I’m frozen, John.”

“We’ll eat something warm now.”

But somehow, even the fried rice wasn’t as hot as it was supposed to be.

“I’m still frozen. This is awful.”

“Sherlock. Go have a hot shower.”

This suggestion evoked some rather warming images in John’s mind. As things like these always did since that morning when he had realized he both loved and craved Sherlock. He still didn’t know what to do about it and kept telling himself to take things slowly. He was trying to find anything in Sherlock’s behaviour that might give him a clue about what Sherlock felt. If he felt something. Judging by what he had done for John since, well, forever, he must be somewhat attached to him. He was grateful for this and he often thought that he maybe shouldn’t hope for more. Surely this, whatever it was, was closer than Sherlock had ever been to someone else. But did it include… a relationship? A different kind of physicality than holding and comforting each other?

“Alright,” Sherlock agreed with a sigh.

“And do go straight to bed afterwards! Your body is supposed to keep the heat from the hot water,” John called as Sherlock went to the bathroom. He heard the bathroom door shut. And open again.

“You go to bed and make sure it’s warm then!” Sherlock demanded.

Well, of course. As if this helped this bloody pining at all.

John did go to bed and a little later Sherlock came from the bathroom, his skin flushed red and positively glowing with heat. When he got into bed, he moved a bit awkwardly.

“Hey. Anything wrong with your back?”

“Don’t know. Maybe.”

“Let me see.”

Sherlock frowned. The atmosphere changed. But he gave in, after a moment’s hesitation, took off his shirt and turned his back towards John. He had seen Sherlock’s scars, but he had never examined them closely. Also, he had never asked about them. He hadn’t been sure if he could take hearing about how he had gotten them. Some of the scars where fading, light silvery lines. Others were large, bulging red marks. John had seen a fair share of scars during his army years and also a fair share of victims of torture. This looked frighteningly familiar.

“Where does it hurt?”

“Here.”

Sherlock pointed at an exceptionally bad scar, red and with a lot of lacerated tissue.
“It’s quite close to your spine… Have your vertebrae been x-rayed after that… happened? Maybe they were injured as well. The scar looks quite bad. Is it the skin that hurts or underneath? Your spine?”

“I was examined, in a military hospital in Germany. I would say it is both.”

“I’ll get you something against the pain. And tomorrow we’ll have you checked at the hospital.”

John got up to fetch some painkillers. Sherlock accepted them without any fuss. He lay down and turned on his side, facing John. He looked at John’s hands and John knew the clenching of his fists had given him away.

“Right. Maybe it’s none of my business, you’re always so secretive about that… but what the hell happened there? What happened to you?”

“I… dismantled Moriarty’s network.”

“Yeah. You’ve told me as much.”

None of them said something. John wasn’t angry, he had given up on that ages ago. He just wanted to understand. And it hurt him to see Sherlock in pain and not saying a goddamn word about it all.

“Why did you have to do that at all–“

“You see, I didn’t want–“

Now they started talking at the same time. Even though this whole thing wasn’t funny at all, both John and Sherlock had to smile.

“Ok. You go first, Sherlock.”

“I didn’t want to go. And I didn’t want to deceive you. I’ve had no choice, John. There were three of Moriarty’s snipers, one for Mrs Hudson, one for Lestrade and one for you. If I didn’t kill myself, three people that I held dear would have died. I had to kill myself and you had to believe it.”

John froze. Nausea rose in his stomach.

“You were being watched afterwards. We couldn’t risk telling you.”

John swallowed and stared at the duvet.

“In Eastern Europe, I tried to find the splinter cells and subdivisions of Moriarty’s network. I made sure its leaders and members were sent to prison.”

He paused and looked at the dark window.

“Serbia was the last group. I got caught. I had gotten caught earlier, I had been in prison and I hadn’t been treated all too well either. But Serbia was different. They… were very brutal. The back, you know. That happened there.”

“How did you get out?” John asked.

“Mycroft had infiltrated the leading ranks. He needed me back here in London. Lord Moran, the underground network. You know the rest.“

He paused. John tried to process all of this, to understand, when Sherlock went on.
“There’s one last thing, John.”

John looked up.

“Mycroft is quite convinced that Mary was one of the snipers.”

John drew in a sharp breath. He felt as if he had been punched in his stomach, hard and without any warning. The nausea was overwhelming. His pulse sped up, he could hear his blood rush in his ears. He thought he might have to throw up. He pushed his fist into the mattress.

After a few moments, he managed to unclench his jaw enough to speak again.

“How long have you known?”

“A few weeks. Since it turned out that she wanted to kill Magnusson, Mycroft has been investigating. It took him a while.”

The problems of her god-forsaken past.

Rage, hurt and bottomless disappointment roared inside John. He was in a restless turmoil.

Sherlock. Mary. Christ, all of this.

“I don’t think I can go to sleep now. Have a drink?”

John lit the fire in the living room. They sat in their chairs, Sherlock was wrapped in a woolen blanket. Drinking whisky and staring at the fire for a long time.

“Why didn’t you tell me earlier? Any of this?”

“I didn’t know how to tell you.”

“Sherlock, you have been bloody sacrificing yourself.”

It took him hours until he could go back to bed. Sherlock had left much sooner, the painkillers and the alcohol had made him tired. John stared at the dark ceiling until he fell asleep.

For the next couple of days John was struck by what Sherlock had told him. He went outside a lot, walking through Regent’s Park. Marching out in the cold, just as he had in Scotland. Everything slowly added all up in John’s mind, everything Sherlock had done – had done for him – after he had jumped. John still hadn’t the faintest idea what to think of it.

Confused and a bit emotional, he told the whole story to Lestrade when he met him that Friday night. They went to a calmer place than their usual pub which would have been much too crowded and too noisy. Greg listened. And remained silent for a frighteningly long time. Finally, he cleared his throat.

“Well, er… I’d say… you see, mate, if it wasn’t Sherlock, I’d say he bloody loves you. Even more so than people usually love each other, it seems… but then it’s Sherlock.”

He took a sip from his pint.

“I mean, he’s been a bit into you forever. Trusting you more than anyone and all that.” Another sip from his pint. “And that best man’s speech… Christ, that gave me a lot to think about.”

John didn’t know if this made him happy or confused or if it scared the sh*t out of him. He had
heard enough life-altering revelations and he had had enough of that emotional rollercoaster ride that week.

“I think I need to get really, really drunk tonight, Greg.”

