Triage

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Summary

Sherlock’s mind goes exceedingly, devastatingly quiet and gray-blank. When he speaks it’s through a thick haze, it’s through molasses, he’s so disconnected from the words that it may as well be the unconscious shooter speaking.

“It was only a twenty-two,” he says, voice unfeeling and unwavering, as though that makes any sense at all.

Notes

- My thanks to Felicia, for once again wielding the machete. Robyn, for her constant support. And Dennis, who never fails to spitball titles with me. You're all rather brilliant.

- The medical bits were edited by my dear friend Eric, an American air force medic who served in Iraq. Any errors are mine alone.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

It’s not a crack in the night or a wild, blistering sound. There’s a pop and a small flash followed directly by a tiny puff of smoke.

The spent cartridge falls to the dirty, wet pavement and bounces only once before Sherlock leaps on the gunman, arms spread wide, thundering down on the man. The hollow brass rotates forty-five degrees in the air and pings against the ground again and when the force propels it upwards for a third time -- the firing cap catching a glint of the streetlamp castoff -- John falls to his knees without the faintest idea why.

For a moment everything is perfectly silent, the suspect rendered instantly unconscious due to vicious hands slamming his head into the filthy tarmac with much more force than necessary. Those same vicious hands press against the man’s shoulders for leverage as Sherlock struggles to get up, his coat and adrenaline hampering the process. He vaults and stumbles on gangly limbs that refuse to cooperate as he crosses the few meters that separate himself from John.

His feet skitter across the rubble of the uneven alleyway as he comes to a stop. Sherlock does not speak as John remains kneeling, clutching just below his left pectoral, his gaze precisely focused on the wet denim that separates his skin from the ground; in the moment Sherlock thinks he looks a thousand years old and too fragile to exist. “These are my good jeans, dammit,” he rasps, a ghost of a thing, a shaky whisper and when he brings his eyes up to Sherlock’s they’re wide with shock.

John doesn’t understand.

The detective does not delve into his pocket for his mobile, he does not reach out and touch John, he just stands there absolutely rooted to the spot, only barely registering the clamor of footfalls as the officers they had outpaced earlier in their chase catch up with them. No doubt they heard the gunshot, no doubt they’ve phoned the ambulance.

‘No doubt,’ Sherlock thinks, all the while not shifting, not daring to breathe, just watching in a sort of removed horror as the small dot of red spreads, seeping rapidly into the synthetic and canvas fibers of John’s moss green jacket. He watches as the first rivulets make their way through his fingers and coat the back of his hand, cloying, clinging until they drip onto the pavement. The blood drips slowly, as though in a nightmare.

Sherlock’s mind goes exceedingly, devastatingly quiet and gray-blank. When he speaks it’s through a thick haze, it’s through molasses, he’s so disconnected from the words that it may as well be the unconscious shooter speaking. “It was only a twenty-two,” he says, voice unfeeling and unwavering, as though that makes any sense at all.

But John, oh he understands.

“Bugger, was it?” John asks as his strength gives and he falls, face-first, against the rough ground. It’s bizarre, how even that violence of John’s body spurs no immediate action from him, doesn’t seem out of place. The detective registers the tinny clinking of the hardware of John’s jacket against the hard surface and the utter insanity of it, of that noise, that small bit of John skittering and causing a noise so unlikely to be heard, forces him to action.

Body lurching forward, Sherlock nearly throws himself at John, reaching a hand out before stealing it abruptly back. Sherlock glances from side to side maniacally, wondering what to do, what on earth is the proper thing to do before sinking. He’s on his knees, debris tearing cleanly through bespoke
trousers as his fingers grip John’s bicep and flip him over. He’s rag doll, a sack of potatoes, dead ‘No, no, not that’ weight.

There are scrapes down his nose and forehead and chin, flecks of dirt and grit cling to his eyelashes as they fan open and closed, slowly. Small abrasions that wouldn’t have occurred had Sherlock been able to function properly moments before he had. As it turns out - he realizes somewhere in the nethermost recess of his consciousness - that perhaps he cannot handle John being injured in a rational manner.

Perhaps he’s not supposed to. And perhaps he does not care.

Sherlock suddenly has the urge to say many, many things. “You’re the doctor,” and “You’ve done this before, tell me how to make it stop!,” and “The human heart pumps two-thousand gallons of blood through it’s chambers every day.” But as John’s lips guppy and his hands shake with the effort to keep the blood in, Sherlock remains silent. With a delicacy he generally manifests only for the most complicated of experiments he pries John’s hands away from his chest and replaces them with his own. The blood smears orange and red against his pale skin, pooling in the pores like little pinpricks.

Sherlock presses down, down and John’s eyelids flicker as his irises strain to focus. There are no pleas of “Stay with me,” or, “Please, no.” Instead Sherlock pushes down harder, nearly grinding John into the ground and says over and over again, “It was only a twenty-two.”

John’s hands twine with what effort he has left around Sherlock’s wrist, holding him there.

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Sherlock doesn’t have to bully his way into the ambulance; he doesn’t even make his way near it as he’s rooted to the spot. The greatcoat is covered in gravel and blood, he acknowledges this distantly as he remembers his bleeding knee and the scrapes on his hands.

There’s a grasp around his bicep and Greg shoving him in the direction of the stretcher and yelling “He’s coming with,” are all that is said before Sherlock is hauling himself in behind John. He doesn’t have a choice in the matter at this point; if he wanted to he couldn’t make this decision for himself.

His mind is white-hot nothingness, framed by static and eye-of-the-storm calm. He can’t process beyond reminding himself that the stickiness rapidly drying and cracking on his hands is John Watson’s blood.

The doors are barely slammed closed before they’re tearing away.

Everything moves lightning fast, hands moving back and forth, passing this and that, everything looking sickly and grotesque in the too-close fluorescence of the interior. And in that moment there’s a fierce possessiveness, and overwhelming desire to gather John up into his arms, press him into his body, inside, absorb all of his pain.

But he cannot, so Sherlock sits and looks on and doesn’t realize that he can’t feel a thing.

The two women are speaking to each other in terms that Sherlock is absolutely certain he understands -- of course he does, rudimentary medical terminology -- but they do not filter into his mind to allow him any concept of what’s happening to John; there’s a disconnect somewhere in his head. “Breathing on his own, not... no, just barely, we’ll tube.”

John’s eyes move sluggishly behind closed lids, left hand attempting to curl and uncurl slowly and lethargically into a fist and Sherlock wonders if he’s able to hear, if Sherlock should say something
reassuring. But there is nothing, just the cacophony of rubber over pavement and Sherlock’s heart thudding blood through his ears, far too loud.

‘That’s not how blood sounds, he thinks fuzzily. ‘Blood doesn’t sound of anything’. The rush, the adrenaline, he knows but he doesn’t comprehend, can’t maneuver the brain cells and mindspace to. It occurs to him bleakly, the flicker of a truth that swells to a flame that this is perhaps what kills John Watson. That this may be the thing that takes him away. But no, that too is absurd. John has felled far worse, has overcome much greater. To give to a shot by thug from a twenty two is entirely unthinkable and-

A flash of light, a glint of off shears and it roots Sherlock’s attention to the two women moving at John’s chest.

They slice through his jumper easily ‘New, new, that’s new, he’s going to be so cross!’ with shears that are comically large and shiny-sharp. There is no waiting until they get him to the examination room; Sherlock is thrown by this, the haste with which they cut him up and bare him. The more rational part of his mind wishes to remind him that this is what medics are trained to do in a crisis but the thought dissipates before it’s properly formed. “Those are his good jeans,” Sherlock wants to say, but does not, keeps his back ramrod straight against the side of the ambulance and watches as the paramedics busy themselves keeping John alive.

There is preparation managed so quickly that Sherlock doesn’t know where to look; it’s no matter because he can’t keep up, he can’t fathom what’s happening. It’s a million different cliches, being underwater and in the clouds and everywhere else in the world but not present, not here. His ears ring and his vision pulls and he’s terrified in that he is completely paralyzed.

He forces himself to attempt focus, pushes off the fog of shock that keeps sneaking in and wrapping around his thoughts.

There is a small hypodermic syringe and Sherlock’s skin shivers at the sight of it, wondering what solution will be administered, the crystalline solution sucked in and filling up the syringe. “Go for twenty medazolam, sux,” says the medic busying herself with John’s wound. And even as she moves efficiently and with a sort of determined grace, Sherlock wants to scream at her to be careful, careful, goddamned careful.

John goes frightfully still.

‘Endotracheal tube,’ Sherlock’s mind fights to supply seconds after it normally would, as the blonde one opens a packet, unfurls and slides a tube down John’s throat.

“You his partner?” the other asks, asks again, shouts it a third time before he can work his tongue to comply with an answer.

There’s distance and gravel and depthless loss in his voice, “Yes.” Sherlock feels as though he’s being strangled and reaches up, undoes his scarf and winds it tautly around his right hand until the blood flow is restricted; it feels like punishment. “Yes, yes.”

She nods briskly then turns and begins rattling off statistics to her partner who nods in return. “Definitely knicked the lung, we’ve got some damage to the ribs, looks like- does he have any allergies that you’re aware of?”

Sherlock’s brow knits in confusion, why they’re asking him in the first place never registers. “I... well, I’m not... I’ve no idea.” And that in itself is a revelation. For all he knows about John Watson, Sherlock Holmes realizes the sheer tonnage of what he doesn’t know about the man. The urge to
wake him up, shake him into consciousness and ask him everything he’s ever wanted to know, 
everything he’s not been able to deduce, is painfully strong.

He needs to know at what age Harry came out and how his parents took it; he needs to know about 
John’s university years, medical school, time in the army. He needs to know if John prefers 
spearmint or wintergreen toothpaste as he’s purchased both equally in the past; he needs to know 
what John thinks of the latest X Factor, if he’s ever kissed a man, what the house he grew up in was 
like and any and all nicknames he’s ever been given. It’s now a desperation, one that shivers in his 
marrow and gnaws down and in, makes its presence viciously, keenly known.

Sherlock Holmes suddenly desires all the time in the world to find the answers to every miniscule 
detail about John Watson. Did he think he would have forever? Did he honestly think something like 
that? How very tedious, how sentimental. But yes, he wants lifetimes over, right now, in this 
moment. It’s absurdly sentimental, he realizes this of all things, and doesn’t care one bit.

He wants to thrust his hands into John’s chest cavity and rouse him from the chemical sleep and tell 
him ‘It was only a goddamned twenty-two, you’ve taken a round from an AK-47 to the shoulder and 
lived to tell the tale, stop pretending and tell me what your favorite brand of crisps is and everything 
it is that you have an allergy to!’

The medic bites her lip and glares as she presses thick gauze over John’s chest. “You just said you 
were his partner.”

Sherlock swallows, realizing his error as though it’s the first time someone has thought of them as a 
couple. And they are, in a way. Not in a way that this woman would understand, not in a way that 
he can articulate, but he should know John’s allergies. He should know positively everything about 
him because he needs to know, has never before realized just how much he’s wanted to learn John 
Watson, desperately wishes to understand every last bit of the man.

His esophagus works to swallow the surge of guilt he feels, suddenly. “Yes, we, I’m... we work 
together.” It’s such an utter tragedy, that these are the words he speaks. They’re not friends, not 
partners in another sense, not companions but colleagues.

Colleagues is the furthest thing from what they are to one another and the realization of it makes 
Sherlock’s face flush.

“Oh, oh jesus ch-right, okay,” and she turns from him like he doesn’t matter anymore, as though in 
the scheme of what’s going on he doesn’t matter in the slightest. And he supposes he doesn’t, not 
really, not at the moment. John’s skin is pale and splotched with fresh and drying, browning blood; 
his hair is caked and matted with debris from the alley. On the center of his chest, a handprint, 
Sherlock’s right palm, painted in blood and dirt.

There is the plastic bag from the oxygen mask laid over the wound and then thick gauze and the 
whisper of tape being pulled and ripped and John’s wound is dressed. It’s moments before the white 
seeps through with splotches of red. ‘When does it clot?’ Sherlock wonders hazily, ‘When does the 
blood stop?’

The blonde paramedic is breathing for John, clasping and unclasping the bag that she has between 
hers hands methodically. John’s chest rises and falls, the gauze moving with it.

“It was... a twenty-two,” Sherlock supplies weakly and both of the women turn to look at him like 
he’s lost his mind.

Of course they already know that, naturally.
The man reviewing John’s chart is shockingly calm, his fingers sliding gently over John’s skin, checking his dilation, the dressing on the wound. The gurney isn’t moving nearly as fast as Sherlock recalls that they should in instances such as these. The blonde paramedic hands the breathing bag over to a nurse and disappears, just like that, just like she was never there.

He knows not to make assumptions but it’s been ages since he’s been to a proper Accident and Emergency; on the telly everything moves so much faster. He knows; John makes him watch those terrible doctor procedurals. There’s no chaos here, no chaos but the hole in John’s chest. Everything else is remarkably sad and still. Cushions dotted with homeless patients, parents with their young son whose wrist, though splinted, is torqued at an awkward angle.

He’s been to hospital before, many, many times. Presently, he finds that he doesn’t know how anything functions, how John can get from point A to point B; he doesn’t understand why people aren’t moving more expediently. He doesn’t understand.

Sherlock expects people pacing, he expects people worrying and overreacting but it is only himself, hand curled so tightly around the rail of the stretcher that he’s not sure he’ll be able to peel himself away. The force of his grip makes it feel as though his knuckles might pop straight through the skin. Perhaps his hand will adhere to the bed, meld with the metal and keep him at John’s side.

The thought is astounding, unsettling. Generally, it is the other way around. He’s aware of certain things, of needing John, of craving John’s presence, of wanting his presence for the foreseeable future (forever, forever). It is always John attached to Sherlock and never Sherlock to John. He’s sure that this means something, that how he perceived their relationship in the past means something but he can’t spare what limited perception he seems to have at the moment on figuring out what.

“Could be double perforation, get a left-sided chest tube placed, if we can get him stabilized it’s straight to x-ray,” the doctor -- younger than seems possible, really -- makes a variety of notations against a clipboard. The gurney jolts forward and Sherlock with it, realizing that he’s walking beside it after the fact, trailing along, an afterthought.

The doctor does not make eye contact as she scribbles something new at the bottom of the chart, writing entirely illegible. “The waiting room is quite comfortable and we’ll-”

Sherlock cuts her off, “I-” and then forgets entirely what he wants to say.

“Sir, this is as far as you go,” she says gently, glancing up with compassionate but stern eyes.

The idea of dropping Mycroft’s name floats through Sherlock’s mind but he dismisses it immediately, pulling his palm from the gurney as though suddenly burned and watching as the nurses jog John through the doors and into emergency. His gaze follows the doors as they swing closed, the doctor hanging back, assessing Sherlock’s state.

“You should get that looked at,” she says, motioning downward and he glances at his knee; it’s covered in blood, glass flakes evident in the skin. There’s a crust of dirt around the edges, likely to infect. He feels the sting, ignores it. It’s likely to scar, this he knows, but something runs up the back of his spine, thrills him in a terrible manner. He can’t be here any longer, he can’t possibly bear it. “If you’d like to check in at the front desk we can-”

Sherlock feels himself fracture in a thousand different directions; he wants to spin out of his skin, away, anywhere that he doesn’t have to bear this uselessness. There’s nothing he can do for John. There’s nothing in his shockingly vast breadth of knowledge that will recover that bullet from his
chest and heal him. He can’t *change* anything. He can’t fix it; there’s *nothing to solve*.

*John is dying and he is utterly, completely useless.*

“No,” he says, clipped and without another thought or word, spins on his heels. *It takes a moment for him to find the exit but when he does he bursts into the crisp night as though it’s been waiting for him. He does not check his mobile or make an effort to inform anyone of John’s condition.*

Sherlock thrusts his hands deeply into his pockets and sets off, walks the distance from University College hospital back to Baker Street.

*Later, much later when he has his violin perched beneath his chin but has not played a note, Sherlock marinates in the realization that the manner in which he reacted was so very unlike him as to have been someone else entirely.*
Chapter 2

Midnight.

There is no sleep.

As though there would even be the hope of respite, now.

There’s rarely slumber on a normal day and this is so distant from a normal day that it’s on another continent entirely. Sherlock’s lids are heavy and his body is fatigued but he doesn’t even make an attempt at sleep. He’s alive but dead on his feet and overcome with nervous energy, the bursts of it twitching through his nerves, sending him this way and that, never in one place for more than a moment.

Though restless, he is numb a study in contradictions. His throat is solidifying concrete and his chest feels as though something very dense and leaden is crushing it in. Still, he breathes, still, he moves, it’s just harder at the moment. Sherlock flits about the flat in trousers caked with dirt and blood. They crack unevenly, stark black lines bifurcating the brick-burgundy of dirt and blood. Crusted bits fall off onto the floor, here and there and Sherlock steps over them carefully.

I should be there. Should I be there? I should be at the hospital waiting. Why waiting? There’s nothing to be done. I should be there. I shouldn’t be here.

The flat is too quiet, the sounds of traffic on the street just barely breaking into the hum of the refrigerator warring against the leaking kitchen spigot. There’s no telly, no creaking floorboards from John moving about upstairs. About this time in the evening Sherlock would hear either the rustle of newspaper pages being turned, the tapping of a keyboard or the water running in the loo, John brushing his teeth, about to turn in for the night.

Somehow the man has infused himself into everything in the flat. It makes Sherlock unbearably lonely in that instant. He pads through the kitchen, bumping into chairs as he goes but he pays them no mind. He waits for the kettle and makes a cup of tea, leaves it to cool on the counter top and forgets it.

Three o’clock in the morning and Sherlock’s fingers no longer want to grasp his bow or press against strings. They can’t calibrate a microscope properly with the way they’re shaking. Even his teeth, as they bite at his tongue and lip, scissor across the rough skin, causing a susurrus in his ears will not remain still in his gums.

Sherlock takes his frustration out on a line of Erlenmeyer flasks that John had lined up on the counter top the day previous. They shatter with force, shards exploding out into the sink and all over the floor. The sound is pleasing in its own way, the crash and tinkling signaling a destruction he’s managed to bring about. Loafers crunch over the detritus and Sherlock bears his heels down, turning the glass to dust, back to a close approximation of sand.

Destruction; he destroys things.

Not two miles away on an operating table lies another thing he’s managed to destroy. The guilt bubbles up in his throat and cuts off his supply of air. This feeling, he’s never experienced it quite so acutely before. The benefit of lacking in awareness of sentiment is that Sherlock Holmes does not attach emotional value to things. But the manner in which his heart wrenches in his chest (the heart can’t actually wrench, just a poetic description of his feeling of free-fall) and his tongue feels heavy
and thick points to a weakening in his defenses.

Sentiment has dug itself in, found itself a home. How did he allow this to happen? How was he so unaware of it as John twisted his way in and around? Hands ball into fists at his sides and he slams them down on the counter top, wayward shards of glass piercing his skin. Even as he winces and plucks them out, he relishes the pain, cannot help the wonder, what does it feel like, being shot? What does hot lead feel like, burning through skin and muscle and tissue?

*How does the blood smell after hot metal touches it?* Sherlock presses his bloodied skin to the fabric of his trousers and hisses, for a moment blinded by the thought that he didn’t even think to smell John’s blood. *How incredibly stupid.*

But John’s blood, he could go back to the alley way. Sherlock could get down on his hands and knees and sniff at it where it’s spilled, two pints of it, all over the ground. He imagines himself taking a beaker and a syringe and collecting every last drop, soaking it into sponges, not to return to John but to have on hand, have with him always.

Just in case. *Just in case.*

The thing is, he’s dreamt of tearing John apart before. He’s imagined sinking his fingers into John’s chest and slashing through muscle and bone and pulling him apart and away until he’s nothing like the man he is. Sherlock has dreamt of positively *decimating* John, wholly good, pure John, just to see what it would feel like. Flaying John wide open, chest to sternum, rooting around amongst his guts to figure out how he’s made up.

Crawling under his skin and slithering there, between dermis and fat, meandering around in sweat glands and being excreted through exertion. He dreams of living in the space behind John’s eyeballs and pressing his palms against them as they move; he dreams about pressing them out of his skull and pressing them back in again.

And of his skeleton. The effect of a sniper’s bullet on scapula; he wants nothing more than to boil him down and bleach him and run his fingers over John’s ilium until it becomes smooth with wear.

But that’s all they are, dreams. Sick, perverse manifestations of Sherlock’s subconscious desires to know and have and *be inside*.

In the destruction Sherlock finds a sense of beauty and peace and contentment, because he knows and has power over every little bit of John Watson. It’s entirely overwhelming and causes his heart to thunder hard against his ribcage just *thinking* of it.

John goes up in a flash of smoke and then Sherlock scatters the ashes. He gathers them up again and once thrust into a beaker with a few added chemicals, John is as good as new. It’s not scientific, it’s not *science*, but Sherlock is mad anyhow, so it makes perfect sense.

In his head, in the very, very recesses of his mind palace, in the dank dungeons even as he destroys John Watson, he builds him back, places him together piece by piece until he’s whole again. The exact part of him that wants to ravage the man can’t do without him as he is, whole.

*Unforgivably perfect.*

And isn’t that interesting, how very intrinsically John has intertwined himself to Sherlock. Not purposefully, surely. But Sherlock can’t help but wonder if this had been part of the man’s intent all along. In that instant he hates him, thoroughly despises him for making him *feel* this way, feel at all, really. It’s as though it’s John’s hands that are around his throat, squeezing the life out of him and
stopping his breath.

*I should be there, I shouldn’t be here.*

A large Berzelius beaker flies through the air and smashes shrilly against the refrigerator. It makes him feel even more of an absence as he watches the shards refract light as they fall.

Mrs. Hudson comes and goes in the night, says nothing about the state of the kitchen. “Your brother is calling dear, he’s worried about you. He said something about John being hurt.” She leaves a tray of warm biscuits and he sends her away with a glance that could wither just about anything, leaving her to assume what she will. She doesn’t need to chastise him; he wears the pain all about him.

’*If Mycroft were truly worried, he wouldn’t bother with the formality of calling,*’ Sherlock thinks and takes solace in the thought. If Mycroft were truly to believe John to be critically injured, he wouldn’t waste a moment in assuring that Sherlock was safe himself, in the flesh. Just the thought has him wrapping his left palm around his right inner elbow and squeezing hard.

He walks up the stairs to John’s room, opens the door and glances around, attempting not to allow his bones to shiver out of his skin. The room is empty, pristine, the only thing out of place is John’s jumper, tossed haphazardly on the bottom of the bed. Sherlock slams the door, wood rattling maniacally in the frame and then throws himself right back down the steps to whirl in a circle around John’s chair. The glare he gives to the empty piece of furniture turns almost immediately into a stare that he cannot break himself from.

*John had been sitting just here not twenty-four hours ago, reading the paper, pestering me to eat the toast he’d made. Sipping tea that was too cold to be pleasant, nattering on about something happening in Poland.* John had been whole and relatively happy, if the way he’d been tapping his feet and humming every five or so minutes was any indication. He’d been as he always was at home, restful, relaxed, concerned with Sherlock’s well-being.

*As always.*

How odd; the realization of the thought sends a roll through Sherlock’s gut, threatens to send him running to the loo. But there’s nothing in his stomach to lose, so the nausea just sits there and settles, greasy in its presence.

He stares and stares at the chair until his eyes water and his vision darkens at the sides, slowly creeping until everything is gray.

He flings himself onto the sofa and his arms lay rigid at his sides. Left hand meets the inside of right elbow and strokes absently, Sherlock’s eye on the window, beyond, beyond. Sherlock strokes at the skin until his thumbnail sneaks in and catches, scapes against the vein twice before pressing in to leave a white half moon in the skin there.

He recalls the indelible rush, the blinding frigid heat, from his veins to his toes and up to his head but he doesn’t recall anything further. Screwing his eyes shut he flings the hand away and bites his bottom lip hard enough to call pain.

He doesn’t know what to feel.

He doesn’t want to feel at all.

*Across the room Sherlock’s phone buzzes, over and over again. It skitters against the top of the table*
until it falls off onto the floor. Sherlock moves and sits in John’s chair, presses his hands together and brings them to his lips, remains quiet and composed, staring out the window, noting as the sky gradually lightens, listening as his phone continues it’s cacophony against the wooden floor. Evening slowly creeps into morning and he has no idea why his chest feels like it’s going to cave in yet explode at the very same time.

The light gradually smudges from black to grey to a dusty pink. The sun struggles to break against the clouds and Sherlock notes dully that this will be the first day in two weeks that they will have been without rain.

His phone buzzes again, twice more before the clouds actually succumb to the rays and let the light through. When Sherlock stands to retrieve it finally, four hours gone by, London is just beginning to rouse itself. His thumb swipes at the screen, unread messages flooding down in a list, latest to last.

Mycroft had been the first, just after Sherlock had arrived home, ‘Thought to inform you that Dr. Donelin best in London. -M’

‘Did you walk all the way back to the flat? Rather melancholy, then. -M’

‘John out of surgery. -M’ the next two texts read.

The third after that, ‘I believe that last information warrants a response of some kind. -M’

‘Please contact me and inform me of your condition. -M’

‘I’ve been informed that you left the A&E in haste just after John was admitted. Status update would be most welcome. -M’

‘Have been updated that John is going to be quite fine. -M’

‘Several weeks of bed rest but otherwise, nothing dire. -M’ And Sherlock’s lip curls at that, not at the notion that John will be incapacitated for weeks or that his recovery shall be arduous but that Mycroft believes a bullet to the chest to be anything other than dire.

‘Where are you? Went to A&E. Alright? John’s in surgery. They say bad but not too bad. Ring when you can!’ from Lestrade.

And then, ‘Actually need your statement sooner rather than later, sorry.

He scrolls through the messages over and over, brain attempting to come up with any reply at all to any single one of them. He has no reason to doubt what his brother has said, that John is going to be fine, but it doesn’t settle his mind any. It still buzzes with nerves and rage and anticipation. The mass of it coalesces and threatens to overwhelm him; Sherlock sifts his fingers into his hair and tugs. Hard.

Sherlock wonders if he should pack John a bag, bring him some of his things. Of course he should, of course. His thoughts all screech together, causing his body to shudder as he rises. He locates a small traveling case in his own closet and steels himself, bounds up the steps and once again tosses open the door to John’s room.

He takes a breath, two and then heaves himself towards John’s dresser, begins with his pants. Sherlock only allows himself a cursory glance at the available selection before curling his hand around a stack of white briefs and shoving them in the bag, careful to keep them in a neat stack.
He knows what to pack because he knows John Watson. The red, flannel pajama bottoms (or the blue, either will do because he favors either after a particularly trying day) and his slippers. The hideous coal, striped bathrobe and three of his softest vests. The grey ones, not the white. And jumpers, the three most worn and unsurprisingly most hideous: oatmeal, olive and burgundy. Socks, the fuzzy ones that John’s mother knits and his toiletries, not the aftershave because it smells antiseptic and Sherlock hates it. A comb, a horrific book-of-the-week tome and the plethora of medical journals he keeps mentioning needing to catch up on.

It’s all zipped up safely, the bag bulging a bit as Sherlock heads back down the stairs, leaving the door to John’s room gaping open, empty.

The bag bounces as Sherlock tosses it on the sofa and begins to pace fervently, running his thumb over the screen of his mobile. And in situations such as these doesn’t one bring the person recuperating some form of gift? Flowers? Balloons? Teddy bear?

His lips curl into a distasteful grimace as he slips his phone into his pocket, only to pluck it right back out.

_I don’t know what to do_, Sherlock thinks feebly, frustrated with the state of his mind. _What does one do in these situations_, he types to Mycroft and allows his thumb to hover over the ‘Send’ button. He deletes the message in haste and turns the phone over and over in his hand a very times before settling on what to say.

No, he doesn’t need Mycroft telling him how to respond to this; he wouldn’t want to owe him something else.

His thumbs fly over the screen, missing a few keys in his impetuousness. ’Fine. En route to hospital. Don’t call. -S’ He cannot possibly stand to be in the flat a moment longer. Sherlock throws on his coat - dirty with blood and soot and sweat - and his bag and heads out of the flat. His feet trip him up as he tears down the steps, bursts out onto the street as the door slams shut behind him.

It’s only in the cab later that Sherlock musters up the courage to send ‘Thank you.’ along to his brother as well. Then he leans his temple against the glass and closes his eyes and tries very, very hard not to recall how John’s face had looked in the instant the bullet had hit his body to absolutely no avail.

He’ll delete that, he will. He’ll delete it later, much later. He’ll have to, he can’t function with that filed away. Can’t possibly.

He’s halfway to sorting the evening - the suspect, the chase, the shots fired - when his phone buzzes insistently in his pocket. Sherlock ignores it until, a moment later, it buzzes again; he’s sick of the sound. He tears at his pocket, rage clearly evident on his face and in the way his hands tense around the object.

It’s to his ear before he is able to view the caller.

“What?”

A woman’s voice is grainy, faint on the other end and Sherlock toys briefly with the idea of simply disconnecting the call.

“I’m sorry?” his voice is curt; he’s got no time for this.

“You’re John Watson’s emergency contact, are you not?” In the background of the call, Sherlock can pick up the din of the other people in the office with her, someone calling for a Doctor Allan
over the announcement system.

“...what?” Sherlock can’t process this. That John would name him the person to call in the event of an emergency. Compulsive, impulsive, manic Sherlock Holmes was not and should not be listed as anyone’s emergency contact, he is very aware of this. It strikes him then, dashes him about the head with it’s obviousness, just how much John trusts him, had trusted him.

And now...

For the umpteenth time in the past few hours, Sherlock finds it intensely difficult to draw a single breath.

“John Watson, sir. You’re his emergency contact. We’ve been informed that he’s made it through surgery and is in recovery currently.” There’s static and a crackle and the sound of the receiver switching from ear to ear. “He’ll be in ICU for the next few hours but he’s expected to be transferred to a room sometime early this afternoon.” She is clinical, obviously reading from a chart and he hates her viscerally, doesn’t know anything about her but he loathes the woman on the other end of the phone nonetheless.

Sherlock clears his throat as the cabbie stops short. “Yes. Fine, good.” He disconnects the call and shoves the mobile back into his pocket, leaves his hand there, curled around the plastic. The coolness of the window is doing nothing to stem the rising temperature of his skin and he beats his temple against the glass for a moment before ripping at his scarf and balling it tightly in his fist.

He wants the driver to go faster.

He wants the driver to bloody well slow down.
Chapter 3

The heel of Sherlock’s right loafer bounces frantically against the slick tile of the floor, a click, click, click that’s in halftime with the heart monitor in the room behind him. His behind is sore in the chair he has not left for three hours. Because he’s stubborn.

Because there is nowhere else to go.

Visiting hours don’t begin until nine o’clock and having arrived at half seven Sherlock had to wait the requisite hour and a half to be allowed into John’s room.

