That’s The Way The Cookie Crumbles

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Summary

A bunch of Sherlock fic authors enjoy a fantastic dinner of dim sum in San Francisco, complete with fortune cookies, and agree to each write a fic based on their cookie aphorisms. These are the results. Tags will be added as new chapters are posted, and each chapter is a standalone story.
A Study in Communication

Chapter Summary

This chapter was typed up in the back of Anyawen's minivan on my phone while stuck in crawling traffic. At least I had wonderful company!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

---In a low enough pH, the integrity of the hydroxyl group---"
"Sherlock?"
"---people never appreciate esters; they think they're just for flavouring foul confectionary when in actuality phosphoesters are the backbone of DNA molecules. Besides, I've always found especially the banana-like esters to be olfactorily too close to the mercaptopurine group---"
"Sherlock."
"---and even lesser known are the orthoesters; for example, triethylorthoformate is derived from orthoformic acid---"
"Sherlock!
"---the ester group is also prone to reacting with weak acids---You threw a pillow at me!"
"Very astute observation."
"John, you threw a pillow at me."
"Uh huh."
"I don’t understand."
"That must be a novel experience for you."
"I wish you’d refrain from further sarcasm and explain."

"You wouldn’t shut up."

"In a conversation, I do believe it is customary to verbalise things."

"In a conversation, all participants get to say things. This isn’t a conversation; it's a bloody monologue – a very boring one."

"You went to medical school. You must be familiar with the ester group of carbon compounds."

"You have no idea how fast organic chemistry outstays its welcome."

"This is also case-related."

"The case you solved yesterday and declared to be a three at best."

"I was educating you."

"Maybe I’d prefer not to be lectured at after a shift from hell at the surgery. When I get home this late, Instead of yammering on about aromatic rings you might, for instance, ask how my day was."

"Why?"

"Because it’s polite. Because that’s what people do."

"I can easily deduce you had an unpleasant shift that entailed staying overtime, and the precise nature of your hardships today is information that neither benefits nor interests me in any way. It also does not benefit you in any way to dwell on those events."

"But it would be nice if you showed interest like that."

"You want me to pretend. You want me to act in an uncharacteristic manner."

"Is it really too much to ask? This can’t be the first time anyone has ever tried to explain the benefits of politeness to you."

"I am appreciative of the fact that you have arrived home and am showing it by sharing what I have been thinking about. Is that not enough?"

"You appreciate that you get to now talk at me instead of talking at the skull or to thin air."

"You’re twisting my words."

"I’m going to bed."

----- 22 hours later -----  

"Good afternoon, John. How was your day?"

"Alright... I guess? Why? Why are you sitting there staring at me?"

"Would you like to share details of your professional experiences today?"
"Um. Sherlock?"

"Yes?"

"Are you quite alright?"

"It is most enjoyable to talk with you, so I am awaiting your input in this conversation now."

"Christ that smile is creepy. Is this about what I said last night? Look, I’m sorry I got mad at you but I was tired, a patient nearly punched me, and you were being—you."

"You didn’t talk to me at breakfast."

"Sherlock, I don't talk to you or at you. It's about talking with someone. Besides, I thought you were reading and didn't want to interrupt that."

"You always talk to me at breakfast, and you made no offer of tea, so I presumed your disapproval had reached a critical level. I weighed the pros and cons of the approach you detailed and decided to humour you. You would prefer for me to feign interest, to effectively lie, which we would both be aware of because you derive some strange sort of comfort from incomprehensible social rituals I have no use of."

"I don’t want you to lie."

"Then I’m afraid I do not know what you expect of me exactly."

"Just—just listen sometimes, okay? If I’m trying to get your attention, give it to me before I have to grab a pillow again."

"So this is about not being ignored and less about specific phrases prompted by your arrival home?"

"That’s exactly it."

"I find that... acceptable. And preferable to being targeted by pillows."

"Good. Have we got a case on or do you want to get into those aromatic rings some more?"

----- The End -----
Chapter Summary

This chapter links back to my entire opus of works as a solo writer (see end notes). I'm not as spontaneous or quick off the mark as J_Baillier, but I was inspired. And perhaps more literal than my partners in this story.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“You’re free to go.”

John turns his head slowly away from the wall opposite the hard bench. He’s lost track of the hours he’s spent staring at the white tiles of the prison cell. It helps to look at nothing; so long as he doesn’t close his eyes, he can keep at bay the image of blood on the wet pavement, and those blue-grey eyes shocked wide open in death.