---

Of course, getting drunk didn’t help. Actually, nothing helped. John was lost. He had figured out he loved Sherlock a long time ago. And now other people were pointing out that Sherlock might feel quite something for him as well. John was wondering whether to make a move or to wait. He spent a good deal of his waking (and in fact, sleeping) time pondering over this dilemma. Not getting anywhere.

In the end, a case turned up. A colleague of Greg’s had been investigating a series of smuggling. Apparently, there was a small, new group of smugglers based in London. But they had managed to escape the NSY again and again. The proof held against them wasn’t enough to have them arrested. Somehow it had seeped through that Scotland Yard was investigating and so smugglers had become even more cautious. Things got more difficult for the inspectors. Sherlock was asked for help. He and John spent a considerable amount of time checking warehouses and hunting people around the city – just to end up with nothing. Sherlock was already getting a bit annoyed.

But one Thursday afternoon, John got a text calling him to an abandoned complex in an industrial area in the east of London. One of the suspects, Jonathan Miller, had been spotted there. John cancelled the rest of his shift and hurried to the address Sherlock had given him. It was an old warehouse, rotten and dark. It seemed to be a good opportunity to get Miller and maybe the rest of the smugglers.

The chase followed. That chase that left John with a bad blow to his head, passing out, stumbling down to the cold concrete floor of the warehouse. Seeing it all again in his mind.

Chapter End Notes

I've written a cliffhanger! I didn't really mean to... but there it is. :) Hope you've enjoyed it.
Seeing II

Chapter Summary

This is what happens after John gets a blow on the head. The conclusion of chapter I.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

His ears are buzzing. His head hurts.

_I’d better not move_...

Carefully he tries opening his eyes. Light. More pain. Quickly, he closes his eyes again. He tries to remember what has happened.

_I was running… it was dark… something hit me._

He tries to move his left hand and touches his head. It’s sticky and warm and he doesn’t need to open his eyes to know it is blood. He puts his hand down again. Slowly, his memories come back to him.


The impressions of the dream he had while being unconscious are still vividly present in his mind. Sherlock, in a million of situations. All the things John felt for him. Still feels. Sherlock.

_Sherlock!_

He does his best to open his eyes despite the pain. It’s so bad that he almost throws up. It gets worse when he tries to get back on his feet, grabbing the shelf next to him to pull himself up. He hears steps from afar, and shouting. Someone calling his name. His legs get weaker and everything gets lost in darkness again.

---

“Yes, I can hear you. Sherlock?”

“John! John, come on. John, open your eyes.”

John can hear the worries, no, the _fear_ in Sherlock’s voice, even though he is trying to speak calmly. He opens his eyes and sees Sherlock’s face above him. His eyes.

_Not shot then. Good._

John smiles. He is about to drown in these eyes.

“Are you alright? You’re bleeding, John, quite a lot.”
John has to close his eyes again, the pain in his head is getting too bad. But the relief in Sherlock’s voice is audible and John is sure his mouth is curling in one of his half-crooked smiles. He can’t stop smiling himself. He feels Sherlock taking his hand and squeezing it firmly. John squeezes back as good as he can. Then Sherlock takes his hand a bit higher and... Oh Christ, is he kissing my hand?

He is.

“I’d kiss your face, but you’re covered in blood, John.”

Now John has to open his eyes. Sherlock looks at him, intensely.

“I heard a shot and I thought you were killed.”

“Yeah, me too. Got dark and… started running. Something… hit me.”

“Yes. But you’re not shot.”

“Neither are you.”

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

John smiles even more. He is positively grinning, as good as he can with the nauseating pain in his head.

He hears Sherlock draw in a sharp breath. And exhale again. After a split second that stretches out like a small eternity, he says, “John, can we stop fussing around then? I want to kiss you as soon as you’re cleaned up and sewn back together in hospital.”

John thinks he is passing out again. There are more steps now, people are approaching them.

“Sherlock, is John ok?” Greg Lestrade asks.

“He got a blow on the head. He needs an ambulance, I’d say he is concussed and he has got a bad laceration on his head.”

“I’ll call the ambulance.”

Greg pulls out his phone. While he is making the call, he comes a few steps closer. He looks at Sherlock, who is still holding John’s hand, in a somewhat comprehending way.

---

At the hospital, John’s head is being x-rayed and his wound needs stitches. His head was hit by a large metal radiator stored on one of the shelves, carelessly heaved up there and sitting halfway on the shelf.

“You’re lucky, Dr Watson, you were hit a few centimetres behind your hairline. There will be a scar since the wound is quite large, but it won’t be visible,” the young doctor says.

“You’ve also got a mild traumatic brain injury, a concussion. You need to stay here tonight. If you are feeling ok tomorrow, you can go home. But you are absolutely supposed to stay in bed, no work, no stress, no tv. Do you have someone to watch over you?”
“Yes,” Sherlock answered, “I will be there.”

“Will you be around constantly? For at least 48 hours?”

“I will be around forever. If he wants me to.”

John swallows. Now that was close to a marriage vow, wasn’t it.

He doesn’t argue that he would prefer spending the night at home. He knows it is useless and he does actually feel quite bad. When they are in his hospital room, Sherlock gets them some coffee.

“You are allowed coffee?”

“I think so.”

“There you go.”

“Sherlock, who was actually shooting at the warehouse?”

“Lestrade. I had called him beforehand and he arrived just in time to catch Jonathan Miller. He tried to escape and to shoot Lestrade. Lestrade shot back and got him. Miller is in hospital as well, he will be questioned tomorrow.”

“Good.”

He closes his eyes again.

“How does my wound look?”

“Awful. You will have a scar.”

“I will need as much product in my hair as you do, Sherlock, just to hide that thing.”

“Oh, you can take some of mine, if you like.”

John huffs a laugh. After a while, he adds, “Glad you called the police.”

“Yes. Me too.”

They remain silent for a few minutes. There are so many things going through John’s concussed brain. He can’t yet find the words to talk about them. So he just takes Sherlock’s hand once more and squeezes it. Sherlock understands. Then he bows down to him and kisses him on his forehead, gentle and feathery.

“I think I’ve promised you that earlier.”

---

When the nurse has finished her final round, Sherlock crawls into John’s bed and gently curls around him. John is glad he doesn’t have to spend the night on his own. And he absolutely doesn’t mind the narrow hospital bed which makes Sherlock sleep so close to him.

