**A Sense of Belonging**

by Emma Locke

**Summary**

Five times John didn't know Sherlock was wearing his dog tags and the one time he did.

**Notes**

This is my first (published) 5+1 story! :)
As in "This Can't Be Happening," I wrote this for myself and therefore haven't bothered to have a beta reader look it over. After my first fanfic (posted only out of curiosity) got decent results, I decided to post another. At any rate, it's obviously another Johnlock fic, so enjoy! c;

Also, pay close attention to the chapter titles, as together they form a short poem I wrote. I will compile the titles at the end.
He didn’t do it on purpose. He never intended to find them, even if he was ever so very pleased when he did. Sure, he had been going through John’s things while he was working the early shift at the surgery, but even that wasn’t truly his fault. He wasn’t the one to blame for the hidden cigarettes: that was John’s doing. If his flatmate hadn’t wanted his privacy violated further than usual, he should’ve just handed the faggots over at the consulting detective’s request. But as he didn’t, Sherlock was left with no other choice. John had brought it upon himself.

He stayed locked up tight in his room until he heard the flat door close solidly, knowing John would not wake him up even to eat after the recent bout of tension that had settled upon their home as Sherlock grew increasingly restless and neared the third week of his attempt to go cold turkey. It was worth noting that no matter how many times he tried, no matter how avidly he told others he was quitting for good, he never made it to the third week without the effects of withdraw setting in and causing him to betray himself.

John knew. John knew it was fruitless, but that didn’t mean the doctor didn’t at least try to pull Sherlock through, though even the man himself knew he could be quite an arse when he didn’t get his way. (Sherlock wasn’t ashamed to admit it, either; in fact, to an extent, his douchebaggery was a source of pride, for it was quite an effective strategy that he could utilize flawlessly.) John didn’t like his smoking habits, he knew, and John had only ever given in to him twice on the matter, on especially bad days. Usually, Sherlock would go behind his back to get a smoke. And he wasn’t the least bit ashamed.

Once he was sure John was gone, Sherlock slipped down from his perch at the foot of his bed, dressing gown billowing behind him as he practically ran to the door in anticipation. He had torn the flat apart looking for any hidden stashes just yesterday, but to no avail. John had arrived home just as he cleared the bookcase, pushing the books from their shelves unceremoniously as they fell against the floor with resounding thuds. John had yelled at him, insisting that he clean up his mess. Sherlock obliged, but only to make sure he didn’t miss anything.

He didn’t.

It was then that he came to the conclusion that John had hid them somewhere private, somewhere he hoped Sherlock had the decency not to look. Somewhere in his room, then. But even that wasn’t quite right: he had gone through John’s things before, so why would the man assume-

Oh.

Oh!

It hit him then, the one place he had never looked. The one place that John begged him to never invade, the one total privacy he allowed his blogger. It was almost a shame to invade that privacy, Sherlock thought, but John had to know it wasn’t safe forever. The box in the back of his closet, collecting dust, never moved. Sherlock had always been curious. And now he had a reason to act.

Thundering up the stairs to John’s room, Sherlock threw open the door brusquely, causing it to slam against the wall loudly. Without checking to see if the wall was alright, he marched across the room and threw open the closet door, instantly bombarded with a scent that could only be described as John’s, and a similar jumper-based fashion sense that left something to be desired. But enough of that.
Sherlock knelt down, pushing items to the side as he reached for the box, carefully cataloging the memory of exactly where and how each item was arranged before he ruined said arrangement. Dragging the box to the center of the room, Sherlock sat down next to it eagerly, feeling like a child on Christmas morning as he tossed away the lid, excitement flashing in his eyes in anticipation of delving into exactly who John was before they had met. He knew where John had been, but never the details. He was not, after all, a mind reader. The contents of this box, however, should provide some insight.

He was not disappointed.

No sooner was the lid pulled away, than a musty, almost damp scent assaulted Sherlock’s nostrils. Clearly these items had been in storage for a while, he noted as he began going through the box carefully, not wanting to mess anything up too bad. He wasn’t sure why, but he couldn’t help but treat these testaments of yesteryears as though they were sacred. He couldn’t help but respect it all, unable to tear his gaze away.

First to come out was a series of pristine uniforms and army fatigues. Sherlock carefully unfolded each garment, checking the pockets for any sign of his cigarettes, and resisting the inexplicable urge to claim at least one set of the fatigues for himself. When he came up with nothing, he tenderly folded the material once more, breathing in the aged scent of the clothing, an inexplicably tempting action that he didn’t quite understand.