Yet still he lingers in the hallway of the ICU. Sherlock supposes he should know better than to trust medical professionals when given specific times, but he wouldn’t have been able to keep himself away from hospital any longer knowing John is inside, regardless of the time given. Sherlock is beyond haggard, eons from weary, he’s on the fringes of a waking dream-state, his hours spent awake all blurring together in a cacophony of static. He needs coffee, he needs a shower and a change of clothes; his skin feels perfectly repellant and he can feel each and every one of the hairs on his head, the grease seeping up the follicle.

If he could just see John, even for just a moment...

He would admit that he needs sleep but to do so would be conceding defeat and thus instead he allows himself a moment of respite, eyes slipping closed as his head angles back to thump solidly off of the wall. From side to side it lulls, very much in time with the tapping of his foot. A sad, stunted metronome.

Ten o’clock ticks around; it rolls like a wave over Sherlock, the sun meandering across the floor towards his foot. He pulls back, back, until the inevitable spill of sunshine touches leather and he gives up; a silly game. Ten forty-five. Even then, they had been redressing his wounds, preparing him for his transfer from the Intensive Care Unit to a room on the trauma floor. A good sign, he supposes, that they’re taking so much care with him. Anything less just wouldn’t do but Sherlock is impatient. As always.

It’s nearly one in the afternoon when a nurse informs Sherlock that he can step in and see John but to be quite quiet about it, as he’s still asleep, a side effect of the drugs. There’s no helping that he grinds his teeth in utter frustration.

“Best to let him rest. Though you probably couldn’t rouse him now if you tried; he’ll find it difficult to breathe and speak, with the tube out of his throat it will be quite raw. A day or so and he should be up to friendly conversation,” she pats Sherlock on the elbow and hurries away.

Sherlock takes one tentative step into the room, the sounds from the hallway rushing behind him, nothing slowing down as though he feels it should, the blipping of the monitors in the room stabbing into his chest with their grating, penetrating noise. The bag slung over his arm slips off of his shoulder but he catches it before it hits the floor, two fingers taut against the strap. Sherlock sets it down just inside the doorway with care and takes a half-step back, grinding his heels into the floor.

John is slack and gray gray gray in the bed; one side of his mouth drooped open, the left nostril of his breathing tube just barely resting on his nose. The painkillers have made him limp and Sherlock imagines that he could walk over and manage to do whatever he’d like with the man’s limbs - make
him dance a Can-Can - and he wouldn’t wake up.

He could curl his fingers around John’s wrist and hold the pulse there for as long as he likes.

“John,” Sherlock croaks once, not for John’s reaction, but to test his own voice. It rumbles and cracks and Sherlock has to swallow before he takes another breath.

It’s a few moments before he observes the state of the room. There is a large bouquet of daisies on the windowsill, no doubt placed there by a nurse and not by the giver. Likely Molly has heard about the... accident and rushed to send her well wishes. A notepad and pen on the bedside table - Lestrade’s pen, a standard-issue police notepad - on which John can write. Write his statement, write words he cannot speak, write anything.

Lestrade is considerate in that regard.

There is a fine set of indecently comfortable looking flannel pajamas, tied together intricately with a piece of navy ribbon, also on the bedside table. The gift bears Mycroft’s taste and though Sherlock would not choose such extravagant sleepwear for his flatmate, John will no doubt appreciate the gesture.

And then, on the floor, a bag full of John’s things, things John has lived in and loved and worn down to threadbare. It’s all Sherlock has to offer at the moment and in comparison to the other items seems quite banal. It’s no matter, these items are necessary and Sherlock would rather be necessary than thoughtful. With his right foot he nudges the bag closer to the bed, pausing after a moment to lift it into the uncomfortable looking pleather and plastic armchair.

The heart monitor continues its low, absurdly comforting beep-beep-beep while the drip bag counters the rhythm every twelve beats or so, saline plunking down in the drip chamber, waiting it’s turn to wander intravenously through John’s body.

Carefully, Sherlock shuffles closer, notes the faint rise and fall of John’s chest beneath the hospital issue, off white blanket. He reaches out and touches it, starchy, scratchy, and twists his mouth in displeasure. He should have thought to bring the quilt from the back of the couch. Should have thought of that. His palm rests flat against the fabric, fingertips just brushing the rise of John’s hip.

His cheek twitches in sleep and Sherlock watches as the tremor lingers for a moment, two, before John snuffles and goes still once more. His hand moves, right index finger poised over the cheek, ready to touch but does not.

Eyes close to slits and Sherlock recalls just where on John’s body the bullet penetrated, just where. An urge rolls through him, to carefully peel back the blanket and hike up his gown and see the wound. Feel it under his fingers, the ridges and the raised bits where the sutures and stitches are. Sherlock wants to dip down and taste it, still antiseptic, likely still tinged with iodine.

Sherlock wants to photograph it, draw it to scale, make a mold of John’s torso so he can have a reminder of it. More, much more than a bit not good, there Sherlock he hears John’s voice echoing in the recesses of his mind and scowls at himself. He knows it’s “not good,” he knows that by now, after ages of John telling him so.

Still, his fingers itch to just pull everything back and have a peek. Just one little glimpse. But John will be upset, upset that he had no say, upset that it was his choice to make and he didn’t have the opportunity to make it and so Sherlock pulls back to rest his palms on the side of the bed. It’s overwhelming, the bustle from outside the door, the people rushing by on their way to and from important things when Sherlock cannot help but only be concerned with this important thing in the

His mobile buzzes in his pocket and he pulls it out with indifference.

Then he reads it: ‘O’Banion confessed after two hours, you did a number on his skull. In custody but at Royal London until they release him.’ It’s from Lestrade, obviously, though he doesn’t bother checking the sender before slipping the phone back into his pocket.

A breath rushes from his lungs, one he’s not been aware of holding; it leaves him light headed and he curls his arm around the side of the bed and leans down, leans in, the plastic giving a bit as it takes his weight. Sherlock’s head dips and he feels heavy, leaden, every part of his body wanting to drag him down and so he falls to his knees, leans his forehead against John’s bed and breathes.

The sunlight crawls across the room and Sherlock remains there at John’s bedside until his knees go numb and his back lets out. When he sprawls back against the wall it’s with what little grace he can summon, pulling up his knees in front of him while his coat fans out beneath. There’s the beep beep beep and the drip drip drip and Sherlock’s eyelids are heavy.

He proceeds to attempt a blink but his lids remain closed, top lashes shielding bottom ones and he slumps down into the corner, taking up not much space for a man so large. Sherlock Holmes does not dream, but he sleeps like that of a man sedated, hard and without pause, for nearly four hours. It’s a wonder that no one disturbs him as nurses no doubt cycle in and out, checking John’s vitals.

Sometime during the course of his rest he turns his body in towards the wall and stretches out his legs, tucks his hands between himself and the radiator module. He could sleep for hours, he could sleep for days; the unexpected emotional toll has drained him but he awakes with a start when his phone buzzes once more.

Sherlock peels his eyes open with a wince and a cringe. He’s not as young as he used to be and when he unfolds himself, his back, knees, behind protest. It seems too that his dashing about over the past few days has caught up with him. His muscles are incredibly sore and his head aches; his mouth is parched to the point where it’s nearly painful to move his tongue.

He stands with difficulty, swaying a bit and is surprised that there is a woman on the other side of the room. “Ah! Finally awake, then!” It is not the same nurse that he spoke with earlier; this woman is younger and much more eager. She hums to herself - something popular, something he’s actually heard - as she administers a vial of something to John.

“No worries, just potassium,” and she continues her humming and smiling and clips the IV back in place, out of the way. “You’re Sherlock Holmes,” she says casually as she brings the wall-mounted computer to life and updates John’s chart.

He says nothing, only stares as the woman - girl, really - flies through John’s chart with practiced ease. “I’ve read his blog. Everyone’s read...” She trails off as she studies an annotation in the system and changes it. “His blog.” When she glances up again at him, she’s grinning. “I’m Katie, I’ll be on the night shift so, I’m supposed to be the one to kick you out, now.”

Sherlock frowns at that, widening his stance as though for a battle.

“But I won’t if you promise to... behave. And maybe eat something,” she gestures to the little rolling tray that rests astride John. There’s a jug of water and two small cups, a paper cup with tablets in it. “I grabbed you some paracetamol for the whole... sleeping on the floor thing.” She finishes up with
the computer and slides it back towards the wall, giving Sherlock one last smile over her shoulder.

“You never saw me, I was never here,” she winks and she’s gone.

He eyes the pills for a moment before swallowing them dry, thinks better of it and chases it with a cup of water. It feels refreshing, invigorating and it serves to wake rouse him a bit and so he pours a second cup and before he knows it, he’s finished the pitcher. He stares at John, notes that there’s been no real change other than his head tipping to the opposite side, the right side of his oxygen tube having slipped off this time.

Sherlock lifts his hands and rights the tube quite carefully, pausing for a moment to register the moist huffs of breath coming from John’s nose. When he can’t resist, he trails two fingers down over the man’s jaw, the stubble prickling at his skin, each hair catching, sending shivers down Sherlock’s spine. John is alive, Sherlock can very well see that but still, he feels monumentally unsettled by all of this.

There’s the urge to smooth back John’s hair but Sherlock refrains; it’s too intimate and he’s not about to share such a gesture with a man who can’t feel it, can’t catalogue it, can’t understand what it means. I don’t understand what it means. I want to touch him and I want him to feel it. Fingers pinch at John’s oxygen tube and then fall away, moving to settle in his pockets as he takes a step back, away from the bed.

His mobile buzzes against the back of his hand and he holds off on pulling it out for a moment, letting it vibrate his knuckles in his skin.

‘You need a shower, I can very nearly smell you from here -M’ He can’t help the annoyed smile that torques his lips.

‘Piss. Off. -S’ he types back and drops the phone back into his pocket, patting it once for good measure.

There’s nothing more he can do for John, not at the moment and the notion of a shower is so welcome that Sherlock is suddenly aware of just how dirty he is. His eyes linger on John’s form, the sodium fluorescence from behind his bed making him look as though he’s painted in shadow; it’s a terrifically painful sight and Sherlock sinks his teeth into the inside of his bottom lip as his throat tightens.

Before he leaves, he opens his leather duffel and sets John’s olive jumper over the rail of the bed. Hospitals are notoriously drafty and he might get cold in the middle of the night. He pats that gently too, and steps back, two steps, three and then turns on heel and leaves the room.

He doesn’t look back, he can’t, not if he wants to make it back to Baker Street this evening. When he makes it outside he realizes that it’s been nearly twenty-nine hours since he’s eaten anything at all. It’s another moment or two before he realizes that the violent cramping in his stomach is not simply an emotional response, but his body rebelling against the taking of medication without prior sustenance.

He pauses at a corner shop and snags a ludicrously sugary packaged pastry, swallowing it down in two bites. Sherlock continues on his way, body on autopilot, thinking of nothing but shower and sleep and the amount of time between then and getting back to the hospital. Pathetic he thinks for a moment and then, No.

It’s bizarre, it’s a thought he’d never thought he would have, wanting to be somewhere and not being able to be there. Being present somewhere but knowing that simply being present was doing nothing
for anyone. Sitting in John’s room all evening, it’s all he wants to do, truly but he needs to take a
modicum of care of himself if he’s to return tomorrow, steely resolve intact.

The emotional toll, no, he hadn’t factored that in at all, and why would he? Why bother? It’s twisted
his gut and flitted about his head all day, the worry and it’s making him dizzy and sick. It’s chipped
away at him, right down to the bone.

By the time he’s made it back to Baker Street he’s practically dragging his feet along. When he gets
his key in the door and turns the knob, he’s met with a surprised looking Mrs. Hudson, clearly on her
way out for the evening.

“Oh! Sherlock! I didn’t...” She takes a moment to look him up and down, frowns. “Oh you,” she
deposits her bag on the chair by the steps and takes him by the elbow. “Look at you, you... get
yourself upstairs, I’ll put on the kettle.”

And for once, he does what he’s told. He drags himself to the loo and shuts himself in the bathroom
for the better part of an hour. It takes in a long while to get out of his clothes and he leaves them in a
tidy pile beneath the sink.

He can’t help but catch his reflection in the mirror and when he does, he scowls at himself. Sherlock
looks wrecked, worked over.

Once he’s under the hot spray of water it’s not that far to the floor of the bathtub and he slumps, back
sliding against the tiled wall before he comes to settle there, arms curled around his knees. He
remains, watches as dirt and crime, the brown-red of blood sluices from his skin down the drain.

The water, taking John’s blood away, away.

It’s all he can manage to run a bar of soap over his limbs, under his arms. He contemplates shampoo
but takes the bar of soap to his head as well, scrubbing into a half-hearted lather before allowing his
head to fall limp, just the water washing the suds away. Just as he’s sure he’s finished, is up on his
knees and attempting to clamber out, he spies John’s shampoo on the ledge, teetering.

He doesn’t think, doesn’t remember that he’s already soaped his hair, he simply pops the bottle open
and pours it out into his hand, dipping his nose to inhale the shockingly-familiar scent. He wasn’t
aware that this scent made up the majority of John and in that moment, he cannot help it.

He thrusts slick fingers into his hair and pulls, slides them over his body, across pectorals, behind his
knees and between his cheeks until he’s immersed in the scent. He barely manages to rinse himself
off before he pitches out of the tub, encases himself in his dressing gown and meets Mrs. Hudson in
the kitchen.

“There’s a dear, you sit and eat that,” she flutters her hands at the eggs and toast beckoning from the
corner of the table. For a moment, she lingers near him; she’s concerned, of course she is. The pit of
his stomach roils and then settles, her affection warming him. “Here’s some tea, honey and milk, just
how you like.”

Sherlock nods because he can’t manage a thank you; she understands he will never articulate it,
regardless of how much he means it. Mrs. Hudson presses a kiss to his damp curls before retreating;
it’s space that he needs. “He’ll be right as rain, you’ll see.”

In her absence he manages to down most of the eggs and a triangle of toast before the nausea of
sleep deprivation sets in. He can’t manage to bring his body up the steps to John’s room though he
wants to, desperately. But that too, if found out, John might hold against him.
When he makes it to his bedroom he spares no time in wrapping himself up in his bedclothes, his dressing gown twisting around his body, binding him there. He pretends that he’s being held down, that it’s John all around him, holding him down, wrapping him up, keeping him, as he closes his eyes.

He spares one brief moment of acknowledgement at how very odd *enjoying* that imagery is before he succumbs to the welcome tendrils of slumber.
Chapter 4

He hates how refreshed he feels; when the morning light peeks through the curtains and rouses him he throws himself onto his back and runs both hands down over his face, upset with himself. His gaze goes to the window, another low, hazy day, the sun struggling to make itself known through the layer of ever present clouds. Sherlock wriggles for a spell and then flops onto his stomach, smearing his face into the pillow as he allows his eyes a moment to adjust and then spasms onto his back once more.

He picks up the pillow to his right and presses it over his face, breathes out a huff of moist breath that the cotton absorbs and diffuses back over his cheeks, tosses the pillow off the end of the bed and forces himself to sit up. The sheet is tangled about his waist and he feels for a moment, hampered. Then he kicks his legs, dislodges the sheet and maneuvers free.

He’s a mess; he can feel it; his hair is sticking up at odd angles and his mouth still feels as parched as it had the night previous; he’ll eat breakfast this morning, he’ll drink his tea. He will pretend that John has ordered him to do so, though he loathes pretending. With a reserved energy Sherlock perks up, ramrod straight, snatches his watch off of the bedside table and glances at the time.

Two hours until visiting hours begin, he supposes he should get ready. He doesn’t consider the color of the shirt he chooses, certainly doesn’t recall the time John had mentioned off-handedly “Looks nice on you, that color,” because that would be absolutely absurd. That would make absolutely no sense at all.

But even as he does up the buttons one by one, he imagines another set of fingers, sliding the hard plastic back through the holes. Sherlock slams his eyes closed, presses his palms to the top of his dresser and takes a long, deep breath.

This is the first time in his life he’s thought so much about breathing.

Once cloaked in aubergine cotton and silk, he paces down to the kitchen in his pants, makes himself a cuppa and throws leftover lo mein into his mouth as fast as he can manage, barely chewing. When he gets his trousers on he nearly trips in his haste to just get out the door.

He needs to get down to the shops and pick up... something for John. Not a teddy bear and not flowers. Biscuits perhaps? Biscuits indeed. Nice, innocuous Hob Nobs.

John does so love Hob Nobs.

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There is too much sunlight in the room, too much sunlight in the whole of England today. It’s not congruent with the atmosphere of the hospital that entombs John. Sherlock remains outside in the hallway, lingers around the doorway and peeks in, can just make out the figure of his feet beneath the starchy blankets.

There’s the repetitive beeping of the ECG and Sherlock turns, notes the flat screen monitors on the wall that display the vitals of the patients in the four nearest rooms. The bottom left quadrant features John’s, his heartbeat strong and sure, his oxygen at ninety-nine percent.
It shows John alive, whole, breathing.

He sucks in a deep, lingering breath and steps over the threshold. John is awake but very obviously groggy, his hair sticking up every which way. The crust around his eyes would be off-putting if not for the circumstances; he obviously hasn’t had a shower since the morning of the shooting. A shaft of light slants over the bed, turning the otherwise dull pallor of his skin to that of butter. Sherlock stares and stares, he can’t tear his eyes away for a moment.

He wonders how long John would have to remain still, just so, in order for his skin to redden and burn.

John’s eyes flicker as Sherlock comes fully into view and he smiles, frowns as his eyes focus and take in the detective’s frame, smiles again.. Sherlock curls his hands together behind his back around the biscuits and takes two, three long strides to the side of John’s bed. Not too close, never too close.

And they stare at one another, John raising a brow, wondering who’s to make the first move. The beep-beep-beep fills the pregnant silence between them. Licking his lips, Sherlock glances down at the floor, back to John, reaches out and places the singular package of Hob Nobs on the rolling tray.

“Oh, ta!” John’s voice is low and grainy but his eyes light up a bit at the treats, fingers pressing against the package and for a brief moment, the sound of plastic crinkling echoes the room. His smile is bright when he glances back up at his friend and fades away into nothingness as Sherlock simply stands there and continues to stare.

From anyone else it would be awkward but John can read through this facade. There’s an apprehension there born of regret, of failed responsibilities. Sherlock doesn’t wish to, but he can’t help but consider himself just as at fault as O’Banion. If John hadn’t been with him- but not, that isn’t an option either. He begins to tick off the possibilities in his head, instances in which John is safe but somehow still beside him. It’s an impossibility. Frowning, he clears his throat and scuffs a heel against the floor.

Sherlock swallows and refuses steadfastly to meet John’s eyes.

“Not your fault,” John croaks at him, though through a now-thin, tight-lipped line. He’s still not the right color, still not John-colored. It’s as though he’s been washed out by antiseptic, as beige as sand against the starchy sheets. Sherlock wonders if his blood is the same color as it had been.

Of course it is.

“I know that,” Sherlock claims, reclasping his hands behind his back as he sidles up a tad bit closer to the bed.

John’s smile is watery, quivering, “Do you?” And that sends him into a coughing fit that whites out Sherlock’s mind just as the ride in the ambulance had. He should: hand him a glass of water, help him to situate the pillow more securely beneath his back, ask if he’s quite alright. Instead he remains standing, eyes wide and waits until John finishes, the grimace on his face not quite disappearing.

“Sit,” he manages as he struggles through the last of the coughs, grimaces and rolls his head against the pillows. “For Christ’s sake.”

Sherlock glares, but just a bit and after a moment of fussing about, he plonks down into the hard-back chair nearest the bed. Tongue slides over his upper lip before bottom teeth sneak out to sink in; he takes a breath (Breath, breathe, always breathing, so boring but no, not boring anymore), screws up his face. His palms itch. “How are... you feeling?”
“My eyes... feel like they’ve been sandblasted, and my chest, well...” John laughs and tuts his tongue against the roof of his mouth, attempting to gather enough saliva to speak properly. He works his lips around a bit, passing over his teeth, grimaces and flicks it against the back of his teeth. Sherlock moves eagerly but with careful intent; he grasps the bubblegum pink container of ice water and pour out a cup before John shakes his head.

It takes him a moment to breathe before he speaks. “Chips... ice chips, I get... there’s nausea after the, the anesthesia. Or that’s how I remember it... ehm, ice. S’best.”

The way Sherlock’s eyes drag on the blink, he wonders if he’s just too tired (impossible) or if his mind has slowed down for not anticipating that. Something else he should have simply known. “Right. Yes. Of course.”

He dashes into the hall and stalks past the rooms, shoes clicking with purpose and coat fanning out dramatically as always. He finally locates the nurse’s station with the ice machine, flings the little door open so that it crashes and bounces against the machine. He begins filling it in earnest, giving a passing NP a curt “No,” when asked if he requires any help. The little pellets brim over the top and he’s careful with the container as he glides back to the room.

The pitcher is freezing in his hand, but he pops the top open and holds if for John to fish around in. After he has a mouthful Sherlock still holds it until John rolls his eyes, takes it from him, sets it on the tray. Sherlock rotates it once and twice and lets his hands fall to his lap.

“You would think that this would be something you get used to...” John says, the ice chip rattling around against his teeth. “This ‘getting shot’ business but, no. Nope.” Wincing a bit, he presses his palms to the bed in an attempt to shimmy up against his pillows but all he gets for it is another grunt of pain and a wobbly tray table.

Sherlock’s hands reach out and then pause, an aborted grab. “Here, I’ll just.” He stands on legs that do not feel like his own and it’s with shaky hands that he slots himself between John’s arms and his sides. He is sweaty and clammy but pliant and with effort they both manage to shift him up a bit on the bed. When he falls back into the pillows it’s with a grateful little sigh and a flutter of his lashes.

He smiles thankfully at Sherlock, eyes soft, unguarded.

Sherlock swallows again, audibly and tears his palms away as though burned. “Alright?”

“Hm,” John hums even as his eyes slit in a wince. “These painkillers, bloody wonderful. I should feel like a raw nerve, but... wonderful.” His voice is strained and wheezy, like a breeze around a corner, thin and barely there. “Okay, it still hurts a bit.”

“I would imagine so,” Sherlock intones gravely and John cracks a grin at that. “What?”

“Nothing, you’re so...” It takes him a moment to decide on the term. “Genuinely concerned. It’s a bit bizarre, feel like I should get this on tape somehow.”

Sherlock’s face slackens for a moment, goes blank. Would John truly think that he’s not concerned? Does John believe himself so inconsequential in Sherlock’s life that this wouldn’t be one of the worst things to ever happened to him? Grinding his teeth, Sherlock sifts through every interaction they’ve ever had; he’s been curt, brash, harsh, clipped but never-

He’s never meant to be flippant about John’s role in his life. Then again, he’s never actually consciously determined the deepest extent to which John is enmeshed. Breathing, Sherlock supposes. Sherlock’s breathing - his entire nervous system really - is dependent on John’s presence and that
presence being alive and whole. Oh. Oh.

Sherlock nods his head at his thought process, accepts it.

“John, you are like breathing.” Sherlock is incredibly proud of himself, that he’s allowed himself to speak sentiment aloud, to process it and accept it as part of himself. He amends his statement because somehow it is entirely more than that. “Or perhaps blood. Plasma or platelets. All of the above, really,” and his words hang there between them. John should understand, he should know.

The doctor’s hand is still in the pitcher of ice pellets.

Tentatively he brings the ice to his mouth and slips it in, watches Sherlock as he does. His eyes have gone a bit wide and his lips form a slack line as he sucks on the melting morsels. “Ah,” John mutters, closing his eyes with his head back against the pillow. “Al... alright, I....”

Sherlock blinks, the doctor’s eyes peel back open.

“What of O’Banion?” he asks suddenly, palms slamming down onto the mattress at the recollection of the man who had sent him to hospital.

Ah yes, that. “He’s in hospital, I may have-”

“Did you cave his head in?”

Fingers intertwine in his lap; there’s no taking his eyes off of them. He cannot look at John, all wrong, gray, not-John in the bed. “Not as such but... not far from,” he concedes and John’s lips twist into a wry smile.

“Good, just... good.” John Watson is a good man but John Watson has just been shot for the second time. Vindication is something of a balm he won’t admit to but Sherlock sees the glint of satisfaction in his gaze.

“Hmm,” he agrees.

John bites his lip, pops another piece of ice. “And Lestrade?”

“Emailed him a statement,” with a flick of his wrist he waves it off as of no consequence. “He’ll not be bothering you, I assured him your intake file would be informative enough though I have my suspicions that Mycroft had something to do with that.”

John chuckles, “Not a surprise.”

Bowing his head to meet steepled fingers, gray eyes finally lift to meet blue “I am... sorry.”

John swallows, turns his gaze to the window. “Well and good, but still not your fault.”

Sherlock sits back, blows a frustrated breath out through his nose and lifts a leg onto the chair, half of his face hidden behind his knee. “It is rather...” Sherlock twists his lips in frustration. “I lived alone for a decade before you - well, not entirely, no one worked out but you were the only one who stayed and now the flat seems... hollow.” Eyes become slits once more. Sherlock isn’t sure his words are coming out properly, they sound rather foreign to his ears. There’s a different way to say this, there must be something better.

“Your tea... is preferable to my own,” he continues, unable to halt the stream of consciousness. “And the toast. The jam that you use and how you specifically butter it.”
“You... you’re a nutter,” John whispers, still looking out the window. “I won’t be making tea and toast for quite some time. You’ll have to-” But John pauses, a shadow passing over his face. He changes his train of thought immediately. “It’s so sunny, why is it so lovely out?”

“Don’t do that.” Sherlock interrupts, voice low and perturbed.

It’s a moment before John turns his face away from the window. “What?”

“I can make tea and toast for you just fine.” He’s not entirely sure it will be any good at all but he can certainly try; at worst, it will certainly suffice. If he can synthesise liquid explosive from ingredients sourced at Sainsbury’s he can certainly manage tea and toast.

“I’ve had a chat with Harry actually and she’s more than-”

Taken aback, Sherlock starts, affronted. “What? Why?”

Cheeks flame pink, John’s hands curling into fists. This isn’t easy for him; John is quite able to take care of himself when whole and able but after having taken hot lead to his lung, well. “Sherlock you’re not going to - and I honestly don’t expect you to - take care of me. It’s going to be quite awhile and-”

He hisses through his teeth, waves his hand in dismissal, scoffs. “Yes, yes, you’re very self-reliant, I understand. Now, stop being an idiot.”

“Harry has the space!” Voice raised and he cringes when he finishes his sentence, taking more ice. Whether this is true or not, Sherlock will hear none of it.

“A complete and utter-”

The ice begins to melt in his hand, dripping onto the blanket. “And she is a massage therapist you know so-”

“Idiot.” Sherlock finishes, now standing. When he speaks it’s as though he’s the authority on the matter, as though there’s no room at all for argument. “You’ll come home. When you leave here you’ll come back to the flat and that’s the end of it.”

His voice is even, the patience evidence. John’s chest expands to a point that Sherlock knows is painful but he holds the breath in him for a beat before breathing it slowly back out, keeping his calm. “You don’t make those decisions for me, Sherlock.”

“No, though Baker Street is where you belong! Do you simply not trust me to care for you? It’s not difficult John.” The condescension in his voice was curbed only slightly, Sherlock managing to tone down the acidity. “Let the physiotherapist in and ensure you’re fed and watered and bathed.”

A sudden image runs through Sherlock’s mind, the possibility of their flat without John. The notion causes his stomach to roil uncomfortably, his fingers to twitch; his mind blanks for a moment and then burst back to life. He rolls his shoulders with the onslaught of emotion. The flat without John, unacceptable. Sherlock without John... unacceptable.

“Makes me sound like a dog, and your skills in the kitchen aren’t exactly...” John grumbles. Eyes closed, he shakes his head slowly, back, forth, back, forth, resigned. “Sherlock, please...”

He’s already pacing at the foot of John’s bed, hand to his mouth, rattling off his thoughts just as they come to him.
“I’ll need a copy of your intake file of course but I suppose I can get that from Mycroft if need be, all of your X-rays, any other imaging that was done certainly and to speak with your doctor, who is your doctor? It is Donelin, is it not? I’ve been informed she is the best in Britain but I’ll speak with her nonetheless. I suppose you’ll have a say in who will be overseeing your care once discharged but I’ll need to-”

He stops speaking once he realize that John is staring at him, wide-eyed and in wonder.

The steady beeping of the ECG settles him somewhat and he backs away from the bed, folding back into himself, shoving his fists deep into his pockets. The sun continues to force its way into the room, dapples John’s skin and Sherlock cannot stand another moment of seeing him here.

John picks up the container of partially melted ice and set sit in his lap, poking at it half-heartedly. There is nothing but the crunch of ice against ice and Sherlock’s heels clicking across the floor and John watches him, back and forth, back and forth until he draws up by John’s bedside, wraps his fingers around the side of the hospital bed. Knuckles white, he squeezes hard and leans closer to John, their gazes holding.

He’s not entirely certain why his throat feels so tight when he manages to finally speak.

“Let me,” and it’s so close to begging that John can do nothing but fold beneath the sweet pressure of his plea.
Chapter 5

There is another cane. It’s exactly like the first, save for a reinforced handle and adjusted an inch higher so he doesn’t lean so hard to the left. But there is a cane and the mere fact that it exists makes Sherlock furious in ways he can’t even begin to articulate. It’s sleek aluminum with a foam grip.

Sherlock wonders at what temperature the entire thing would liquify.

Sherlock pushes John in the wheelchair out through the enormous sliding hospital doors to the waiting cab; John had demurred when told the chair was available to him but Sherlock had insisted. Sherlock had insisted on the wheelchair but he draws the line at the cane, wants to bend it in half. Surely if he put a foot to it and yanked with all of his might...

John has to leverage himself out of the wheelchair using it, and Sherlock glares at the apparatus all the while John struggles into the backseat.

“Little help?” John grunts, trying very hard not to fall into the seat; Sherlock mobilizes, hooking an arm gently around John’s waist and dipping him into a sitting position. He swings his legs in with care, patting himself on the knee once situated comfortably.

He lets out a long sigh, “Ta.”

The wheelchair is left on the pavement for a nurse to retrieve; Sherlock wipes his hands on the front of his trousers, not having cared for the foam grip of the handles. “Baker Street!” he calls as he pitches himself inside, taking the seat across from him and steepling his finger immediately across his mouth. His gaze once more settles on the cane; if he could will it to flames with his mind he would be doing so, right now.

John peeks an eye open and gives Sherlock a smile with the side of his mouth; the gesture is not returned but their gazes linger for a moment as the cab pulls out and meanders through mid-day London traffic. Outside it begins to drizzle. How appropriate; John spends a week in the hospital during which they have some of the nicest weather they’ve had all year. And now it rains.

John is thinking exactly that (Sherlock can tell) when he clears his throat to speak. “Sure you’re ready for this? We’ve no food in, do we? Shall we stop by a Sainsbury on the way or-”

Their gaze breaks, Sherlock inclining his head to make a statement that’s tinged with trademark brotherly malice. “Mycroft has once again stuck his unnaturally large nose where I’ve not asked him to and delivered... provisions.” His lips twist when he tosses his hands into his lap and glances out the window, resignation painting his features. “And while not entirely unwelcome but they will be received as such.”