The next morning, Mrs Hudson arrives with a bag of fresh clothes for John. John insists on taking a shower before he gets changed. Sherlock is a bit worried he might pass out while he is in the bathroom. So he stays right in front of the half closed door.
“I'll leave the door a bit open. Keep talking. If you don't answer, I'll come in.“

“Yeah, right.“

John starts showering, making sure his head doesn't get wet.

“John?“

A pause. Then Sherlock asks, “John, what are you doing?“

What's this about? Trying to make some sexy shower talk?

As much as he wants him – and Christ, he does – this is neither the time nor the place to get started with it.

“I'm scraping dried blood off my chest.“

“Ah.“

After thirty seconds, Sherlock asks again, “John?“

“Yes, Sherlock?“

“Keep talking to me. What are you doing?“

“Washing myself. It's been 24 hours since I've last had a shower. I've chased a criminal through a warehouse, I was wounded and passed out. I smell awful.”

Nothing.

“Sherlock?“

“Yes. Right.“

Another pause. After a few moments, Sherlock asks again, “John?“

“Yes, Sherlock?“

“What are you doing?“

“I've passed out and am lying face down in the water.“

He hears a rush at the door, as if Sherlock is about to storm in.

“I'm washing my balls, you curious git!“

---

The young doctor reminds John to rest a lot and, once more, instructs Sherlock to make sure he spends most of his time in bed. And then it is time to go home.

Chapter End Notes

Just a short one this time (so sorry!) - but I promise you some smut in the next chapter.
Chapter Summary

“So. We both know what might come next.”

This sounds... interesting. And a bit terrifying.

“Do we, then?”

“I will kiss you properly. And then, I'll take it, we'll have sex. At home.”

Did he really say that?

Then Sherlock adds, “Finally.”

When John remains shocked and lost for words, Sherlock insists, “Don't you agree?”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They take a cab back to Baker Street and end up in London's daily rush hour traffic jam. John is pleasantly nervous with anticipation. His head aches a bit and there is pain where he has had the stitches. But still he smiles, looking out of the window, not knowing how to look at Sherlock. They sit just ever so slightly closer to each other, not touching, but a bit less distance between them.

What is going to happen next?

“So. We both know what might come next,” Sherlock breaks the silence.

“Oh.”

This sounds... interesting. And a bit terrifying.

John clears his throat, feeling sweat on his forehead.

“Do we, then?”

“I will kiss you properly. And then, I'll take it, we'll have sex. At home.”

Sherlock pauses. And John chokes.

Did he really say that?

Then Sherlock adds, “Finally.”

When John remains shocked and lost for words, Sherlock insists, “Don't you agree?”

“Fuck. Yes.”
John is still trying to handle this, when Sherlock goes on.

“We could put the time we’re stuck here to a better use.”

*Christ, what is he suggesting?*

“I suppose you've got questions, John.“

John exhales loudly.

*Questions.*

“Well. Yes. Quite a lot actually.“

“Ask. It seems we've got plenty of time.“

John is still trying to figure out what to ask first when Sherlock interrupts him.

“For example, you have been wondering for ages if I've ever had sex before.“

*Am I really so obvious?*

“Er... Right.“

“Yes. I did. During uni. It's almost impossible to go through years of drug use without sex.“

John swallows.

*Of course.*

“No, it's not what you think. I didn't use sex to pay for drugs. It's rather – when you're high on cocaine, you feel like you can do anything. Accomplish anything. And *have* anyone.“

This sounds surprisingly sexy from Sherlock's mouth. His green-grey-impossible-to-define eyes are fixed on John, whose heart is beating faster as he sees images of a younger Sherlock in his mind, brilliant and beautiful and high as a kite. It must have been difficult to resist him even when he hadn't set is mind to seducing you.

“Usually, I didn't do that sort of thing. Relationships. Romantic entanglement. I was far too... *shy*. And I was afraid of becoming dependant on somebody else, it frightened me. It would have been too much. Too close. Besides, I didn't like most people.“

John smiles. Surely *this* hadn't changed much over the years.

“But. Sex. I wanted sex. I was so curious. I wanted to know what it was like. Explore it. I never would have dared to do that – but with cocaine... It was a lot easier. There was one of the other students, he was two years older than me. Not dull, but challenging. He liked me. And I didn't despise him as much as the others. We were lovers for one and a half years. Not boyfriends really, but... lovers. When I was high. And when he was around. Quite a lot like Jonathan Kingsley and his guy. He let me down in the end, too. And then Mycroft dragged me to rehab, finally. That's it. When I had stopped taking drugs, I didn't feel like trying *that* again.“

John clears his throat.

“Did you... er... use condoms?“
Christ, why am I asking this? He's revealing this to me and I ask about condoms.

“John. I was a gay drug user in the late 1990s. Of course I used condoms. And I have been tested for HIV and every STD possible more than once. I'm clean.“

John's heart skips a beat when Sherlock says ‘gay’. It is really bloody obvious, but it is something completely different hearing it from him. John briefly looks at Sherlock. There is something unguarded in the way he looks. Just... honesty and himself.

“Right. Sorry. I mean...“

“It's alright.“

The cab is still stuck somewhere on Oxford Street in a line of cars, cabs and busses, moving very slowly.

This ride will take quite a while, John realizes. Maybe I should just try to enjoy this, this careful shifting from the usual John-and-Sherlock-are-flatmates to something else. Something that has been lingering between us for months. Or years.

“Well. Sherlock. I've got more questions.“

John looks at him. Sherlock let down all his guards and walls. ‘Alone is what I have’ – that seems to be so far away now. John allows his hand to wander a bit closer to Sherlock. Just a bit.

“I know.“

Sherlock's voice is even lower than usual. It drives John mad that he is the one Sherlock is talking to like this. It is quite an impressive, flattering, arousing thing to be the centre of Sherlock Holmes's attention. He swallows and goes on.

“Since when?“

“Since you were so jealous of Irene Adler. Since the pool. Since you've shot the cabbie. Since I've met you. It's been forever.“

John rubs his hand over his face.

Oh my God.

“And you, John?“

“I've been a bit of an idiot it seems... I only realized it when you were dead.“

“And when I came back, you were engaged. A promise you couldn't break.“

“Or so I thought.“

John sighs. It is more than relieving to finally have this talk. A weird kind of ease swells inside him. As if he can breathe again for the first time in years.