The Snow Hill Police Station had been the closest to Barts, and that was where Sergeant Hanson had dumped him after he’d been arrested*. His memory of the arrest for assault on the Chief Superintendent of Detectives is fragmented; it feels as if it was a lifetime ago. It is as if the world has been moving at a faster speed than his brain can comprehend. He remembers Lestrade speaking to him in the reception area of the hospital, but he can’t remember what he said, or why he had disappeared. He remembers the nurse trying to explain why he had to go to another hospital, when John would not, could not, leave voluntarily. After reciting to him his rights, Hanson had cuffed him and man-handled him into the back of the car. He’d not resisted. What was the point?

What was the point of anything, now?

He’s numb, totally devoid of feeling, empty. Emotions that should be raging—anger, grief, guilt—are just absent, shocked right out of him. All day long, on an endless loop of repeat, he’s been trying to make sense of things. Since the moment last night when Sherlock had put a gun to his head and called him a hostage, John has been struggling to understand. When he really thinks about it, John knows that things have been weird for days. From the first meeting with Mycroft
and being told that there were four assassins within spitting distance of 221b, all through the formal arrest by Lestrade, and then their mad dash across London to end up sitting in the dark in Kitty Riley’s flat, he’d been just about able to follow the bizarre twists and turns. But Sherlock had not taken time to explain it to him; it was almost as if he was just tagging along behind a Sherlock who didn’t care one way or the other if he did. And John had gone along with it because it had felt like, at any moment, Sherlock would pull something magical and all would be resolved in time for them to get back home and have a laugh about how Sally Donovan’s jealousy had led her to accuse Sherlock of being a criminal mastermind.

The moment when he’d realised that there were wheels within wheels and it was all too complicated for him to understand had come when Moriarty showed up at Kitty’s, and the Richard Brook scenario unfolded. After that John kept losing the plot. Then Sherlock had disappeared in the taxi on his own, leaving John standing in the street open-mouthed in surprise. After that the nightmare just got more and more terrifying.

Sherlock’s final words keep coming back in snatches. John can’t remember them all; he’d been too shocked at the sight of him up on the roof to make sense of them. Not for the first time, he wishes he had an eidetic memory like Sherlock’s. He’s spent the long day in the cell trying to remember exactly what Sherlock said, looking for clues which will show everything that had happened after he left the lab to go back to Baker Street to help Mrs Hudson was just part of one of Sherlock’s elaborate schemes.

He wants this to be a magic trick. Wasn’t that what Sherlock had said on the roof? It’s all just a magic trick. It makes no sense. Nothing does. He can’t understand it, but he clings to the idea like a lifeline. He can’t give in, can’t grieve or cry because that would be to accept that Sherlock is dead.

Yet, every time John tries to imagine just how Sherlock would find a way to stop Moriarty’s plans to destroy his reputation, he eventually ends up at that moment—the blood spattered pavement, the brief touch of his hand finding no pulse.

“Doctor Watson, did you hear me? You’re free to go. Follow me and we’ll sort out the paperwork.” The police officer seems a little concerned. “Are you okay?”

Will that word ever apply to him again? As John stands up and walks out of the cell, he doesn’t answer the man’s question. To be honest, his head still hurts from where he’d grazed it on the road, after the cyclist knocked him over. The doctor in him wonders if part of his confusion is a mild concussion, complicated by the shock of what has happened over the past twenty four hours.

None of that actually matters. Not in the slightest.

The police officer escorting him to the desk to collect his things tells him that it’s his lucky day. “Seems you’ve got friends in high places. The assault charges have been dropped.”

That makes John wonder if Mycroft’s been at work. He wants to… he needs to believe that maybe the impossible has happened, that his being released is just the start of the bizarre plot unfolding, that the crumpled body with the bloodied face haunting him is not real, and that he will find out soon just how Sherlock managed to pull it off.

Once his phone is back in his possession, John walks out of the station into the gathering twilight. He stands on the pavement and hits the first number on speed dial.

After one ring, a woman’s voice which he instantly realises is a recorded message: “The number
you have dialled is no longer in service.”

After a deep breath, he scrolls down for Mycroft’s number.

It is answered on the third ring.

“Doctor Watson. Mister Holmes is unable to take your call at the moment. I understand that the police have released you without charge. Do you require further assistance?”

Is it his imagination or does the voice of the woman whose name is not Anthea sound slightly strained? He has no idea how to phrase this, because for the past ten hours he’s been in a police cell, cut off from the world. He blurts out, “What the hell is going on? Can you tell me that? Where’s Sherlock?”

There is a brief silence on the other end of the phone. Then she answers, “The post mortem was completed three hours ago; the body has been collected from the mortuary at St Bartholomew’s Hospital and taken to a funeral home in West Sussex. The media is calling it suicide, in light of the Sun’s exposé and the arrest warrant.”

John drops the phone away from his ear, staring at it in disbelief. Then he puts it back up to his mouth again. “You tell Mycroft I want to talk to him, and I want to do it NOW.”