John twists his mouth into a wry smile and diverts his eyes from the detective, watches the scenery as it flies by the window and nods along with Sherlock. “It’s amazing how he believes you’re not an adult human male,” John delivers evenly. “Amazing.”

Sherlock glares, “Shut up.” Eyes flicker to the mobile in his hand before he pockets it. “There are parsnips; I’ve no idea what to do with parsnips.”

He receives a snort from John, who presses his hand delicately to his jumper, just over the wound. Dimly Sherlock wonders when he’ll be able to laugh without a twinge of pain. “Think carrot but nuttier. People put them in stews.”
“Stews...” Sherlock tests the word on his tongue, swivels his head to glance out the front of the cab. “The sort of thing you can toss in a pot and let alone for hours, a stew is, yes?”

John blinks; this is not dialogue anyone would have ever expected to come from Sherlock’s mouth. Nonplussed doesn’t begin to cover how he’s feeling, but he manages to catch his jaw before it hits the floor and levels Sherlock with a cool gaze. This is very nearly a conversation about the culinary arts, an area of common knowledge most would assume that Sherlock Holmes erased long ago in favor of more space for types of river silt or some such. “Are you going to be making stew?”

Sherlock’s eyes flick back to John briefly before returning to watch the road. “I don’t know,” and then, defensively, “It’s rather simple, cooking. I just don’t do it often.” He has the decency not to sound too spectacularly affronted by the notion that he wouldn’t be able to cook, but barely.

“Or ever.”

Sherlock’s barbed response is immediate. “Why bother when I have you? I could toast my own bread I suppose, but it’s much easier if you do it.”

Again, John scoffs but settles back more comfortably in the seat, only finding the strength to be vaguely insulted. “Easier or better?” John manages a humorless chuckle. “What in the world did you do before I came along.” The comment is rather off hand and rhetorical.

Sherlock answers as he does when something appears of no consequence to him. “Cocaine.”

“Not funny,” John stares resolutely out the window with an absolutely blank expression as the taxi slows and stops at an intersection.

Sherlock brings his head round, situates himself properly on the seat, crosses his legs at the ankles, just next to where John’s left foot rests. “But true.”

They fall into silence and to keep from thinking about the blasted cane, Sherlock ruminates. It’s interesting, how deeply Sherlock’s past cuts John. How often John thinks about the time before, when Sherlock can see it in his eyes, the hopeless yearning to have saved the man before he became sullied. An impossibility. The detective watches surreptitiously as John’s eyes pull at the corners and his mouth sets into a straight, angry line. It’s always like this, when Sherlock alludes to times past, to a life in which he was without someone who wanted to save him. And John Watson wants to save him, that’s as clear as day.

It’s oddly compelling, to, to watch someone want so desperately to go back in time and right wrongs that aren’t theirs to fix. And to think that if Sherlock hadn’t bottomed out so spectacularly, who was to say their paths would have even crossed? Fate: too tricky a topic to delve into when only blocks away from Baker Street; he shelves that notion at the back of his mind. “We were talking about dinner,” Sherlock reminds, redirects. “It’s a bit late to be beginning stew but...”

John’s mouth twists to crease the other side of his face; he accepts the temporary truce but just only.

His hands curl together in his lap, fingers folding against one another as he restrains himself. “What about casseroles, can you make those? Soufflés? You really intend to cook,” his laugh now is disbelieving and a shade of bitter and Sherlock accepts it instead of returning the volley. He deserves it after the dig about the cocaine.

He’s overcome with the burgeoning need to both tend to John and destroy him; the juxtaposition nearly rips him in two. “You’re making fun of me,” it’s said in a rushed breath and, truth be told he’s a bit embarrassed. Perhaps he does want to make soufflés and flambés and roasts and real food and
feed John up. Perhaps he won’t harbor as much resentment toward Mycroft as he’d originally intended if he’s able to feed John up. Because the idea is appealing suddenly, in a visceral way, to have something that he’s touched and created inside of John’s body, helping to make him whole again.

John allows a sigh to slip from him, long and long-suffering. “I wouldn’t do anything of the sort, I’m excited to see what you come up with.” It falls flat.

Sherlock smiles. “I’m sure.”

“It’s true,” John says firmly but with a smile on his lips and all is right once more with the world. A dithering little silence falls between them, punctuated by the clatter of the world whizzing outside of the taxi. “Those pajamas were quite nice, I won’t ask you to thank Mycroft for me but perhaps I’ll send him an email.”

“He was likely not the one to choose them, better to address the thank you card to ‘faceless minion.’” But Sherlock knows, knows that Mycroft cares for John, cares for him in the way one might a valued employee. Still, it is care, it is sentiment and the knowledge that his brother feels a fraction for the doctor what he himself feels is enough to allay any further barbs at his expense.

John’s smile is soft, affectionate and he lingers in looking at Sherlock for a brief, warm moment before he redirects his attention outside of the cab. “Still, nice gesture.”

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Sherlock totes John’s small satchel of belongings up the stairs before bounding back down and assisting him.

John doesn’t need assistance, he needs space and he makes that very clear. “Just be patient, I haven’t lost a leg, I just need to be very careful navigating.” Leaning heavily on the banister, he shoves the cane out in Sherlock’s direction. The disdain he feels for taking it rolls off of him and this time, John rolls his eyes in acknowledgement. “And you just stay behind me, in case I lose my footing.”

He takes one step up. “But I’m not going to lose my footing.”

It takes just a few minutes to get to the top of the steps and inside but once he does, John collapses cautiously into his armchair, feeling behind him in order to catch his fall. He wears the pain of exertion plainly on his face. “Oh, alright, next time you’ll sling me over your back and carry me,” there’s a winded little laugh and his head falls back against the leather, eyes closed. There’s perspiration dotting his brow but Sherlock knows John won’t complain, even if his body is screaming at him.

Sherlock stands in the kitchen and watches the back of John’s head for an unreasonably long time. He looks on as John stretches his legs out, rubs at his right wrist, sifts a hand through his hair. He waits and waits until John’s breathing has calmed and his heart rate has slowed. When he offers tea John does not hear him; he’s not sure whether it’s because he’s spoken so quietly or because John simply isn’t present.

“Tea?” Sherlock asks again, swaying up onto the balls of his feet with the effort. It feels so out of place to even offer that he shakes his head in confusion for speaking the word not just once, but twice. It’s as though he feels he’s not permitted to tend to John, to comfort him. Rather, that he’ll fail spectacularly at it if truly given the opportunity.

John shakes his head and shoots a glance over his shoulder before the position becomes too much.
“Maybe just a glass of water and if you can bring me those pills and a knife, actually. I’ll take half.”

Sherlock is at his bag in an instant, rummaging around inside for the prescription painkillers. “You should take a whole one, perhaps you’ll sleep through the night.” He plucks up a packet of pills, discards it.

“Half, never a whole,” his eyes are closed, head back against the chair when Sherlock steps up to him and drops one half of a small, white pill into his palm. His thumbnail is coated with the powder from the effort of splitting it and for a moment he thinks to lick off the dust.

But no. No.

Addiction. He and John share that particular demon in very, very different ways.

The pill goes down easily and the doctor drains the glass entirely, leaning to place it on the floor, licking his lips of the excess moisture. “That’ll tap me out,” he smiles slowly, warmly, somehow sadly. “I’ll head to bed and tomorrow we’ll get everything sorted, yeah?”

“Mmm,” the hum is distracted. But no, no that’s wrong too. “Wait, no.” Sherlock motions for him to stand and after a moment of hesitation, snatches up John’s bag and leads him through the kitchen and past the bathroom to his own bedroom. “Um,” and he gestures to his bed.

John’s eyes go from the bed to Sherlock’s face and back. He is stock still in the doorway. From the front to the back, Sherlock musses his hair and tosses his hand about the room as John surveys the area warily.

“You’ll be staying here, obviously; I’ve moved most of your things into, well,” Sherlock tosses his hand about again to indicate John’s belongings. “There’s... clothing on the left side of the bed to do with what you will. I’ve cleaned out a bit of the dresser and the closet to do with what you like.” He gestures dismissively with a hand, with the other he reaches into his pocket and retrieves his mobile, scrolling through aimlessly.

John nods, hums a little in agreement and raises a brow. “These sheets are rather posh,” he moves into the room and pats the bed shakily, playfully. “You’re alright with me sullying them?”

Sherlock’s eyeroll is very, very apparent.

John smiles, allowing his fingers to linger over the duvet. “You, um, you honestly didn’t have to do this. I appreciate it, very much Sherlock but...” John sighs and licks his lips. “This was a very kind thing you’ve done, you know?”

“It’s what,” Sherlock begins but is tripped up once more by his damnably tight throat. “Anyone would have done John.”

He shakes his head. “No, not anyone. No, even Harry would set... set me up on the couch; you’re... This is too much, Sherlock.” His heart kicks to fervent life, trips over itself in quarter-time; just the thought of John recuperating elsewhere is razor’s-edge unbearable.

“It’s what you would’ve done.” The answer is immediate.

John laughs bashfully, eyes downcast as his cheeks color. “Maybe, I don’t know. Even so, you certainly,” he takes a pause to lick his lips. “Have better sheets.”

“If you’d like me to switch them I-”
“No,” John cuts in with a quiet little laugh. “Was a joke, just... yes this’ll be quite alright. Better than alright. Thank you, Sherlock.”

Sherlock blinks. “Yes. Right. Good, good.”

John nods and they stand in what turns out to be the most uncomfortable bout of silence either one has experience in some time. John runs a hand through his hair, gives a half-smile. Sherlock digs his fingers nails into his thigh through the thin silk of his pocket.

“And you!” John says suddenly. “Obviously feel free to take... my bed.”

Eyes narrowing, Sherlock blinks again. He can’t come up with a single response to John’s offer. He wants to state that he’s likely not going to sleep in the first place. He wants to state that the couch is fine. He wants to state that he’ll be lingering about the kitchen any way, listening for any signs of John’s distress. That last thought throws him for a loop for a moment; John is a grown man, a medical doctor and he can take care of himself. Regardless of this truth, Sherlock is rather certain that he won’t feel at peace unless he’s somewhere in John’s vicinity, just in case.

“Right,” is what he settles on with a tight little nod.

The idea of actually lying in John’s bed presents itself to Sherlock and he’s struck immediately with the want to do it. To spread himself out across John’s sheet and linger in his scent, to press his face into the man’s pillow and inhale and inhale until he becomes lightheaded. It’s a rather appealing thought; Sherlock sets his tongue against his bottom lip and considers this.

John’s bed sans John has appeal, though John’s bed with John in it holds much, much more.

“Right,” Sherlock says again, mouth parching immediately at the thought of being in John’s bed with John. How... odd. His train of thought fades into obscurity as he wonders about the how and the why and then swells again, a dull throb of certain need cresting over his consciousness.

The possibility of being without John has caused him to evaluation the possibility of being with John. Naturally, duality. The intellectual chasm he’d fallen into in the cab earlier came back to insinuate itself. Considering the possibility of not having met John at all, of fate, he naturally considers the future. The million different scenarios that could take place between the two of them. But it’s together, strangely always, together.

The realizations that Sherlock is coming to so suddenly today are rather potent and taxing; Sherlock fights back a yawn. “Well!” he forces levity into his voice. “I suppose you’re tired, I’ll just get out of your way, let you... settle yourself.”

“I-” John begins and then closes his mouth up tight. Evening is just about to fall over London, the skies turning a mottled sort of purple. Sherlock reads the wariness on John’s face and retreats to the doorway. “Alright then. And we’ll sort everything else out tomorrow.”

“What else is there to sort out?” Sherlock asks honestly, leaning a palm against the frame, turning his head so that John’s face is cast entirely in shadow.

There’s a long-suffering sigh and the doctor takes a step towards Sherlock, light falling across his face once more. He looks even more haggard than he did just moments ago and Sherlock is seized with the urge to scoop him up and deposit him in his bed, tuck him in until he’s unable to move an inch. “Things, Sherlock.”

“What-” is as far as he gets before he shuts up his mouth and nods. “Things, alright.”

Askance, John glances at him, waiting for a fight, waiting for the inevitable “What, why?” that
Sherlock presses on with when he doesn’t understand something but nothing comes. Just another nod of a head and another step out of the room.

“Goodnight, John,” and with that he turns on heel and walks back down the hall, through to the sitting room. A moment later he hears his bedroom door quietly snick shut. Sherlock paces briefly, glances out the front windows at the street below, picks up his violin only to set it down once more. His eyes settle on the darkened hallway leading to his bedroom; he finds he couldn’t tear it away for some time, wondering desperately what is going on behind the door.

Sleep, born of gentle, pharmaceutical sedation.

It’s nearly an hour and a half before he ventures back into the kitchen, listens for signs of John moving about, hears nothing. Sherlocks retreats to the sitting room to retrieve a few medical tomes and totes them back into the kitchen, keeping only the light about the sink as he delves in. After an hour and the refrigerator kicking on once or twice, he considers unplugging the appliance. Instead, he shuffles into the hallway and settles on the floor, leaning over at an awkward angle to allow himself to continue his perusal of his book.

After midnight, back aching and head swimming, he moves back to the kitchen table, rests his head in his hands and wills his eyes to remain open. There’s the drip-drip of the faucet to keep him company, the words on the page, a cup of tea (sans milk or sugar) he locates on the counter. Two days old, but he drinks it anyway, cringing at the acrid flavor.

Sherlock dogears a few pages, underlines some things, scribbles notes in the margins all the while keeping his attention attuned to any sign of movement from his bedroom. It’s very late indeed where there’s a shuffle and a thump, John maneuvering through the dark. For a moment the detective toys with the idea of checking on his flatmate but then steady footfalls resonate in the quiet and Sherlock sits back, anticipates John’s presence.

The door flicks open and the creaking of the floorboards signaled John’s emergence. Sherlock glances at the clock - three-thirty - and then back at the hallway, catches John just as he slips into the loo and shuts the door. He listens for John emptying his bladder, washing his hands; the entire process takes one minute and forty-seven seconds longer than usual. Even simply going to the loo must pain him in some way.

When he emerges, sleep-rumbled and hunched over he catches sight of Sherlock at the table and starts slightly. “You-,” John’s voice is delightfully sleep roughened, though Sherlock doesn’t linger on that knowledge for longer than a moment. “Can’t sleep?”

Sherlock says nothing, wills his eyes not to follow John’s movements although he desperately wants to.

“Silly question,” John rumbles, takes a few steps into the kitchen and struggles with getting a glass down from the cupboard. Sherlock doesn’t move, just listens as he turns the tap, fills his glass and drinks from it with a satisfied sigh. If Sherlock closes his eyes, he could imagine John’s fingers curled against the glass, the way his throat works to swallow. If Sherlock closes his eyes he can imagine John and that’s positively something, isn’t it?

He sets the glass down on the counter and slides his fingers into Sherlock’s hair. The detective doesn’t move, doesn’t breathe, just feels the fingers twine and tug. “You should try and get some rest. I’ll be terrible tomorrow after all that walking,” there’s a smile in his voice.

When John walks away, he’s still hunched, arms wrapped around his torso. Sherlock still feels the fingers in his hair, the warmth against his scalp, the slight, sweet tug. A small gesture, tiny really but
it speaks volumes, volumes Sherlock can’t yet categorize, doesn’t understand, though he will, though he wants to. His nerves sing with the touch, carry down his spine and flood his chest cavity, shiver all the way to his fingers.

“Night,” John calls quietly, footfalls shuffling dimly away..

Sherlock watches him go and once the door is closed, he launches himself out of his chair with a careless abandon that has the piece of furniture teetering on it’s back legs before clattering to settle. First, he hides John's cane in the hallway closet next to the original.

Secondly, he grabs his laptop from the sitting room, opens Google and searches, ‘Parsnip, recipe.’
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Sherlock can’t speak any further because John turns his face up to him and what he sees in the depths of his gaze confuses and unsettles him. Blue eyes are amplified, his gaze watery and unsure and his bottom lip is trapped beneath his teeth. There’s weakness there that Sherlock plainly sees that John is trying desperately, desperately to hide. “It’s... alright,” Sherlock manages eventually, leaving the cloth to drip, spread over the side of the tub.

John manages to sleep straight through the appropriate breakfast hours and straight on into lunch. When Sherlock hears stirring from his bedroom it’s nearly gone two o’clock in the afternoon. Mentally, Sherlock bins the idea of scrambling him any eggs; eggs are not a lunch food, he’s learned. He’s not sure about breaking the conventions on foods and at what time of day they’re served just yet; he is a novice after all.

Though he’s learned much over the past twelve hours regarding the culinary arts. Most of it is obvious, temperatures at which to cook meat, how to properly baste a turkey. Would John want a turkey? Do they have a turkey readily available? How much does turkey cost and why do Americans insist on eating it at Thanksgiving?

He’s committed to memory the nutritional value of most staple vegetables - peppers, onions, carrots, tomatoes (though not a vegetable and characterized as such incorrectly on several websites) - and sussed out what combinations of food taste best with which. It’s not too difficult, really. He knows how the human palette discerns taste and he knows John’s tastes and therefore basic cooking should not be a bother to him whatsoever.

Sherlock is about to greet his flatmate with a barrage of questions as to how he’s feeling and what exactly he’d like to eat when he hears the bathroom door slam. It’s only a moment and the sounds of heavy footfalls reverberating off tile before the unmistakable retching begins. The cacophony is quite displeasing to Sherlock, who frowns though takes a step towards the door. Palm open and pressing against the wood he gives a little shout, “John?”

The returning answer isn’t so much a word as an “Unnnnnnnng.”

That startles him and he staggers a step backward, bumps into the wall and remains there until the toilet flushes and John’s feet drag across the floor with a little ‘swuffle-swuffle.’ The faucet turns on and John brushes his teeth, slower than normal. It sounds like he’s just dragging the brush casually back and forth instead of giving any real effort. He rinses, he spits with a cough, rinses and spits again.

When the door cracks open John’s eyes are lidded and it appears as though gravity is taking a toll on his body more so than usual. He slumps heavily; his whole being slumps, arms, torso, cheeks. In a word, he looks entirely wretched.

“You look wretched,” Sherlock states very plainly, remaining stock still against the hallway wall.

John spares enough energy to glare at him and then turns on heel and swuffle-swuffles into the
kitchen. When he sits it’s more of a collapse, limbs and bones all jostling together to land in a heap on the chair. “Ta, you arse,” he sighs and balances his head in shaky palms. “Too much, yesterday after not...” He pauses a moment to huff out a woof of a cough, cringing as he does. “After not being about for a week. It’s...”

“This is different than your previous injury,” Sherlock very nearly tuts and walks to the kettle, fingers lingering over the button. When John gives a slight nod, Sherlock visibly decompresses and flicks the kettle on to boil.

‘Yeah, I got that,” John mumbles into his palms before bucking up a bit, wiping the backs of his hands across his eyes and unfurling in the chair. It takes him a moment to settle himself properly but when he does he levels Sherlock with a look of such utter contempt that it startles him. “You didn’t sleep.”

Sherlock sets his lips in a very, very tight line and slips his hands to bracket his hips. “No.”

“Damn it, Sherlock,” but there’s no real malice in his voice; Sherlock has to wonder if he’s simply too knackered to put forth the effort or if he’s truly upset at all. John’s jaw shifts and he moves his tongue about, passing over teeth and gums before tutting it against the roof of his mouth before setting his face back in his hand. “It’s incredibly bright in here...”

Sherlock raises a brow and without a word walks into the sitting room and retrieves the half of a pill from the bottle. He deposits it onto the table just near John’s elbow and steps back, waiting for his eyes to open. “You’ll need to eat something first.” His nose is just the slightest bit in the air, shoulders back, proud of himself for stating the necessary instead of leaving John to simply down the medication. Forehead still to palm he nods but makes no move to either take the pill or secure himself the requisite food.

Twisting his lips into a frown, Sherlock gingerly plucks open the refrigerator. Peering inside, he locates all of the necessary items and pulls them out, places them on the counter top. “I’m aware situations such as this call for chicken soup or something else equally as bland but as I’ve not had the time to prepare...” Sherlock sucks in a nervous breath and rounds to face John with a false smile. “French toast?”

One eye peeks open and a side of his mouth curves into an amused grin, eyes softening exponentially. The way he cants his head, it’s nearly dreamy, the way John is gazing. “You’re. You. Are going to make me French toast?”

Sherlock glares a moment, gestures at the eggs, the bread, the milk, the cinnamon as though it’s the most common thing in the world. As though Sherlock is seen puttering around the kitchen for its intended use every day. As though he’s ever used the milk other than to run them out of it completely. “You cannot possibly think I could bollocks this up.”

There’s a skip of laughter, a little bubble of a thing that bursts from him and the doctor tilts his head in the other direction, expression no less dreamy. “No, no, I just, yeah.” John reins in the smile and pulls his chin from the cup of his hand. “French toast would be lovely. We’ve syrup and everything?”

The breath he’d been holding rushes out as he turns back to the counter, opening a drawer to pull out a fork with a flourish, a spoon, sets about preparing two cups of tea. One mug is placed in front of John - bit of sugar tipped in, no milk - and he fills the other just to the brim with scalding water; he always adds his milk after a bitter sip. “Syrup and all. It seems Mycroft knows-”

“The man knows what I like to eat?” Of course Mycroft Holmes knows what John likes to eat, and
to read, the brand of soap he uses in the shower and about that time in university when he passed out
in on a park bench in Glasgow; John is always perturbed by the breadth of information Mycroft
possesses, it never fails.

“Are you surprised?” He cracks an egg into a low bowl and then another. “I know what you like to
eat.” His fingers move deftly over the utensils. Sherlock plucks out a large frying pan and twists it
onto the stove expertly, barely a scrape of metal on metal. John relaxes back into the chair and
watches him work, dunking the bread into the egg concoction. Very nearly an art, the way he moves
about the kitchen and John can almost believe that he’s not going to bollocks up breakfast.

“Not too burnt please, the black bits are-”

“Backseat cooking is not helpful at all, John,” he chides gently, placing another pad of butter in the
pan to melt. The knife twists gracefully as he drags it about over the hot surface and the kitchen fills
with the wonderful, rich smell of butter fat. “I’ve not even begun and you assume I’m going to burn
it!”

“Well, you did manage to incinerate-”

“Yes, yes, that was... surprising, I’ll admit but this seems rather straightforward if you would stop
running on about it and let me concentrate.” The way he gestures with the spatula forces John’s
response to clog his throat. He gives a little cough to clear it and hushes, watches on as he lays two
pieces of egg-soaked bread carefully into the pan.

“Are you having any?” A bit of pleading leaches into his voice and it raises the hairs on the back of
Sherlock’s neck; John thinking that he must still look after him... remarkable.

“No.” He flips both pieces of bread easily, golden brown toast flips to greet him.

“Why not?”

Sherlock straightens his shoulders and sets his spine, standoffish. “I’ve never tried it and I don’t
believe I will-”

“You’ve never tried French toast,” John deadpans. “Ever?”

Sherlock shoots him a glance over his shoulder, brows raised, appearing surprised though not. “No?”

“...alright, make four slices, you’re eating, I demand it.” Palms make contact on the table in
adamance and Sherlock jumps slightly, spatula scraping against the pan. John smiles serenely and
sniffs at the air, the delicate scents of butter and cinnamon and vanilla warming him. “Because this
actually smells brilliant and you need to try it. I’m rather surprised-”

“Alright, alright, I’ll eat! Just...” Sherlock sniffs and drags the point of the utensil across the hot
face of the pan. It takes him a few more moments before he flicks off the stove and transfers the
bread to the plates, fussing over them for a moment, depositing them on the table with a little flourish.

John smiles down at the food and then up to Sherlock, dipping an index finger in the little sprinkle of
confectioner’s sugar that he’s carefully shaken over the plate. “Sherlock, yeah, thank you.” Twin
pads of butter melt in the center of the shockingly perfectly-browned bread.

“It’s nothing,” he says offhandedly and brings a napkin across his lap, picking up his fork as he does,
but John looks at him as though what he’s said is the most grievous lie. He rolls his eyes, pushes the
toast around his plate.
Sherlock looks on as John prepares his toast, drizzling syrup over it artfully, from corner to corner, letting it pool gently in the center of the bread. It appears to be a practiced ritual; he finishes with a little flick of his wrist, tipping the syrup back into the bottle and passing it over.

John cuts into the tender bread with the side of his fork and spears it eagerly, watches as the sugary syrup drips and pools back onto the plate. When he pops it between his lips it’s with a look of such utter delight and surprise that there’s a sharp shove to Sherlock’s solar plexus. “Alright, this is... very, Sherlock this is good you need to try it.” He has the decency to wait until he’s chewed and swallowed though immediately sections another piece and scoops it up.

Sherlock pours a bit of syrup onto the corner of his plate, uses fork and knife to cut a tiny little triangle off of the crispier side and drags it through. Bringing it to his lips, he watches John watching him and brings it into his mouth as though it might be quite deadly.

There are two blinks, one as Sherlock processes the flavor and a second as he realizes how quite good French toast is. He somehow manages to rein in his new found enthusiasm and cuts himself another piece, gathering more syrup this time around. “It’s... different,” he settles on and eagerly eats his bite.

“Tosser,” John says as he swallows, chases the bite with the other half of the pill and his antibiotics. “You like it.”

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It’s late afternoon and John is drowsy from the painkiller and from the exertion of walking to the loo and back several times. When he presses himself off of the sofa for the sixth time he wobbles a bit, steadies himself with a hand on the arm and bends over.

They’ve spent the majority of the afternoon in silence, John reading and answering emails on the couch, Sherlock carefully leafing through an ancient-looking text on botany. Everything is quiet and peaceful until John pitches over and grabs his side.

Sherlock starts immediately, dropping the letter opener he’d been using to turn the pages. “It’s alright,” John seethes through his teeth. “S’alright just got up too quickly.” Sherlock says nothing but his hands hover about John’s form, just in case. He shuffles a bit towards the kitchen, slowly, his palm coming away from the sofa belatedly. Another step and another and the detective continues to hover, one hand nearest John’s lower back, the other at his right shoulder.

“Not going to fall,” John grinds out and Sherlock isn’t sure if the painkiller is wearing off or the exertion is getting to him, but he moves a fraction closer. “Really not going to fall, bugger off.” It grates out of him and this time there’s heat behind it, anger, and Sherlock slinks back, his gaze following until John reaches the bathroom and clutches the door frame.

There’s a heavy breath and he allows his head to fall, chin to chest. “Going to have a shower.”

“Is that a good-”

“Had to make do with hand baths in hospital and... I need a shower, a proper one.” With that the door is shut forcefully and Sherlock is left to linger in the hallway, looking down at his hands as though they’ve betrayed him.

A moment later Sherlock hears the tap run, followed by the shower kicking to life; he resigns himself to sitting in the kitchen and listening for any signs of distress. Sherlock contemplates going to retrieve his book from the sitting room when the shower stops and the tub tap begins running once more.
He’s at the bathroom door before he can question himself, knocking gently. “Alright?”

The splish splash from behind the door is delayed and after a moment there’s the unmistakable ‘thunk’ of plastic bottles of hair product hitting the floor. A delayed, dejected and weak “Bollocks,” follows it up.

The thoughts that run through Sherlock’s mind in that instant are all rather dire: John’s stitches having ripped, John having slipped in the tub and broken something, not quite John drowning as he’s able to curse but thoughts very much along those lines. They spur him to open the door in haste, push his way into the bathroom.

John is sitting in the tub, water to mid torso, curled in against his knees. “Too... couldn’t stand up and... tired...”

Sherlock raises a brow and moves into the room, shutting the door quietly behind him to trap the humid heat; seating himself on the toilet; he unbuttons his shirt at the wrists and rolls the fabric to his elbows. “You didn’t sleep last evening either.”

There’s a little splish but John says nothing, doesn’t move.

“Nightmares,” Sherlock vocalizes and there’s a more violent splash from the tub as John uncurls, slides down into the water, mindless of his nudity and rests the back of his head on the porcelain. John’s eyes blink open and back closed and he sighs a little sob.

“Here I was thinking I was done with them,” his hand comes up to press at his forehead. “Fuck,” he mutters and then more forcefully. “Fuck!” John’s hands turn to fists and he punches the water hard, sending a small wave over the side. “I need to... I’ve got to get out, the wound shouldn’t be wet this long.”

“You haven’t even washed,” Sherlock mutters.

“Yeah, well,” John laughs at himself bitterly and goes to sit up but leans back against the tub after a moment, dizziness overcoming him.

Sherlock stands and moves to the side of the tub, keeping his eyes carefully focused on the top of John’s head. “Here,” he dips to grab up the bottle of shower gel that had fallen to the floor. Sherlock locates a flannel in the drawers next to the sink, grabs the cup he keeps to rinse his mouth with and then crouches to settle on his knees on the floor.

“Sherlock,” John sighs but it’s very obvious that there’s no fight in him; his hands remain lax, floating over his lap.

“Just... shut up,” Sherlock says so quietly that it barely resonates in the tiled room.

Laying the flannel on the side of the tub, he picks up the nearest bottle of shampoo - his own - and squeezes some into his hand. He sees John’s own bottle - store brand - just behind the toilet. He doesn’t wish to get up to retrieve it and what’s more, there’s something mysteriously appealing to having John smell something like him. Glass in the water, he pours the warm runoff over John’s head and holds the cup out for him to take.

Gently, Sherlock runs his fingers through John’s hair, carefully at first. When the doctor gives a soft little grunt of acquiescence he bears down a bit, moves back to front, grazing his nails over the man’s scalp. He works behind the ears and around the crown of his head, bringing his other hand to massage at the base of John’s skull.
“Water,” he urges gently and John fills the glass, hands it to Sherlock. He presses a hand to the curve of John’s forehead, shielding his eyes from the soapy runoff. He fills it twice more himself, dunking it by John’s hip before he’s convinced it’s rinsed mostly clean. “There, now sit back.”

John shifts a little, straightens.

A moment later Sherlock places a soaped flannel to John’s neck and begins scrubbing. After a moment he anchors his free hand against John’s right bicep and drags the soaped fabric against John’s skin. All the while he thinks of John’s body temperature, of what John’s own shampoo might smell like so close, of how the skin pulls against still-present muscle. Sherlock thinks about the angle of John’s shoulder and the exit wound that he washes. Sherlock lifts John’s arms and washes beneath, works over his elbows and between fingers that have clutched the trigger of a gun.

All the while John sits there, quietly, allowing Sherlock’s hands to move over him, clean him, care for him. It’s rather intimate, Sherlock thinks, as he begins on John’s chest. He skirts the fresh bullet wound and cleans down his sides, all the way to his belly button where he stops, pulls back, sits on his heels. “Can you—”

Sherlock can’t speak any further because John turns his face up to him and what he sees in the depths of his gaze confuses and unsettles him. Blue eyes are amplified, his gaze watery and unsure and his bottom lip is trapped beneath his teeth. There’s weakness there that Sherlock plainly sees that John is trying desperately, desperately to hide. “It’s... alright,” Sherlock manages eventually, leaving the cloth to drip, spread over the side of the tub.