After a while, Sherlock says while his hand is awkwardly inching a little closer to John's, “There are things I want to know, too.“

John can hear the tension in his voice.
“Yeah.”

“What if we do have sex and we… get naked and you’re confronted with… how undeniably male I am. What if you can’t help but question your decision?“

“Sherlock. I’ve been attracted to you for years. To your soul, your brain and your heart. And to your body. I’ve been bloody fantasizing about you. And I’m particularly looking forward to finally getting to know your… undeniably male parts.“

Sherlock inhales sharply. The fingers of his hand lingering between them start drumming on the seat. John feels himself flushing.

_Damn it. If we are doing this right now, I will ask all the questions I have._

“Sherlock. What is it that you want?”

Sherlock looks at John again and John isn't sure to ever have seen Sherlock like this before. He licks his lips. John slowly reaches for Sherlock's fingers, exploring them, entangling his own with them. The moment they touch feels electric. Sherlock's hands are warm, firm and _so real_. The cab is moving again, even if it moves very slowly.

“I want you to touch me. And I want to touch you. Only you. Only ever you, I don't want anyone else touching you. I can't bear thinking about anyone else touching you. It should be only me. I'm… a bit jealous.”

Sherlock takes a deep breath. He looks at John’s hand and starts drawing circles on its palms with his fingertips.

“What I want, John?”

He looks up and holds John’s gaze.

“I want _everything_. You. Us.”

John breathes heavily. His hand is touching Sherlock's more firmly. Feeling it, its muscles, its strength, the beautiful, elegant bones underneath his skin.

“What if a relationship – a physical relationship – turns out to be too much for you? Too close?”

Sherlock's fingers draw a line up from John's palm to his wrist, just above the pulse in his arteries. John almost shivers at this. They have left the worst part of the traffic jam behind them. The cab is almost back to something like normal speed.

“It could never be too much. Not when it’s with you. Never too much. Never close enough.”

John swallows. This is very close to be too good to be true. There is one last question.

“Sherlock. Why... me?“

He takes Sherlock's hand in his again. He needs to feel... _this_.

“Because you are... _endlessly_ fascinating, John Watson.“

Sherlock gently and slowly pulls at John's hand, pulls _John_ closer to him. He turns towards him, cups the back of John's head and draws him into a kiss.
Sherlock's lips are – Oh God Yes – they are as soft and delicious as they look. He tastes like tea and sugar, like a rich, complex blend of a thousand things and unmistakably Sherlock. It is bloody amazing to feel his skin, the slightest hint of a stubble. He smells Sherlock's hair, his skin, his aftershave and something underlyng to all of this. Him. Sherlock kisses slowly and luxuriously. He doesn't hurry or push too far too soon, even though John is quite sure nothing could ever get too far too soon when it comes to kissing Sherlock. His tongue feels so f*cking sexy, John couldn't describe it any differently. He is amazed and inexplicably aroused by the little sounds they make while they kiss. Small moans and sighs, their hushed breathing, the soft, wet smacking of lips and tongues. John is completely lost in all these sensations.

The cab stops. They don’t notice.

“Baker Street, boys,” the cabbie says.

John breaks their kiss. Sherlock looks completely bewildered. John smiles at him, nods at the door of 221b and pays the cabbie. When Sherlock realizes where they are, he takes John’s hand, opens the cab door without a word and pulls John along. He doesn’t let go of John’s hand while he unlocks the front door.

They ascend the stairs and, once in their flat, both slip off their coats. The flat is silent, all they can hear are their sped-up breaths. John slowly touches the strained buttons on Sherlock’s shirt. His finger slips from the top button to the next and the next and the next. Just touching them.

Christ, he’s wearing that purple shirt. Of course he is.

“Open them, John. Undress me.”

John does. He slips open the buttons, revealing Sherlock’s chest. He feels his heart beat in his throat, in every blood vessel in his body. He has never seen Sherlock from so close. He never has felt allowed to look at him like this before. He looks at the freckles on his skin and his soft dark hair. He takes Sherlock’s right hand and starts undoing the buttons on his cuff. He goes on with the left one, with great care. He lets the shirt slip down Sherlock’s shoulders. He feels the tension and anticipation in Sherlock’s body. He sees his quick heartbeat in the artery on his neck. He kisses his neck and lets his hands travel across Sherlock’s chest. When he brushes his nipples, Sherlock exhales loudly. He wants to draw Sherlock close, to feel him, but decides to take off his jumper first.

When their naked chests meet, he feels the warmth radiating from Sherlock’s skin. He buries his left hand in Sherlock’s hair, tousling and touching his curls, and starts kissing him again. Sherlock kisses back, without haste, passionately. John sighs into their kiss.


He gently pushes him from the living room to the kitchen, tenderly shoving Sherlock forwards until he touches the table with the back of his legs. John almost forgets to breathe when he tries to recall how often he has dreamt about this. About Sherlock surrendering to him like this. Allowing John to feel him. He groans. Sherlock is half sitting on the table, half leaning against it. He opens his legs a little and lets John come closer. John brushes against his groin and Sherlock pants into the kiss.

“Oh fuck, John...“

John has never heard him swear. Sherlock sounds completely lost, there is an edge of despair in his voice. It arouses him madly. Sherlock pulls him closer. As his own rock-hard cock is colliding...
with Sherlock's, he feels like he is about to pass out. Even though there are layers and layers of
cloth between them. He can't get enough of him. He is going to be torn apart by how much he
wants him. And a tiny part of his brain is still trying to process all this, tracked in an endless loop
of This can't be true. I'm finally doing this. This is it...

Sherlock's hands slide down from his head to his shoulders and back. His fingernails scrape down
his skin. He feels Sherlock pulling him closer and rolling his hips against his own. John groans.

This is just half-naked kissing and grinding... and it's the most arousing thing I've ever done. God,
I'm over 40, I've lived a life. This isn't supposed to drive me so mad.

When Sherlock's fingers are attempting to slip into his waistband, John's thoughts come to a halt.

“Bed,” he pants into their kiss.

They can't let go of each other on the way to Sherlock's – their – bedroom. Somehow they even
manage to get rid of most of their remaining clothes. They leave a trail of socks and trousers from
the kitchen to the end of the hallway. Sherlock is stepping out of his trousers as they arrive at the
bedroom door. John adores the sight of him. His long, slender and yet muscular torso, his beautiful,
pale skin, his nipples, his navel, his slim hips. Oh buggering hell, the absolutely and madly
promising bulge in his charcoal pants.