“That’s not possible. I will leave him a message, but it will take some time to get back to you. He has been in a series of meetings all day regarding his brother’s death. The Metropolitan Police Commissioner has launched an investigation into whether cases that Sherlock worked on have to be reviewed because the convictions have been compromised.”

It takes time to register the meaning behind those words.

Quieter, with an undertow of concern, she continues. “You have been exonerated from any involvement in the conspiracy, and will not be subjected to any of the investigations. Go home, Doctor Watson. The press have been cleared from Baker Street now. You won’t be bothered.”

The line goes dead; he realises she’s ended the call. He had not even thought that the press might be camped out at the flat, waiting for him to return. They would want to know if he was part of the conspiracy that Richard Brook has fabricated. If he says he isn’t, then their line will be that he, too, was duped into thinking that Sherlock was not the criminal mastermind. Whatever he says will be a case of damned if he does, damned if he doesn’t; equally culpable or too stupid to realise that his flatmate and colleague had played him, too.

He should be angry. If what has happened is some sort of elaborate plot, and Sherlock has kept him in the dark about it, then he deserves one hell of an earful about it. But when he reaches for that emotion, John can’t find it; he’s empty.

Staring at the phone again, John checks for messages. Maybe Sherlock has left a text to tell him it is all a hoax and that he is working undercover to clear his name.

Nothing new. The latest entry is from last night:

23.49 Vatican cameos in the lab

There were no initials, and it was from an unknown number. Perhaps by then Sherlock had been worried that the police would be monitoring his calls, so he’d borrowed someone else’s. It had been enough to make John cautious. He’d taken a circuitous route to ensure he wasn’t followed on his journey to Barts from the Diogenes Club, where he’d given Mycroft a piece of his mind.
He’d been tempted to do the same to Sherlock once they were re-united but something in the man’s demeanour made him hold back. Sherlock was taciturn to the point of being almost mute. He just sat there, while John paced up and down between the lab benches asking any question that came into his head about what the assassin had told them at gunpoint. That’s another scene that seems to be on constant replay in his head. He’d tried to understand how a computer code could have been left by Moriarty without them knowing it when he’d visited 221b after his release. How could it somehow have remained hidden there for two months then go missing and no longer be at the flat? Why did the assassins believe that Sherlock had the code on him, when clearly he didn’t? The four gunmen had sat there across the road from the flat for weeks. Why didn’t they just shoot each other, and let the last one alive go after the code? What was Moriarty trying to do? It made no sense.

Eventually Sherlock had just told him to shut up and let him think. With a doctor’s unerring ability to sleep anytime, anywhere, John had put his head down and taken a nap. How he hated that fact now; the acid of hindsight eats into him that he’d wasted his last few precious hours in Sherlock’s company. Perhaps if he’d been awake, asked the right question, made Sherlock actually tell him what the hell was going on, things would have ended somewhere other than on that bloody pavement.

All day in the police cell, John has been hearing his own words the way Sherlock must have heard them: being shouted at that he was a machine, someone who didn’t understand that friends protected people. He knows now that he was guilty of that very same thing: after all, he had abandoned Sherlock and shouted at him. And, in their final phone call, he’d been too stunned and stupid to offer any words consoling enough to have kept Sherlock from jumping.

He is finding it hard to breathe. Whatever hopes he might have had about magic tricks and miracles are fading; the emptiness that has kept him calm is starting to fade.

He takes a cab from High Holborn to Baker Street. Where else would he go?

Thankfully, there are no police cars parked at the kerb or press waiting to doorstep him as he unlocks the door. Whatever Mycroft has done to keep the press away as he returns seems to have worked. The hook where Sherlock’s Belstaff often hangs is empty. In its place is a note from Mrs Hudson, pinned in the empty spot.

John, I’m sorry but I’ve had to go to my sister’s; the phone won’t stop ringing and I’ve disconnected the doorbell, but they keep knocking. The press are hyenas and I’m too upset to deal with them. I tried to tidy things a bit; the police left the flat in a terrible state.

John is relieved that she is not there; a wailing Mrs Hudson might just be too much for him to bear at the moment. Perhaps she had rung Mycroft and told him to pen up the press. He drags himself up the stairs, dreading what he is going to find.

A quick scan of the living room shows him two things. First, that Sherlock is not in his chair or on the sofa, face lit up in that slightly manic grin of his when he has pulled off a spectacular stunt to solve a case. Second, the police seem to have removed a lot of the files and papers that are normally strewn about the place. There’s no sign of their laptops, either. But his favourite union jack pillow is just where it should be, and it makes him recall the number of times he’s thrown it at Sherlock.

He’d give anything to be able to do that now, but the place is devoid of everything and everyone that he had wanted to find there. His eyes keep roving around, trying to find some tell-tale clue, some piece of evidence that would have meaning only to him and Sherlock, something to cling to
that would say all of what has happened is a charade.