Next was a set of medals and certificates, some pertaining to John’s time in the army and others providing insight to his days studying medicine. Sherlock read over each certificate aptly, holding the medals so they reflected the ceiling light before replacing those too.

Sherlock pulled a weighty shoebox from the larger box, opening it to reveal a collection of letters with a few photographs intermingling. The dates were vastly varying, although Sherlock noted the senders were very limited. Most, it seemed, were from Clara, John’s ex-sister-in-law, with only a depressing few from his sister herself. A few other names surfaced as well, all unfamiliar, presumably relatives or friends of sorts. Although tempted to delve into the contents of these letters, Sherlock decided he better not, as he only had so long before John would return. Besides, the letters were irrelevant to the purpose of his search: the cigarettes.

The box was almost empty now, with only a pair of spit-shined boots and another shoebox remaining. After briefly checking the inside of the boots for his cigarettes, Sherlock removed the final shoebox, certain that he’d find the little treasure here. And indeed, he had struck gold, just not in the manner that he had intended.

This shoebox was filled to the brim with photographs, all from John’s time in the army. Most featured the same group of men and women, smiling or laughing far more than he would have expected considering the circumstances. Although, Sherlock reasoned, perhaps it was only natural to deal with troublesome times with laughter, no matter how inappropriate it could seem to outsiders looking in. Yes, he decided. That sounded like his John.

One photograph in particular captured Sherlock’s interest as he scrutinized it, holding it carefully in his long-fingered hands. A John much younger than his John lounged casually against a wall, eyes carefree and filled with laughter, blond hair not yet grayed by the sights he would see, the stress yet to come. He was sitting almost suggestively, a glint of mischief in his eyes as his well-defined muscles strained noticeably in his tight-fitting fatigues, a set of silver dog tags dangling in the center of his chest. Sherlock found himself unable to tear his eyes away from John’s own, an enticing dark blue shade he seemed to emphasize with his smirking expression.

Sherlock flipped the picture over to find a sloppy, undated caption scrawled across the top, and he imagined it was written in an amused manner by one of his buddies. “Three Cs Watson at his
finest.”

Pondering the odd nickname briefly, Sherlock flipped the photo back over, marvelling once more at the young man in the picture. What he wouldn’t give, in that moment, to have known John back then, living on adrenalin and shared laughter, not quite as hardened as the John he knew, the John who was safety first, laughter second. A John still in his prime, muscles unnervingly apparent, eyes taunting, hair cut close. Yet he supposed his own John had his merits. His muscles were still, if not as defined, his eyes inviting and calming, creases and scars speaking of the intrigue of his past, gray hairs somehow emphasizing the dusty blonde strands, callouses adorning his fingers, souvenirs of hard work.

Suddenly Sherlock’s heart ached, and he tore his gaze away from the photograph before tucking it back into the pile, glaring at the stack as though it intended to bring about his end. The thoughts that had suddenly flooded his mind at the sight of that picture were unnerving, and he didn’t dare focus in on a single one for too long. Instead, he out a breath he didn’t know he was holding and hardened his resolve, returning his focus to his search for his cigarettes. He cleared out the rest of the photos from the shoebox, breath catching in his throat at the sight that greeted him.

A pair of shining silver chains sat in the bottom of the otherwise-empty box, an engraved dog tag on each. Without realizing what he was doing, Sherlock ever-so-carefully reached into the box, hands shaking slightly as he felt the cool metal against his fingers, rubbing the tags fondly. John wore these back in the army. They identified him, made him recognizable. These tags practically made him him.

An inexplicable urge ate at the back of Sherlock’s mind, and he decided in a millisecond to give in. In all reality, it wasn’t much of a choice. He felt as though he had to do this that he didn’t have a choice. As was such, he carefully laced both chains around his neck, tucking it under his gray t-shirt if only to feel the cool metal against his chest.

In a dazed state, Sherlock put John’s things away neatly before retreating back to his bedroom, cigarettes forgotten. He did not delve into why he was wearing John’s tags, but acknowledged, if only in his own mind, that this sensation was far more satisfying than that provided by a smoke. He had found an alternative.

But that didn’t mean he would go back to needing those cigarettes, which he still hadn’t found.

Curse John Watson.
When He's Gone

Chapter Summary

John is sick, but Sherlock attempts to mind his manners anyway.

Chapter Notes

I have been made aware of the fact that some paragraphs are indenting and others are not. Unfortunately, no matter how I attempt to fix this issue, I am unable to succeed, though it might just be my computer being deficient. Kindly ignore the issue to the best of your ability.