“Do it,” Sherlock breathes.

“Ok,” John replies, taking a step closer to him and kissing him again. Sherlock leans against the
frame of the door, his eyes closed and his fingernails scraping across the wall as John touches his
pants to pull them down. He tries to be patient when he takes down the last piece of cloth on
Sherlock's body and not to behave like a randy teenager. Which he feels like.

“God, hurry up a bit, John, you're torturing me...“

John kisses him so fiercely he pushes him against the door frame and takes the pants down with
both hands in one quick move. After a split second of hesitation, he takes Sherlock's cock in his
hand. It's hot, hard and fucking wet at the top. Sherlock moans, breaks the kiss and closes his eyes.

“Fuck. Touch me, John. Touch me."

John strokes him the way he has been craving to do for so long. He feels the silky, delicate skin
under his fingertips. Sherlock moans again, even louder.


John pulls him to their bed, getting off his own pants and pushing him on the mattress, wanting
him so madly. Sherlock pulls John with him as he lays down. They touch at the full length of
John's body and John tries to explore Sherlock with every part of his skin. His mouth against
Sherlock's, his hands on his shoulders and arms, his chest against Sherlock’s and his hips rolling
and thrusting against his. He feels their cocks together, hard, wet and so... good.

He feels how much Sherlock wants him. He wraps his hand around Sherlock’s cock and his own
again. He had no idea what this would feel like, none of his fantasies ever came to close to this. He
brushes his thumb over the heads of their cocks, spreading their precome. He is desperately curious
for all the sensations promised in this closeness. John blatantly enjoys finally touching Sherlock,
feeling the texture of his skin, the shape and length and girth of his cock, the dark hair, his balls.
And the way Sherlock moves underneath him, how he moans and pants, how his breath goes faster
and faster. There is something so vulnerable to all of this.
You’re so fucking adorable. You’re perfect. The sexiest thing I’ve ever seen.

“Do you know you do that out loud?”, Sherlock pants breathlessly.

John feels a bit caught and yet this fuels his desire for Sherlock endlessly. He starts stroking them in earnest, firmly, speeding up. And then he sees Sherlock losing it all, finally, throwing back his head, groaning loud and deep and biting his lips. He is sweating, his skin is slightly glistening and he is panting heavily. He moves his body beautifully, even when he is about to come, his movements are elegant and somewhat cat-like. John feels him thrusting, fucking into his hand. Hard. And harder.

“Oh God... Oh fuck, John...“

Sherlock’s hands around John’s head and shoulders grab him tightly, pulling at his hair and digging into his skin. He comes with a moan and John can’t possibly tell by how much this excels his fantasies. John cries out Sherlock’s name as he spends himself within a blink of an eye later.

*He is EVERYTHING I ever wanted. I would do anything for him. Anything.*

Sherlock draws him into another long, passionate and hungry kiss as if he understands.

As they break it, John sighs, “Sherlock, you have no idea for how long and how much I’ve wanted this... You.“

“I have *every* idea, John,“ Sherlock pants, still a bit breathless.

They lie in each other’s arms until they’ve caught their breaths again. John can’t let go of him, and neither can Sherlock. They kiss, short, open kisses, gasping for air. Finally John brushes one curl, damp with sweat, from Sherlock’s face. Sherlock looks at him, smiling.

“So.“

“Yeah.“

“You've been fantasizing about me.“

“Yeah. For bloody years.“

“Tell me about that. What was it like?“

“I've just realized it never got anywhere close to the real thing.“

“Oh? Is that a compliment?“

“It fucking is.“

John smiles and lets his fingers dance across Sherlock's chest. He touches his nipples and Sherlock inhales delightfully.

“You like that?“

“Yes. I like being touched like this by you... It never felt quite this amazing in my fantasies either.“

“Oh? Is that a compliment?“ John grins.

“Oh yes it is, because I've got a *mind palace* with a whole room dedicated to my sexual fantasies...
about you."

Sherlock turns on his side and kisses John.

"Is it a large room, then?" John says into their kiss.

"Amazingly large...""

They go on kissing. Sherlock's hand wanders down John torso until he touches the wet remainders of their orgasms.

"But I guess we need to clean this up before I tell you more about it. – No, John, you stay right here. I am supposed to make sure you spend most of the next 48 hours in bed. That eager young doctor almost made me promise."

He kisses him once again and then sits up, elegantly swings his long legs out of bed and walks to the bathroom. He returns with a wet towel and carefully cleans up John's stomach and his own.

"Is there anything you need, John?"

"Something to drink would be nice. And Christ, I'm hungry. The last thing I've had was lunch at the clinic yesterday."

"I'll order something."

Half an hour later, Sherlock brings their favourite Chinese meals to the bedroom.

"Lunch in bed, then?"

"Yes."

Sherlock, still wearing his dressing gown, sits down next to John. They're both leaning against the headboard, stealing forks full of food from each other's boxes and feeling utterly joyous. When they are finished eating, talking and kissing, John falls asleep. He dimly notices Sherlock getting his laptop and sitting down next to where he lays.

He wakes two hours later. It's the middle of November, it is getting dark outside already. Sherlock has switched on the lamp on his nightstand. His hand rests on John's shoulder.

"How are you, John?" he asks without looking up from the screen.

"Bit of a headache."

"That was to be expected."

"Yeah. But I feel like getting up a bit."

"You sure?"

"Yes. I'll just go to the living room. Sit in my chair for a change."

"You can't watch any telly, remember?"

"Yes. But the doctor said nothing about listening to you playing the violin."

He looks at Sherlock.
“Would you do that? Please?“

He can see Sherlock swallowing before he replies, “Of course."

Sherlock plays calm, beautiful pieces for what seems to be hours. John is cuddled into his chair, his head resting against its back and his feet on Sherlock's chair. He feels so relaxed and easy, he is almost dozing off one or two times.

*If someone had told me ten months ago that I would be so happy today or that things would ever be so good again, I wouldn't have believed it.*

He has to think of his daughter. She has always been his daughter for him, even if he wasn't her biological father. *I cared for her. I loved her.* And he still does. The pain isn't gone, not at all. But it is less stinging and less paralyzing. Sometimes there even is a weird kind of comfort in the thought that her short life mattered so much that she is being missed. And that during this short life, she was loved.

Sherlock stops playing.

“That was beautiful, Sherlock. Come here."