It’s just horribly empty.

His stomach grumbles. He’d declined the lunch tray offered at the police station, and now he’s both hungry and thirsty. He wanders into the kitchen, past a half-completed experiment that Sherlock had been working on before the American ambassador’s children had been kidnapped.

Putting the kettle on, he wonders if there is any milk, so he opens the fridge. No milk; in fact, the fridge is nearly empty, making him wonder if the police had removed the contents as evidence of some sort. There is only one thing: a paper bag with a post-it note on it. Curious, he takes it out and puts it on the kitchen table, pulling the note off so he can read it.

You owe me £17.58. This came after those rude policemen tried to arrest you two. I kept it in my fridge until I had to leave.

It’s in Mrs Hudson’s writing. He vaguely remembers Sherlock ordering Chinese takeaway from the Peking Palace; that had been right after Lestrade’s first visit, before the DI had returned with a warrant for Sherlock’s arrest. That must have been before John had told Sherlock that nobody but him could be such an annoying dick all the time.

After they’d bolted into the night to avoid arrest, Mrs Hudson must have accepted the delivery.

John starts to head for the bin with it, but then stops. The idea of going out to get food is just… impossible. If he doesn’t eat something, he isn’t going to be anywhere near his sharpest when it comes to figuring out what Sherlock has done and why, and he just can’t give up on the idea yet. He puts the bag back down on the counter, for a moment wondering if there might have left some sort of clue or message inside. The police wouldn’t have thought of that.

He pulls out the foil containers: it’s Sherlock’s favourite, Cha Sui Bao— barbecued pork buns with a sweet chili dipping sauce. There's John's favourite, too: Moo Goo Gai Pan, in a foil wrapped triangular package. There are also fried sesame balls and a hot and sour soup, some dumplings, and fried rice. Nothing dramatic or out of the ordinary. He puts the pork buns on a plate and into the microwave to heat up.

That’s when he spots the two fortune cookies alongside paper napkins and plastic cutlery.

On their first night, he’d called out Sherlock on his absurd claim that he could predict fortune cookies, and been rewarded by a shy smile. Ever since that first post-case celebratory dinner, he and Sherlock have had a ritual of having a laugh about the inanity of the messages in these cookies.

Sherlock had made his objections sound logical, methodical, almost scientific in his distain: “I like the almond, vanilla and sugar biscuit, but I object to having to read some claptrap about the future as the cost of eating them.”

“They’re designed that way, you dork. General enough to let anyone find anything they want to read into them. It’s fun—the start of a conversation about what you’d like your future to be.”

John had giggled at how his that first night had been so appropriate: “Danger is needed if progress is to be made.”

“Tonight mine will seem relevant to drugs or attempted murder,” Sherlock had predicted. They’d both giggled when it turned out to be “Beware of unexpected journeys.” As a matter of fact, they’d cracked up in a way that had made the waiter eye them suspiciously. But, a Chinese restaurant open until 2 a.m. needs to be willing to cope with oddball customers. Perhaps that is
why Sherlock was a regular.

As John stares down now at the two fortune cookies on the kitchen table, he tries not to think about the fact that there is no one around to pretend to predict them. He rips open the plastic wrapper and cracks open the first cookie. Uncurling the white paper, he reads: “Depend on the predictability and steadiness of life to support you.”

He can hear the scoff this would have raised. “You? You don’t want predictable and steady. I said dangerous, and you came along. This is yet more evidence of how ridiculous these fortunes are at predicting anyone’s future.”

The microwave pings behind him, but John knows he has to let the buns rest to release steam. He unwraps the second cookie and cracks it in half.

It’s empty.

He peers into the ends of the broken cookie, expecting to find a tightly scrolled piece of paper. But there is nothing there. No fortune, no future prognostication.

Nothing.

Suddenly, his tears well up and this time, he doesn’t stop them.

Chapter End Notes

*Author’s Note: for the predecessor to this story, read The Good Man, in the series Got My Eye On You. http://archiveofourown.org/works/11282727/chapters/25236672
Sherlock has been insufferable for the better part of two days and John has no idea why. It could be the lack of an interesting case; it could be a Sherlock-strop; it could be hemorrhoids, for all he knows. Sherlock will never tell him. The Consulting Detective's hurtful comments to Mrs. Hudson were over the line as far as John is concerned, and after a day of stony silence between them, John reluctantly agrees to accompany Sherlock to a "boring 5" crime scene.

Not that anyone but John would have noticed the briefest hesitancy in observations, the minute pause before deductions, the tightness in his face, the slight creasing around his eyes.