This is the shortest chapter of all six, so yeah. Also, I don’t even try to incorporate Holmesian deductions into these, because I am never satisfied with them. Therefore, kindly excuse the lack of shared deductions.

As time passed, Sherlock grew more and more attached to his army doctor and more and more attached to those dog tags. They especially came in handy when John wasn’t there, and he needed to keep his cool, serving as a constant reminder to think about how his actions would affect the people around him. He needed to make John proud, so he tried his best to behave even when the other man wasn’t there to see. After all, practice makes perfect.

On that particular day, John had locked himself in his room, sick, and Sherlock had no desire to stick around the cranky man. So of course, when Lestrade called in with a case, he rushed over to the scene immediately, easing his brief sense of guilt with the assurance that John would just sleep for most of the day anyway. Besides, the doctor had already told him to piss off more than once. And for one time in his life, Sherlock was compelled to comply.

“Where’s the body?” Sherlock greeted Lestrade as he stepped out of the cab, not even sparing the detective inspector a glance as he fell into step beside him.

“Where’s John?” Lestrade retorted, and Sherlock knew he was thinking that today was going to be a disagreeable day, that Sherlock wouldn’t bother to mind his manners.

“I asked you first.”

“I’m already leading you to it, so where’s John?”

Sherlock let out an impatient sigh as they ducked under the yellow police tape, rolling his eyes. “At 221B, where else? Can’t very well come along when he’s sick, now, can he?” He stopped as the sight of a brunette college student sprawled across the ground in a rain-soaked gray sweatshirt, stooping down next to her as he removed his magnifier from his pocket.

Lestrade stopped short. “Wait. John’s sick, and you left him alone to see a corpse? Really, Sherlock, I-”
“Expected more?” Sherlock challenged cooly, the only thing keeping him from making a
drastically snide remark being the cool metal pressed against his bare chest, a constant reminder
that John wouldn’t approve, that John would be angry at him. And the last thing he wanted was to
make John angry at him. So as an alternative, he continued to inspect the body, addressing
Lestrade coolly all the while. “He is currently under the hospitality of one Mrs. Hudson, although I
doubt he’s still conscious considering the fact that he took sleep-encouraging medication shortly
before I left. Additionally, he made it clear to me more than once that my assistance was not
welcome, so I took the good doctor’s advice and pissed off.”

“Ah. I see.” Lestrade was silent for a moment. When he spoke again, amusement spiked his
voice. “It also sounds like your vocabulary rubbed off on him.”

Sherlock couldn’t help but snort at that. “Please. When have you actually heard me curse
vocally? And you and John have gone out for drinks before; surely you’ve beheld his artful
speech patterns.”

“Sherlock, most people curse more when they’re drunk.”

“Be that as it may, John rarely finds himself that far under the influence, and he has cursed in
my presence on numerous occasions that did not call for it by any means.”

Lestrade got very quiet. “Oh.”

Sherlock felt his face heat up when he realized exactly what the DI thought he was implying.
He wrinkled his nose and looked up, conscious of the dog tags beneath his shirt. “Not like that,”
he scolded hotly. “Contrary to popular belief, my John and I have never engaged in activities of
sexually origin.” He stood up briskly, tucking the magnifier away.

“Um, Sherlock?” Lestrade said quietly. “You just called him your John.”

He turned on his heel, chains shifting around his neck. “Good day to you, Lestrade.”

He was almost to the police tape when the DI thought to call after him. “Um… Sherlock?”

“It was the brother!”
I Belong to Him

Chapter Summary

Sherlock uses John's dog tags to save himself from a seductress.

Chapter Notes

This one is the first chapter to take place in a set episode. I shouldn't even have to tell you which one.

Sherlock Holmes was no stranger to admirers. He had been told time and time again that he had been gifted with ungodly beauty. He has reduced men and women alike to blubbering messes, has heard the more artful of his admirers croon about alabaster skin, glasz eyes, tender curls, and slicing cheekbones. He was quite aware of his own beauty, and he used it to his advantage. He liked to think of himself as a god of sorts, deceitfully beautiful with a sharp tongue and quick wit. He played the part of a flirtatious beauty just long enough to get his way before his words sharpened, and he left his suitor blinking in shock. It was, in all truth, quite amusing.