Sherlock sits down on the armrest of John's chair. John takes his face in his hands and kisses him for a long time.

They eat the leftovers from lunch. John watches Sherlock. Seeing Sherlock eat – really eat, not nibbling on two biscuits while he is occupied with something entirely different – is a real joy.

“Does sex make you hungry?"

“I think so. Need more data, though. Do you think we could go for a second round? Or do we risk injuring that amazing brain of yours permanently?“

“I think we can... I think we definitely should. – Wait, did you just call my brain amazing?“

“Yes. It's yours, John. That makes it absolutely outstanding."

Sherlock takes John's hand and takes him to the bedroom. He strips down John's t-shirt and the pyjama bottoms and undresses himself. Suddenly they both feel as if there isn’t any time to lose.

“Oh God, Sherlock. It's been too long since this morning. I want you so badly."

“Have me, John. Go have me."

John pulls him down on their bed, lost in kisses and groans and sighs. He touches Sherlock’s back, he feels the scars and caresses them gently. He moves a bit further and grasps Sherlock’s backside, absolutely thrilled that he can do that now. Sherlock groans and kisses him more deeply.

“Sherlock, you have an amazing and absolutely breathtaking ass.”

Sherlock blushes at this, he actually *blushes.*

“Don’t stop that, don’t stop,” he pants into his mouth as he leans down to kiss John again.

John doesn’t, he kneads his buttocks, feeling the muscles under his fingers. After a while, he lets his index finger rest on Sherlock’s tailbone, a bit unsure if it is ok to move on from here. Sherlock
inhales and thrusts his hips against John’s – Oh Christ – and John takes that as a yes. He slides his finger down his cleft. Sherlock’s breathing accelerates and when John brushes over his anus, he moans. Sherlock spreads his legs a little wider and thrusts against John’s cock. It’s almost too much for John to concentrate on doing anything with his fingers when Sherlock’s cock puts the most delightful friction against his. He does his best to take up Sherlock’s rhythm and goes on touching him there. Sherlock closes his eyes and sneaks a hand down between them, grasping both their cocks firmly and moving. Now John is panting hard, he knows he won’t last much longer. They feel their climaxes rise and they don’t even need to move any faster, because it all just bloody intensifies, it feels so good, oh God, Sherlock, Sherlock, oh fuck…

John, John, John, ooohh…

Then Sherlock is lying on John’s chest. His head is buried in John’s neck, and he feels his hot, moist breath against his skin. Sherlock starts placing small kisses on John skin, his ear, his hair.

Finally he whispers, “I am happy, John.” And they fall asleep.

---

The next few days resemble this one a lot. They stay in the flat almost all the time. John does indeed sleep a lot and while he does, Sherlock works on his laptop, helping Lestrade wrapping up the smugglers’ case. When Mrs Hudson asks Sherlock if they need anything from Tesco’s, he decides that the current situation is some sort of emergency. He gratefully accepts her offer, handing her a Fifty-Pound-note.

When John is awake, Sherlock sometimes plays the violin. They never really leave each other’s orbit. They are close, physically close, as if they needed to make up for all the years they didn’t have this. They explore each other and they are both hungry for touches and kisses. They discover that the tub is a bit small for two grown men having sex in there, but absolutely not too small. Sherlock finds out that he is quite taken apart by the feeling of John’s stubble against his nipples. Whereas John discovers that Sherlock’s lips around his cock reduce him to begging gibberish.

---

The next Friday, after John has taken up his shifts at the clinic again, he meets Greg at the pub.

“Hey John! How is your head? Looks like you are going to have a bit of a scar there.“

“Yeah, think so too. Maybe it makes me look dangerous.” He laughs. „I’m doing quite well, the concussion is all over and stuff.“

He can feel that Greg is trying to say something.

“So. How are you doing, you… and Sherlock?”

“Er, well, we’ve… made it.”

“Made what?”

“We’re together now. We’ve settled things between us and… it feels bloody good.”

“So you’re… boyfriends? Now?”

“I haven’t exactly thought about what to call it, but… yeah. Yes, definitely.”
Greg grins proudly. He gives him a pat on the back, laughing, “Mate, it’s been about time. I’m so happy to hear that.”

They both take a sip from their beer and go on watching the game.

After a while, Greg asks, “May I ask you something?”

“About me and Sherlock, I take it? Yeah, sure.”

“What is it like? With a man? I mean, so far, you’ve only had girlfriends, didn’t you?”

John can’t help but be a bit amused.

“Yeah, pretty much. It’s… well… it is definitely a bit unusual. The physical thing is quite different.”

Greg’s eyes widen slightly.

“I mean, he’s bloody tall and he is quite strong and… well, heavy. It feels different. Rougher. But – oh God, I will sound like a lovestruck teenager now – it’s so good. Greg, I’ve been in love with him for ages. And so I’ve had quite some time to get used to the idea that I love a man and that I want him… sexually. And now we’re there, he loves me as well and the sex is fucking amazing. And I really don’t care whether this makes me gay or bisexual or whatever.”

John smiles and takes a sip from his beer. Greg is still grinning.

“But, most of all, he’s Sherlock. And it seems that everything he has been doing for years was trying to make sure I’m safe. Or happy. Not to mention that I have no idea how I’d have survived this year if it weren’t for him. Nobody has ever done that for me. And this is what really thrills me and leaves me lost for words.”

John swallows and Greg intently stares at his pint. Then Greg gets up and hugs John tightly, patting him on his back. His eyes do seem to glisten a bit. Sitting down again, Greg coughs and says, “Stop that now or I’ll start crying, John.”

“You’re right. So. Who’s made the last goal in the match up there?”

Chapter End Notes

Special thanks to asolitarybee and ennisapril for helping me with the dialogue in the cab. <3
At the beginning of December, John and Harry meet in a small café in Bloomington. They hadn't heard much from each other in weeks. Sherlock has something to do at the British Museum and the café isn't far from there. He kisses John swiftly on the cheek to say goodbye. Sometimes he does that, not always, but John likes it. A lot, actually.

John enters the café. He finds that Harry is already there, waiting for him on a small table near the large windows.

"John!"

Harry almost jumps at him, hugging him tightly.

Oh God. She's seen him kiss me.

John smiles.

"John! What was that? Was that Sherlock kissing you? And you never said a fucking word about that?"

She laughs and John can't help but laugh, too.

"Yeah, right. We're together now. Well."

"Oh thank goodness! Took you long enough. So. You're looking great, actually. How have you been?"