Lestrade had recapped. According to neighbors, the late Mrs. Sarah Osborne had been heard arguing with her husband, Richard. There was much screaming between them and Sarah's 18-year-old daughter Anne, followed by the throwing and smashing of objects which now litter the crime scene. It had been hours before a neighbor, who had heard the arguments escalating for several days, had stopped by to check on her friend and saw the body through the window.

"Cause of death?" DI Lestrade asks.

"Too soon to tell," Anderson states, and starts expounding further before a simultaneous warning look from Lestrade and an elbow from Donovan silence him.

"We can eliminate many causes," the Consulting Detective says in a disinterested tone, as he circles the corpse. "At least, most of us can. Present company excepted," he adds, looking pointedly at the Forensics lead, and proceeds to rattle off a dozen or more blatantly obviously not-the-COD, ending with "...stabbing, gunshot, blunt force trauma, freezing, flamethrower, leprosy, and premature baldness."

John is minutely shaking his head. "I dunno know, Greg. I'm not convinced this is a homicide."

Sherlock counters John with, "The husband and step-daughter are missing, his car gone. Ooh," he says, excitement creeping into his voice. "This could be a murder and kidnapping."

"Yeah, well my gut says natural causes."

"Your gut is woefully inarticulate except for telling you you're hungry."

John turns away from the police team, faces Sherlock and totally invades his personal space, leaning in toward his ear. He drops his voice dangerously low, speaks rapidly, as he only does
when he's fuming. "Whatever happened to me being a sounding board? Being your fucking conductor of light? Whatever happened to me being a \textit{partner}? I have just as much expertise in medicine as you do in deducing, so don't give me this shit."

He turns back to the group, puts on a pleasant façade. "Until the post-mortem says otherwise, I'm going with natural causes."

"All right, \textit{Doctor}, name something not boring that it could have been." It's practically a dare.

"Fine, \textit{Consulting Detective}," John says, in the same tone. "It could have been SUDEP... Sudden Unexpected Death in Epilepsy", he adds for the benefit of Lestrade and company.

"Epilepsy?" Sherlock. "How could you possibly reach--?"

"You didn't see the bottle of Lamotrigine on her nightstand? Not like you to miss something like that."

Sherlock visibly stiffens.

Around them, the police fall silent. Gazes are averted. The mild shuffling of shoes disturbs the uneasy silence.

The chill in the room plummets twenty degrees when Sherlock icily tells John, "It is much easier to be critical than to be correct."

"And you always have to be both, don't you?"

Sherlock's eyes narrow dangerously. "I \textit{am} correct. I \textit{always} am."

John can't hold back a loud scoffing noise.

"All right, boys and girls, everyone. Let's take a break." He starts herding the group toward the door. "Sounds like we're all just pissing in the wind until the post-mortem."

\textit{OoOoOoOoO}

A day later, the police find the missing husband and step-daughter shacked up in a romantic cottage in Cirencester. The pair state that Sarah was devastated when Richard asked for a divorce and that the months-long affair with Anne was consensual. At least Anne has the decency to cry when informed of her mother's death.

Two days later, Sherlock uncharacteristically confesses that he's been having migraines, bad enough to interfere with The Work but not severe enough to incapacitate him and drive him into the den of darkness and solitude of his bedroom. John sighs and swats him with a pillow.

Three days later, they're at Molly's lab. John is reading the post-mortem report which she'd just handed to him.

"Natural causes, Sherlock," Molly says and backs away a step as Sherlock scowls in disbelief. "Apical ballooning syndrome led to a full-blown M.I." she explains.

John is equally stunned. "Don't see that often. Takotsubo cardiomyopathy."

Before he can explain further, Molly adds, "Broken Heart Syndrome, brought on by shock."

John nods. "She finds out her husband is being unfaithful and wants a divorce, then gets sucker punched with her daughter being 'the other woman'."
"Quite rare, then?" Sherlock asks, still shocked by the findings.

"It's not as rare as you'd think," Molly says. "Remember that Irish football referee? What was his name?"

"Bridie Stafford," John knows immediately. "It was in the news. Written up in a medical journal, too, I think."

"Right. He died of a heart attack just hours after his wife died. And that "EastEnders" actress, Mary Tamm. Not a nice lady. Oh, sorry! Not Mary! Orlenda, I mean. Her character, Orlenda was... Never mind, doesn't matter... Tamm's husband died right after she did. And those are just a couple of the well-known cases."

John seems thoughtful before he offers, "Chest pain. Shortness of breath. It's not always fatal, Sherlock. Often, it's just transitory. Treatable. Of course, if you're a heart attack waiting to happen, then...."

"Some things make you more susceptible, like pre-existing heart problems, PTSD... Sarah Osborne's epilepsy made her more prone to Takotsubo," Molly explains. "I spoke with her physician. She'd had some chest pain the day before. He shrugged it off as stress," she says with some venom. "Twenty-first century and women are still getting written off as hysterics."