However, when a certain dominatrix showed her interest, he realized quickly enough that she wouldn’t be put off of him so easily, not at all simple to get rid of. Her obsession was not just with his appearance, but also with his intelligence. She found intellect intriguing, attractive, and nothing could get her off his back. Sherlock did suppose, however, that if the circumstances were any different, he might not have minded her advances so much. He might have toyed with her for a while, if only to hear her sing him praises. As it was, however, he already had someone who did that. And that someone had a personality far more appealing than that of a certain Irene Adler.

Certainly he found her intriguing, an enticing specimen, but her flirtations made him angry, though he refused to let it show. Could she not see that he was taken, if only in his own mind? Could she not see that he was waiting to be seen, practically begging for John Watson to notice the unsettling sentiment that had risen within his breast? It was foolish, he knew, to assume she would know, since he was not by any means an open book with anyone. All the same, it was infuriating to have anyone other than John, also regrettably oblivious, try to claim him, try to get him to open up to them in ways he never had before.

It was for these reasons he decided to reveal the tags.

“As if you didn’t follow me to this spot, Miss Adler,” Sherlock drawled, allowing the corner of his lip to twitch in a sort of half-smile.

The Woman laughed, folding up her glasses and sticking them in her coat pocket fluidly. “As
charming as always, I see.” She scooted closer to him so their legs and shoulders pressed together. Sherlock’s brain screamed at the contact, but he made no move to scoot away.

Silence settled over them as they just sat there, both carefully calculating their next move and knowing very well that their companion was making similar contemplations, all while hoping they’d be the one to prevail.

Finally, Irene spoke up. “You know, Mr. Holmes, you are an intriguing subject.”

Sherlock felt his lips curl slightly at the words, cocking an eyebrow in the dominatrix’s direction. “Really? How so?”

Irene laughed softly, fingers trailing up his thigh as she leaned against his shoulder. Sherlock stiffened at the contact, eyes locked on her dancing fingers in disbelief. “You have this wall surrounding you, so impenetrable, aiming to put people off. You try to hide from others, and yet your mannerisms only serve to attract them.” Her lips were a mere inch from his ear, and Sherlock could feel the Woman’s cool breath against his flesh, giving him goose bumps. Irene seemed to make a wrongful assumption about their origin as she laughed that tinkling laugh of hers, nuzzling into his neck.

“You like the attention, I think,” she purred. “You want to make someone yours, you want to take in a little pet for your benefit. You can’t expect anyone to believe that a man of your stature doesn’t seek out prey once in a while, Mr. Holmes, doesn’t pounce when he finds a satisfactory piece of meat.” She tugged at his earlobe with her teeth, causing the consulting detective to feel almost sick. He wrenched away brutally, feeling his skin tear slightly as he scowled at the temptress sitting before him.

“I don’t need to play predator,” he informed her coolly, savoring the blatant surprise upon her face as he wrenched the tags out from under his shirt. “Not when someone has already laid claim.”

Irene blinked in surprise as her eyes raked the tags before coming up to meet Sherlock’s gaze in disbelief. “Dr. Watson?” she said in breathless disbelief. “Preposterous! There’s no way that—”

Sherlock just got to his feet calmly, patting Irene on the shoulder as he tucked the tags back into place. “Please cease this ridiculousness,” he requested coolly. “As you so wisely pointed out, somebody loves me.”

With that said, he marched away without looking back.
And He Belongs to Me

Chapter Summary

Sherlock uses John's dog tags to save him from a redheaded wench.

Chapter Notes

Poor girl. She doesn't even get a name.

Sherlock didn’t like John’s girlfriends. He never did, even before he came to terms with his own feelings and desires. The only one he had ever truly been tolerant of was Sarah, the only one who seemed to like his John for something more than the sex and the looks. And she even tolerated Sherlock, going as far as to discuss some of their favorite books together on the many occasions Sherlock showed up at the surgery to summon John to a crime scene from work.

That wasn’t to say, however, that he was disappointed when Sarah and John reached the mutual agreement to break it off and just be friends. After all, not even Sarah Sawyer was worthy of John Watson.

In months to come, Sherlock would watch John go off with countless other girls, never getting very far. And when the relationship seemed to last too long, Sherlock himself would step in, saving his unappreciative blogger from the clingy wenches who felt the need to assault him. After all, toss John into a case, and he wouldn’t be mad for too awful long, anger eased by endless rushes of adrenaline.

John’s newest wench was quite dreadful, a young redhead with bright green eyes and an admiring view of his John. She loved his personality as much as Sarah had, but for some reason, this new woman friend of his just seemed wrong, like she was trying to pull something terrible. That, and she seemed utterly simple-minded and dull.