John sucks in a shaky breath and tears his gaze away, allowing his head to fall. “Yeah, yeah I can...”

Sherlock retreats to the toilet, clasps his hands in his lap and stares at them, waits as John finishes cleaning. He glances up briefly, sees John’s profile - eyes closed, mouth downturned - as he works to finish scrubbing himself. He runs the tap into the cup to rinse off, the water in the tub too dirty and soapy to be effective.

He hears the water begin to drain from the tub and stands, retrieves a fresh towel from the cupboard and returns to the side of the tub with it slung over a shoulder. “Can... can you stand?”

John blinks and nods. It takes him a moment to find footing against the slick surface, has to lean his hands on the side of the tub before he can press himself up into a hunched position. Sherlock urges him to take hold of his shoulders and stand and John does, very shakily.

With the most care he knows how to manage, with every bit of tenderness the man can muster, Sherlock dries John off, pats down his arms, his back, his behind. He runs the towel briskly over his hair and reaches rather ineffectively for his chest and stomach. “Here,” Sherlock says when he’s finished and extends a hand, helps him out of the tub to stand on the mat.

Sherlock ties the towel around John’s hips, sparing a fleeting, guilty glance before covering the man up and slingling his right arm over his shoulders. “There we are,” Sherlock says encouragingly. “There we are.” They take it slowly, the two of them shuffling out into the hallway after a few moments. In the brief time it takes to get from the bathroom to the bedroom John slumps harder and harder into Sherlock, the detective reverently taking the weight.

They maneuver John onto the bed and when he sits he loses his towel; it’s an exercise in morality to keep his gaze from straying from the man’s face but Sherlock manages. Even so, his cheeks heat with embarrassment at the inappropriateness of the situation. Now isn’t time for such thoughts.

He gets John situated on the bed and brings him a clean t-shirt and pajama bottoms, a fresh pair of
pants.

Sherlock steps back, back, until he’s on the threshold of the room. He’s not certain why he suddenly feels the need to retreat after having wanted to be so close, but he does. Lingering in the doorway, he waits to see if John will speak and when he doesn’t -opting instead to set about getting his shirt on - Sherlock does. “Do you need-”

“No,” John clips out harshly. “I don’t need anything.” He looks up at Sherlock, a fierceness in his gaze. “I don’t need anything.”

“Right,” Sherlock mutters, “Right, then,” and goes to shut the door.

“Leave it open,” John commands quickly, a touch of fear in the tremor of his voice. “Just, yes, please.”

He’s not sure what to make of it, so Sherlock makes his way to the sitting room, slinks himself into his armchair and stares into the vacant hearth. Fingers curled hard into his knees he thinks, about how close he’d been to John, how his skin had felt. He thinks about the size and shape of his wound, the tender pink flesh healing, the older, gnarled skin of his shoulder wound. The pain and sadness lingering in his gaze and the desperate, sudden desire to seep all of the dark things from his mind and body and take them into himself.

Was that something that anyone would want to do, when a friend was hurt or is this more? Perhaps this is more significant. His lips curl into a bit of a snarl at his own lack of knowledge and experience. Sherlock calculates the distance between himself and John, imagines John’s naked skin against his sheets and-

No, no. The detective shakes his head briskly and slumps down in the chair until his head lolls. Does he feel these things for John because he’s currently in a caregiver position or does he-

No, again. The mere thought of being without John is unacceptable, it makes his stomach turn and his throat close in such a way that is beyond troubling. Sherlock crosses his ankles and then uncrosses them, crosses them again. He stands, circles the chair and sits as he makes an attempt to sort through the various new feelings that have forced themselves to be acknowledged.

His eyes are about to roll all the way to the back of his head, severing his optic nerve when he hears the delicate click-click of kitten heels on the stairs. He doesn’t bother moving, she’ll notice him soon enough.

“Hello there?” Mrs. Hudson calls out hesitantly, sticking her head in before stepping into the room. “Oh Sherlock, sit up properly, that’s awful for your back!” She moves over towards him and makes a fuss, tugs on his sleeve and begrudgingly he shifts up, huffs, sits properly.

“Yes, can I help you Mrs. Hudson?”

She gives a little start of a huff, hands on her hips in her very best authoritative stance. “I heard all sorts of commotion in the bath earlier. What you boys do is your own business but try not to make a mess.”

Sherlock’s eyes widen, not just at her words but at the decibel of her voice. “Keep your voice down,” he spits, standing, rounding on her. “John is resting.”

“Oh, oh poor John, shall I go up and see him?”

“He’s just fine Mrs. Hudson, I’ve kept an eye on him and he’s through there, not upstairs.” Pointing
to his room, he rounds Mrs. Hudson and paces into the kitchen, leans towards his room and listens.

Her mouth twists into a frown, “You’ve put him in your room, oh, aren’t you a dear. How is he? He’s getting better?”

“He’s... in pain but. He’s well. Quite well, stronger every day,” he shuffles some papers around on the coffee table and glances round at her. “Anything else?” It comes out brusque but he immediately tempers his ire with what he assumes is a gentle smile.

“Of course he is, you looking after him,” she wrings her hands and shuffles around the floor. “Well you’ll let me know if there’s anything I can do.”

“I do,” Sherlock mentions, recalling that he’ll have to wake John at some point to give him his antibiotics and possibly painkillers, that the man hasn’t eaten since lunchtime. “Possibly need assistance in making... chicken soup.”

She perks a bit at this, hands relaxing. “Chicken soup, oh Sherlock, that’s easy, here, come with me.”

He follows her into the kitchen and then moves to close John’s door halfway. He’s about to pull away when he hears a low snuffle and presses back in, deftly avoiding the floorboards that creak. Sherlock sidles up to the bed and looks as John uncurls from his side to his back, one hand fisted in the hem of his shirt, the other curled into a ball at his side.

Reaching out a hand, Sherlock smooths the flat of his thumb of John’s brow. The doctor’s hand relaxes around the hem and the other flexes open, meanders to rest against the sheet.

Swallowing audibly, Sherlock steps back and leaves the room hastily, leaving the door open, only a crack but still open.

When he returns the kitchen his landlady is pulling out more vegetables than Sherlock has likely ever had on hand in the flat at one time.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

“No,” Sherlock agrees, gaze flicking momentarily to John’s lips. “But you’re injured and you need to be well. I need you well and thus-”

“Sherlock.”

“Let me do this.” It’s more out of anger than desperation; they way his voice shakes terrifies him and he swallows audibly and straightens.

It’s late when Sherlock finally peels himself from the kitchen chair. The soup had been left to cool on the hob for a few hours and then he’d transferred it to the refrigerator, making room for the large pot amongst all of the groceries. There’s so much food that for a moment he’s overwhelmed by it all; he doesn’t have the brain space to think about it at the moment and closes the refrigerator door on the plethora of fresh produce.

He draws the curtains in the sitting room and switches off the lamps, even makes an attempt at tidying some of the things that are out of order. There’s a large, plush quilt on the back of the sofa that he grasps and unfurls, is about to spread out against the worn leather when he remembers. One flight up, there is a perfectly serviceable bed, a bed that is generally put to use by John Watson. A bed that has cradled his flatmate’s body, that has experienced his dreams and nightmares.

There is a bed that is done up in sheets that surely smell of John, sheets that have enfolded his body, cotton that has tucked into places that Sherlock wouldn’t dream.

He’s mounted the stairs before he’s made the conscious decision and allows quick feet to carry him up the flight.

The door is slightly ajar and he kicks it open gently with the toe of his shoe. The door gives but Sherlock remains on the threshold of the room feeling as though he’s about to trespass. Odd; he never would have thought twice about entering John’s room before. Somehow having the permission makes this much more difficult. Somehow, John knowing and approving of Sherlock sleeping in his bed renders this situation of much more importance that he would have originally thought it.

Sherlock is quite sure that it means something, the way his stomach feels as though it’s being tossed about, but he’s not sure what; it is beyond maddening that he can’t work it out. His lips twist into a grimace; he doesn’t appreciate the nuance of not knowing something. Sentiment, he chalks it up as, and unfurls his hands from where they’re clutching the door frame.

He pads in, shoes scuffing over the rug floor until he reaches the bed. Sherlock tests the give with a hand, presses into the comforter and the quilt, the sheet and the mattress. Harder than his own mattress, and smaller too. A full size to his own queen; it’s not a huge difference but as he notes it he begins to think about how he and John might fit in this bed.

How they might slot together. Which side each of them might choose. John sleeps on the left side, closest to the door. In case he needs to escape? No. Faster to get to the loo, faster to get down the steps when I shout for him. When I shout for him.
He considers slumber, sleeping with his flatmate, how it would be much easier in his own, plusher bed. In his room, on the first floor. He thinks about how much easier it would be to just tumble into his own room with John in his arms instead of having to climb the stairs.

Ah, there it is. There it is... There’s nothing he wants more in this instant than to know that feeling, to know what John’s solid weight would feel like if he walked them backwards into his room. He wants to know how John would look in his bed if he were healthy, well, whole and... aroused.

Sherlock leans a temple against the door frame and bites his bottom lip. Not sentiment, no, something much more complicated than that. The detective understands respect and he understands affection and admiration. But it’s this burn right in the center of his chest, the irrational urge to lock John away so that nothing may ever happen to him again, this he does not understand. It’s not the natural affinity between the two of them, it’s much more painful and torturous.

The breath he emits is labored, shaky; he knows he shouldn’t be thinking of such things. He shouldn’t be allowing even the notion of he and John in a bed together to perforate his carefully constructed defenses. But he does. Sherlock sits on the edge of the bed and primly, unties his shoes, slides them off to nestle just beneath the bed all the while desperately wanting to press his face to the center of John’s sheets and breathe. There is restraint, visible, as his hands shake; his socks are rolled into a neat little bundle and tucked into the right loafer.

Leaning back on his arms, Sherlock surveys what of the room he can see. He wonders if John sees it differently, through his own eyes, wonders how John sees his room. Sherlock doesn’t deduce much about the space, other than John’s inherent military tidiness (Obvious) because he doesn’t particularly want to at the moment. Sherlock wants to simply sit in John’s space and feels what he feels, absorb the sounds, the shadows, the slant and fall of the curtains in the case that this is the only time he finds himself here.

Standing, he removes his trousers until he’s down to his pants and folds them properly over the modest, wooden chair to the side of the bed. He unbuttons the cuffs of his shirt and rolls them up. He wishes he’d thought to get a shirt from his room before John had dozed off but he supposes he’ll make do with what he has. Or... no, that would be too much, too intimate.

Sherlock rests against the duvet - utilitarian, drab navy - not bothering to peel back the bedcovers yet, settles against John’s pillow and looks at the ceiling. There’s a tiny fracture in the plaster, forty-five degrees from the south wall; Sherlock’s eyes follow it until it either terminates or disappears behind the wallpaper. He imagine what it might look like beneath, running down, skirting the lightswitch, canting off to run behind John’s dresser.

He studies that too, just perfunctorily, though. The dark wood and tarnished handles, how the bottom drawer is slightly off-center; John clearly had to force it back into place to get it to close. His eyes linger on the second, right hand drawer in which Sherlock knows John keeps his t-shirts. He rearranges himself on the bed, the buttons of his shirt pulling uncomfortably.

Sherlock twists himself until he’s sitting upright, starkly straight on John’s bed. He doesn’t think about it too much, doesn’t want to talk himself out of it. He gets as far as rationalizing comfort and John’s likelihood to allow him to borrow a shirt before he’s out of bed and opening that second, right hand drawer, pulling out a soft, worn, grey v-neck shirt.

The haste with which he undoes the buttons on his oxford speaks of the need to feel the fabric against his skin and once on, Sherlock runs his hands over his torso, feeling it flex beneath the delightful fabric. He dips to gingerly peel back the blankets on the bed and sighs as his flesh meets the cool cotton sheets.
John’s scent envelops him. It’s just this side of spicy, a hint of fabric softener, something akin to tea but much earthier. He can pick up on the scent of the oils of John’s hair and as he does he scrubs the back of his own head down into the pillow, masking it, intermingling their scents. Sherlock feels for a moment every part a wild animal, marking this place as his, his. But it’s not. This is John’s bed and if he had not been convalescing, Sherlock would not be welcome here. So, he relishes it now, in the present, willing his mind to calm and his body to relax as he twines his arm around a pillow and holds it to the side of his face.

It is not a dreamless, deep sleep that he falls into. It is fitful, but when he finds that his mind will not settle, he presses his face to the pillow and inhales deeply. Holds John in his lungs for as long as his body will allow.

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Sherlock awakes with an incredible start, shaking to consciousness, legs kicking erratically beneath the sheets. He places where he is almost instantly but it is no less unsettling. His arms are twisted in the sheets and he shakes them out, holds his hands up in the dim light and flexes.

There’s barely a sliver of blue light peeking through John’s curtains. He estimates it’s just after dawn, before eight o’clock, later than six. Stretching out in bed he realizes he managed at least seven hours of sleep and even for that, he does not feel rested.

He gives himself a moment, stretches, doesn’t wish to move just yet.

Sherlock settles his face back into the pillow and waits a moment, his mind shaking off the slumber and kicking to life, humming with observations. What he hadn’t had the strength or the want for the previous evening, he catalogues now. He commits to memory every detail about John’s room that he can manage from his vantage point on his stomach in the man’s bed.

He’s quite content to simply lay there and look his fill until a thump and a curse from the kitchen catches his attention. Sherlock spurs to life, manages to snatch his trousers and tug them on as he thunders down the steps two at a time. When he bursts into the room he sees John, frumpy in pajama bottoms that are a shade too big and his bathrobe hanging off of him attempting to take down a bowl from the cupboard.

“Do. Not. Move,” Sherlock grits out and John immediately freezes, mid-reach. The detective dashes across the room and takes down a bowl with ease, placing it with far too much force onto the kitchen table. “Why did you need a bowl?”

John looks bashful for a moment before gathering himself, “Wheetabix.”

Sherlock’s eyes narrow and he leans in. “You should have called. You shouldn’t be stretching like that; you’re a doctor, you know this.” He speaks so fast that John reels a bit. The contempt in his voice is plain, he makes no effort to disguise it as he spins around John and moves to the refrigerator, retrieves the large pot of soup and unceremoniously plonks it onto the table. “Soup,” Sherlock states with a single nod of his head.

“Soup?” John asks. “Is that what you got up to last evening? Sherlock-”

He scoffs as he finds a ladle. “Save the reticence about trying it; Mrs. Hudson helped.”

“Oh, did she?” John asks with a wry little twist of his lips.

Sherlock scoops a large helping into a small pot, the cooled soup more like gelatin than liquid. After a moment he adds a second scoop for himself and then a third, just for good measure. “You need the
protein.”

“So, soup for breakfast?”

Sherlock blinks blankly at him. “It’s good for illness, is it not?”

John gives a half smile and shrugs. “Not sure that applies to gunshot wounds.” He licks his lips and rounds the table, reaching up to grab at the handle of the cupboard. Sherlock cuts him off efficiently, tossing a hand out in front of him.

John grinds his teeth, takes a step back. “Damn it, Sherlock, I can get myself a glass of water?”

“You’re not supposed to be stretching,” he grinds back darkly. “I’ll place clean glassware on the counter if you find it so necessary to serve yourself!”

“Am I to call for you every time I require a glass of water?” John hisses sarcastically and even is incensed enough to bracket his hands on his hips.

“Yes!” Sherlock nearly thunders, brows reaching for his hairline as he gestures insanely with the ladle, bits of congealed soup spattering against the walls. It’s frighteningly quiet for a moment as they both suck in heavy breaths, chest heaving in their mutual anger. Sherlock’s lips purse and he flicks his gaze momentarily to the floor before meeting the doctor’s eyes again.

John’s voice is thin when he asks, “Why?”

Sherlock glares, “I’m your emergency contact.”

John’s eyes are drawn to the spatter; the tension drains out of him, his jaw unlocks and his shoulders slump. He scrubs a hand, hard over his face. “It’s been two days and... christ.”

Sherlock raises a brow as he lowers the ladle, maneuvers so that he can turn on the burner. “Soup for breakfast,” Sherlock gets back to it, turns his back to John and stirs the pot, the sound of metal scraping metal harsh against their ears. “Just eat it.”

John blinks, throws himself into the chair, the legs smacking against the floor with the effort. “...Fine.”

Sherlock gets some crackers out and fills two glasses with milk, noticing that he’s pouring himself a glass after he’s already started. Well, if John is eating, he is eating, he supposes and it’s been positively ages since he had a glass of pure milk. He wonders if it tastes the same as he remembers.

He sets a bowl and glass in front of John; some of the soup sloshes over the side. Of course, of course he expects John to call on him if he needs a glass of water, if he needs anything at all, hasn’t he made that clear? He’s very much aware that John wishes to believe himself entirely self-reliant but the man has to make some concessions, especially where his health and well being is concerned.

“Eat,” the detective urges gruffly, shoving a spoon into his hand as he slings his own body across a chair and begins to tuck in.

“Do you have your pills?” Sherlock asks after he swallows a mouthful, his head tipped towards the bowl. It is rather good, he admits to himself and locates a bit of chicken with his spoon.

John takes a sip of his milk, shakes his head and Sherlock places his spoon down and launches himself from his seat even as John calls after him, “Don’t, I can bloody get them myself Sherlock-”

He rounds on John so quickly that the movement is very nearly a blur. “Shut up, John. Just... shut
up. Let me, and... shut up.” He’s so close to John that the doctor can surely feel the huff of his breath over his cheeks; if he leaned in just a fraction their noses would brush.

“I’m not helpless,” John gasps.

“No,” Sherlock agrees, gaze flicking momentarily to John’s lips. “But you’re injured and you need to be well. I need you well and thus-”

“Sherlock.”

“Let me do this.” It’s more out of anger than desperation; the way his voice shakes terrifies him and he swallows audibly and straightens.

John holds his tongue between his lips for a moment, crosses his arms delicately across his chest. “Is this penance? Is this you punishing yourself because of... Sherlock this isn’t your fault. None of this is.”

Nostrils flare and Sherlock blinks. Neither of them move. Neither of them say a word. John’s jaw works for a moment and then he settles back against the chair. The once-over he gives Sherlock lingers. “You’re... wearing my shirt.”

For a moment Sherlock does nothing but glare. A second later his face smooths out, a blank expression replacing it. “Yes,” Sherlock says quite plainly. There’s no desperation there although he feels it welling within him, causing the acids in his stomach to roil and turn. He feels things acutely for John, things he isn’t entirely certain he’ll be able to put into distinguishable words.

John licks his lips; Sherlock follows the line of his tongue over his mouth before meeting his gaze once more. Perhaps it is because John senses this in him or perhaps it’s because he’s picking his battles. “Alright,” John says and turns back to his soup, the set of his shoulder still tense but lets this go.

Sherlock stomps into the sitting room and retrieves the bag of John’s medication.

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Sherlock notes that there are no fewer than six-hundred and thirty-two comments on John’s blog asking after him. “Do people have nothing better to do?” Sherlock balks as he prepares a wet mount with surprising speed.

John rolls his eyes; he is sitting up extremely straight in his chair, pillow at his back as he warms his feet by the fire. Thankfully, Mrs. Hudson had offered to deal with the hearth, nullifying a potentially volatile situation between Sherlock and John. “Well, it was in the paper,” John says by means of explanation and Sherlock lets the matter drop. The casual click-click of John’s distinctive typing filling the silence between them. Every so often John gives a little chuckle or a hum but other than that is it the quiet hiss and pop of the fire.

After three hours of John wanting for nothing and Sherlock casually shooting glances at the back of his head in order to be absolutely certain he was still sitting up straight (as the doctor had instructed), the detective huffs and bounces against his stool. “I’m out of slide covers.”

“So get more,” John says distractedly. He takes a pull on his near-empty water glass. Sherlock almost scuttles over to refill it but manages to abstain.

Palms to the front of his trousers, Sherlock rubs distractedly. He very, very much wishes to finish his experimentation this evening. It will have to wait until the morning, at least. Sherlock attempts to
brush it off, but the need to finish his observations prickle the back of his neck, make his palms itch. “I’ll have Mycroft send some.”

“Sherlock, just go to Bart’s. You’ve not seen Molly in two weeks, I’m sure she’s... worried about you, or something.” He is distracted, going back to edit a comment he’s leaving to a reader.

“Worried, why would she be worried?”

The side of John’s mouth jumps in a smile. “Nevermind.”

Sherlock gets up and paces the length of the flat, from the back hallway to the sitting room and around again; on the third pass he swipes John’s water glass and refills it. On the fourth pass he runs both hands through his hair and tugs. On the seventh, John’s had enough. “You need to get out.”

“I’m fine.”

“You are very clearly not fine,” the doctor says, stretching his legs, knees and ankles popping with the effort. “Really Sherlock, you’re driving me batty. Take a walk, I’ll be fine for an hour.”

Sherlock studies John, twists his mouth into a disbelieving line.

“Really, I will. Survived Afghanistan, remember? Just... set me up with some tea and toast and I’ll be right as rain.”

The detective just continues to stare at him.

John settles his laptop secure on his thighs and folds his hands on the keyboard. “Sherlock, I am serious. Get out. An hour, that’s all I’m asking. I’ll have my phone and will text you the second anything is amiss.”

His cheek twitches as though the idea now sounds appealing.

John smiles a small ghost of a thing. “Although nothing will happen.”

Doing as asked, Sherlock pops two pieces of bread into the toaster and unearths the butter and jam. He swaps honey for the sugar in John’s tea - a rare treat - and brings the entire affair into the living room on a tray. He spins around three times looking for an adequate surface to lay down the meager dinner. He recalls the tray shoved in the back of the closet and digs it out.

“Ta,” John says, flicking his gaze up briefly before directing his attention back to his laptop.

Sherlock lingers another moment and then turns to pull his coat off of the peg. “Do text me. Immediately, if anything is-”

“Already said I would,” John sighs and goes back to his typing, waving Sherlock off with a lazy hand.

Sherlock nods, pats down his pockets to assure himself he has everything he needs. “We have everything in, don’t we?”

John rolls his eyes but doesn’t look up. “Yeah, Mycroft got everything except Penguins, however could he forget the Penguins.” His voice is flat with sarcasm but Sherlock is already turning on heel and bounding down the stairs.

“Text!” he shouts out before the door slams closed and John is left alone in the peace and quiet of the flat. Finally.
He hurries along the pavement, hands shoved into his pockets as he twirls out of the way of oncoming pedestrians; Sherlock speeds around those walking in the same direction as him. *Too slow, *too bloody slow!*. Once at the corner he hailed a passing cab and all but launched him into the seat.

“Prescot Street, St. Bartholomew’s,” he grinds out, plucking out his mobile. First he shoots off a text to Molly, asking if she’s in. It’s later in the evening and though it’s a Wednesday, a night she characteristically stays late to finish paperwork, he doesn’t want the trip to be in vain.

When she responds in the affirmative, he opens his latest text block with John and is hastily keying out ‘Alright?’ when he pauses with his thumb over the ‘send’ button. No, John had said he would text if anything was amiss; he has to trust that. There was a delicate balance here to strike, to trust John to tell him when he needed something while still keeping a careful eye on the doctor.

He cannot be there every second of every day, regardless of how selfishly he wants to be.

Sherlock presses the side of his forehead to the cool glass as the cab rounds onto Prescot Street, directing the driver to idle for a few moments while he runs inside to pick up his necessities. He jogs through the lobby, flashing the badge he’d pinched from an orderly ages ago; the guard barely looks up.

He opts for the stairs instead of the elevator and takes the two flights down to the morgue, throwing the door open dramatically; he finds Molly in her office, bent over her desk, look of concentration on her face. “Ah, Sherlock, here are the slides,” she doesn’t even bother to stand. She must be positively swamped.

Sherlock takes them, dips his head in thanks and is about to turn around when Molly stops him.

“How’s John doing? Every time I tried to go and see him... well...”

The detective clears his throat and gazes at Molly quizzically, noting her general concern. He clears his throat primly. “Good, yes, he’s... well. He... enjoyed the daisies you brought. Said they... brightened the room.” And with great effort, Sherlock gives her a real smile, a small one, but genuine.

She smiles back and twiddles her pen for a moment. “And you’re... caring for him?”

Sherlock holds himself up as straight as possible, adjusts his posture, prepares for fight. “Of course.”

Her smile turns into something else; her mouth doesn’t move but there’s something that tints her eyes. If he had to guess he might name it sadness... but why? Molly plucks another file from the pile and looks up at him from beneath her lashes. “Best be getting home then. I’ll try and stop by this week.”

Molly shakes her head as she turns back to her paperwork, smile still curved on her lips. Sherlock stares a moment, refrains from telling her that her stopping by will have absolutely no effect on John on his healing but stops himself. Not good, that’s not good to say to someone who is worried after one’s friend.

“Oh, alright,” Sherlock mutters, dips his head again and then leaves, bounds back up the two flights and is out to the taxi in short order. He barks out “Baker Street,” startling the cabbie, before he had a chance to consider the destination in mind.

As they’re approaching Regent’s Park, Sherlock amends their destination, sits back and considers Molly’s reaction, all the while turning the box of slide covers over and over in his hands.

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Sherlock returns home fifty-three minutes after he left with mint, orange and wafer Penguins, two packages of each. John just bubbles with laughter and smiles sleepily in thanks.
“But I want you to need me!” he says all in a rush and then immediately shuts his mouth in horror. What has he said? What... has he said. And why has he said it? “What? Why, why do I want you to need me?”

They’re halfway through *Dr. No* when Sherlock decides he can no longer abide the James Bond films. Instead of standing, he tosses himself from the chair and across the room in very obvious agitation. “This is possibly the worst thing you’ve forced me to watch.”

John doesn’t bother taking his eyes from the television. “First of all, Connery is a national treasure and secondly, I’m not forcing you to do anything,” John grimaces and shifts on the sofa, readjusting the hot water bottle that is balanced precariously just above his wound site; he’d decided on it after changing his dressing and finding himself rather sore. He bends a knee, decides against it, bends the other knee, decides against it. There is still no comfortable position to recline in, really, unless he’s lying flat on his back.

Sherlock runs two hands through his hair, ruffles it maniacally and turns on him. The situation is about to crest from unacceptable directly into maddening. “You’re here, watching it. I can’t simply *tune it out* as you’ve suggested I do.”

A little annoyed chuckle escapes John, the sort he employs when he’s gearing up to make a well-worn point. “Hard is it? I’m forced to do it with you, all the time.” John grimaces again; he can’t find a comfortable position. Sherlock sighs dramatically and grabs a throw pillow, and tosses it at him. John glares but piles it atop the one he already has beneath his back.

Sherlock simply stands and watches John from behind the armchair, unmoving. The doctor glances up at Sherlock once, does a double take and serves him with another withering look, rolling his eyes. “Go... do something.”

“Something,” Sherlock mutters, twists a wrist to check the time. “And what shall I do? You’ll be needing your antibiotics in an hour so, no going out then. I can’t possibly begin any experimentation I’ve been waiting on in that time. The things that I could begin with are all likely to result in fumes which you won’t approve of.”

Shifting on the sofa, he gives a resigned little sigh. “I never approve of fumes. And I think I can take a pill by myself,” John pauses the DVD lest he miss anything interesting, as though he hasn’t seen it at least a dozen times before.

“Well they may also be detrimental to your health,” Sherlock spits quickly, running hands through his hair once more. He knows he looks undone, unhinged, like a complete lunatic. The picture he presents causes a small smile to curl onto John’s mouth.

It’s not as though John is trying to understand. Quite the contrary; he is mocking him. “So only when it is detrimental to my health will you refrain from doing anything with noxious fumes...”

Sherlock spins on him, glaring, eyes wide and teeth set. “I cannot accommodate to your every whim
and *need*, but I will not see you harmed!"

He’s struggling with the effort to breathe so heavily, nostrils flaring; Sherlock feels as though his chest is about to cave in from all this pressure that he’s experiencing. And so he heaves his breath, in and out while he waits for the look of surprise to melt off of John’s face. It takes a few, long minutes.

The DVD screensaver flicks to life, bathing the room in a slight, dull blue glow.

The doctor licks his lips, proceeds with caution. “I didn’t ask you for this, Sherlock. In fact, I was quite adamant about you not trying to... care for me.” The restraint in his voice is evident. It’s how John speaks to him when he’s going off on a rant or spiralling out of control with his deductions.

The eye roll is expected, but the softness in the tone of his voice is not, not even by himself. “If not me, then who?”

“Literally anyone else,” John says quickly, running out of breath at the end of his sentence, sucking in another in a sudden burst of anger. “My sister, a *nurse*, literally anyone else because I knew from the onset that you’d be like... like this.”

Brow lifted, the left side of his mouth twitches, the only betrayal that he feels anything at all. Sherlock asks, “Like what?”

John snaps, lips tightening, bottom teeth jutting out just a bit. “I don’t... Resentful! You’re hard enough to deal with on a good day but having to *need* you for my... Sherlock, you have-“

“But I want you to need me!” he says all in a rush and then immediately shuts his mouth in horror. What has he said? *What...* has he said. And why has he said it? “What? Why, why do I want you to need me?”

John’s face has gone suddenly still and his mouth slack; his brow is creased and the man is at such a loss for words that he actually has to move his mouth a few times to spur his brain to think of what he wants to say. Sherlock watches as he struggles to find something, anything, to rationalize this. “I... that is... well, alright,” He stumbles, frowns at himself and continues. “I suppose it means that you care about me.”

“No,” Sherlock says immediately, waving off the explanation.

John makes every attempt to wipe the look of abject hurt off of his face, arms up in defeat. “Alright, you don’t care about me.”

“Oh be simple, that’s not what I meant.” He says as though speaking to a four year old, a *boring* four year old. “Of course I care about you, you’re my friend, it’s *not* that.” Pointer and middle fingers tap against his mouth as Sherlock ponders, ponders the shivering in the pit of his stomach, how the scent of John both comforts and intrigues him, how he’s not exactly sure what the shade of his eyes is but how he wants desperately to catalogue it.

The doctor hesitates, swings his legs off of the sofa and very stiffly manages to sit up straight. Still, he clutches the water bottle to his stomach. “Alright... right.”

Sherlock’s eyes flash. “Is it?”

The confusion that he wears on his face bleeds to his tone. “What?”

“Is it *alright*?” Sherlock mocks the words with his tongue, even goes so far as to give them airquotes.“That I’ve no idea what this *is*, this ‘more than caring’ lark? No idea at all, and yet you claim it’s
“Alright.” There, the airquotes again as he begins to pace in the entryway to the kitchen.