John's face twists in distaste, his agreement apparent. "So, the husband pulled a Woody Allen, and the step-daughter is of age, so..."

"So they will go unpunished?" Molly is not happy; Molly dislikes injustice. "But it's wrong! What they did, it's...immoral."

"There is hardly a 100% correlation between immorality and illegality."

"But it's not right, Sherlock!" She glances between the two men, pulls a tissue from her pocket, then makes an excuse to bolt, leaving the men in silence.

Sherlock finally speaks. "John... Hmm. Seems we were both right. Death by natural causes, murder by cruelty and betrayal. The murder weapon? A sharp tongue. I recognise it; I have wielded that weapon myself against many. Against you."

John knows that's as much of an apology as he's going to get. John also knows he gives as good as he gets. "That's a weapon we seem to share."

Sherlock's look says he's taken by surprise. Once he schools his expression, he nods in acceptance.

"Broken heart syndrome. Sentiment-induced illness, Sherlock? Didn't think you'd put any stock in that."

"The power of human emotions should never be underestimated."

John is about to say something, but he hesitates uncertainly. "You know someone who had it."

"No I don't. Do I?"

A veil of sadness passes over John's face and he is lost for a moment in another time. He unconsciously rubs at the small scar on his forehead where it had struck the asphalt in front of St. Barts not so long ago, an eternity ago.
The pain in Sherlock's face as the realisation hits is crushing. "Ah," he says, barely audible.

"I had it checked out and treated." John reassures him.

Sherlock moves to stand next to John, their shoulders almost touching; he's ostensibly reading the report John is holding, but instead, he's studiously studying his feet.

"I-- It is...possible that I may have experienced--" he clears his throat-- "something similar during my...time away. Theoretically speaking, of course, hardly in a position to be formally diagnosed," he says, as emotion threatens to derail his voice.

John is shaken by this admission. Sherlock has never discussed his absence, and certainly not his *emotions* during that time. They both carry scars too deep to ever fade completely.

"But you survived, John," Sherlock says, meeting John's eyes.

"So did you."

Sherlock's eyes soften for the first time in days. "And so did we."
“Did you see that?” Donovan asked without turning her gaze away from the scene playing out in front of her as she felt Lestrade’s approach. This bit was familiar. She’d seen it a dozen times or more. What had come before, though - John Watson taking control of the situation and the resources and organizing the rescue - that was new.

“I did, yeah.”

“You knew he could do that?” Across the road an ambulance pulled away from the kerb, lights flashing. Half a block away the driver turned the sirens on, then turned the corner, taking the injured suspect to hospital. A black and white police car followed.

“You didn’t?”

“And how would I have known?” she demanded, shooting Lestrade an incredulous look, which he returned.

“Come on, Sally,” he said with a huffed laugh. “Look at him.”

“I am looking,” Sally retorted, her gaze drawn back to where John Watson, jumper stained with blood that was not his, was arguing with Sherlock about letting the paramedics do their jobs.

“He wasn’t just a doctor, you know. In the army,” Lestrade said. “Captain Watson.”

“You think he saw combat?” Sally asked, surprised.

“You think he didn’t? After that?”

Sally watched as Sherlock grudgingly sat on the trolley, petulantly swatting the small pillow with enough force that it hit John in the thigh and bounced away to land in a puddle. John just sighed and nodded to the paramedics that it was generally safe to approach to clean the consulting detective's wounds. If John hadn't had combat experience in the RAMC, he certainly got plenty of it now, dealing with his cantankerous bastard of a partner. Sally thought he deserved a medal for it. And hazard pay. And possibly sainthood.

“I didn't even think of arguing with him, y’know?” she said as she observed the scene, John
rolling his eyes at Sherlock's complaints and flashing a friendly, if somewhat rueful smile at the paramedic. He looked harmless. “I was obeying his orders before it even registered that I was the one with the badge, and that he is technically a civilian.”

Lestrade snorted at that, and Sally flashed him a grin.

“He's never been a civilian, has he? Probably not even before he enlisted.”

“I reckon not,” Lestrade replied.

“I didn't know,” Sally said, watching as Sherlock climbed out of the ambulance and crowded into John's space, glaring down at him. John looked back, unruffled, and clapped a hand on Sherlock's shoulder. They were clearly having an entire conversation, with not a single word spoken. She saw Sherlock nod, and John's lips twitch upward slightly. His hand slid down Sherlock's arm to tangle their fingers together, then, as one, they both looked over to the squad car where she and Lestrade sat.

“Go on, then,” Lestrade said, waving a hand at them. “Come by my office tomorrow at nine to give your statements.”