"I am really fine. Things are really… quite amazing."

"Don't start drooling on the table. I'll go and get us some coffee."

She touches his hand before she goes to the counter and orders coffee for both of them.

"John, you never told me how beautiful Sherlock is."

"Oh, I'm pretty sure I did. His looks were torturing me for ages."

"Hmmm… I think you said something about his cheekbones and his eyes... And now that I think about it, maybe you've also mentioned his mouth and his hands."

"Oh God."

"You've loved him for years."

"Yeah. Guess so."

"And what about him?"

"The same. It just took us a while."

"You're idiots, both of you. So you've got everything sorted out?"

"Yes. We talked a lot over the past months. And now everything's just… easy. And fine. Christ, what am I saying. It's fucking amazing."

Living
“Will I get to know him one day?”

“Yes. Promise.“

As John watches her talking and laughing, John realizes how rarely they actually see each other. 

_Maybe we should really change that. Her and Sherlock, they are closest to me._

“Well don’t you come and see us during the holidays? We could have dinner together one night.”

“I’d love to, actually.”

Harry is curious about their everyday life, asking a lot of questions. John tells her hesitantly, but after a while, he gets a little carried away with it.

“We’re even taking cases together again. Sometimes Sherlock is still acts like a stupid git. With all his sulking and his experiments in the kitchen—“

“Those eyeballs? In the microwave? Chemical stuff on the kitchen table? He still does that?”

“Yeah, sometimes. But, well, that’s the way I want to have him. This life with him is the best thing I’ve ever had.”

“Not to mention the sex. Obviously serves you well.”

“Harry, stop it.”

“You’re blushing! It does! God, I haven’t seen you this much in love since you were a teenager.”

“Harry, stop that _now_. How are _you_ doing, after all?”

They talk for a long while. Harry tells John about her new job and a woman she met at the library. She looks good as well and hasn’t been drinking in months.

“So. And apart from that…? How do you feel about your daughter?”

“It still hurts. A lot, sometimes. But it’s something I can bear now. I miss her. Think about how old she’d be by now. What she’d look like and stuff. Well. I sometimes feel like I’m still a father. Even though there’s no child.”

He sighs.

“Well, you are. You don’t stop being a parent when your child has died. You’re a bereaved father.”

Harry takes his hand. After a while, she asks, “And Mary?”

“Well. Mary.”

John inhales sharply, a ball of anger forming in his chest.

“It’s possible that she did even more things in her past that were… difficult. More lies. Hard to explain.”

He takes a sip from his coffee and stares out of the window.

“You know, when I left her, I was just tired. I was so disappointed and hurt. Now it’s different. I am furious sometimes, but I don’t know with whom. With her. With myself for falling into her
trap. But it’s over and I take it she has been dealt with. So – I try to let go.”

Harry looks at him for a long time.

“John. Take your time. This doesn’t heal overnight.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right. I am just so angry.”

“Yes. So am I. I understand you. But look at you, how much you’ve been through this year. And after all, things are quite good now, aren’t they?”

“Yeah. Better than ever.”

He smiles again.

---

And so people find out or are being told about John and Sherlock. When John accidentally calls Sherlock “love” on a crime scene, Lestrade’s team takes the news with a certain ease. Either Lestrade has told them before and ordered them not to make any stupid comments or they have been suspecting it for a long time. John blushes once more at his lapse, Sherlock blinks and Lestrade smiles.

Mrs Hudson is never really told. She also never really finds out, because she has had her own ideas about the two of them all along. There is just this one time when Sherlock and John come home late in the evening. They are still discussing the case they have just finished as they open the front door of 221. John is carrying a bag with Indian take-away and Sherlock has wrapped his arm around his waist. In the narrow ground floor hallway, Sherlock has to let go of him, but places a kiss on his cheek as they talk. In that moment, Mrs Hudson comes out of her door, the rubbish bags in her hand. She smiles proudly.

“There you go, boys. Have a lovely evening. Just don’t be so loud, will you?”

---

As they settle down in their relationship, it becomes fairly obvious that John is quite fond of blowjobs. He can’t get enough of Sherlock’s tongue swirling around the head of his cock, of his lips on his shaft or the absolutely indecent little noises he makes when he tastes his precome. Not to mention his eagerness to slowly take John apart, to make him forget anything - his work, his everyday worries, even his fucking first name - when Sherlock is sucking him off.

It also becomes fairly obvious that Sherlock is quite fond of rimming. One day, when they just come home from one spectacularly triumphant case, Sherlock actually ends up clinging to the kitchen table while John does unspeakable things. Sherlock is close to hyperventilation. And he needs far more than one go until he is capable of uttering more than vowels or ragged breaths.

“John...”,“ he tries.

“John...“

“Mmmh?“ John doesn't want to stop what he is doing, but this leaves him incapable of saying something.

“John - oh God, fuck, John...“
John loves it when Sherlock finally starts swearing.

“John, I... I want you to... Oh holy shit-“

Sherlock breathes heavily and is almost whimpering.

“Hmmmh?“

Sherlock scratches his fingernails across the table and turns his head towards John. He can see that Sherlock is biting his lips and his cheeks are pink. His neck is glistening with moisture.

“I want you to...“ he tries again, obviously concentrating hard, “...want you to – oh Christ! – fuck me... now.“

Sherlock closes his eyes and throws back his head, groaning loudly. He turns to John again and the look he casts at him almost leaves him breathless.

“Will you fuck me...“ he groans, “...John?“

John leans back, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. His voice is deep and rough when he pulls Sherlock towards him and breathes out, “Yes."

He takes Sherlock to their bed. When Sherlock lets himself fall onto the mattress, John starts undressing. He doesn't take his eyes off Sherlock, who is still panting. His eyes are half-closed and his pale skin is flushed and damp. When Sherlock starts stroking his own cock, John breathes “Oh fuck,“ and speeds up. He climbs into bed and over Sherlock, filthily kissing that obscenely plush mouth of his. Sherlock moans and takes John's cock into his other hand, caressing it in a rough and wanting manner.

“Now, John. Do it. “

John brings himself into position and lets Sherlock, still holding his cock, guide the way inside him. John holds his breath as he enters Sherlock slowly, so slowly.

“Oh fuck, John, oh fuck, oh fuck...“ Sherlock pants at the sensation of John gliding into him.

When John is inside him completely, he exhales.

This feels... amazing. Hot. Tight, oh Christ. Bloody inexplicable.