John sighs, drops his head and stares at his knees for a very long time; even his shoulders slump in supplication. When he looks up at Sherlock, the bags beneath his eyes look as though they’ve multiplied tenfold, he looks like he’s aged ten years, it appears as though the simple act of wondering over Sherlock’s intent in his head has taxed him greatly. It’s only been a moment but it seems as though he’s been burdened for years. But when the doctor speaks, his voice is clear and even. “All of it, everything, anything you’re feeling... is alright.”

Sherlock breathes heavily through his nose, hands on his hips, stares manically back at him, eyes wild. John looks so small on the sofa, bundled in soft clothing, incapacitated. It would take nothing at all for Sherlock to cross the room and subdue him, stop his blood pumping in his veins. But no, not really. His companion is a study in contradictions, wouldn’t go down without a fight, might not even lose. And Sherlock needs that too, the steadfast partnership of John Watson, the restrained violence, the tea and jumpers and blond hair and Sig Sauer tucked away upstairs.

He needs it all; he’s not quite sure what shade of gray his life would become without all of it.

And Sherlock wants John to need him too, just like that. Just like breathing.

It was only a .22

“It’s not,” Sherlock decides because beneath it all, beneath everything, he doesn’t know how to do this, not really. And the fact that he can’t even begin to think about trying terrifies him. Sherlock’s eyes flash at John’s once more as he walks purposefully to the door and snags his coat off of the hook. “It is... not.”

He’s bounding down the steps before he’s given John an explanation; he wants desperately to throw himself outdoors, let his feet hit the pavement and run but when he’s halfway down, Sherlock pauses, turns back, calls. “Text. I’ll be back... shortly.”

He waits a beat, two and then John answers, “If I need to.”

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Sherlock heads down the street towards the Tube station; he requires the crush of people, the bustle of rush hour to settle him into his thoughts. As soon as he turns the corner he’s jostled along by the crowd, men and women going to and coming from. It comforts him.

All of their thoughts muddling together into a delightful, distant buzz. He’s pressed onto Marylebone Road, headed west and doesn’t even pause, crossing Gloucester Place as the light changes.

Need, interesting indeed.

He’s been in the flat with John for five days, helping him to bed, preparing his meals, ensuring his comfort and well being. It’s beginning to pick away at his resolve, being around the man all of the time. He recalls the times when John has been out in the past, at the surgery or the shops, perhaps on a date. He recalls those times and can sense the desperation he’d felt, in wanting John back, wanting him close, just in case.

It makes absolutely no sense now, that having John so close is causing such ire; it’s jumbling his thought process. Sherlock begins again, supposing a life without John Watson in it. A life in which he is never introduced to John thereby never being told to clean up after himself, eat his dinner, play nice with Mycroft and so on and so forth.
The notion does appeal to him on some more basic levels and he can feel the muscles of his jaw wanting to smile; he does not. He doesn’t smile because in lieu of discovering that doing without John’s meddling he can invent no concrete scenario that would fill the void of the time they have been together. He cannot conjure the image of another supposed flatmate, cannot possibly fathom what else he would be doing.

Or want to be doing.

Without John.

That is vexing in the extreme. How can one know what might have been if one has no ability to somehow go back and experience it. Positing that that were possible, to live in a world where he was never to meet John Watson, would he wish to do it?

The answer is quite clear: absolutely not.

And as such Sherlock must admit to himself that to put up with John’s positively annoying habits means being able to live his life with John in it. If the detective could do a double take on himself he might; has he just conceded himself a point, that living with someone somehow makes his life better?

The possibility of living a life without John now, having had him even in the small way that he has is simply unthinkable. But so is the idea of having him as he is, presently.

Sherlock screws up his face at that, at wanting more. It’s been ages since he’s succumbed to such base desires, but it can’t be denied. There are things he wishes to ask of John that go far beyond the relationship that friends might have; the shock of nearly losing him has dragged that kicking and screaming to the forefront of his consciousness.

That just won’t do either. Sherlock purses his lips and picks up his pace, shoving his hands balled into fists down into pockets. He hunches his shoulders and curls into himself; he’s not sure he wants to go back to the flat (needs to go back to the flat, need, need, need) because there are things he’s sure must be said, he’s just not terribly clear on what they are.

He’s about to check the time when his mobile pings.

It’s a text from John that says only “I need you.”

Sherlock sighs, it is about time for him to take his medication - he should be getting back. “I can be back at the flat in-” Sherlock glances up at the cross street, if he hurries back it won’t take him long at all. “Ten minutes.” He sends off the text and does an about face on the corner, crossing the street he’d just crossed previously.

When he’s made it to Edgware Road his phone alerts him again; sidestepping around a couple holding hands, he views it. “No, you don’t have to come home, I just wanted you to know that I do need you.”

He stops, right there on the pavement, and people are forced to move around him for once. Sherlock stares at the tiny words until they nearly begin to pulsate in his vision. He blinks up, takes note of his surroundings, wonders how anyone else in the world can feel at all remotely normal if he’s just received this text from John Watson.

That I do need you.

Sherlock is walking again before he realizes it, gaze still fastidiously locked on the screen of his mobile. His ears ring and he imagines John saying the words, speaking them to him. Turning onto
Baker Street he walks directly into a woman who looks bewildered but hurries away without saying a word. Sherlock is rooted to the spot on the pavement, looking down the street towards 221.

The steps he takes feel leaden, heavy with trepidation and consequence. These words have changed him, the knowledge of John’s mutual need has altered him irrevocably. And in such a short time. Sherlock doesn’t quite know how to absorb this knowledge, doesn’t know where to sort it. Sherlock makes a helpless sound in the back of his throat, something like a growl and walks across the road briskly.

For a moment the thought of repressing his newfound emotions calls to him and it is appealing in a way, in that his heart won’t have to feel this thoroughly wrenched any longer. But that isn’t truly an option now, not since he’s been flayed wide by this realization. It’s not an option now that his heart harbors the truth of this thing between them.

He counts the remainder of his steps in heartbeats, in the deep thuds that resound in the hollow of his chest. Sherlock Holmes does have a heart, contrary to widespread belief, but it took John Watson to coax it to life. His fingers threaten to curl against his chest, over the space where the muscle pumps away but Sherlock refrains.

He must have some control, some proper reign over himself if he’s to face his flatmate after this. After becoming so keenly aware. Key slips into lock without obstacle and Sherlock slinks inside, shutting out the late autumn wind behind him.

He’s selfish; this he realizes. To be selfless would be to sacrifice the work. To care about anyone at all would be impractical and messy. Sherlock Holmes needs to be efficient and steadfast, unwavering. For all his years pinpoint-focused on exactly that, how in the world did he allow John to slip right in?

He contemplates this as he climbs the steps, slowly, clutching his coat to his chest like a security blanket.

John is... extraordinary. It’s the only explanation that fits, it’s the only explanation that quiets the frantic buzzing in his head. To consider anything else is less than optimal.

“Nice walk?” brow perked, John is leaning back against the arm of the sofa, eyes closed. He looks just this shade of ashen, sweat dotting his brow. Sherlock takes note of the quilt that he has draped over him (Gift from Harry, synthetic fibers, surprisingly not hideous.) and the way he leans his chin down into it.

Sherlock says nothing, hums non-committally. The detective’s eyes won’t focus as he shrugs out of his coat, catches it before it hits the floor and hangs it on its peg. Hangs it on his peg next to John’s. His peg.

John’s peg.

The sigh he heaves shivers out of his lungs and he gives John a sidelong glance, bites the corner of his lip. “That is where your coat belongs,” voice low, deliberate. “And this is where my coat belongs...” A mirthless laugh breaks the tension between them. “It just happened like that, didn’t it. I put my coat just there and you... there.”

His pointer finger waggles in the air between the two, back and forth, back and forth. He hums, steps up to the coats and then steps back. “Odd.”

The leather of the couch creaks as John sits up properly, looks at their outerwear hanging limp side-
by-side. “This isn’t,” John sighs, running his hand nervously over the back of his neck, all the while keeping the quilt tucked closely to his body. “This isn’t something new, Sherlock, it’s not like you said that and something clicked in my head, it’s not...”

*This has been in the cards a very, very long while, now.*

Sherlock turns to meet his gaze, ears *ringing* with the admission, brain shivering in its effort to place the words properly. He cannot sort it in his mind. “No...”

John shivers, but holds eye contact. “No?”

Sherlock blinks. “Of course it isn’t; I suppose... I simply wished to hear you voice it.” With his gaze fixed on the floor, Sherlock licks his lips and grimaces, the truth a heavy burden, tumbling out of him awkwardly. He’s terrified of John knowing this of him, terrified of John *never* knowing. John and what the man makes him *feel is terrifying*. “Sentiment,” he gives a tiny, self-deprecating smile.

John smiles back, “Sentiment.”

Sherlock folds his hands behind his back and bounces up on the balls of his feet; if he never hears that word again it will be too soon. “Well-”

John is a flurry of immediate thoughts, springing from his lips unbidden, even for the weight of them; his eyes are a bit glassy. "You're an utter idiot if you think I don't need you. How in the world do you think I'm still here, still breathing, still wanting to get out of bed in the morning." There is sadness there and pain, John’s voice rough with the effort of his telling.

Sherlock swallows and nods twice, very slowly. But his face clouds over, masks whatever emotion he’s managed to allow to bleed through. Sherlock is once more rigid, unwavering, slightly cold. This is how it has to be, right now. This is how it has to be until he has the time to *process* it all, fit it where it belongs in his head. Maybe then he’ll understand it fully. “You need your pills-”

“Sherlock,” John croaks, not ready for the man to wall himself off, emotion laced in his voice. “I...” But his voice trails off and he resigns himself to the whirlwind that is his flatmate, doesn’t dare voice anything else of his own need.

He’s already hurrying into the kitchen, flinging open the refrigerator. “And dinner, dinner first and then the rest of *Dr. No.*” The noise of him rooting around in the appliance nearly drowns out his words. Celery is shoved aside on his hunt for green that he can use to make a salad

*A salad can’t be too hard to make, just a matter of chopping and tossing. Boring, utterly and completely but... “I won’t enjoy it. At all, I want you to know.”* 

John’s voice is off, different from before. It’s still low in tone, but an urgency has tinted it. “Sherlock...”

It takes more than a moment for Sherlock to notice, his thoughts spiraling out boisterously in his head. “I’m going to reheat that soup? And there’s enough bread for toast, soup and toast-”

“Sherlock!” John shouts and immediately groans, slumps back onto the sofa with a heave of breath. “Something is... something isn’t right. Very... very not right.” His last words trip over themselves to get out before another wave of dizziness takes him.

Immediately, Sherlock whips his head around, eyes flashing. “What?”

“Oh,” John says, quite underwhelmingly and drops the water bottle to the floor with a swishy thud.
“Thought it was the water bottle and the, the quilt but...” His face scrunches up and John grunts with effort as he attempts to straighten out a bit better on the leather. “And that I needed to take the... Christ, christ...”

There’s white noise, a blank brilliance in Sherlock’s brain before everything sparks and flares bright orange, lips moving to vocalize, moving too fast, too fast. “There is always likelihood of infection with a gunshot to the chest, clothing, dirt, dragged into the wound—”

“Sherlock,” John grunts, huffing with the effort of saying the word, his eyes roll back into his head; he smacks his lips twice, languidly, testing for moisture. Sherlock presses the inside of his wrist to John’s forehead. Hot, clammy... fever. High fever.

Dangerously high.

“Cab, now. We’ve got to... I need to go to hospital, I-” But the end of his sentence is cut off abruptly as John wilts back onto the sofa and closes his eyes, tries to breathe calmly, calmly through his nose.

Sherlock is down the steps in an instant, taking them two at a time until his bursts back onto Baker Street looking like a man deranged.
Chapter 9

On this occasion John is admitted to St. Mary’s, the process expedited by a surprisingly calm Sherlock, who details in full John’s medical history to the admitting nurse. He speaks in short, paced but clipped sentences. She nods along kindly, her smile warming all the while.

“Sir,” she has to stop him when he gets to the bit about chicken pox in primary school. “We have his file right here, he’s in our system.” She is kind and swivels her monitor around so that Sherlock can see it. To his left, John rests in the starchy hospital bed, barely aware of his surroundings.

There is little privacy in the busy, expansive emergency room, only a thin, wispy little curtain separating John’s bed from that of his neighbors. To their right, a man is screaming for more, more of what he does not specify. If Sherlock had to deduce he’d likely say opiates, addicted for six years - since his late teens - coming off of a bad score. To their right, an elderly woman with an entire family doting on her, lung collapse, unlikely to pull through.

Sherlock does not vocalize these thoughts.

Instead he stands back while the short, efficient nurse takes John’s vitals, takes a peek under his bandage, checks his pupils and sets him up with a standard saline drip. “You’re likely a bit dehydrated on top of it all,” she mentions as she swings the monitor around again and begins typing something in; Sherlock’s mind cannot process the words she’s typing as her fingers fly over the keys. “You’re top priority, someone should be into see you very,” she taps a very more keys. “Very soon.”

As she leaves she pulls the curtain closed with a swish, giving them some semblance of privacy.

John rolls his head aimlessly against the pillow, passing his tongue over dry lips. “That cab, never seen one move that fast before.”

Sherlock glances behind him and then logs into the system (child’s play) and pulls up John’s information, eagerly scans through his previous diagnostics, committing them to memory. There are things in this file that he couldn’t possibly deduce, his exact blood pressure for instance. It’s brilliant. “Well, I can oftentimes be very persuasive.” He shuffles closer to the screen, squints as he reads.

John huffs a little breath out of his nostrils, meant to be a laugh but he can’t manage right now, delirious as he is. “Stop it, you’ll get in trouble... I’m the doctor, you don’t even know what you’re reading...”

Sherlock laughs, indignant, and scrolls down the page, down, down. So much medical history to absorb, so much new information about John. And John isn’t telling him not to look, not exactly. “Hush, you’re doing yourself more harm than good.”

There’s a grunt and a rustle of fabric as he attempts to find any position that doesn’t cause him pain. “Sorry,” John whispers, closing his eyes.

Sherlock spares him a quick glance before turning back to the screen. “No need to be sorry,” his voice is the lowest it can register; he has to clear his throat after he speaks. “This isn’t your fault.”

“Well, suppose not,” John agrees.

John makes an effort to swallow, Sherlock can hear it over the hum of the equipment in the small space, can hear it over the din of the countless other people in the emergency room. “Thirty-nine point three,” Sherlock mutters and then rounds on him. “You were unaware that the fever was
“Like I said, thought it was... the hot water and the, the quilt and...” John tries to swallow again, ends up grimacing before he gets anything down. “Didn’t feel like last time and I thought...”

Sherlock’s mouth twists up in a worried half-smile. “What were you saying about being the doctor?”

John begins to protest but Sherlock hushes him again, first with words and then by walking around the bed and patting soothingly against the blanket atop him. He toys with the idea of sitting against the edge of John’s bed, of just resting his left hip there really. Just to be close. It doesn’t matter, he doesn’t have a chance to decide if he will or if he won’t.

The doctor bustles in after a perfunctory “Knock, knock,” and skirts around the right side of John’s bed. “Doctor Watson, seems we’ve got some complications due to... gunshot wound to the chest, yeah? I’m Doctor Kavi and I’m going to see if I can’t figure out what’s going on.” She spares Sherlock a brief smile and snaps on blue nitrile gloves. “Going to pull the bandage back here, look away if you’re squeamish.”

There is no one to see Sherlock roll his eyes.

The gauze is peeled off of John’s ribs and the wound is angry, red, completely different from the entry wound Sherlock recalls seeing in the bathtub. It is obviously not healing properly. “Oops, yes, we’ve got some infection here. This occurred today?”

John nods weakly, eyes closed, head against the pillow. He tries to peel open his lids and focus but he can’t seem to manage, the fever and exhaustion pulling him back.

“When was the wound last treated?” she asks John but Sherlock cuts in easily.

“Last evening, roughly ten forty-seven; he sterilized and held the gauze while I bandaged. The wound site has been kept clean with repeated washings throughout the day.” Again, his voice is clipped but clear.

The doctor nods along with Sherlock’s information, pulling the sticky gauze entirely away from John’s body. “Fever presented just over an hour and a half ago,” the detective continues, inching closer to the lefthand side of John’s bed, pressing his right palm to the mattress, directly next to John’s own hand. “To our best knowledge.”

She checks his lymph nodes and his eyes once more, presses her fingers around the edges of the wound and bites her lip. Dr. Kavi presses again, a bit higher and John hisses weakly. Brow perked, she unloops her stethoscope and presses it to John’s left pectoral, his right pectoral. “Can you sit up please?”

John gives a wobbly nod and holds a hand out to Sherlock. The detective glances down at it and after a moment curls his fingers around the forearm and gently pulls. She presses the cold metal to John’s back and asks him to take deep breaths. When she’s satisfied with his breathing, they both help John back down onto the bed. “Your lungs sound fine, great actually, so there’s likely nothing wrong on that front, I don’t think this will require a chest x-ray.”

His movement isn’t so much a nod as a boneless side-to-side roll of his head, acknowledging that she’s spoken. “Mmmph.”

Sherlock blinks, resettles his hand on the bed just next to John’s.

“Let’s get that order in and we’ll get some blood, swab this and see where we’re at,” she smiles at
the both of them as she roots around the drawers beneath the cart and comes up with a few, wrapped swabs. Dr. Kavi is gentle as she probes John’s wound site, capping off each sample as she goes with an efficiency that Sherlock appreciates. Once collected, she calls to the nurse, who pops her head in to retrieve them and then disappears just as quickly.

“There we are, should have those back within the hour. If anything changes or you note any distress, press the call button and a nurse will see to you.” She nods to the both of them, pats John’s arm one last time, snaps off her gloves to dispose of them and hurriedly whooshes through the curtain, surely off to attend to another of the numerous patients admitted this evening.

John struggles once more to open his eyes but Sherlock manages to find the back of his hand, pat at it soothingly. He watches his movements as he does so, the feeling of skin on skin, of touch for comfort so foreign to him that Sherlock feels as though he isn’t in his own body, but watching from a distance. “Go to sleep, they’ll wake you for the x-ray.”

The doctor manages a weak nod and then goes boneless against the bed. Save for turning his hand over so his palm meets Sherlock’s, John doesn’t move for the next hour.

Sherlock meanwhile attempts to unravel the addict’s story from his watch by the bed, based solely on the stream-of-consciousness babbling coming from his mouth. It isn’t easy, as most of it is slurred and clipped, portions of thoughts running into new sentences. But it passes the time and keeps him from delving into his previous ruminations. That dangerous meditation about John and feelings and forever.

Because it’s too much, because he can’t focus.

Sherlock watches the drip of the saline, trails his gaze from the end of the bag to where the tube enters John’s vein. Back and forth, back and forth, over and over as he works out that the addict is from Manchester (clearly), that he completed college, is an avid rugby viewer and is in a relationship with not one, but three different people. All quite rudimentary deductions but it keeps him from considering how John’s hand feels against his.

It keeps him from curling his fingers down and around and holding.

Just as he’s about to parse out just where the addict went to primary school, there’s a gentle whish of metal-on-metal and Dr. Kavi appears once move, a thick chart in her hand. She smiles at Sherlock, half of her mouth turning up as she motions at their hands with her chin.

Sherlock does as expected, applies a bit of pressure and manages to rouse John from his slumber. It takes him a moment to come to but when he does, he squeezes Sherlock’s hand hard. There’s no telling whether the gesture is conscious or not, but the detective squeezes back before untangling their fingers.

“Alright, John what I think we’re looking at here, from how you’re presenting to the nature of your original injury is a staph infection, okay?” She tinkers absent-mindedly with the ends of her stethoscope where it hangs around her neck. “We’re going to take a bit more blood and see what antibiotics we can administer but everything is looking up with how quickly you made it in here and we caught it.”

“How long will it take for the antibiotics to begin taking effect?” Sherlock asks before John has the chance. And he knows, somewhere in his mind, how long the antibiotics will take to go into effect. He knows this. But with John, with John like this there are no chances he’s willing to take. No questions he’ll leave unasked.
The thought of somehow getting a sample of the drugs of his own and getting it to Barts to confirm its half life does cross his mind but he quells it just as quickly as it comes to him. He knows John’s complete medical history; that’s enough for now.

A nurse hustles in with a new saline bag and switches it for the empty one with ease.

“Somewhere in the next hour, two, we hope. We’re not sure what strain we’re dealing with so we’re going to start with a standard dose and when the results come back we’ll alter the dosage as needed.” She puts on a forced smile, something doctors learn to emote when they’re in a hurry but wish to keep the patient calm and complacent.

Sherlock stares hard at her. John stares at Sherlock.

“Sound good, Doctor?” she asks, reaching down to check her pager.

“Yep, yeah, good,” John coughs out.

And with that she disappears again, leaving John limp and loopy with Sherlock standing over him, wondering what to do with his hands. It’s perfunctory, the urge to ask “How are you feeling?” It was never before, never before did he care to vocalize his worry but now, now he must.

John shrugs, sitting up a bit in the bed. “No idea,” he blinks down at his lap and then glances up at Sherlock, a small, sad smile just reaching his lips. “Sorry to put you through this, I... I... yeah...”

“Do you believe that if I did not wish to be here I would be?” Sherlock asks, needing desperately to take John’s hand again; he refrains. “They can’t keep me away, you see,” he mutters and flexes his fingers against the sheet.

It’s quiet for a time, but when John unfurls his digits from where they’re tangled in the sheet, he passes them over the pads of Sherlock’s pointer and middle finger. “Still, I appreciate it.”

“Hmmm,” Sherlock hums, John’s words registering through the delightful buzz that kicks up between his ears at John touching him so delicately. As though he’s the one made of glass at the moment.

“I’ve needed you all along,” the doctor mentions in a whisper, spreading his fingers, making little vees of invitation through which Sherlock hesitantly slides his own fingers. They cling and hold properly this time. “You see,” he parrots Sherlock’s earlier words and closes his eyes once more, does not let go of his hand.

“Your skin is... clammy,” Sherlock notes stupidly and John manages a laugh.

“Well, a fever will do that to a person,” the smile he gives is wide and loose and Sherlock smiles weakly back, focusing once more on their hands, on the disparity between their skin tones and textures. “Is this alright?” John asks, noting his gaze, tapping his thumb against Sherlock’s index finger.

“Yes,” is all the detective says and taps back, finally settles himself on the side of John’s bed and stares at the room curtain.

And the tension drains from John’s body when Sherlock’s thumb begins moving back and forth over the back of his hand. With each passing sweep, lines of worry smooth out on his brow. His eyes are no longer pinched and his wrist no longer locked. In Sherlock’s embrace, John relaxes.

Comfort.
Sherlock didn’t know he could give it so easily, so readily, without so much as a thought.

Again, silence falls between them and John’s breathing evens out once more as he begins to doze. Sherlock registers every twitch his body makes through their joined hands and every time he does, he glances over his shoulder to check on John.

There’s a tug at his heartstrings, a constant thing that he no longer feels the urge to question, just allows the delicate, nuanced endorphins to take him over, causing a tumultuous riot in his stomach and veins. It’s startling and out of place but he swallows the fear at trying to process it and just lets it happen.

John tugs his hand, once, twice and then their entwined fingers are resting on John’s stomach. Sherlock can feel the stirring of John’s breath and is soothed by it.

It’s as he’s counting John’s breaths (five hundred and fifty three) that Dr. Kavi returns, no longer bothering with the pretense of stating her presence before entering, it’s too far along in the evening for that. Sherlock squeezes John awake again as she rounds his bed.

“All right it seems we have, methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, unfortunately,” Dr. Kavi says blandly, placing the folder she’s carrying onto the cart beneath the computer. Her tone and composure is completely incongruous with the news she’s just delivered. Putting her hand on her hip for good measure, she licks her lips and explains further. “And since you’re already on the nafcillin I’m going to recommend that we go straight to the vancomycin. How does that sound, Dr. Watson?”

John blinks sleepily at her, the combination of the fever and the painkillers they’d given to relieve the edge making him sluggish. He takes a moment, moving his lips as he recounts to himself the course of treatment just suggested. “Admitting me?”

She nods. “A few days, three at most, we hope.”

“Gonna bag me?” John asks hesitantly but turns his head towards Sherlock, not the doctor.

Dr. Kavi smiles down at him. “Just a one and a half gram drip but we’re going to put you in a nice room with premium telly and everything.” She adds a laugh for good measure. “Someone will be by to take you up shortly, okay?”

When she’s gone, Sherlock stands and smooths out his trousers. “Three days.”

“Hmmm,” John turns his head to look at him. “Premium telly.”

“We have premium at the flat,” Sherlock grumbles and slides his hands into his pockets. “It wouldn’t be terribly difficult to come by vancomycin. I’m sure Molly would be able to supply me with a proper dosage, it’s just a matter of—”

John breathes out hard through his nose sounding exasperated, but when Sherlock meets his eyes he can tell that John is amused. “Let’s not add fraudulent actions against the NHS to your already long list of transgressions, no?”

The glare he gives is without any real intent, but Sherlock still sees fit to tighten his lips and huff a bit. “Three days, John. Three.”

John nods. “Seventy-two hours.”

Sherlock’s scowl furrows his brow deeper and he bares his teeth. “This is intolerable.”
John rolls his eyes, “You’ll manage.” A bit of the color has come back to his cheeks. A nurse enters and switches out his saline bag again. John smiles at her before turning his attention back to Sherlock. “It’s really not long at all.”

There’s a darkness cresting in Sherlock’s eyes, a doubt that manages to betray him. It’s not long, but he still doesn’t wish to endure it. “I’ve just managed to...”

John waits for him to complete his train of thought and when he doesn’t, makes an attempt to look on the bright side, alleviate some of the unspoken tension. “Hey, you’ll have your bed back for a bit! Before I come back and... take it all over again.” The grin he gives is goofy, trying to reassure Sherlock.

“It will smell of you,” Sherlock says quickly. “...intolerable. All of this, intolerable,” he spits and paces around the bed, from one side to the other. “I want you well,” Sherlock nearly begs, fingers tearing through the hair at the sides of his head. Belatedly, he realizes both the truth and the falsity in the statement. He doesn’t wish for John to be in pain, but the thought that John will no longer be reliant on him is truly unbearable. To have no reason to dote, to have no concrete, tangible reason to care.

What an awful, horrible thing to want. Then, he still wants John’s blood and bone and plasma and saliva so in comparison he supposes it’s not quite as terrible.

John clears his throat, looks away, “Are you saying I smell bad?” The joke lands flat and does nothing to relieve the weight of the implications Sherlock has just made.

He wishes to vocalize this to John, his desire to care for him indefinitely, if only to relieve himself of some of the burden of having to think on it when two nurses ease back the curtain and saunter in. “We’re going to take you up to four now,” the younger one says in a tone that is positively laden with saccharine.

Sherlock scowls at her.

The other nurse, an older man, kicks off the brakes on the bed and unwinds John’s saline from the stand and places it beside him on the bed. “You just hang onto that now and we’ll take care of the rest,” he directs. Sherlock steps out of the way as they roll John out onto the main floor and he follows along behind, keeping in pace instead of hurrying ahead.

Once they reach the elevator bay, the young woman turns to Sherlock. “Sir, we’re actually going to have to ask you to say your goodbyes here, for the evening.” Her smile is perfect, teeth too white. He glares at her but it does nothing to diminish her cheery attitude. The other nurse steps in between the two of them easily and rests a hand on Sherlock’s shoulder. The detective eyes it warily and then meets the man’s gaze.

“Visiting hours are actually over soon, and once we get him settled we’ll need to redress his wound... you understand.” There’s a little pat to his shoulder and the man steps away as Sherlock curls his lip in distaste but takes a step toward the bed.

He understands fully, of course he does, but is hesitant to leave John. Not now, not when he’s just learned how to comfort him. Again, the thought of contacting Mycroft crosses his mind but the glare he receives from the doctor is enough to chase it right from thought.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, yeah?” John asks, fingers twitching at his side. Sherlock reaches out to halt their movement. John glances from Sherlock’s face to their hands and something shifts in him,
something fractures and crumbles sending delicate shards through Sherlock’s veins. It’s beautiful and devastating and he has to quell the urge to crawl up on John’s bed and press him into his body as far as he’ll possibly go.

Sherlock’s face sets, stony but he nods resolutely once and squeezes John’s fingers so hard he’s sure he can hear the bones rub together. Their knuckles knock and hold, joints pressing hard against skin.

“Jesus, Sherlock,” John laughs surprised, voice catching in his throat and tugs his hand gently away.

Managing to keep his composure, he curls his hand into a fist and nestles it into his pocket. “First thing,” Sherlock promises, but it comes out thick, dark, as though a warning to the two personnel taking him up to his room. A warning indeed, it is.

John’s bed disappears into the cavernous elevator and Sherlock steps back, watches as the nurse pushes a button and the doors begin to close. Their gaze holds all the while, John looking a restrained sort of frightened and Sherlock is alight with anger and something else, something more visceral. He experiences a million different things at once, endless, countless similes and metaphors that do absolutely no justice to any of it.

This, Sherlock Holmes realizes, is self-immolation.

This is allowing himself to realize the depths of his heart.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Follow me on tumblr for Triage updates, pictures of Benedict, musings about my cat and too much Boston Red Sox baseball.

Sherlock hails a cab with his usual expediency and throws himself into the seat, a shadow of the whirlwind that he usually is. Fingers fly in his haste to draw up information about methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus. He is aware of the basics, of course, of the pathology of staphylococcal infections.

He is more than aware of the threatening nature of the bacteria.

Sherlock scrolls down page after page of medical text, flicking between journals impatiently. The notion that John had become infected while in hospital enrages him, has him concocting all sorts of scenarios in which he wrings both the treating doctor’s throat as well as Mycroft’s. ‘Best in London’ may have been overstating it a bit. His fingers tighten around his mobile, knuckles blanching white as he bares his teeth down against one another.

This doctor will certainly be the recipient of significant wrath once Sherlock has parsed out just how to best serve it. As soon as John is well again and he has adequate brain space to focus on anything else.

Turning his gaze out the window, Sherlock’s vision blurs as the past few days catch up with him. Though he hasn’t been overtly physically active, the weight of his thoughts and the effort with which he’s attempted to sort through the newfound emotions have sapped his reserves. Just as his heart has opened and allowed John inside, it has also expended far too much energy in getting there. Nearly bone-weary, Sherlock slumps down in the seat and darkens his phone screen, all but content to ride out the rest of his journey in something approaching numbness.

But still, he thinks.

Rage. This is something he understands. Pure, unadulterated rage. It would only be logical that he would be able to feel the opposite. If he can feel the harder emotions, the converse must also be true. And so the swelling of his heart makes sense, the bottoming-out sensation in the pit of his stomach is finally something that he can begin to wrap his head around.

He does not simply care for John; he adores John. He loves him.

His temple meets the glass hard, three times in succession.

“Oi, alright back there?” the driver calls, unkindly.

Sherlock glares through his closed lids and responds. “Quite well, your concern for your customer is shocking. Now kindly shut your mouth and drive.” The inability to allow himself any shortness or derision in his speech while around John these past few days has worn on him, and ire is now ever-present. For what it’s worth, the driver does silence himself and just drives.