John nodded agreement, then caught Sally's gaze and nodded again. The gesture was both the acknowledgment of a commanding officer for a job well done, and an expression of thanks.

Sally nodded back, aware that her unhesitating acceptance of his assumption of command had given them the minutes they'd needed to recover both the kidnapped boy and the consulting detective alive.

“He didn't act like a man who expected his orders to be obeyed,” she said to Lestrade as they watched the two men walk away, hand-in-hand. “He acted like a man who knew they would be.”

“Yeah,” Lestrade agreed. “Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.”
Soup or Consequences

Chapter by GhyllWyne

Soup or Consequences

Summary: The serial killer they've been hunting is dead, but Sherlock still has questions. Written for the Fortune Cookie challenge, this will also be added to my The Hazards of Living with a Genius universe.

* * *

Standing over a body in a dark alley at half one in the morning is bad enough. The icy rain dripping down the back of his neck, John decides, just wraps it all up in a big bow. What he needs right now, aside from having stayed in his bed, is for Sherlock to get the hell over it so they can leave. Going by the weary look on Greg’s face, he agrees.

“There’s no way we could have seen this coming, no matter --” Greg tries, but Sherlock cuts him off.

“Is that the royal ‘we’? Because I not only saw it coming, I described this precise outcome,” Sherlock tells Greg, leaning in for maximum glowering impact.

John is forced to admit that the glower is warranted, if less than helpful at this point. The killer is now his own last victim, having slit his own throat cleanly from the left carotid artery to just past the larynx which was apparently as far as he could go toward duplicating the ear-to-ear wounds he left on the four women he killed.

Greg crosses his arms. “If you want to feel guilty for not stopping this guy from killing himself, go right ahead, but I won’t be joining you. He saved the Crown a lot of time and money by not putting us all to the trouble of a trial. Call it justice, and let it go.”

“Try telling that to the parents of the two women whose bodies we will now never find.”

This jab from Sherlock makes Greg’s arms drop to his sides. The killer had emailed pictures of each victim to her parents using the victim’s own mobile phone, but only two bodies had been found. There seemed no pattern to his choice of dumping grounds, which left them no clear path to search. There were two sets of parents who would now have to mourn at empty graves.

John sneezes wetly into the pause, and both men turn to look at him as a second sneeze follows.

Sherlock’s focus shifts immediately to John. “It’s raining,” he seems to notice for the first time. “We will resume this discussion in your office tomorrow,” he tells Greg, turns on his heel and heads out of the alley, presumably in search of a taxi.
Greg gives John a weary smile. “You should have tried that an hour ago.”

John grins back. “It was purely involuntary, but you’re welcome.”

“John!” Sherlock’s voice cuts cleanly through the distant hum of traffic and ceaseless pattering raindrops.

John turns to find the familiar silhouette at the mouth of the alley standing in front of another familiar silhouette. He already has a cab waiting. “He conjures the bloody things out of thin air,” John observes dryly. “We’ll be seeing you tomorrow, apparently,” he tells Greg, and heads up the alley to join Sherlock.

“Golden Palace,” Sherlock tells the cabbie before John is even settled into the seat. John eyes him with some curiosity. Sherlock certainly did not seem ready to declare the case solved a moment ago. Eating at this juncture is unprecedented, not to mention the inappropriateness of Chinese food at this hour. “You’re eating?”

Sherlock’s focus doesn’t shift from his phone. “Wonton.”

John suppresses a smile as the phrase ‘Chinese chicken soup’ pops into his head. “I don’t have a cold.”

Sherlock hmms noncommittally and keeps scrolling.

The restaurant is about the size of Angelo’s, and largely devoid of patrons at this hour. The young man who will be their waiter lets them know that the menu is limited after midnight. He apologizes for the selection and hands them each a paper menu that, thankfully, includes wonton soup. John is in no mood to follow Sherlock around London in single-minded pursuit of the remedy he has apparently decided John requires.

As if reading John’s mind, Sherlock orders two bowls of wonton soup, then returns his attention to his phone. John watches him for a moment, trying to decide if this is a diversionary tactic to avoid conversation, or if Sherlock is still working the case. The soup arrives before he reaches a conclusion. Without looking up from his phone, Sherlock pushes his own bowl across the table until it touches John’s. John nods to himself. The case isn’t over after all.

John isn’t especially hungry, but the steam rising from the bowl promises some welcome heat, with the trick being to get that heat into his stomach without boiling his tongue. He dips his spoon into the broth and takes a cautious, noisy sip— and immediately dips his spoon into his glass of water and fishes out an ice cube for his tongue. Sucking on the now more welcome cold, he spoons out another cube from the glass and slips it into his soup where it instantly melts. He is aware that Sherlock is surreptitiously watching him.