John had been dating the redhead (Sherlock knew he kept deleting her name) for three weeks when the consulting detective finally grew fed up and decided to take matters into his own hands, to save his John from such tediousness, even if John didn’t realize yet that he needed to be saved. So when John left with his date that night, Sherlock followed, only after Lestrade responded to his text and assured Sherlock that if he wanted to come, they had a case he could take care of.

The couple wasn’t hard to find; Sherlock knew John’s favorite restaurants, and he knew which ones served as his go-to for dates. Sure enough, his eyes fell on the pair as soon as he stepped into the exquisite pub and dining hall, low lights and careful design doing nothing to hinder his search for his blogger. He caught sight of John just as the man rose from the table, heading toward the loo. Sherlock smiled to himself and decided to act on this opportunity.

“Good evening,” Sherlock greeted the redhead smoothly as he slipped into the seat John had occupied just moments before. “I trust you’re having a good time tonight?”
The redhead looked up at him in surprise, raking over his visage once, twice before a grumpy look washed over her. “Don’t tell me you’re going to try to steal John again,” she huffed, glowering at him. Sherlock mused about how nice she always was to him, until he interrupted a date.

“I have no reason to steal John,” Sherlock responded smoothly. “Especially when he’ll come willingly.”

The young woman laughed bitterly. “Yeah, because he knows you’ll get yourself killed otherwise. You can’t very well take care of yourself despite what the papers say, can you?”

Sherlock smirked, leaning back jovially as he pulled a set of chains out from under his shirt. “I don’t need to take care of myself,” he told her softly as her eyes flickered to the dog tags.

“Are those…?” she drifted off, gaping.

Sherlock leaned toward her, smirking with pride at the effectiveness of his weapon. “Feel free to read them, Miss. I assure you, you will not be disappointed.”

Giving him a dubious look, the girl leaned forward, taking a tag in her hand and running her thumb over the text. Watson, John H.

“Hamish,” Sherlock said suddenly. The girl looked up in surprise.

“What?”

“The H is for Hamish.”

Surprise lit up behind the girl’s eyes. “How did you…” she looked him over, seeming to remember as she shook her head. “Nevermind. Why are you wearing those?” Her voice was suddenly hard, eyes dark as she met his gaze.

“Why do you think I’m wearing them?” Sherlock asked with an amused grin, tucking the tags back under his straining white dress shirt.

Her freckled face paled. “No,” she said quietly.

Sherlock opened his mouth to speak just as footsteps interrupted him. He looked up quickly to find John Watson looming over the table. “Sorry, love. I hope Sherlock her isn’t causing you too much trouble.” John shot Sherlock a glare, the younger man just giving a shrug in response.

“No,” the redhead said softly, staring down at the table in front of her, looking dejected. She stood up suddenly, glaring daggers in John’s direction. “You are a sick man, John Watson,” she snarled, storming away without looking back, leaving John to stare after her in disbelief. As soon as she was out of sight, he whirled on Sherlock.

“What did you say to her?”

“I merely asked for her opinion,” he quipped, picking at his fingernails under John’s scrutiny.

“On what?”

Sherlock rolled his eyes with a careless wave of his hand. “Irrelevant. Now come, John; we have a case.”
If Only in My Mind

Chapter Summary

Sherlock lets his thoughts wander to John in times of suffering.

Chapter Notes

Cheating a bit here, but what else is the Mind Palace for, eh? At any rate, I inexplicably loved writing this chapter, so enjoy! <3

He wanted the tags.

He needed the tags.

He couldn’t do this without the tags.

Since Sherlock had been forced to fake his own death, he never stayed in one place very long. Town to town, nation to nation, continent to continent as he hunted down Moriarty’s correspondents under his brother’s guiding hand. He hadn’t wanted Mycroft’s help for this, but the fact remained that the British Government saw things even he possibly couldn’t see, for he could not see in multiple places at once. For once, Sherlock was grudgingly thankful for his brother’s extensive surveillance network.

That didn’t mean he was happy with Mycroft, not by any means. After his “suicide,” Sherlock stuck around for a few weeks to assist with final preparations for his journey. On the day he had to leave, Mycroft confiscated anything and everything with any relation to who he was and what he had done. As was such, Sherlock was tragically stripped of his designer clothes, expensive shoes, his scarf, and his Belstaff. He could have dealt with that, even having to leave his coat behind. What he couldn’t deal with was being separated from the tags, even though he knew they’d put John in danger again, making his feigned suicide virtually pointless.