The detective chooses to steadfastly ignore the conclusion he’s just come to and focus on the illness,
which is concrete and scientific and doesn’t require Sherlock reassessing aspects of himself.

Sherlock flicks through what he knows and what he’s learned about MRSA, sorts it all, updates the information he is already aware of and deletes that which is no longer relevant. He’s unsure whether or not he needs to archive this knowledge to the area which John occupies or to the wealth he already knows about bacterium. That absorbs the majority of his concentration for some time.

They arrive at Baker Street before Sherlock has time to consider the possibility of John as anything other than healthy and whole. He doesn’t have time to consider any of the darker things because the driver is tapping on the glass, expectant, and Sherlock has to fumble for bills to toss at the man.

Ejecting himself onto the pavement, Sherlock whirls around once before taking two bounding steps to the stoop of 221 and unlocking the door. He’s not sure why his movements carry so much haste and intent; he’s nowhere to be.

Mrs. Hudson is in the entryway, sorting through the considerable amount of post that has accumulated on the little table. She serves him with a kind smile but after taking in his appearance, she drops the bundle of mail and scuttles up to him nervously. “Oh, where is-”

Sherlock cuts her off before she has a chance to voice her concern. “Back in hospital. Those inept, pathetic excuses for a medical team caused an infection and he must be on antibiotics for the foreseeable future. This is all bloody Mycroft’s fault. Can’t believe I didn’t pay more attention to-” Sherlock fumes, shrugs out of his coat and drapes it over his arm. He stoops down and gets into her personal space. “Visiting hours,” he smacks his lips, “Were over, you see.”

Chest heaving, he mounts the steps and begins up, Mrs. Hudson shuffling to the bottom of the stairs. “Sherlock,” and when he doesn’t halt his ascent she adds a bit of weight to it. “Sherlock!”

He pauses, leans over the bannister and glances down. “I’m just down here if you need anything, dear.” He blinks at her, says nothing, does nothing. “Just... I know how it can be when someone you... someone... you care for is... ill. And I’m just downstairs.”

She nods once at him and stares until he does the same in acknowledgement of her words, “And I’ll see if I can’t pop round and look in on John tomorrow. I’ve made some of those biscuits he’s fond of.” Sherlock just rolls his eyes; Mrs. Hudson always has “those biscuits John likes” on hand. Still, the gesture nestles itself in his chest and warms him.

“Goodnight, Mrs. Hudson,” he calls with a bit less acid than he might have intoned.

When he enters the flat he tosses his coat on the sofa and immediately undoes the buttons at his cuff, rolling his sleeves up until they are secure at his elbows. The flat is dark and quiet and he makes his way through the dimness to his room, settles on the edge of the bed.

He lays back, gently, his actions causing the sheets to shift, releasing the lingering scent of John. It’s a comfort just as it’s nearly... too much. But still, he settles against the pillows and allows his eyes to fall closed.

Sherlock begins with what he knows.

He knows the parts that make up John Watson. If he had to mete him out and break him down but by bit, Sherlock is almost certain he could manage to do so with startling precision. But he wants more than that; he wants the pleasure of taking the temperature of juncture where neck meets shoulder, test the tensile strength of the skin that covers the inside of his elbow.

He wants the corporeal John Watson committed to memory with teeth and tongue and lips and hands
and cock. He wants it; the simple acknowledgment of it sends a warm simmering through his belly. Sherlock presses his entwined hands down hard against his spleen in an effort to quell the sensation.

Not now; he has to separate mind from body if he’s to work any of this out at all.

Lying straight as a board in his bed, Sherlock crosses his hands against his stomach and stares resolutely at the ceiling. This is perplexing. The wanting. The needing he understands now, he thinks he has a fairly good grasp on the reasons behind John’s necessity.

But it’s the abject, visceral wanting that is completely out of place.

(The crease between his eyebrows, that too, he would also like to taste that.)

Sherlock sighs in supplication, allows himself a moment of indulgence. Imagines John confused, utterly, and the line appears between his eyes and Sherlock leans in to rest his tongue there. Just a sampling.

Sherlock wants, more than anything he thinks, to press his mouth to the little bundles of lines at the corner of John’s left eye. Just there, and a half a dozen other places, before bringing out his tongue to savour any number of two hundred and fifty-three other locations on John’s body.

And he knows, knows inherently how to make John feel brilliant while he’s doing all of this. He knows how to make him feel pleasure, just the barest edge of pain. He wants to make John feel cherished and wanted and wanton and... loved.

Loved?

Sherlock takes a step back, deconstructs.

He’s not a virgin.

Perhaps no one has expected this, but how can someone so obsessed with crimes of passion never have indulged? To know the human condition is to know how humans think and work and function. The human race’s preoccupation with sex almost begs his indulgence.

And he has indulged, many, many times.

Sherlock Holmes finds a lot of things unpleasant but sex is not one of them. All the bodily fluids, animalistic instincts, it’s beautiful in that it’s completely base with variation but essentially the same experience for everyone. And he finds in the repetitive snap of his hips, the way his body takes over, his mind crystallizes and still and he can think as fast as he’s ever been able. It’s not mind over body, it’s some delicate synchrony of both.

It takes a moment but he conjures images of past lovers, the trysts in soft beds and dirty alleys, crowding into bathroom stalls. Mind going blissfully, startlingly, pinpoint clear.

But he can’t imagine that with John. There’s no possible reality in which he could lay with John and allow his mind to be anywhere but present, cataloguing everything. And how to proceed otherwise? Clasped hands come up to rest against his lips.

How... frightening. To not just indulge in the act of copulation but to extend one’s emotions towards it...

He’s never quite done that before. This is the cart before the horse; he’s no idea if John returns his affections. But regardless, the idea of attempting to translate his need into physical pleasure for John
to experience is wholly appealing. Sherlock wonders, can John possibly know the depths of his affection from mere words? Why does he feel so strongly that he must wrap the man up in his arms and never let him go?

Why does he feel the urge to bare his doctor and lay him out and have him in every way imaginable? Why on earth does he feel the urge to do the same himself, flay his chest cavity open and give everything he has. To take only to give back in kind. A reciprocity he’s never experienced and it is mind-numbingly frightening.

And thrilling too, that notion. Of having John open and willing and being able to take anything at all he wants from him.

Kicking his shoes off, he struggles with the duvet beneath him. He rolls onto his side and curls in on himself, tugs the sheet tight over his shoulder and squeezes his eyes closed. How utterly perverse to be thinking such things while the man is in hospital. How completely wrong.

It’s demented to be thinking such things. Sherlock presses his head down into the pillow as hard as he can, brings his fists up to his mouth. He’s solved nothing, drawn no conclusions except ‘love’ and it’s something he still can’t get his head around so he tries to relax.

There are experiments that he could be doing, data that does require fastidious checking but at the moment, he truly cannot be bothered.

How novel.

Sherlock takes a deep breath, two and wills himself to sleep.

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His gait is rather unsteady as he walks through reception and to the elevator bank; when the door slides open, he wills his body inside, limbs heavy with lack of sleep. He’d managed to doze for a bit but due to the persistent buzz of a puzzle unsolved, his slumber had been fitful.

Pressing his face to the pillow had only conjured up images of John, possibilities for all of the ways in which they could possibly see their way out of this situation. Still, he’d managed a few hours and had risen, summarily drank two cups of scalding coffee, showered and dressed in record time and had seen himself off to hospital as though this was now a habit.

He walks into John’s room, his coat draped between his clasped hands. He’s cautious, stepping slowly from the brightness of the hallway into the shaded room, careful not to make too much noise. The blinds are drawn and a thick, plastene curtain is pulled across them, sunlight bleeding around the edges. It gives it a mottled, ombre effect to the window dressing.

John notices him just as he rounds the empty companion bed. “Hey,” he says brightly, half-surprised, half-genuinely pleased. The doctor uncrosses his legs beneath the blanket.

His right hand is hooked up to three drips, saline, antibiotics and something else that Sherlock can’t make out. He steps closer, noticing that it’s simply potassium and releases a breath he was unaware he’d been holding. John looks a bit better; there’s color in his cheeks and he’s animated - as animated as one can be, bedridden. It takes every ounce of restraint he has not to hack into the lab computer affixed to the wall and pull up John’s chart.

Sherlock dips his chin in greeting. “Yes, hello.”

John’s mouth twitches in a weak smile at the odd return. “Hello, hello. Don’t ask me how I’m
A small flare of worry flickers across Sherlock’s expression. “Why?”

“Because I feel like utter garbage, truth be told, but I don’t want to have to tell you that because you’ll worry - a reaction I’d never believe you’d have, before all of this if I’m being honest - and I don’t want to lie to you, so don’t ask.” He smiles, looks away.

Sherlock just stares at John as John stares at the wall in front of him. It’s long moment before Sherlock offers, “That was the most appallingly structured sentence I’ve ever heard.”

Again, his lips curl in a surprised smile. “Well.”

He tosses his coat on the empty bed and moves forward. “Utter garbage, you say.”

“Never wanted to be away from hospital so badly. Not even the first time around and I was bedridden for nearly a month with infection and fever and, and then the physio but... jesus...” John shifts around in the bed, shimmies his hips a bit so he’s out of the indent he’s been resting in for quite some time.

Sherlock clears his throat and does his best to look upbeat, cheery. “Chin up, Mrs. Hudson said something about bringing by those rubbish biscuits you enjoy.”

John’s eyes light upon hearing that. “They’re not rubbish. They’re delicious and that’s sweet.”

Sherlock doesn’t argue with him, instead sliding into the hard, plastic chair by the bed and swinging his feet up to rest on the blanket. “Sennnnntiment,” he clips his teeth on the ‘t’ and snatches the remote off of John’s eating tray. “Now, something about premium telly?”

John laughs, throws his head back against the pillow. “You don’t want to watch telly.”

For a moment his teeth sink into his bottom lip as he facetiously keeps his eyes trained on whatever drivel the morning newscaster is going on about. “Oh, don’t I?”

The breath John releases is shaky; Sherlock’s gaze flicks briefly to regard his face. “We were in the thick of a very serious conversation when this... bacteria had to go and bollocks everything up.”

Sherlock rolls his eyes, tries for disinterested, “Yes. Well.”

John frowns, licks his lips, tries to begin a sentence, stops. He tries again. “Harry hasn’t been by, but then you know that. You know that my sister hasn’t been in to visit me. You know each and every person who has come and gone from this room and the room before...” John smiles sadly, in spite of himself. “Can’t seem to shake you off.”

Something flashes across Sherlock’s eyes before he can steel himself and John sees it, cracks a quick grin. “Oh, not like that, come now.”

Sherlock focuses his icy gaze directly on John. “Then what?” His words are deliberate, acidic, meant to burn.

“You’re not resentful,” John says plainly. Shrugging against the sheets. “You’re... Sherlock this is... this is something else entirely, isn’t it?”

Sherlock sneers and turns his face away again. “You tell me, John, you seem to be doing swimmingly thus far, really top notch.” His voice betrays nothing of the jangling of his nerves, the
hammering of his heart, the sudden tightness of his throat.

“Ah, hit a nerve there, did I?” His tone is nearly teasing.

“No,” the detective is quick to respond, turns the volume on the telly up. John turns to watch it for a moment before turning to Sherlock.

They are very quiet for a very long time, the both of them pretending to focus on the morning news. It’s only after a nurse comes in to check John’s vitals, some half an hour later, that he’s worked up the courage to speak. “Remember? When I said everything was fine?” John asks quietly, barely audible over the din from the television.

Sherlock straightens in the chair, blinks. “Yes.”

John blinks back, holding his attention. ”Still applies. Always applies.”

Sherlock turns his entire body in the chair, placing the remote back down on the tray. “I can’t possibly begin to even speculate as to what you’re talking about.”

Sucking his lips in, John looks on the brink of either a serious grin or a serious frown. When he glances back up from his lap, his eyes are so soft with affection that Sherlock has absolutely no chance to prepare himself for the onslaught of emotion that surges against his ribcage.

John swallows audibly. “I need you, very, very much. And more than that Sherlock, I...”

And as John trails off, the detective stands, inching up to the side of the bed.

The doctor takes a deep, shudder breath and mutters, “Christ.”

Unable to help himself, Sherlock leans down, over the bed, desperate to see that in John’s eyes again. The other man obliges, lifting his chin, setting his jaw and gives Sherlock everything he needs.

Sherlock’s face is so close to his that they’re sharing breath in the literal sense; it’s not romantic or prelude, it’s simply how close Sherlock has brought his face to John’s. He gazes into John’s eyes, their connection not breaking, even as the doctor’s eyes shiver with the effort to hold. And it’s that, the unrelenting weight of it, the fact that John refuses to look away from him... that does it.

When John’s eyes flick to glimpse Sherlock’s lips, their fate is as good as sealed.

John heaves a breath and closes his eyes. “I haven’t brushed my teeth...”

“I know,” Sherlock mumbles and shakes his head to clear the cobwebs but ends up brushing his chin against John’s, leaning his head in, pressing his closed mouth to the corner of John’s lips. It’s nothing, just a brush of skin against skin, chapped mouths resting against one another.

Until Sherlock shifts back on his heels, meaning to break contact.

“No, no,” John says, nearly begs and brings a hand up to trace along Sherlock’s collar. It’s not a pull; he’s not holding him there, he’s giving Sherlock the choice. He’s allowing Sherlock the knowledge that this is what John wants, that he can take it if he so chooses.

There’s a brief moment where Sherlock’s mind whites out and then he’s canting his head right back in, sliding John’s bottom lip between his and kissing him, slowly. It’s an entirely new sensation, this. This isn’t one of a thousand kisses, this is John. This is thundering in his chest and blood rushing between his ears and this is the one being he can’t do without.
This is the amalgamation of everything powerful that he has ever felt.

Something in him fractures and crumbles, shatters, is decimated totally; a hand comes up to hold the side of John’s head, gently. He moves, smears his lips across and tugs a bit, turns his head away, breathes, heaves in deep breaths.

Kissing John.

Overload.

It’s a bit much for him to believe this sensation has never been felt by anyone, but his ears ring and his knees shake all the same and he can’t imagine anyone in the world walking about, living their lives, knowing that they’ve been kissed and have kissed... like this.

This is different, this is different, this means something.

Oh no, this... this means everything.

Another deep breath, pulled into his lungs and held while he allows his eyes to slip closed, briefly. Bizarre, he feels both full to brimming and achingly hollow at the same time. Having, and want of more. There are words for this, there have to be.

Sherlock moves his jaw, attempts speech but comes up empty. When he dares glancing back up, John’s gaze is open and soft and pleading.

John settles back against the pillows, untethered palm against Sherlock’s jaw and draws the man in. It is Sherlock who runs his tongue along the seam of lips and it is Sherlock who deepens the kiss, takes over, presses into John as though his next breath is somewhere inside.

Unfettered, Sherlock manages to slick his tongue against John’s, attempts to pour into every atom of his self exactly how he feels. Exactly, precisely, to the letter.

But he can’t, how could he? It’s beyond frustrating, ages beyond, and that too he tries to convey with lips and teeth and tongue. As though in pain - and he is, he swears he is, he’s breaking - he cringes, shudders, stops a groan as it threatens to rise from his throat.

John’s fingers slip against his cheek, trail down and catch on his jaw for a brief second before falling away completely.

It’s then that Sherlock’s brain surges back to life, brilliant color and a thousand different words in every language to describe what has just happened. He pulls back as though surprised, as though burned. Sherlock says nothing, doesn’t stumble but does take a step back, eyes wide, hands clutched at his sides.

John’s mouth flickers, as though he doesn’t know if he’s allowed to smile. Regardless, one blooms suddenly, brilliantly, his flushed pink cheeks perking right along with his lips. While Sherlock stands there in shock, unable to move his limbs, John looks down at his lap and chuckles.

“Still feeling absolutely atrocious but...” John grins at him, the color still brilliantly high along his cheekbones. “That was lovely.”

“John I”
“And that,” John adds, interrupting before Sherlock’s mind can shout down his emotions. He says it with a judicious nod of his head, for good measure. “We were on the subject of what we need earlier. I need, that, more of that I think.”

Sherlock blinks at him but John just continues to smile, raises his brow after a moment, a silent urge for Sherlock to speak.

It takes him a moment to find the words, but when he does, they’re low, dangerous. “I will want more, John,” he says darkly. “I will want... everything. More than you can give. I want everything, every little bit of you, for days and weeks and eons.” For something so startlingly telling and affectionate, Sherlock delivers it as though a death sentence.

“And I will need it all, just the same,” he finishes.

John takes a moment to digest that, the heavy knowledge that there is no part of himself that Sherlock does not want to know. And Sherlock waits, just stands there watching the man in the bed figure out what he wants.

John sighs, settles back boneless in the bed and allows his eyes to drift shut. “Sounds about right...” come his light words and Sherlock is so shocked that he makes a very undignified sound in the back of his throat. “But we can discuss all of the ways in which you’re sure you’ll destroy me when I’m out of this bed. For now...”

Sherlock perks up, noting the change in John’s tone.

“Go down to the cafeteria and grab me a ginger ale because I’m parched. And I’ll brush my teeth and we can try that whole bit again.” He tries to deliver it confidently but his voice wavers towards the end and Sherlock finally, finally smiles.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

John grits his teeth as his cheeks flush in embarrassment. “Sherlock, are we in a relationship?”

“Define relationship,” he gives the word airquotes and ducks back to his laptop because he’s not sure how to navigate this. He’s not sure of anything at the moment, wants desperately to end it all by slipping his tongue into John’s mouth.

Chapter Notes

As always, my thanks to Felicia, Robyn, Eric and Dennis.

It’s another ten days before John is even considered nearly well enough to be discharged from the hospital. Though his complexion and demeanor both seem to have improved significantly, John’s mood has not. He’s agitated, annoyed to the very last, his movement carrying evident, wound tension. He refuses to answer any more of the doctor’s questions on the grounds that he’s himself a doctor and he now feels completely fine, right as rain.

He says as much, adamantly, several times.

“I don’t understand, if my labs are coming back clean, I have no fever and am aware of how to self-administer the dosage though IV, why you can’t let me leave.” John growls at the young man and Sherlock, in the corner, grins like the cat that ate the canary. He takes a moment to shoot Sherlock a similarly annoyed glare but the detective just continues on smiling, listening as the doctor explains his reasoning with a patient half-smile.

“Tomorrow, at the earliest. You’re a doctor, you know how difficult bacteremia is. We have to be patient with this, keep an eye on it. If the blood cultures come back negative tomorrow, we can send you home and have a visiting nurse attend, but that’s only if the cultures come back negative again tomorrow.”

John scowls.

“I know, you must be going crazy in here but thus far you’ve responded splendidly to the vanco, so let’s wait for one more clean culture, just to be sure.”

When the man leaves, Sherlock replaces himself in the seat by John’s bed, props his laptop back on his knees and once again hacks the hospital’s wifi password. They only change one digit a day, so it’s not terribly difficult.

John huffs and harrumphs in the bed seeking attention while being steadfastly ignored by the man to his left.
Updating his own website has been his priority over the past three days, changing the layout to look more clean, tagging all backlogged entries as to be more easily accessible. For himself, not for the readers. He’s interspersed visits and code tweaking by taking cases that rank five or below from Lestrade. He’d go stir crazy if he didn’t, and John acknowledges this, squeezes his hand in a goodbye every time he has to leave to chase down a lead.

That doesn’t make John’s absence from the flat any easier, however. And if Sherlock feels restless being in this room for a fraction of his day, he can only imagine how John feels. Sherlock can feel John’s eyes on his face but he does not look up, instead clicking down until he’s reached the code level of the website and starts tapping away at the keyboard.

“Thanks for all of the help with him,” John intones sarcastically after a few moments of silence.

The right side of Sherlock’s face perks in a sneaky little smile. He’s not really listening; day ten of lingering about John’s room is beginning to wear on him, regardless of the fact that this is absolutely the only place that he wants and needs to be. Still, he is a restless soul and if his mind doesn’t latch onto something meaty soon, he’s going to go out of it. He’s returned to the flat only to shower and change, has taken all of his meals - if one can call coffee and mini doughnuts ‘meals’ - in the cafeteria. When he’s not at the Yard, chasing down a lead or finding a semi-secluded place to nap, he’s at John’s side.

It would be entirely endearing if it wasn’t slightly startling. But then, people do indeed do strange things when they care.

It’s surprisingly intimate, the ease with which they fall into this new routine. It’s all startlingly careful; John’s chest tube makes getting too heavily into the moment difficult and so they must feel it out gently. Sherlock stands closer and lingers longer, knows just when to put extra distance between then so as not to arouse the suspicions of staff. It’s easier, being the only ones who know about this subtle shift in their relationship and while people will surely know soon, they’re both content to harbor it between the two of them for the time being.

There’s a quiet tensity between them, in their shared looks and feigned-casual touches. Sherlock is learning John in this new way, startlingly slow. It helps that he’s confined to bed, can do nothing to escape Sherlock’s presence. But given the chance, he’s not sure that John would want to escape. He seems perfectly content to allow fingertips to rest on his eyelids for a few long minutes as he drifts off. Perfectly content to allow Sherlock to take his pulse at the wrist and carotid.

Sounds tumble out of Sherlock’s mouth during these quiet, shared moments. Casual little observations and startled little hums as he acquaints himself with the various sundry of John. He holds off on making examinations of either of his bullet wounds - there will be time enough for that later.

Now, John is looking at him with eyes that are guarded but clearly pleading. Sherlock does not turn to look, he steadfastly ignores, isn’t quite certain how to find his footing with this. With the words.

There’s a moment where John fiddles with his fingers, turns the remote control over a few times in his palm; the tension in the room has crept upon them suddenly and taking note of it, Sherlock’s shoulders tense as John speaks. “I don’t get it... do you not want me out of here or... what?” He manages to shut off the television with a minimum of effort, though his hands are very obviously shaking as he tries not to appear so unsure of himself.

Straightening in his chair, Sherlock levers the laptop screen closed a bit and focuses on his bedridden flatmate, realizing that he must at least make an effort to assuage any lingering doubts he might have; he wrangles his words, all of his vocabulary and attempts to shove them into coherent speech. It
takes quite a bit of his patience to maintain an even tone. “I very much wish for you to be out of the hospital,” he states plainly, face managing to fall into a look that is the slightest bit forlorn.

John is so human, so endearingly so, that Sherlock puts all of his effort in trying to be.

He manages to scrunch up his mouth into a perturbed little pout at the lack of explanation given. “Then why no... temper tantrums. Why no making deductions about my doctor and the affairs he’s having or the illicit scripts he’s passing until he folds and gives in and lets me out.” John shakes his hands in agitation before squeezing his fists tightly and allowing them to fall into his lap.

He addresses the concern as succinctly as he can manage. “Because... I need you at your peak physical wellness or as close an approximation as possible. I cannot tolerate another instance of admittal to the hospital after this one.” Sherlock is all posh arrogance as he speaks, gaining momentum, finally able to articulate exactly what is in his head.

“Ah, right, you selfish twat. You can see to me just fine back at the flat as you had before. If this is about getting me back on cases then-”

“It’s about getting you into bed, John,” Sherlock states plainly, sitting up quite rigidly, managing to somehow look stately.

“I’ve been in bed for two weeks, you-” He pauses in his outburst and Sherlock takes a particular glee in watching his cheeks flush with blood. “Oh.”

For a moment, Sherlock grins devilishly and nods his head but just as quickly as the look comes, it’s gone, his face morphing back into placid indifference. He types fastidiously and avoids John’s eyes. “Sometimes, you are remarkably obtuse, you know.”

Since the kiss ten days prior, they’ve managed to spend a considerable amount of time not talking at all about the shift in their relationship. They have managed, however, to indulge in some rather lengthy snogging sessions, the most recent this morning, during which Sherlock had managed to drape half of his body across John’s bed - carefully avoiding the central line tube - and suckle at his collarbone for nearly a quarter of an hour before he’d hopped off, sensing the doctor’s arrival. John is feeling rather wretched, tired and achy but he accepts Sherlock’s affection readily, doesn’t protest when he nips at his neck or smooths back his hair to pepper kisses over his brow.

It’s strange, that Sherlock is the one who hesitantly embarks on these sessions, leaning in close, waiting for John to take the hint and tangle his fingers in the hair at the nape of the detective’s neck. It always begins slowly, nervously, until tongues press against lips and they’re lost to it, to the depth and the feel. There’s the slight edge of teeth, drawing, nipping and fingers that try to feign casual exploration but that shake with intent.

John is the one to mutter things like, “No, we should stop,” and “Someone will see,” and “Christ, Sherlock, we’re not teenagers, we shouldn’t be snogging like this! In public!” And yet he goes willingly back to Sherlock’s mouth with a resigned little sigh, licks in, stays for quite a while.

Thus far, no one has managed to catch them either, which is quite a feat, given the amount of time they’ve dedicated to kissing one another. Aside from a nurse who’d eyed the sudden bruise that had appeared just below John’s jaw, no one seems to be the wiser.

There is quite a bit of kissing but as of late, there has been no discussion, no talking about what all of the kissing means. When John brings it up, Sherlock slants his mouth against John’s and that is that. Up until this moment, John had been content to let himself be pressed back into the pillows while Sherlock demonstrates a stunning gentleness John hadn’t thought he would possess for a task as
trivial as this.

But then, Sherlock Holmes doesn’t think that kissing - doesn’t think kissing John Watson - is trivial at all.

Clearing his throat, John tucks his blanket a bit more securely around his waist and sit up more fully in bed. “Now, don’t get up, and don’t you dare try and... you know... kiss me to make me shut up about this,” he begins, a faint pink rising to his cheeks. Though they’ve indulged in some kissing and very heavy petting, John is still nervous. Of course he is, not knowing where he stands. Not knowing where they stand. “We’re talking about this... now.”

“And you make that decision solely on your own, do you?” The way in which he torques his head while he speaks is mocking; this is his default. If he thinks about this too much, the talk, he becomes nervous, his palms sweaty as he struggles not to bite his lip and so he lashes out, falling back on old instincts, to be snarky and evasive.

If John can’t talk to him about this, John can’t gently tell him that he’s changed his mind, that this isn’t something that he needs after all. Stupid, stupid man. He’s letting you kiss him, is he not? He’s letting you touch him and hold him and be with him while he’s weak. He’s letting you see him at his utmost weak and that means something.

John shoots back immediately, not without a slight bit of ire. “And I suppose you were going to bring it up?”

Sherlock’s lips twist in discomfort. “I suppose not.”

“Right,” John heaves a sigh, the fight leaving him. He continues on, pacing his words as though he’s rehearsed them in his head many times before speaking them. “Right, now. There’s been a whole lot of kissing. Snogging really, which you rather seem to enjoy-”

Sherlock seizes on this immediately. “Are you saying you don’t enjoy it?”

“No. I’m over the moon about it, mad about it, really. Just not something I’d expect from you - now stop trying to sidetrack me, git. “ Licking his lips, he tries again. “I’m going to be out of this bed quite soon and we’ll have to go home, back to the flat and... I think it goes without saying that we’re no longer just... flatmates.”

Sherlock rolls his eyes and turns to edit a line of code, hiding his eyes from John’s view. “Idiot. We haven’t been just flatmates for some time.”

“Okay...” he’s not exactly making this easy, and with each passing moment, a bit of courage seeps from John’s body. “Well, regardless, I think it would be good, that is, I think it would serve us well if we discussed exactly what is going to happen... from here on out.” The words bleed into one another as John rushes to finish without drawing another breath.

Sherlock had thought that John would have been better at this, that it would somehow have been easier, what with his past experiences being in relationships. He’s just as on edge as Sherlock is, however, which makes this doubly confusing and difficult.

Sherlock turns his head slowly, meeting John’s gaze, narrows his eyes. “...’what is going to happen’?”

John grits his teeth as his cheeks flush in embarrassment. “Sherlock, are we in a relationship?”

“Define relationship,” he gives the word airquotes and ducks back to his laptop because he’s not
sure how to navigate this. He’s not sure of anything at the moment, wants desperately to end it all by slipping his tongue into John’s mouth.

“You are such an... Are we in a romantic situation in which neither one of us sees other people? Are we exclusive? Are we-”

Sherlock sucks in a hard breath and swallows the sudden ball of nerves that lodges itself in his throat. Best to rip off the plaster in one, clean go. “John if it’s all the same we can stop carrying on about this. I love you; we’ll decide... sleeping arrangements and sides of the bed and all of that utter nonsense when we’re actually in a bed. Together.”

“Is that all you’re thinking about, sharing a...” but he trails off, unable to complete his thought for the enormous revelation that’s just been made. John’s throat is dry when he next speaks. “You love me.”

“Hm?” Sherlock glances over at him quickly.

“You love me?” John repeats louder, voice quavering though bolder.

Sherlock’s face morphs into a mask of pure, honest confusion as he asks, “Who else would I love if not you?”

“I...” John frowns. “I don’t... have you ever said that to anyone before?”

“Does it matter?” Sherlock snaps. There’s a silence that settles between them; the detective’s heart thuds painfully in his chest, so much so that he’s worried John will hear it, that it will betray how frightened his is.

“Well, it does, Sherlock is... do you understand what... this isn’t just something you can take back.” Squirming in his bed, he fights with his words, struggling with the effort to get his point across as softly as possible. “Those aren’t just words to me.” His voice tight, John swallows hard and watches the side of his partner’s face as he swivels his head so their gazes can meet.

“I know that,” is all he says slowly, simply.

John pauses, licks his lips. “Oh. Right.”

Sherlock’s eyes narrow as he assesses John’s tone and composure, lips twisting into a slight frown as he does so. “Are you baffled because you think yourself undeserving of my love or think me incapable of love?” Carefully, he sets his laptop aside.

Eyes wide, John stammers through an attempt at an explanation. “I, no, I just didn’t... I don’t... I didn’t.”

Sherlock huffs a breath through his nose and slaps his hands down on his knees. “Why bother even entertaining notions of partnership with me if you don’t believe me able to love. Is it that? It can’t be that, you’re not the pining type. You wouldn’t have entertained such a notion unless, ah. Ahhhh.”

John’s question is a dry rasp. “What?” As though he doesn’t know the words that Sherlock is going to speak before he puts voice to them.

“You’re in love with me as well.” It lands there between them, heavy, real. The ‘in love’ bit catches them both off guard and for one stunning second, Sherlock forgets to breathe.

John blinks once, doesn’t even spare a moment to consider it. “Yes.”
“Then what is the issue, John?” He withers back into his chair, swinging his legs up easily to rest on John’s bed. As he steepls his fingers beneath his chin, his eyes fall closed. “Might we... leave this for the time being? There will surely be problems and complications along the way and I would just as soon... wait for them to arise.”

John’s mouth twists back and forth as he contemplates what’s been said. “I’m not sure I understand what you’re saying.”

“You’ve been shot, nearly died, are currently recuperating from an attack of life-threatening infection. I’ve had to come to terms with your mortality, that you may have died due to my... recklessness. I’ve spent the past fortnight figuring out the exact depth of my regard for you. I am... tired, John. You must be as well and I would like...”