“Can I... move?“ he asks.

“Oh, please, John, please...“ Sherlock whimpers.

John starts moving his hips as lightly and slowly as he can manage. From here on, he is lost for words.

While he hears Sherlock's ragged swearing (“John, love, fuck me... Oh... God...“), he dives into their rhythm, into feeling Sherlock. How Sherlock thrusts against him, surrendering to his movements. When Sherlock suddenly clenches the sheets and groans vocally, he knows he has hit the right spot. Sherlock's hands let go of the sheets. They travel restlessly over his own shivering body, shoving his long fingers into his dark curls, caressing his neck, brushing against his nipples, sucking his fingertips.

John watches him. Sex with Sherlock is something he can never get used to. Pleasure starts pooling inside him, getting stronger – “God, Sherlock...“ – and more and more – “Sherlock... Sherlock...
You're so beautiful... *Sherlock*...“ until he thinks it can't possibly get any better than *this*. But it does as he sees Sherlock coming, spurting two, three times across his belly with a small, hoarse scream that could be John's name.

“Sherlock...“ he pants, completely out of breath, as his orgasm consumes him, takes him like a flood wave taking down a breaking dam.
Chapter Summary

So, that's it!

Part of the last scene is based on this tumblr post by perfectly-addicted. I love it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

John is sitting in his chair in the living room when Sherlock comes back from Molly’s lab in an utterly good mood. It’s a few days after Christmas.

“Oh. Didn’t expect you back so quickly, Sherlock.”

“Mycroft gave me a lift.”

“Oh dear. What did he want?”

Sherlock grins.

“He invited us for his party on New Year’s Eve.”

“Your brother? A party? I would have thought that he'd hate that.”

“Oh, he does,” Sherlock retorts with delight. “But maybe he feels the need to impress his fellow Etonians or people from the Government. Who knows.” He shrugs his shoulders.

“So. Are you planning to go?”

“Absolutely. We will get immensely drunk on his expensive champagne and eat as much posh food as we can.”

“We?”

---

The party is quite nice. John recognizes a few people from the Diogenes Club and government officials he usually only reads about in the newspaper. Sherlock and he do a bit of small talk (Anthea is a hopeless case when it comes to this, as a short conversation proves once again). They are actually enjoying themselves. Sherlock made John wear the new suit he gave him for Christmas. Must be a bespoke suit like his own, John thought when he tried it on first. And even though he was still wondering how Sherlock got his measurements, he had to admit he never owned such a well-fitted suit.

The champagne, after all, is delicious. During the evening, they do have quite a few glasses and get giddily tipsy. When they say hello to Mycroft, he just raises his eyebrows, tilts his head and tries to say something. But Sherlock interrupts him.

“Oh, don’t spoil it, Mycroft. We are having a wonderful evening. Come on, John.”
By half past ten they have progressed to pleasantly, but impressively drunk. They are standing next to one of the large windows and having a look at the people floating past them. Sherlock deduces the crap out of people’s wrinkles on their jackets, the way the women carry their clutches or their hair style. John is giggling when a man standing next to them nods at Sherlock and says, “I think we’ve met before, Mr…”

“That’s Sherlock Holmes. The world’s only detecting consultive,” John points out.

“Er. Consulting… Detective. Yeah.”

“Ah, pleased to meet you, Mr Holmes! George Billingham. I went to college with Mycroft. And you are…?”

Sherlock beams.

“Dr John Watson. Captain John Watson of the Fifth… Fifth Nosummer….” Sherlock blinks, takes a deep breath and finally manages with pride and emphasis, “Fifth Northumberland Futhilierth. Captain.”

“Just as I thought, just as I thought…! I read the blog!” the man says with a paternal smile. The woman accompanying him, much younger and quite beautiful, looks at John and remarks just slightly too interested, “Oh. Captain.”

Sherlock’s eyes narrow at this.

“Yes. My. Captain.”

He straightens, inhales sharply and declares, “If you will excuse us.”

Then he turns to John, wraps his arms around him and kisses him in an almost dramatic, Rhett Butler-ish manner. The couple generously moves on and finds someone else to talk to. After a few minutes, John is released from Sherlock’s embrace and he catches his breath again.

“Oh. That was… passionate.”


“But it’s not even midnight.”


They audaciously make Mycroft’s driver take them home. When the car veers away from the brightly lit house, John sighs.

“It’s a bit of a shame we’re leaving so early, Sherlock. You were right about the champagne. It was marvellous.”

“Who said we’d have to go without champers,” Sherlock says as he produces a bottle out of his coat.

John laughs.

“Christ, Sherlock, you’re unbelievable.”

Sherlock opens the bottle right there on the back seat. The cork is popping loudly, shooting against the roof (the driver turns his head at this) and champagne is spilling all over the seat and on the
floor. Sherlock drinks hastily from the bottle in order to not to letting any more of it go to waste. He hands the bottle on to John, who takes a gulp as well. When John puts the heavy bottle down, he looks at Sherlock, whose eyes are glistening with mischief. He looks utterly happy.

“I love you, you know.”

“Love you, too, John.”

Sherlock draws John into another, no less passionate kiss and the rest of the drive is left to breathless snogging with occasional shared sips of champagne.

They spend the night kissing, undressing in the hallway, giggling, having a lot of champagne and a lot of sex. Neither of them notices as the clock in Big Ben strikes midnight or as the fireworks explode all over the London sky.

---

The next morning, John gets up to go to the toilet. On his way back, he makes two cups of tea and takes yesterday’s newspaper to the bedroom. He doesn’t have a hangover \( \text{that was really good champagne} \) and he is pleasantly awake. He leans against the headboard and starts reading the newspaper. Sherlock crawls close to him, wrapping his long legs around him and cuddling his head against his chest. After a while, he kisses John’s skin.

“Morning, Sherlock.”

“Morning, captain.”

“Happy new year, Sherlock.”

“Happy new year.”

John can’t help but smile.

\( I've \text{ been through so much. There was so much pain. More than I'd thought I'd ever have to bear. And more than I'd have thought I'd be able to handle. And Sherlock, too. I guess he suffered even more, though it's probably pointless to try to find out who has suffered the most. But it fades. The pain doesn't vanish from one day to the next. But it becomes less fiery, less stinging, less dark and less over-whelming. It has found its place in my life, but it does leave enough room for laughter. Or love. Or Sherlock. } \)

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!

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