Mycroft had frowned deeply at the sight of the tags dangling around his little brother’s neck, regarding them thoughtfully, though not with distaste. Sherlock fidgeted uncomfortably as his older brother looked up to meet his eyes.

“Does Dr. Watson know about this?”

Sherlock shook his head, and the issue was dropped, Mycroft tucking the tags into one of the Belstaff’s pockets. Somehow, Sherlock recognized the action as a promise they’d be there for him when he returned. Though he wanted to protest, he said nothing, accepting a stack of new clothing from Mycroft’s PA. Within the course of three hours, he was on his way.

Now, about two years after having left, Sherlock wanted those tags more than ever. Everything had gone smoothly at first, anonymously handing crooks over to the cops or felling the most dangerous when proven necessary. There was little interruption, and each success caused pride to rise in his breast, knowing he was one step closer to returning to London and the life he once
knew. But the self-assuredness wouldn’t last.

Eventually, he moved on to the most ingenious of villains, some who clearly had tabs on him before he had tabs on them. He was careful, but that caution wasn’t always enough. He had been tortured more than once, always managing to escape in the end. But this. This was by far the worst predicament he had ever been in. And as they had left to leave him alone, he saw no way out.

Sherlock had long since blocked out their babblings, the questions he knew he couldn’t answer no matter what they did to him. The pain was apparent with each and every blow, but he was doing quite well blocking it out.

He would do even better if he had the tags. But as that was not an option, at least realistically, he settled for the next best thing.

John used to have a single room in his Mind Palace, carefully boarded up so the sensations filling that room couldn’t bombard him and leave him a blithering mess. But since he had taken his leave, Sherlock had taken away those restraints, even going as far as to expand John’s sanctuary into a complete wing, a wing he’d enter only during the most trying of days. A wing full of memories of words and touches, meaningful glances and significant events. A wing that was all so completely and thoroughly John that Sherlock couldn’t resist entering.

Perhaps his travels had made him soft, had filled him with sentiment. Somehow, he couldn’t bring himself to care, instead embracing the chemical defect that was, indeed, starting to look less and less defective. In times of trouble, he lost himself in that newfound sentiment, lost himself in his John.

And that’s exactly what he did now.

“Hello, Sherlock,” a familiar voice greeted him as he pressed through the door. There, lounging in a familiar armchair next to a familiar fireplace, was his John, graying blonde hair and cobalt eyes, tanned skin and toned muscles, and donning the military fatigues he had only ever seen once, years ago on a search for his cigarettes. Two familiar silver chains dangled around his neck as he stood to greet Sherlock, boots sending echoes through the near-silent room. There was pain in John’s eyes as he stood before him, pressing a gentle hand to Sherlock’s cheek. “What are they doing to you?”

Sherlock shuddered under the touch, but couldn’t bring himself to answer the concerned question, merely shaking his head in response as he leaned into John’s touch.

John let out a frustrated sigh, reclaiming his hand. “Well, okay, I see you’re not going to talk about it right now. Why are you here, Sherlock? What is it you want?”

Sherlock closed his eyes, gritting his teeth as he forced himself to remain separate from his aching body, at least enough so that he couldn’t feel the pain entirely. It was bad enough already. “It hurts, John,” he whispered hoarsely. “I can hardly bear it.”

A concerned sound rose from the back of John’s throat, and Sherlock felt a set of strong arms wrap around his neck and pull him close. The touches were not simply fabricated by his mind, instead based on data collected and compiled each time John had ever touched him, creating what he felt was a fairly accurate representation of being in John’s arms. Combine the feeling of John wrapping him in a friendly bear hug with the feeling of John’s fingers absentmindedly running over his neck, and he got this calming, soothing scenario. The hug of someone who was beyond just best friends. The hug of someone who was a lover.
“Stay strong, love,” John whispered in his ear tenderly, lips brushing effortlessly against the flesh. “You need to stay strong for me. Can you do that, Sherlock? For me?”

Sherlock kept his eyes squeezed shut as he returned Mind Palace John’s embrace. “It’s so hard…” he muttered, hardly believing he had cared to admit that even to himself. John laughed softly.

“I know that, Sherlock. But remember that I’m still waiting for you to come home, to tell me exactly how you feel. You’re not allowed to die just yet.”

John broke the embrace, Sherlock opening his eyes to see a pained smile on the shorter man’s face. “You want that first kiss, yeah?” he asked quietly.

Sherlock nodded in rapt. Kissing John was one of the many things he had never allowed himself to imagine. He wanted to experience it first hand, in reality, before he made any assumptions. Mind Palace John knew that, and never made an advance. Instead, the specter pulled the set of chains from around his neck, placing them around Sherlock’s own instead.