He trails off, dropping his gaze from John’s. They sit in silence for a few moments before John nods, smiles shyly. “I know.”

Eyes blink open. “Know what?”

John’s smile turns into a knowing grin; when Sherlock sees it, he immediately rolls his eyes. “You want the world to stop for awhile, figure out what all of this is while we’re alone...”

“Oh dear god,” Sherlock hops up from the chair. “Spare me the romantic drivel, you-”

John manages to speak while still sporting an ear-splitting grin. “You’ll talk about taking me to bed but you won’t talk about your feelings towards me and it’s-”

Sherlock’s smile was quick to appear as he struggles not to laugh. A light, warm feeling had seeped into his chest.

“Stop it, I will leave.”

“You will not,” John scoffs, good-naturedly. “Stop being such a drama queen, you’re making this far more dire than it is.” As Sherlock’s eyes flash, John amends, “Not to say that this isn’t quite possibly the most important thing that’s ever happened to me - meeting you in the first place, notwithstanding - but you need to... not stress about this too much.”

“I am not stressed.”

“Sherlock, I know when you’re stressed.” After a moment, “I know you.”

He concedes the point, gives only the barest of nods. “This could very well be the biggest mistake you’ve ever made,” Sherlock intones, somehow managing to keep the smile on his lips.

“Oh! What did I say about being dramatic? Let’s just get me the bloody hell out of here and... see where we are. And stop... are you trying to talk me out of this? What are you playing at?”

That gives him pause. He has absolutely no idea why he’s trying to talk John out of this. Sherlock is selfish by nature, takes what he wants, when he wants it with no real care for anyone else. But John, he cares about John, about John’s feelings. And this, now, having him, being given the permission to have him seems too much. It’s spun him on his axis, apparently. “I’ve no idea.”

“Well bloody... shut up about it, then.” John grumbles and flicks the television back on. “Because you’re not going to get rid of me that easily.”

“Well,” Sherlock offers. “If I haven’t managed to yet.”

“That’s the spirit,” John says and reaches his tube-laden hand over the bedrail. Sherlock takes it after
a moment, twining their fingers easily together. The doctor’s palm is warm against his own, and a flurry of new information registers. Sherlock sits back in his seat, gets as comfortable as possible in the unforgiving plastic and goes about analyzing each and every new sensation, right to the last.

When he’s had his fill, Sherlock untangles their fingers and rests John’s palm down against the blanket. “Got all you needed?” the doctor asks on a yawn and smiles sleepily.

“That’s strange... why do people enjoy that?”

“Mmm, a way to stay connected, show affection that’s publicly acceptable,” John says slowly, eyelids drooping.

Sherlock bites his lip and rests his hand just to the side of John’s, their pinkies dueling for a moment. “I don’t think I will do that, with you, in public. Is that...”

“That’s fine, Sherlock,” he says, snuffling as sleep begins to pluck at him. “Absolutely fine, every little bit of it is alright.”
Chapter Summary

“Hmmm, you’ll tell me if anything feels off, won’t you?” Sherlock nuzzles closer, sucks at John’s neck playfully, the underside of his jaw. He noses his way across his chin and down, front teeth clipping a nipple through John’s thin shirt.

John is given the word on the following day that he can finally leave the hospital, though it takes hours to determine and schedule his aftercare and draw up his discharge papers. There are nurses in and out and John meets with the aftercare specialist that will be seeing him, a harried but kind woman who assures him that it’s all very quick and painless.

“Bloody NHS,” John keeps muttering to himself as he stalks restlessly about the room. He walks his fill, back and forth, back and forth, circuitous. Ten days confined to bed have made him deservedly eager to get moving and he walks about as though manic. Sherlock watches him, noting the length of his strides, and thinks how very much this must be what he looks like in the midst of a particularly daunting case.

Or a week without a case.

Sherlock is lying in John’s abandoned bed, texting hurriedly. His eyes track John lazily as he stomps around, his hands on his hips, nose flexing with the efforts of his breaths. It’s a rather endearing sight if he really thinks about it and the evenly-paced steps begin lulling him into a bit of a trance for a few long minutes.

“I need a shower,” John grumbles, picking at his fingernails. “With proper water pressure. You don’t appreciate the shower at the flat until you’ve been forced to shower here. And oh god, soap.”

“And with a tube in your chest,” Sherlock blandly adds, sparing a tiny smile as he returns his attention to his phone. “If I’d known you were in such need of soap I would have brought you some.”

Mouth twisting in a grimace, he once again spins on heel and sets off across the room, keeping his eyes on Sherlock when he can. “Going home will feel like a positive spa day compared to this.”

It’s a while longer before the doctor returns with John’s chart, pushing a wheelchair. “Seems as though we’re good to go, Mr. Watson. Now, nothing too strenuous for the next week or so. Certainly walk about and get yourself moving, but no cardio, no exercise, take the stairs slowly. Lots of fluids, no sex.” The doctor doesn’t look at John, instead making a notation in his chart.

John’s cheeks heat and the tips of his ears turn pink. Sherlock makes no indication that he’s heard a word the doctor has said, keeping his face down, close to his mobile as he scrutinizes a message he’s received. John signs the forms he needs to sign and calls the detective’s name twice before he finally looks up.

His hair is disheveled though his eyes are bright. “Mmm?”

“Time to go.” Smiling at the picture he presents - feet up on the bed, crossed at the ankle, still
“I won’t be needing the chair.”

“Standard procedure,” the doctor apologizes and makes a gesture towards the seat.

John twists his lips and huffs in annoyance. A moment later, Sherlock is behind him, giving a low murmur of thanks to the doctor before he swivels the chair around and heads out. “You’re loving this, aren’t you?”

“What?”

“Me... You having to push me around, me in a wheelchair, so helpless.” his mouth twists in an odd combination of humor and annoyance as he looks up over his shoulder at him.

“Nothing could be further from the truth,” Sherlock assures, playfully zigzagging the chair into the elevator to a surprised chuff of laughter from John. “Well, I suppose it’s quite nice, having you at my disposal such as you are. Perhaps I’ll wheel you round to the morgue?”

John’s laughter is hearty and stunningly real and a weight Sherlock hadn’t known resided on his shoulders melts away. “I honestly might allow that to happen, I’m just so bloody happy to be out of that room.”

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When they arrive at the flat, John steps out of the cab and stretches, takes a deep breath of the crisp, afternoon air. He turns his face up to the sky, as though he’s catching rays of sunlight instead of diffused light from cloud cover. Sherlock watches him, voyeuristic, won’t allow the smile that is threatening him to creep onto his lips. It wouldn’t do to show such outward affection in public, not before they’ve determined the exact nature of their relationship.

They climb the stairs slowly but steadily, John halfway up before Mrs. Hudson has popped out, on her way to the shops as is evident by the reusable bags in her hands. “Oh, you’re home! How lovely!”

“So good to be back,” he sighs. “Thank you again for all of the biscuits and the magazines, those definitely helped pass the time,” John says genuinely. Sherlock settles his palm at the base of his spine. “Maybe this week you can come round and I’ll make you a cuppa in thanks.”

“Oh that’s alright, quite alright John,” she tuts at him, but they both know she’s likely stop by anyway and likely be the one making the cuppa for the three of them. “Do you boys need anything at the shops?” She fiddles with the strap of her purse while managing the bags and then sets her hat on her head.

“Perhaps some milk, certainly,” Sherlock says.

Mrs. Hudson smiles and nods and sees herself out the front door. They finish making their way up the steps and John sighs happily upon entering the sitting room. “Just as we left it. ...cleaner than we left it, come to think of it. Mrs. Hudson?”

“Indeed,” Sherlock says, and closes the door behind them, locks it.

They stand together in the sitting room, reserved, John looking around while Sherlock looks at him. He’s not sure how to go about telling John that he would like to keep him near for as long as possible. “John, you’re still healing and, well, if you’re going to be receiving your treatments down here, you may as well keep up in my room.” It all tumbles out a bit too quickly, a bit too rushed.
John’s mouth twitches, “...Ah.”

Sherlock’s eyes flash, “What?” John shifts his weight from foot to foot, scissoring his teeth against his bottom lip.

“With all of the... snogging I... hmmm.” John looks sheepish, runs a hand over the back of his neck. “I’d... you should join me, in your room, that is.” He scrunches up his face as though he’s assessing what he’s just said and has deemed it to be rather odd. He opens his mouth as though to speak again but then shuts it up tight, just as quickly.

Sherlock huffs out a breath through his nose and takes a step towards John. “It’s rather amusing, thinking you can invite me into my own room. As though you could keep me away now.”

“...Oh.” John swallows hard as he blushes for what must be the tenth time today. Sherlock swipes the pad of his thumb over a cheek and John sucks his lips into his mouth as though holding back words.

“Nothing indelicate, I promise you.” He passes a hand gently over John’s shoulder as he drifts past to hang up his coat on its hook.

“That... alright.” He can't keep the note of disappointment out of his voice.

Sherlock freezes, his back still turned. “Hmm?”

“Nothing,” comes his reply, far too quickly to seem natural.

A sly grin paints itself on the detective’s mouth. “Unless-”

John’s eyes snap to his immediately and they stare one another down, the heat there threatening to simmer over. “What?”

Sherlock’s smile is somehow both predatory and shy; a warm hand settles itself on John’s shoulder, squeezes gently. “I’m not certain of your physician’s definition of sex.”

John swallows thickly, shakes his head of the thoughts coalescing in his head. “I’m...” He scrubs his face with his hands. “Christ, I need to-”

Sherlock licks his lips and takes a step even closer. “You need to lie down, John.”

“Sure. What? Yes- No, I need a shower.” John stumbles back, Sherlock’s hand reaching out to steady him as he shrugs out of his jacket and tosses it over the back of his chair; he can’t be bothered with the hook. “A shower,” he repeats, catching Sherlock’s eye as he moves through towards the kitchen.

Sherlock’s smile is still in place, taunting, more of a purse of lips than an upward curl. “So you’ve said.”

There’s a moment where John does nothing but blink at him and then he gives a curt nod and tilts his head in the direction of the bathroom. “If you hear a loud thud from in there...”

“I’ll be just around the corner,” Sherlock assures and refrains from reaching out to grab at John’s arse. He’s surprised at his behavior. It’s almost... playful, affectionate, silly. That’s unsettling.

While John showers, Sherlock remakes his bed, tugs at the fitted sheet until the Egyptian cotton lies uncreased once more. He brings the few water glasses that have managed to accumulate into the
kitchen and sets them on the sideboard and then returns to gather up the small, folded pile of dirty laundry John has stacked next to the bed. All the while, he forgets to remember that these sorts of actions should be tedious and annoying.

Once he has John’s laundry in the machine and makes it back into the flat, John is already in the room, freshly showered and dressed in his pajamas.

“Everything you’d hoped?” Sherlock asks, setting down a fresh glass of water and John’s various bottles of pills.

“Better than, better than,” John sighs and settles himself on the bed, smiling serenely up at Sherlock who smiles back, briefly.

He watches as the doctor swings his legs up and on, pulls the blanket up to his waist and pats the right side of the bed. It’s incredibly domestic, Sherlock thinks, how natural John looks reclining in his bed, like he belongs there. And he does, Sherlock reminds himself, he does.

Sherlock leans in a bit, dividing his focus between John’s gaze and his body. He wishes to ask things of John, wishes to tell things. There are facets of the man he needs to know; the scar, he wants to investigate it, investigate the pair of them and note the differences aloud. He wishes to take him apart piece by piece and examine each bit endlessly until there’s nothing he doesn’t know. The thoughts are too tender and too raw and they threaten to flay him as he stands before John; instead of voicing any emotion, he stares blankly down at John’s legs and swallows the swell of affection. “Bed already?”

“That actually took a lot out of me, the walking. I’m going to need to work up to jogging again. This is...” He takes a moment to roll his head against the pillows, leaving damp little patches on the case. “Frustrating,” and he sounds tired too.

“It will get easier,” Sherlock says but even as he does, it doesn’t sound like himself.

John rolls his eyes, “Very convincing, thank you.”

Sherlock laughs gently, rounds the bed and sidles up next to John, settling his left leg beneath the blankets, the right lolling off of the side. They’re both stock still, glancing at one another, when John slides his hand over to curl against Sherlock’s on the against the sheets.

He stares at it a moment before steeling himself; Sherlock pulls a face that is akin to how he looks when he’s attempting to feign innocence. There’s intent there, John can see it in the depths of his eyes and it causes his breathing to shorten and stutter. Moist breath ghosts over the skin of John’s neck as Sherlock dips in, his knee pressing against John’s own. “John...”

“Yes?” comes the raspy whisper; he has his free hand balled at his side as though fighting not to touch the other man. When Sherlock’s hand turns over and their palms rest against one another, John shivers.

Sherlock feels want more keenly than he ever has, he’s sure of it. Licking his lips, he steadies himself and the spinning in his mind.

“Hmmm, you’ll tell me if anything feels off, won’t you?” Sherlock nuzzles closer, sucks at John’s neck playfully, the underside of his jaw. He noses his way across his chin and down, front teeth clipping a nipple through John’s thin shirt.

Brow creased in confusion, John asks through a haze of sluggish arousal, “What?” Sherlock twists his body, gets up onto his knees and straddles John’s calves.
A warm hand meanders past John’s waist and settles lightly over the vee of his thighs. Beneath Sherlock’s palm his cock jumps, as though eager for attention. He looks up at him from where his chin is perched on John’s lower stomach, beneath heavy lids. “You’ll tell me, yes?”

“Oh,” John moans, it finally dawning on him, and his head thumps back against the headboard as Sherlock’s hand sinks between his legs and cups his hardening prick through the cotton of pajamas and pants. “Oh, yes, yes, of course. Yes.”

“Anything at all,” Sherlock speaks to the fabric that covers John’s cock. Leaning down, he laps at the cotton once before tugging at the waistband. John lifts and Sherlock shucks the pajama bottoms gently off, leaving the doctor lying atop the sheets in a pair of navy pants. The color contrast is stunning, skin against pants against sheets.

The smile on Sherlock’s lips is indulgent when he tips down, nudges his nose at the crease where thigh meets torso and inhales. “How,” Sherlock breathes, the warm air causing John’s cock to jump again. “How did I know you would smell like this here?”

“Wonderful imagination?” John asks jokingly, softly, as he runs his fingertips tentatively over Sherlock’s scalp. Not a warning, but a reminder that this is okay, that everything is going swimmingly thus far.

“Hm,” Sherlock agrees with a hum, lays the flat of his tongue against the bulge in John’s pants and allows his saliva to soak through. “Hm, perhaps,”

The head of his prick strains against the waistband but Sherlock takes another moment, kissing up the cotton-trapped length of his erection, moving his lips so the fabric drags against the sensitive flesh. When Sherlock’s mouth kisses sloppily at the skin just above the elastic John groans, his eyes slamming closed.

Sensory overload.

“Still with me?” the detective asks as he draws the waistband back, just far enough to expose the head of John’s cock, swollen and shiny with precome

The swallow the doctor makes is audible in the heavy quiet of the room. “Yes, yes.”

“Good,” Sherlock hums and then dips his mouth, suckles at the head. The moan that tears from the doctor is strangled yet boisterous and Sherlock hums again against the skin, tonguing the slit sloppily before his left hand presses against the fabric and his right wraps itself securely around the shaft. John fumbles upright for a moment and tears off his shirt.

Sherlock applies the same fastidious attention to John’s prick that he might to an important experiment. Pinpoint focus and it seems Sherlock knows just what John needs, where to apply pressure when. All of his years of indelicate scrutiny and attention to the behaviors of others have taught him to read the language of the body like words spoken from a mouth. So when he runs his tongue hard around the head, leans down to suck hard thrice, he’s not at all surprised when John sucks in a breath of air and fails at not thrusting into his mouth.

And though he can guess John’s reactions, they’re no less gratifying, no less stunning.

The detective spares a moment to glance up at John’s slack jaw and flushed cheeks, but he can’t see the man’s eyes. Fingers slide up and settle against John’s hip, tap there until his lids pull slowly up, eyes opening. “Keep,” and a wave of emotion slams into Sherlock, blindsiding him. John’s eyes are open and pleading and honest, ringed with arousal but heavy with something much more damming.
“Keep... looking, look at me, look at me,” he rasps. John’s right hand runs over his chest, tweaks his own nipples before sliding into Sherlock’s hair, twining and settling.

He can’t maintain eye contact any longer; it’s too much. Sherlock divests him of his pants, fully swallows him down as far as comfort will allow and hollows his cheeks and sucks him with a desperation that mirrors the emotion swirling in the depths of John’s eyes. He wants to get closer, wants to suffuse himself through John’s skin and cells, reside there forever. It’s startlingly intimate, coming to that realization with the man’s cock in his mouth, the realization that he wants to be a part of someone else, forever, right down to the molecular level.

And so he attempts to convey this with his movement, with his mouth and tongue and hands. His palm slides wetly, tugging and curling against his prick, even as the tip of his tongue traces the vein on the underside of John’s shaft, down to his balls, maneuvers with a bit of difficulty back to his perineum. That causes an ungraceful buck and so Sherlock does it again, presses against the smooth flesh, delighted by the half-stutter of John’s hips.

He settles in, inside the bracket of John’s knees, curling his own legs under him as he bends over and sucks him, takes him down against the back of his throat. One hand is wrapped around the base of John’s cock and the other one steadies the man at his knee, caresses there.

John licks his lips, hums as Sherlock takes him down again and then he feels a tug at his hair. For a moment, he ignores it but it comes again, just a bit harder. When Sherlock glances up, John is boneless against the pillow but smiling. “Come here a moment.”

With his hand still wrapped around the man’s prick, Sherlock crawls over him, worried briefly that something is wrong.

But then John is running his hand down Sherlock’s neck, sweeping across his shoulders. “Hey,” John whispers before taking his lips in a kiss. It’s incongruous with the affection that Sherlock has been proving below John’s waist. It’s slow and sloppy and without any precision at all. But still, he drinks from it greedily, moaning low in his throat, continuing to jerk John through it.

When he is released, John falls once again back to the pillow, blinks hard and allows his hands to fall away.

Sherlock kisses back down John’s chest, mouth open and warm and pauses a moment at the nestle of pubic hair at the apex of thighs, just to breathe him in again.

When Sherlock takes John back into his mouth, it’s with added vigor. His unoccupied hand slides down a thigh, warmly cups John’s balls, drawn up and tight against his body. Fingers slip along the slight crease there, rounding against one and then the other before a forefinger bends and his knuckle presses intently against John’s perineum.

“I could stay here for days” Sherlock drawls as he pulls off, pressing kisses to the underside of John’s cock teasingly.

A strangled laugh reverberates through John’s belly as he says, “Oh god, please don’t.”

Sherlock smiles, tongues the bit of precome at the tip and twists his hand in the opposite direction, setting up a rhythm that has his tongue falling in sync with the pressure of his knuckle behind John’s bollocks. John’s breathing, the way his hips shake, the tightening of fingers in his hair, Sherlock knows he doesn’t have long.

So he brings his hand up, sucks at his index finger and then slides it down, around, presses gently
against the pucker of John’s arse, and in, just to the first knuckle.

It’s only a moment - and it feels like it’s suspended in time, glassine, on the brink - before John swears “Fuck,” Sherlock pumps him twice and he’s coming.

Sherlock pulls back and allows it to fall in the cup of his tongue, a few wayward rivulets sliding out and over his chin. Gravity takes them, falling to land in the nest of John’s pubic hair as Sherlock grips the man’s hips and keeps him at bay, lest his cock fall away from where Sherlock has it rested against his lower lip.

He holds John’s come in his mouth for a moment, until John’s eyes slide open and attempt to focus. “Oh, oh _christ_” John croaks when Sherlock makes a point to crawl halfway up John’s body before swallowing. He meanders back down, presses his mouth to the bit that had escaped, sucking it off of John’s skin and hair.

He smiles with one half of his lips but John smiles with his whole mouth, drawing Sherlock up to him and bringing their lips together, hard. Sherlock is sure John can taste himself between them, and his cock gives a painful little throb in his pants.

“Of course you’re amazing at that, of course you are,” John says breathily against Sherlock’s cheek when he pulls away. “Is there anything you’re not fucking _brilliant_ at?”

“Mmmm, cricket,” Sherlock hums against John’s collarbone and that sends them both into a fit of laughter.

When Sherlock moves to roll off, John’s arm settles heavily against his lower back. “Where are you going?”

He blinks, twice, jerks his head in the direction of the loo. “No,” John says once and then again. “No.”

Brow creased, Sherlock settles back onto the bed beside him. John’s hand makes quick work with the buckle and flies of Sherlock’s trousers and when the doctor’s hand wraps around him, he feels as though he’s honestly been waiting forever, just for this.

“Hey,” John says as he strokes him, Sherlock lifting his hips so they can get the trousers off of his thighs.

Sherlock glances over at John, his face mere inches away. “Yes?”

John leans in, presses his nose just against Sherlock’s and says, shakily, “I love you.”

Sherlock says nothing, just allows John to work him rather sloppily, but when he comes it whites him out, draws from his bones, leaves him gasping and spasming in John’s hand.

And he can’t help how quickly he shifts himself into John’s side, sated and sticky, sucking in massive breaths of air, settling his face into the curve of John’s sweaty neck. “Oh _christ_,” and it sounds very much like he’s in pain, like he’s coming apart, all at once. “I love you, too.”
Sherlock wakes gently.

As he surfaces he comes to realize that his nightshirt is sticking to his skin, his chest slick with sweat where it is pressed against the hard line of spine before him. As carefully as possible, he lifts a hand to his eyes and wipes the last vestiges of sleep away, noting the fuzzy light of pre-dawn filtering through the half-drawn curtains.

There’s a smile that perks Sherlock’s lips as he settles back into the pillow, eyes roaming over the figure before him. John could do with a haircut, he realizes hazily; it’s running a bit long against his neck, curling in towards the skin. Slowly, Sherlock draws his hand up until it hovers just over John’s hip, waits until the man exhales and settles his palm against the cotton of pajama trousers.

This is new and lovely, Sherlock thinks, waking up beside someone. Having someone snug and warm against him. He wrinkles his nose and leans in, sniffs at John’s hair and finds that more-than-pleasant as well.

In his sleep, the man sighs, makes a little grunt in his throat and maneuvers so that his shoulder turns back a bit, his bottom shimmying up into the harbor of Sherlock’s thighs. He turns his face into the pillow and goes still.

Sherlock wishes he could admire John’s face, surely slack and unguarded in sleep; he doesn’t dare move, for fear of rousing John from slumber. Instead, he settles for guessing at John’s body temperature, how much heat he gives off while at rest, how much heat they create together, just lying against one another. John’s hair, he places it as best he can on the four paint spectrums that he’s memorized, deciding that an amalgamation of Designerpaint’s Castle Keep, Walbrook and Malm are as close as he can get.

John gives a little moan and tilts his head just so, giving Sherlock full view of his right ear. There’s nothing extraordinary about the ear except that it is John’s and so he spends a moment determining the length and width of the lobe, wondering how it might feel in his mouth, between his teeth.

Sherlock resolves to find out exactly that sometime in the next twelve hours.

He spreads his fingers against John’s hip, flexes the tips and feels the skin give and press back; it’s a wonderful sensation, one of give and take and Sherlock closes his eyes and simply basks in it, the easy intimacy, the affection he feels at being able to touch wherever and whenever he desires.

The breath Sherlock takes is long and deep and thorough, as he sorts his varying forms of love for the man into the proper compartments in his chest. His world is still just slightly off kilter from the events of the past few days, from the startling, sweet bone-shaking intimacy from the night before.

John rouses slowly, rolling his shoulders back with a little “Ah,” as the tension that’s coiled in his muscles during sleep ease, shift and melt away. He stills when he feels Sherlock’s breath against the back of his neck, takes a deep breath, surely reminding himself of his surroundings and relaxes fully, curling his toes down into the mattress. Wriggling his hips, he torques his body and turns until he’s on his back, right shoulder resting against Sherlock’s left pectoral.

“It’s... early.” His voice is sleep-rough and delectable and Sherlock watches as John’s lips form the words and speak them, just slightly chapped.

“Yes, you slept for eleven hours,” Sherlock confirms, looking down into John’s face, noting the
wrinkles impressed upon his skin from the creases of the pillowcase. His fingers itch to trace the patterns. “Good morning.”

John’s eyes fall closed again and a delicate little smile spreads across his mouth. “Good morning.”

They are silent for some time, just looking at one another, eyes darting this way and that. “You need a haircut,” Sherlock says to him eventually, voice low and still rough with sleep.

John blinks and blinks, moistens the sides of his mouth so he’s able to speak properly. “What?”

“You need a haircut.” To make a point, Sherlock curls his hand around John’s neck and tickles the ends of his hair. John squints and frowns until Sherlock pinches a bit of it between his fingers and gives a gentle tug.

“Your hair, it could do with a trim.” To make a point, Sherlock curls his hand around John’s neck and tickles the ends of his hair. John squints and frowns until Sherlock pinches a bit of it between his fingers and gives a gentle tug.

“Dictating how I should look now, didn’t figure you’d be so vain,” John grumbles good-naturedly, swipes his cheek against Sherlock’s bicep before shimmerying back a few inches to better see his bedmate.

“Hardly,” Sherlock scoffs, carding his fingers through. “You become irritated when it skims your ears, it’s all very military of you. Short, cropped, it lends to the overall image you portray, calm, in control, harmless.”

“Harmless,” John tests the word on his tongue.

Sherlock applies his nails to John’s scalp, moving front to back. “You’re anything but.”

John’s mouth flickers in a ghost of a smile.

Sherlock blinks, shifts his lips and his feet. “I want to kiss you.”

The admission freezes the little smile on John’s face; it takes him a moment to understand the words. “I’d like that very much but... believe me... I need to,” and John smooths a hand over Sherlock’s cheek before rolling away and sitting up. “Give me a mo.”

When John disappears from the room, Sherlock flings himself onto his back and stretches, languishing in the sweet pull and strain of his muscles as they move, supposes he should follow suit. He pads into the loo, nudging John with his hip as he reaches for his own toothbrush and begins cleaning his teeth. When John is through, he nudges Sherlock’s hip back and disappears from the room.

Sherlock stands before the mirror, watches as the brush passes behind his cheeks, along his lower and upper gums. The bags that have been present beneath his eyes for the past two weeks have begun to recede, no doubt a result of the ten solid hours of slumber he’d gotten the night before. He gives himself a cartoonish grin, watching as his skin pulls and creases and then lets his face fall, steps back, regards his rumpled shirt and crazy hair, shrugs his shoulders back and stretches his chest.

He hasn’t looked at himself like this, not properly, in some time. And this, his reflection like this, is what he wants to remember. The morning after, the morning after he admitted to John Watson everything that resides in his heart. It’s strange and thrilling and he thinks, for just a moment, that he must look different now. With a pointer finger he presses his right brow up on his forehead, examines his pupil.

“Come back to bed,” John calls, still croaky from long hours dreaming and Sherlock’s stomach falls out at the words, the wonderful implications of them. Sherlock shuts off the light in the loo and makes his way back to the bed. He looks on John for only a moment before slipping around and
climbing back in.

“May I kiss you now?”

John gives a tiny little nod and Sherlock shuffles across, blows out a warm little breath through his nose against John’s chin. “Alright.”

“Alright?”

Neither of them move.

“Sherlock?”

“Mmm?” He’s staring, staring at John’s lips as they move.

“Bit of an odd time to get shy, considering where...” John peters off, blinking shyly at the man beside him. “Well.”

Sherlock smiles, slowly. “Hmmm, yes, considering where my mouth was last evening?”

John bites his lower lip and chokes on a chuckle.

Sherlock wrings up his lips to make it seem like he’s thinking and then breaks into a grin, leans in and slants his mouth against the doctor’s and waits for his lips to part.

It’s a slow, languid press, appropriate for the hour of the morning. And though they’ve peeled their eyelids open, been conscious for quite a few minutes now, it feels as though they’re just waking up. Together. Sherlock hums into it, uses his knees for leverage and maneuvers in closer, pelvis against John’s hip as he cradles his head in one hand.

He feels as though he’s being compressed, swept deep down into water that is pressing all of the air from him. There’s a heaviness in his chest that ebbs and alleviates as John responds, licking back, nipping at the corners of his mouth in supplication. “You are,” John mouths sloppily in between kisses. “You are,” John mouths sloppily in between kisses. “You are,” John mouths sloppily in between kisses. “So remarkably good at this.”

“Surprised?”

John sinks his teeth into Sherlock’s lower lip and pulls until the lip slips away. “I don’t... can’t think. Keep kissing.”

Sherlock nuzzles into him, smiling. Concedes. “Alright.” It feels decadent and heady and lethargic, the way John leans in for more, striping against his lips with a deft tongue. “How do you feel this morning.” he asks against John’s jaw, laying the flat of his tongue against the stubble there, briefly, before glancing back to nip at the curve of his chin.

“Yeah, good,” John breathes, ending on a little moan that he does his best to conceal.

Stilling, his nose against John’s neck, his eyelashes flutter against his Adam’s apple. “Good?”

Sighing, John admits, “Still a bit sore, somehow still tired and unbearably aroused. Obviously.”

The tip of Sherlock’s nose presses against the side of John’s neck, prompting. “So you’re...”

“I am beyond fine to continue... this.” John confirms slumping his body a little closer into Sherlock’s.

The detective smiles into his skin for a moment before sitting up, peeling his shirt away. John’s eyes
are drawn immediately to the skin that’s been revealed and he looks on it with a sort of guarded awe. “I’ll be gentle,” he says with a wink as John hurries to follow suit, giving a little chuckle in response. When he lays back against John, the shock of skin on skin causes him to tremble, dip his mouth to a shoulder and suckle while he acclimates.

“You’re so warm,” John whispers, dragging his mouth against Sherlock’s brow.

He smiles and glances up, shares a long gaze with John and then claims his lips, draping himself easily over the right side of his body. Sherlock spends ages licking John’s mouth open, settling against his lips as though he’s nowhere else at all to be. There’s a warm hand on a warmer stomach, tucked under thin cotton, thumb just barely tracing back and forth beneath John’s belly button.

John’s hardness presses against Sherlock’s hip and the man squirms, his own cock giving an envious twitch in his sleep pants. His thumb meanders down, slips under the waistband of John’s pajamas and pants and sweeps across the skin there, back and forth, just skimming the line of John’s pubic hair.

It’s a careful dance they maneuver, hands seeking skin while granting the other access to more skin that is yet untouched. John’s hand snakes around, pushes against Sherlock’s lower back and then slides beneath, his reach giving him just enough arse to cup, bringing Sherlock hard against him, the man’s hand skidding down a few inches to bump his cock. “Not too gentle, please,” John begs lightly and lifts his hips, his unoccupied hand helping to take his pants down to his knees where he fumbles to kick them off.