After a moment, Sherlock lowers his phone. “That somewhat defeats the purpose of the soup.”

John swallows the tiny remnant of ice cube. “Trust me, it’s still hot enough to cauterize what’s left of my tongue. I think I’ll give it a few minutes.”

There is a small plate of fortune cookies on the table, and John picks up one of the cookies to test whether he’s scalded away all of his taste buds. He unwraps the cookie and extracts the paper fortune, then gives the cookie an experimental lick while holding up the printed slip of paper. “Beware of friends bearing hot soup,” he pretends to read.

Sherlock scoffs but doesn’t entirely manage to hide a smile. “Beware of friends who make you stand in the rain until you catch pneumonia,” he mimics John’s reading, but all traces of the smile
disappear.

“I don’t have pneumonia. I don’t even have a cold. Not that standing in the rain would cause either one.” He takes a bite of cookie and enjoys the bland sweetness, crunching carefully around his tender tongue. He chases it with a swig of ice water. “And you’re not responsible for the killer killing himself, either.”

“I failed to convince Scotland Yard of his guilt.”

“Sherlock, they believed you. They just couldn’t hold him without evidence. At least he didn’t kill any more women after they let him go. Greg had him picked up on your word, and he tried to find enough to charge him. It just didn’t happen. You know all this as well as I do.” Of course he knows, but it’s not in Sherlock’s nature to accept the machination of law when it runs contrary to his own unshakable logic.

“John, the killer chose the dumping grounds for a reason. If Lestrade had allowed me to interview him two weeks ago, we wouldn’t still be missing two bodies.”

“Greg knows you too well. Maybe if you hadn’t insisted on interviewing him alone With the cameras turned off.” John softens it with a wry smile.

Sherlock matches it. “It would have worked, you know. Now we have to do it the hard way.” He lifts his chin toward John’s bowls of soup. “Better tuck in before your soup gets cold. Then it’s back to work.”

Satisfied with Sherlock’s improved mood, John returns to the soup which has achieved near-eatable temperature. He glances up to find Sherlock watching him. “At least try the fortune cookies. That’s not what I’d like to see you eating, but at least you’ll get some carbs.”

Sherlock gives him an odd, almost startled, look, but picks up one of the wrapped cookies and rips it open. He removes the fortune and discards it without a glance as his nibbles delicately at the edge of the cookie while wearing an expression of mild disgust.

John puts down his spoon. He can’t recall if he’s ever seen Sherlock with a fortune cookie before. “You can’t possibly dislike the taste. They don’t have any.”

Sherlock shakes his head and places the nibbled cookie on the tablecloth. “It’s the texture. Like trying to chew a desk blotter.”

John chuckles. “Can’t say I’ve tried that, so I’ll have to take your word for it.” He picks up his spoon and returns to the soup. “You didn’t read the fortune.”

“Nor did you.”

“Touche. Read yours first. And remember, you have to add ‘in bed’ to whatever it says.”

This time, there’s no mistaking the look on Sherlock’s face. He’s slightly scandalised, or giving a damned good imitation of it. John decides to pay close attention to this. He puts down his spoon.

Sherlock picks up the tiny slip of paper and makes a great show of smoothing it out. “Before I read this pearl of wisdom, you do know that the quaint custom of adding that phrase to the printed fortune has inspired the creators of said fortunes to include as much innuendo as possible. There are even ratings provided to identify the child-safe versions.”

“I didn’t know that. As a matter of fact, it sounds like something you made up just now.”
“Not at all. Look it up.” Sherlock brings the fortune to eye level and his gaze narrows. At the same time, his fair skin takes on a faintly rosy tint that John finds unnervingly attractive.

Sherlock clears his throat. “To affirm is to make firm.” Pause. “In bed.” The last two words are delivered in a deliberately husky purr, exaggerated for effect and hitting the target flawlessly. He puts down the fortune, and meets John’s gaze levelly. “What does yours really say, John?”

John realizes he is staring with his mouth slightly agape. Not quite scandalised, but close. Sherlock’s voice is memorable under any circumstances, but John has always believed that its seductive quality was unconscious. Simply an accident of anatomy. It is disconcerting to realize that quite the opposite is true. It takes John a moment to find the fortune which he never really read the first time. He reads it now, and looks up at Sherlock with what he hopes is an appropriately bloke-y grin. “It’s the same bloody thing.” He picks up a new one from the plate and opens it. There are two more, and he opens them all. “They’re all the same.”

“Isn’t that how affirmations work, John? Repetition?” He takes the wallet from his jacket and stands up. “Fortune cookies are a purely American invention, and that’s where they’re all made. I’d say these skipped the quality control step.” The purr is completely gone now, replaced by the familiar professor-know-it-all tone, and John finds himself already wondering if it was ever there at all.

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