“Then you need to stay strong. I need my Sherlock to come home to me, to tell me exactly what he feels for me. Okay?”

Sherlock nodded once.

The next morning, the torturers assumed him to be unconscious, and he slipped out of his Mind Palace to find himself alone and in excruciating pain. All the same, he managed to get loose and escape, one word on his mind, on the tip of his tongue.

John.
Until the Truth Comes Out

Chapter Summary

Sherlock returns with his heart on his sleeve and John's tags on his breast.

Chapter Notes

Yeah, so I saved myself from all of John's disbelief, denial, and questions by enlisting the help of the British Government. The reunion goes pretty smoothly, Sherlock is a tad OOC from his trials, and sexual content is led up to and then implied.

Obviously there's no Mary for the purposes of this fic, despite my inexplicable fascination with her character. (Yes, I'm a Johnlock shipper who has an attachment to Mary. Bite me. That's what Jackie almost did.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

As Sherlock stood on the stoop outside 221B Baker Street, a sense of unease washed over him. Three years since he had last seen John, three years since they had last interacted. It had been four months now since he had finally finished uprooting Moriarty's web, yet Mycroft had insisted he lay low at the old Holmes vacation house for a while. Naturally, Sherlock had protested, but when Mycroft pointed out that John might very well have a heart attack if he just showed up at random one day, seemingly back from the dead, he was forced to submit to his brother's far more planned out idea for their reunion.

For the past four months, Mycroft had been feeding subtle clues to John, hinting about the fact that Sherlock was not, in fact, dead. His clues were infrequent and vague, but much to Sherlock's pride, John had come to the conclusion quickly enough, after only two months. The other two months were put into place to allow the fact to sink in, as well as a precaution Mycroft insisted he take in case John showed any signs of hostility toward him.

Those four months were the hardest, knowing John knew the truth, but not knowing what he thought of it or how he'd react. Now, on the third anniversary of his Fall, he was finally permitted to return. Sherlock let out a shuddering breath as he squeezed John's dog tags tight in his hands, giving him the strength he needed to face their owner. His resolve solidified, Sherlock tucked the tags back underneath his shirt and pushed the door open, wasting no time mounting the seventeen stairs to the flat in which he had lived for so long, the flat in which the love of his life had suffered in the wake of his absence. And now, as he pushed open the door...

"I was wondering if you were going to show up today."

Sherlock’s breath caught at the sound of that voice, that voice that he had so missed, that he had so longed to hear. John was standing in the sitting room, looking him over with analytical, murky dark blue eyes. He donned one of those wretched jumpers, a gray one, somehow filling Sherlock with the urge to run up and hug him. But he couldn’t. Something was wrong. Something was wrong with his John.
John’s voice seemed neither menacing nor inviting; instead, the ex-soldier maintained a neutral tone and an equally neutral expression. It was obvious that he was withholding his own emotions to an extent in which Sherlock had hardly ever known John to do, and it tore at his heart to know that he had been, assuredly, the cause of it.

Finally, something clicked in his brain and he thought to answer John breathily. “You couldn’t have known I was coming back today.”

John snorted at that. “Please. You tend to have a dramatic flair, Sherlock. As soon as I realized what Mycroft was trying to get across to me, I knew you’d return on the anniversary of your own death. It’s just like you.”

“But I’m not dead,” Sherlock blurted without thinking.

A harsh laugh assaulted him. “Clearly.”

Suddenly anxious, Sherlock took a step closer to John, eyes pleading with the shorter man to listen to him, to understand him. “I didn’t want to,” he said quietly. “I’m rubbish without you. But they would have killed you. You and Mrs. Hudson and Lestrade…”

John let out a sigh, a weary look coming over his face as he allowed himself to slump slightly out of his stiff posture. “I’m sure you did just fine without me, Sherlock; you’re the one with the inhuman brain.” Somehow, Sherlock couldn’t bring himself to hear the word as an insult in that context. But still, he had to set John straight.

“But you’re my heart, John,” he said softly, taking a small, tentative step closer. “I thought you knew that. You’re the one who sets me straight, who doesn’t mind my social issues but still tries to help me through them. You’re the one who tells me when I’ve crossed the line, when I’ve gone too far. You’re my moral compass, my conductor of light. You’re my doctor, my blogger, and my best friend. You’re my John.”

John just froze, staring at him for a long moment. Sherlock knew what it looked like; John wasn’t used to Sherlock displaying emotions so outwardly, let alone so passionately. But after his time away, he could hardly bring himself to care. But with the stocky man just standing there staring, he couldn’t help but feel slightly unnerved.