“Christ.” Sherlock grits out, his eyes slamming closed as blunt fingernails dig into the flesh of his arse. This isn’t how he wants it all to culminate. He doesn’t want this hard and fast and fumbling. Sherlock wants time with John’s skin, he wants ages with his cock and lips. He wants to stay in bed all day and fully explore the vast expanses of John’s body that he’s uncovering.

But the way his prick throbs - still trapped in his pants - he knows that it’s foolish to hope for such a lengthy encounter. There will be time enough for that later, he supposes, and opens his mouth to suckle John’s earlobe. There’s a groan that’s pulled from deep within him as John shakes at the sensation of eager teeth nipping around the pliant skin. “Keep, keep up with me here,” he stutters, palming Sherlock through cotton.

“Hmmm?” The hum comes directly against his ear and they share the vibrations, lips to skull.

John rolls his head away, lobe slipping out of Sherlock’s mouth. “Trousers, pants, gone. Now.” His chest heaves with the breaths he’s taking, laborious, but his eyes sparkle and shine. Sherlock plants one last, hasty kiss against John’s mouth and clambers off of the bed, stripping himself bare quickly before climbing back in and under the covers.

“No fair,” John complains even as his hand come out to wind around the man’s shoulders.

“Oh?”

John’s mouth is open against Sherlock’s neck, just at his carotid as he responds. “Didn’t even get a real look. I’m going to spend hours...” He’s distracted for a moment as he rakes his teeth over and down. “Hours, just looking at you. And soon.”

“I’m amenable to that,” Sherlock says lazily, fingers tickling up and down John’s bicep, startling a laugh from him.

John’s hand finds its way down and over Sherlock’s hip, pausing for a minute to rake lightly through
the curls at the base of his cock before curling up and around. John squeezes experimentally, humming happily when hips stutter into his hand. “Christ, christ, you’re...”

Forehead to his, Sherlock gasps, “What?”

“I do this to you. I did this to you,” John says in wonder, gaze held rapt by the movement of his own digits on Sherlock’s cock.

Spine weak with the easy pleasure that races up it, he curls harder into John, hiding his face in his neck and breathing back, “Obviously.” They palm at one another for a few long moments, both on their sides, eyes focused on the movement between him.

*Duality*, Sherlock thinks, as he runs a thumb over the moisture leaking from the tip of John’s cock. *Beautiful.*

There’s a flush on John’s cheeks, high and pink and endearing and Sherlock spares a moment to kiss all of the tinged skin that he can reach. John’s breath rushes out, fast, fast, as he smiles, mouth moving as though to snatch Sherlock’s lips for a kiss. The man doesn’t oblige, instead settling back on his pillow and focusing on John’s irises as he pumps him. There’s little lubrication but he makes do, twists his hand on the upstroke, darting away to tease against the fur of John’s balls.

Teeth graze over Sherlock’s chin and fingers tighten minutely around his cock. Sherlock’s entire body shakes with need, with want and he has to swallow three times before he’s sure he has control of his faculties and shifts his hips. It takes a moment of maneuvering, but he manages to straddle John’s spread thighs, looming over him.

Fringe hangs down over his eyes, bits sticking to his forehead where it’s damp. He feels wrecked and he hasn’t even *had* John yet. “I want... I want you inside me but... I want to see you and...” Sherlock doesn’t have to say it. Though John tries to make it seem as though he’s fine, Sherlock knows that he will have to be gentle with his body.

“Later,” John assures and spreads his thighs further, allowing Sherlock to settle on his knees between them. Carefully, he draws his legs up, wraps them around Sherlock’s hips. “C’mere,” John murmurs and Sherlock swears to himself that if he’d been standing, just hearing John say that would have taken his feet right out from underneath him.

Sherlock drops his hips and presses against John, their cocks slotting against one another. They heave out twin breaths of surprise, very nearly into one another’s mouths. John wriggles his hips, eyes rolling back as his cockhead bumps against Sherlock’s clumsily; it sets Sherlock’s teeth on edge.

“Stop,” he gasps and John does so, immediately stilling his body. Instead, Sherlock begins moving his hips, drawing back agonizingly slowly before sliding back up John’s body. Their chests brush, just so, but he’s sure to keep clear of the bandage from where his chest tube was placed. He keeps his hips tight, the movements even and John begins meeting him a bit, thrust for thrust.

It isn’t enough, there’s not enough friction, not enough pressure. Sweat pools at the base of John’s belly but it only goes so far. Sensing Sherlock’s frustration, John licks his hand, holds it to Sherlock’s mouth until he too swipes across his palm with a tongue and then manages to catch most of their combined girth between his fingers, awkwardly torquing his wrist in order to hang on.

There’s a groan that catches in Sherlock’s throat as he pumps his hips hard three times and he stops moving, presses his sweaty temple against John’s and breathes. “Not yet... not...” Sherlock wants to say everything he’s ever thought about this man, he wants his hands everywhere, everything all at
once. It’s a rush of colors and thoughts that spin his mind until he’s dizzy with it all. Fingers melt away from their pricks and Sherlock sucks in a few more heaving breaths, and then peppers kisses to John’s ear, his cheek.

Sherlock slides his hand down, wraps it around himself and urges John’s hips just a little higher. His cockhead slides wetly against John’s perineum and then slips against his hole, once, twice, Sherlock just barely pressing.

“Jesus christ that’s...” John gasps, digging his fingernails into the nape of Sherlock’s neck.

Humid breath cascades over John’s face as Sherlock asks, “Okay?”

“Different,” John hums, sucking in his lips. “Different and very, very good.” Hands scrabble at Sherlock’s back as he jerks himself against John’s puckered skin. It’s just a bit, just the slightest bit of pressure that has John thrashing his head against the pillow.

His chest is a heaving mess, blotchy and red, covered in sweat and Sherlock takes the opportunity to reach his lips up and pluck at John’s left nipple. “Fah-fuck, going to come,” John grinds out and with one hand on the back of Sherlock’s neck, draws his face up and aligns their lips.

It’s entirely too messy, too hot, not enough, but when their cocks press together again, Sherlock moans so loudly that it shakes his entire frame. He comes between them, hot, spurting up John’s chest; he places a hand clumsily before John’s bandage to block it from the mess he’s making.

John coos at him as he passes a hand through Sherlock’s curl, pets at him until he’s spent himself and then grins when their eyes meet. “Okay?”

“No,” Sherlock manages after a moment composing himself and slithers down John’s body and takes his achingly hard cock into his mouth. It takes only a very short while and a press of one, slick finger in to the second knuckle for John to come, semen hitting the back of Sherlock’s throat and dribbling out the side of his mouth, filthy. He does his best to clean himself up, yet when he lifts his head there’s a bit clinging to his lower lip.

“Christ,” John croaks against the pillow. “Can you... jesus, get up here,” and when he does, John kisses it off of him deeply, slowly.

When Sherlock falls back against the bed on his side, he reaches out and draws his fingers through the mess he’s made on John’s stomach. He traces back and forth with just the tips of his fingernails.

“Thank you,” John says after a moment of watching Sherlock.

“Hmmm?” He doesn’t stop his tracing, just raising his eyebrows in acknowledgement.

John smiles with half of his mouth. “For, not... you know,” and he waves his hand at his stomach and then at his bandage and Sherlock glances up at him.

He chuckles.

John chuckles back.

A moment later they are laughing, arms around one another, sticky and sweaty, chest shaking against one another. It’s mildly unpleasant, but it’s not enough to force them to part so they lie there as their laughter subsides, lingering in one another’s arms.

When they finally separate, only to roll onto their backs, Sherlock keeps hold of John’s wrist,
forefinger and thumb circling the thinnest point. Together, they stare up at the ceiling while their skin cools.

“Fancy a shower?” John asks eventually, tugging his wrist in Sherlock’s grip to get the man’s attention.

“What, together?” Sherlock turns his head against the pillow, looking pleasantly surprised.

John gives him a half-smile. “That would be the point, yeah.”

Sherlock sighs, closes his eyes and determines that the likelihood that either he or John will be able to get an erection in the foreseeable future. Taking a shower with him however will give him more time to explore, and from a different angle and under different conditions. He can’t help wonder how the water will break over his shoulder and stomach scars and the thought of tasting his skin through the water is certainly appealing. “I suppose,” he says after a moment and swings his legs daintily from the bed.

John follows a moment after, the two of them walking starkers down the hallway to the loo. Sherlock turns on the water so it’s just hot enough and the room begins to fill with steam. “Your nurse will be here at three.”

“Yes,” John confirms, climbing into the tub.

“That gives us roughly eight hours,” Sherlock calculates.

John smiles and tugs at the man’s wrist until he follows him into the tub. “Yes, now get in here you git!”

“And we’ll have hot water for roughly... twenty-two minutes,” Sherlock concludes, walking John back the few centimeters until he’s beneath the spray.

“Twenty-two,” John whispers, his eyes falling closed as the water sluices over him. “Best make the most of it, then.”
“Do you ever think,” Sherlock poses, glancing down into the depths of his wine. “How particularly strange it is that we found one another?”

John ponders for a moment. “You mean like fate?”

It’s been twenty-four days.

Three weeks, three days, sharing Sherlock’s bed. It’s been three weeks and three days of surprisingly fluid partnership. They’ve had their spats of course, over the dishes in the sink and the amount of takeaway Sherlock consumes. John’s shouted at him and Sherlock has shouted back and they’ve both had their sulks. John has come to learn that Sherlock steals the covers and kicks in his sleep, that his limbs seek out the nearest warm extremity and latch on.

John has slammed doors and Sherlock has left various toxic substances out on the counter.

In short, it’s really no different than it had been before John was injured. The only real change was that they were now sharing a bed, sharing their bodies with one another.

When he makes it out of their bedroom (and it has, officially become theirs, as the moving of John’s clothing and the paperback book that is kept on the bedside table prove) on day twenty-five, Sherlock has been up for hours and hours, since dawn had appeared on the horizon. His doctor is sleep-warmed and rumpled as he pads out, scratching the back of his neck, feet catching on the too-long pajama bottoms he’d grabbed off of the floor. Sherlock makes to point out that those are indeed his own pants but is too caught up in how slight, unassuming and adorable John looks in the oversized bottoms.

He takes these moments and cherishes them as they are so seldom presented; John is not adorable and he is not unassuming but when he’s caught unaware and unguarded, he becomes softer and sweeter. Such a juxtaposition to his usual sand, steel and jumpers persona. This is one of the facets of John that Sherlock enjoys the most because it’s so entirely incongruous with how John Watson is in action.
And though he’s been faced with the softer, sleepier doctor for the past few weeks, he also yearns for the time when they can return as a team to cases, to the thrill of the case.

John licks a yawn back into his mouth and scrubs at his eyes roughly. “What’s this then?” he asks on a sleepy smile. His fist is curled tight around his bottle of painkillers but he stops en route to the rubbish bin to fully take in the spread laid out before him.

On the kitchen table is a bounty of food; muffins and pastries, bangers and greasy potatoes, eggs scrambled to such a delicate fluffiness they look to be fake. Sherlock watches John assess the breakfast food spread before him as a small, indulgent smile lights his face.

“I have heard that it’s rather romantic to bring one breakfast in bed but as said breakfast would take up the whole bed…” Sherlock waves his hand around at the food and shuffles over to John, plunks his chin down on the top of John’s head perhaps a bit too forcefully.

John’s grin slides easily across his lips, wonder seeping through the tone of his voice. “Did you make this?”

Sherlock feels full to bursting. He feels, unabashedly, infinitely happy. “Mmm, not the muffins.”

“Well, you’ve outdone yourself,” John says into his shirt, his hands coming to settle lightly at the man’s hips. His prescription bottle presses into Sherlock’s side and without looking, he sneaks a hand down and uncurls John’s fingers from the orange plastic, plucks the bottle away. “Through with the painkillers means you’ll have your appetite back.”

It’s crisply sunny out, the late winter light filtering through the small window to spill across the floor. Inside 221B it smells of bacon grease and dust, the ever-present cloying odor that the radiator emits when heating the room. It’s a cozy smell that reminds him of the darkest, quietest most snowy of nights. Now, Sherlock will associate the smell with a happy and whole John Watson, finished with his treatments and his prescriptions.

A John Watson who’s been given the go-ahead to begin living his life again. Sherlock is giddy, has been waiting for Lestrade to text or call for the past two days with a case worthy of their time. He doesn’t think in terms of simply his own life and time any longer, he thinks of John’s too. Because if John is not with him during his travails, they’re hardly worth it at all. A month ago this admission would have irritated him, angered him but now, it is simply a fact well known.

He’s not startled by these codependent thoughts any longer, has come to take them in stride. John has helped to show him that needing someone isn’t an inherent weakness.

They’ve discussed the ins and outs of who they are to one another and in Sherlock’s opinion, they’ve talked it to death. He knows that there will be times when their relationship is trying, John had assured him that there would. But it had been Sherlock who had spoken of the need to tread very carefully on the new ground they have discovered together. He doesn’t have to vocalize to John that he’s frightened he’ll cock it all up - the likelihood of that is enormous he knows - because John knows him.

He curls his palm around the bottle and steps away from John, the other man’s gaze following him as he walks to the rubbish bin and pitches in the half-empty bottle with a rattle.

Heaving out a sigh, John slides his hands to his hips. “Just a totally, run-of-the-mill romantic breakfast from you, then?” John says it as though it’s nothing, but Sherlock can tell from the slant of his eyes and the curve of his lips that he’s touched.
“A last hurrah of sorts,” Sherlock explains. “No more nurses visiting, no more physio and physician appointments, you’re well, now. It’s back to the grind. Back to work... just as before.”

“This is true, I suppose now that I’m well I can return upstairs, no?” He’s being cheeky, it’s rather obvious, but that doesn’t stop Sherlock’s stomach from lurching unpleasantly.

He makes the short few steps back to John and settles his hands back on his hips, swatting John’s own away; after a moment, he wipes under the shirt with his thumbs, pads of his fingers tracing warm, soft skin. “Well, I don’t think that’s necessary-”

John’s hands settle just above the curve of his arse. “Mmm hmm.”

“But as you will no longer be requiring such assistance from me, I thought that it might be fitting to make one last grand gesture to prove... my affection,” Sherlock bows his head towards John.

John’s grin is a little loopy and he presses an open-mouthed kiss into the skin of Sherlock’s neck, breathes in his scent. “Is there tea?”

The answering silence is all he needs to hear as he breaks into delighted laughter. “I’ll make the tea, you get down some plates,” John instructs, patting Sherlock’s bum as he steps around and sets about making the tea. They slide into chairs that have over time and use become ‘Sherlock’s’ and ‘John’s’ and the detective doesn’t wait for John to dive in before securing a triangle of toast for himself.

“We’ll have leftovers for days,” John says, picking up his fork and waving it over the bounty, wondering just where to begin. He ends up sliding a few bangers onto his plate and piling the eggs high, knocking a bit over to land on a triangle of buttered toast. Sherlock says nothing in return, just nibbles at his toast and watches John eat voraciously.

“How’s that embezzlement thing you were working on.” It’s said through a mouthful, the words muffled through eggs.

Sherlock smiles; the food must indeed be good for John to forget his usual fastidious table manners. “Solved. Child’s play.”

Lifting his head a bit, John gives him a knowing look before he spears a potato and chews it thoughtfully. “See, all it took was a good night’s sleep.”

Sherlock taps at the side of his mouth without making eye contact with John and the doctor huffs a little breath, lifts his napkin to the corner of his lips and wipes. “That had nothing to do with it,” Sherlock sips at his tea daintily, face a careful mask of indignation.

They share in the amiable silence for some time. Sherlock actually spoons some eggs and potatoes onto his plate, eating slowly, methodically. All the while, he watches the man across the table from him, basks in his easy, relaxed demeanor. Sherlock appreciates John at rest like this just as he appreciates John when his adrenaline is high.

“I was thinking... we could have sex tonight.” The words are spoken very carefully, Sherlock’s mouth hidden behind the rim of his teacup; his gaze is focused just above John’s left ear.

“We’ve been having sex all the while,” John points out, spreading jam over a small corner of toast. He glances at it a moment before snatching it off with his teeth. “Unless you, oh... oh right.”

“I would like,” Sherlock places his teacup down with infinite care. When their gazes meet, it’s shaky. “To be inside of you, John.”
A fork clatters down to John’s plate, ends up on the table. “Christ.”

“Hmmm,” comes Sherlock’s little hum and he watches John place both of his hands palms faced down on top of the table. “Thoughts?”

“That what this is? Buttering me up for... for that?” Cheeks still flush pink when he thinks or talks about that and though Sherlock should find that problematic, he just finds it endearing. They’ve discussed anal sex quite a bit, Sherlock in rather clinical terms and John in both embarrassment and confused arousal. John is well aware of where Sherlock stands and has said enough to prove to Sherlock that he’s amenable to it, just a bit nervous.

He’s never partaken before; Sherlock has. “It’s almost what one might call romantic,” Sherlock had whispered into his ear one evening as they got ready for bed. “I’ll be your first.”

“You arrogant arse,” John had breathed but couldn’t deny it. It was rather... romantic. John had then made it a point to acknowledge Sherlock’s own acknowledgement of romance until the man had crowded him into bed and had done nothing but snog him lazily for the better part of an hour.

Sherlock fondly recalls that evening, how pliant and warm John had been beneath him, his breathless, needy little mewls. Something wonderful and new to add to his list of things he enjoyed, kissing for absolutely ages.

Still, kissing isn’t what Sherlock has in mind for this evening. Not exclusively kissing, anyhow. Drawing himself from his thoughts, he leans closer to John over the table. The grin on his mouth is ludicrous, surprised. “‘Buttering’ you up? That certainly would make things... easier.”

“Cheeky bas-... shut up,” he mumbles, licks his lips and picks up his fork once more. The manner in which he bites his bottom lip - it isn’t nerves, it’s... anticipation. A little flare of desire lights in Sherlock’s belly.

Sherlock leaps from his seat, restless and rounds to the kettle to flick it on for another cup; his dressing gown follows him with a flutter. “But no, breakfast is not intended as a seduction. Breakfast just... is.”

John clears his throat, makes to speak and then thinks better of it. He fills his mouth too full with food and chews for long, heavy moments. When he finishes off his cup of tea and holds it out for Sherlock to refill, he’s made up his mind. Sherlock freezes by the sink, teacup in hand and waits. “Yeah, alright?”

The rush of breath that comes out of Sherlock is shocked and tinged with confused humor. “Alright?”

John turns in his chair and gazes up at Sherlock, jaw set, completely serious. “Just because I’ve never... doesn’t mean I haven’t thought about it every time we’ve been together. I want to...” He sucks his lips into his mouth and then lets them go, glides a tongue over them. “I love you.”

The words come in a manner that leaves no room for interpretation. It just is. Still, the words shake Sherlock, cause a warm thrill to run over the back of his neck, down his spine, settle in the pit of his stomach. Sherlock smiles and then turns back to the tea, hiding his face. “Good, then.”

“Yeah, good.”

“Brilliant.”

“Spec...” John pops another piece of potato into his mouth. “Tacular.”
“Splendid!”

John chuckles. “Magnificent.”

“It is going to be magnificent,” Sherlock says, swooping down next to John, whispering in his ear. “You won’t be able to walk for days.”

John blanches, then laughs. “Alright, alright, you win.”

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Sherlock doesn’t cook dinner but he does order John’s favorite take away. He uncorks a 2001 La Rioja Alta Viña Ardanza that they’d received as a gift from a client - John had assumed he’d done away with it, but apparently not. “Jesus christ, Sherlock Holmes. Wine? Take away? Next you’ll be lighting candles.”

“I will be, yes,” Sherlock confirms with a nod, pulling two awkward-sized tapers from the cupboard with relish. He walks into the living room and places them on the table by the windows, a table that had been cleared of all the detritus. John marvels as he sets the scene, stokes the fire and draws up the flames. John runs his hands over his face briskly, several times.

“Oh dear god, you’re seducing me, aren’t you, setting a mood, oh... mygod,” The last of it comes out as one word, he’s so shocked. John is disbelieving but laughs nonetheless, walks over to his chair and sits himself down. “Sometimes, you’re remarkable, you know.”

“I’m always remarkable,” Sherlock says, cleaning a smudge off of one of the wine glasses.

“Yes, well, this is a different sort of remarkable.” John perches his chin on two fingers and watches Sherlock finish setting the room to his liking. When he’s through he stands back, surveys the area and glances at John, pride evident in his features.

“Come here,” John says with a little jerk of his head; he doesn’t remove his chin from fingers, just waits for Sherlock to go to him. He does, after a moment, and stands with his hands on his hips next to the chair. “And bend down a bit, little more, a little more...” John kisses him, soundly, thoroughly.

“All of this was entirely unnecessary,” John says huskily, speaking against Sherlock’s lips..

Sherlock is the one to disengage, draws his nose against John’s. “Let’s eat.”

“Okay,” he smiles dreamily up at the detective and drags himself from the chair.

They eat off of matching plates with actual silverware, foregoing the plastic utensils that had been tossed into the bag. They gaze at one another across the table, over the glare of the candles and John can’t help laughing as he cradles his glass of wine.

“What?” Sherlock asks, startled.

“Nothing, nothing... just, next time I want to murder you because you’ve left something entirely awful in the sink I’ll think of this night and hopefully that will tame the urge a bit.”

Sherlock grins at him and then lowers his eyes, a bit of a blush creeping up onto his cheeks. “Have I done that thorough of a job?”

“Of romancing me?” John takes a sip of wine. “Yes, yes you have.”

They finish their meal in silence, John refilling their glasses then they become empty. It’s a rather
lengthy meal and they talk about nothing much of anything, simply basking in one another’s company.

“Do you ever think,” Sherlock poses, glancing down into the depths of his wine. “How particularly strange it is that we found one another?”

John ponders for a moment. “You mean like fate?”

“No, I don’t...” Sherlock sighs, leans back, slips a bit low in the chair. “I don’t want to believe that bullet was fated for you, no. But without that, without the realization of what the loss of you might mean also came with it other, more startling revelations.”

“You’re worried that if I hadn’t been shot you wouldn’t have allowed yourself to be with me?”

Sherlock worries his bottom lip. “Perhaps, maybe. It’s all rather... morbid.”

Finishing off the last of his glass, he places it on the table and stretches out his feet to tangle with Sherlock’s. “It is. So let’s not think about that. Or the bullet let’s... I think it’s damn time we’re simply happy we found our way to one another at all, yeah?”

“That is... painfully romantic.”

John smiles, blows out the candles. “Pot calling the kettle black. Now, take me to bed.”

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Once in bed, Sherlock presses him back into the mattress with lazily insistent kisses. John can’t help but chuff laughter when Sherlock pulls back, seemingly only to grin down at him, running a hand up and down his side.

“You are...” John begins and then shakes his head, because there are no words. Sherlock palms John’s cock, circles the crown and slips his fingers all the way down to the root. With a half smile, he climbs up onto his knees and shifts himself over John’s lap, taking his prick in hand. Cupping the top of his shaft where it presses up against John’s belly, he runs his tongue against the thick underside, tip tracing the vein until he stops, suckling at the top.

He spends long moments simply teasing at the slit there, delighting in the precome that leaks. John watches all the while, repeating “Oh, oh, oh,” though managing to keep his hips relatively still. While Sherlock holds his cock, he leans up to press an amused kiss to the left of John’s belly button and then climbs back up John’s body; below he leaves John’s prick maddeningly hard, mottled red, gleaming with saliva.

He settles back on the pillow, once more takes back up stroking John’s side, sighing into his hair. “I’m going to touch you, now,” he murmurs, rolling away to secure a small bottle from the bedside table. “I’m going to touch you everywhere.”


The pad of his index finger warms the lubricant and Sherlock finds his hole easily, making sneaky little passes over the muscle without any real pressure. John bites his lip and waits, waits, eyes half-open and wholly wanting. It’s a moment more before he gives a little press, circles against his hole, adding more pressure with each pass until John is relaxed enough for him to slip in to the second knuckle.

“How does it feel,” Sherlock asks, dividing his attention between John’s face and where his finger is
entering John’s body.

“Good, yeah, really... good,” he breathes through a smile and shimmies his knees up a bit further.
“Kiss,” he asks and Sherlock bestows one readily, licking at the corner of John’s mouth before pressing in and lingering there, mouth moving in counter rhythm to his hand.

Sherlock works him slowly, brow to brow. With gentle fingers he presses John open, first with one finger then with two. He crooks them inside John with purpose, letting his mouth fall open against the man’s cheek. John squirms, faintly and huffs calming breaths through his mouth, twisting his head until their noses slot against one another.

“Just like that,” Sherlock whispers, watching John with a rapt gaze. “God, that’s perfect,” he mutters when John clenches against him and then melts, boneless into the mattress. “You’re gorgeous.” He’s entirely breathless, his cock leaking against his stomach. His hips shake with the need to thrust into the warm body next to him but he withholds, grits his teeth and twists his fingers anticlockwise inside of John.

He’s panting, hands scrabbling at Sherlock’s arm and back. He can imagine the pain-pleasure welling inside of John but cannot fathom how John will - sometime very soon - feel inside of him. For now, he focuses on the tasks at hand and he gives a whisper of a warning before maneuvering a third finger inside.

John presses fingers to his eyes and grunts, opening his mouth to speak and not finding any words.

“John?” Sherlock asks carefully, mouth against the man’s temple.

“Bit slower, yeah?”

Sherlock smiles against him. “Slow as you like.” He eases his fingers upwards a bit before drawing back. “Next time, I’ll open you with my tongue.”

The resulting sob is all Sherlock needs in answer. He graces John’s cheek with a few sloppy kisses before easing his fingers out. “I know we’ve not discussed this, an oversight on my part, but I do have condoms if you deem them necessary.”

John speaks like a man who’s been in the desert. “Want to feel you. Just you. Please.”

Swallowing at that, Sherlock nestles himself into the vee of John’s legs, running his slippery hand over his cock. “I want to see you. Like this. Is that-”

“It’s perfect.” John nods, eyes slipping closed for a moment before popping back open. He looks positively blissed out.

When Sherlock presses into him, John releases a gust of breath that’s so telling, they both still. John’s eyes are wide in astonishment, moisture clinging to his lower lashes. Sherlock bows his head, curses at himself, bites his lower lip. “And now you understand,” Sherlock says, head bowed towards John’s chest. “I almost lost you.”

John nods once, twice, slack jawed and curls his fingers around Sherlock’s shoulders. When Sherlock dips his head to press his lips to the side of John’s mouth, the doctor just breathes. He breathes and feels the weight inside of him. Heat skitters along Sherlock’s spine, his skin; every nerve ending in his body is alight with this.

“Jesus, jesus,” John seethes, tosses his head against the pillow several times before sucking in a few deep breaths through his nose, curling his hand tight around Sherlock’s neck. “Still okay, still good.”
Sherlock gives him a small smile, a tender kiss against his brow.

John sighs, pulls against himself hesitantly, slowly, twice, shifting his hips an inch so Sherlock moves inside of him. “Brilliant,” he adds as Sherlock continues to rock into him slowly.

Sherlock is lost in it, terribly, frighteningly pulled under; he has enough sense to slide his fingers over the crown of John’s cock, to smear the precome there as he applies pressure in the form of a sloppy fist. He picks up his speed, pressing in harder, as deep as possible. His other hand is flat on the pillow, his thumb just close enough to John’s ear to brush; the muscles and tendons burn with the strain but he does not give in, instead snapping his hips, driving himself inside.

There’s a huff of breath leaving his lungs and John twists his legs around Sherlock’s backside and pulls him in and down, until they’re flush against one another. His left hand moves hastily to John’s shoulder, scrabbling for purchase as the doctor emits a whine, thrashes his head and scissors his teeth against Sherlock’s ear. “God, oh god,” he says and manages to throw off Sherlock’s rhythm with the movement of his own hips.

“Relax,” Sherlock whispers, pressing his face to John’s skin wherever he’s able. “Relax, relax.”

John tips his head back and swallows and the detective takes a minute to lean down and nip and kiss the bared throat. Putting his weight back on his hands, he puts space between their chests, hips begin moving once more, slowly and with utter intent. He keeps each of his thrusts the same until the third, where he torques his hips and plants his knees, pressing against John’s prostate.

John’s heels dig into his arse as he strains his neck up to press his nose right against Sherlock’s, twisting after a moment to kiss him. The detective huffs a humid breath over John’s face and grins. It takes a moment but John slides his hand between them and takes up his prick, his other curved possessively around Sherlock’s nape, holding him close. “Oh, oh, fu-, I’m so close.”

“Yes,” Sherlock gasps, confirms, snaps his hips a little harder, strokes becoming ever-so-slightly off-kilter. Hips hitching up a bit more, John twists his wrist and comes, spurting between them, over bellies and chests, groaning the first syllable of Sherlock’s name as the orgasm is wrung from him.

Sherlock can feel John coming, the spasming of his muscle, the tightness of his body as it clamps down. He feels brilliant and alive and whole and Sherlock feels his throat constrict with the beauty and pain of it all. “John,” he gasps, “I-”

But he can’t he can’t speak, can’t think. His brain whites out completely for a lovely, long moment. John looks up at him like he’s done something spectacular, mouth moving words that Sherlock cannot make out.

His hips stutter and then stop and he hangs his head, sweat trickling down the back of his neck. “Wha... what? Did you say?”

“Hmmm,” John hums, “I can feel you... it’s... it’s...” And then John slumps his body fully into the bed and lets out a spectacularly mirthy little giggle. Sherlock is stunned into silence, feeling as though all of his muscles have seized.

And then he too is laughing, doing his best to remain seated inside of John as he does so. Forehead falling to the doctor’s chest, he reaches a hand over the side of the bed and takes up the first item of clothing his grasps - his own pants - and maneuvers the fabric between them in order to try and minimize the mess.

“Brilliant thought, that,” John croaks and bursts into another fit of laughter as he pitches the ruined
pants over the side of the bed and then grabs a handful of tissues to mop them up a bit. “God, s’it always this *messy*?”

“Only when it’s spectacular,” Sherlock confirms, sliding along John long enough to suck a loud kiss into the side of his neck. “Shower, then the best sleep you’ve had in years.”

John peeks an eye open as Sherlock takes him in. He is debauched and patched with pink where Sherlock has pressed into his skin. There’s a sheen of sweat at his hairline and his softening penis is still splotched with a bit of their come. Sherlock has done this to him. John has let Sherlock do this to him.

What a heady realization.

“You can promise that, can you?” John finally asks, shuffling himself to the side of the bed with only a minimal cringe.

Sherlock just smiles. “Shower, paracetamol and *then* the best sleep you’ve ever had.”

They climb into the shower together, doing their best to share the space without colliding.

Sherlock doesn’t allow himself to think any morbid thoughts, doesn’t consider the caliber of the bullet or the person who fired the gun. He is quite occupied by his ongoing plan to commit to memory every last millimetre of John, scarred or not, and love every bit.

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**End Notes**

If you’re interested, you can buy my love bid on me at the [AO3 Fundraiser Auction](https://archiveofour.org). Please drop by the [archive and comment](https://archiveofour.org) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!