“Please say something,” he ventured pleadingly.

John’s voice came out weakly, face coated in disbelief. “You don’t mean that, Sherlock.”

In response, Sherlock pulled at the chains around his neck, extracting the set of dog tags so John could see them. The doctor’s breath hitched as his eyes fell on them, widening to the size of dinner plates. “Are those my…?”

“I’ve had them for years now,” Sherlock said shakily, not quite believing that he was about to spill all, so to speak. “I had them for years before I was forced to die. I had them before the Woman. You never opened your box, so you never knew I took them.” He offered the incredulous John standing before him a shaky smile. “They helped me when you weren’t there, made me feel like you were by my side. Naturally, I had to hand them over to Mycroft for safekeeping when I set out to dismantle Moriarty’s network, but not a single day passed when I didn’t wish they were still in my possession.” He looked down at his feet meekly, suddenly embarrassed. “I liked the feeling wearing them gave me. I liked feeling that I belonged to you.”

Footsteps sounded, and Sherlock didn’t need to look up to know John was closing the space between them. He squinted his eyes shut, bracing himself for a fist against the side of his face, to
“Sherlock, please. Look up at me. I want to see your face.”

Swallowing down the bile rising in his throat, Sherlock looked up slowly, still expecting an attack. But John just stood there, staring deep into his eyes, deep into his soul. Sherlock felt completely and utterly exposed under John’s scrutiny, but he did nothing to distil the tension he was sure the both of them were experiencing. Sherlock was relieved when John finally broke the silence, but his words were completely unexpected.

“The thought of belonging to me comforted you?” the voice was hoarse and disbelieving.

Sherlock felt himself blush as he nodded. “I know you’re not gay, but I couldn’t help but think that maybe someday…” He wrenched his gaze away, unable to finish the statement as dread sentiment assaulted him, threatening to tear him to pieces. But for once in his life, Sherlock didn’t care.

A period of silence ensued. Finally, John let out a soft chuckle. “You know, Sherlock, I never thought seeing my tags around someone else’s neck could be so hot. Or maybe it’s just because it’s you, the prospect that you wear them because you want to feel that you belong to me. It’s incredibly attractive.” Sherlock looked up in surprise to see a familiar mischievous smirk on John Watson’s face, a smirk he knew only from a certain photograph taken decades ago, a photograph he had called to memory time and time again. His heart fluttered as it was directed at him, and he could have died then and there. But dying would mean leaving John, and he didn’t want to go through that ever again.

In one fluid motion, John stepped closer, bringing a hand up to cup Sherlock’s face. The younger man’s eyes widened as a calloused thumb ran over his cheekbone tenderly, with the air of someone who had fantasized about doing so for a very long time. Did John want him, then? How long ago since this had started? How could he not have noticed? Why-

Suddenly, Sherlock’s brain shut off as John pulled him down and brushed their lips together passively, tenderly. His breath caught in his throat, and he stiffened, but John didn’t seem to mind as he pushed his hands up into Sherlock’s curls, entwining his fingers tightly in the dark locks. Did John want him, then? How long ago since this had started? How could he not have noticed? Why-

“Please, answer me! How long ago since this had started? How could he not have noticed? Why-

There was a glint in John’s eye as he tugged at the tags around Sherlock’s neck, smirking once more. “These mean something to you, you said it before. What exactly does it mean to you?”
Sherlock frowned, leaning against the wall. “I already told you,” he practically pouted.

“Yes, well, I like hearing you say it. So say it.”

“They mean that I… They mean that I want to belong to you,” Sherlock managed.

“Really, now? Are you sure about that, Sherlock?”

Sherlock tried to lean in to kiss John, but the shorter man pulled away. “Come, Sherlock,” he said softly. “Tell me what that brilliant mind of yours is thinking.”

“I’m thinking that I love you,” Sherlock said without hesitation. “And that I want to be yours forever and ever, and I want the whole world to know it.”

John seemed to savor those words as his eyes flashed, a grin lighting up his face. “Well, if that’s your decision…” He pointed toward the stairs. “My bedroom. Now. I need to make you mine.”

Chapter End Notes

I almost forgot about the poem!

A pang of longing when he’s gone
I belong to him, he belongs to me
If only in my mind until the truth comes out

Yeah, it's a cheesy little thing. I found it in my journal and decided to put it to good use.

I'll see about posting more fics during my next bout of boredom! :)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!