Behind the Lens

by TodayWe_Are_Infinite

Summary

John's tumblr blog is becoming pretty popular when Sherlock stumbles across a "#johnlock" comment on his own rarely-frequented website.

He's not entirely impressed with John's explanation of "shipping," and he's definitely against the idea of his university flatmate starting a vlogging channel on YouTube.

But he grudgingly goes along with it, because the viewer count is rising quickly by the day, and because he's Sherlock, and he doesn't mind the attention.

It makes John happy too, but that kind of sentiment doesn't factor into Sherlock's actions whatsoever. Of course not.

Notes

This is my first attempt at writing Johnlock, so I hope you all enjoy it!
I'm really excited about this story. I got the idea from my delightful chummy beta, @blondietoldme (on Tumblr), and I'm so glad she convinced me to try it out. She's usually the one to give me a kick in the butt when I'm being lazy about writing, so go give her blog some love to show my appreciation! <3

I can't promise to be super quick with the updates, but I can promise that I will definitely see this story through, so please stick with me and leave lots of lovely kudos and comments to keep me motivated :) xx
Chapter 1

“#johnlock”

Sherlock frowned and scrolled back up, rereading the comment on his website he hadn’t bothered to pay attention to before.

“OMG how did I not know this existed? This is hilarious, #johnlock!”

His eyes darted across the screen, and his frown deepened when a third and even fourth reading failed to make sense of it.

“John?” he called out into the flat without taking his eyes from the screen.

“What?” John’s voice was faint, and Sherlock realized, with some annoyance, that his flatmate was upstairs.

“John, what is ‘pound sign johnlock’?”

There was a brief pause, and then footsteps sounded from upstairs, and John’s voice was louder when he responded.

“What is what?”

Sherlock rolled his eyes and waited.

When John finally entered the sitting room, he flung himself quite unnecessarily down onto the sofa beside Sherlock.

“Pound sign Sherlock?” he questioned, his voice sceptical, and Sherlock huffed in impatience, tilting the screen towards John and pointing.

John leaned forward, squinting slightly. His shoulder pressed against Sherlock’s, and the scent of John’s shampoo drifted over.

“Oh!” said John suddenly, his voice odd, and Sherlock jumped, turning to look at his friend in surprise. John was grinning widely, but there was a faint blush to his cheeks, and Sherlock narrowed his eyes.

“It’s ‘hashtag johnlock,’” John said after a moment, his eyes still fixed on the screen. When he fell silent once again, Sherlock sighed.

“That quite literally clears nothing up.”

John barked out a laugh and straightened up, turning to meet Sherlock’s eyes.

“I know. I’m trying to figure out how to explain it to you.”

Sherlock’s eyes narrowed even further.

“I’m—”
“A genius, yes, I’ve heard,” supplied John, waving his hand dismissively. “Everyone knows you’re the youngest and brightest student at uni-okay, okay, in the country. That doesn’t mean you understand everything.”

Sherlock arched an eyebrow and opened his mouth, but John beat him to it again.

“Before you waste your breath, I can guarantee you’ve never heard of this.”

Sherlock felt a sudden and irrational urge to smile. He quelled it with a deep frown. This conversation should be inciting irritation, and he did his best to convey that to his face.

“Try me,” he finally hissed.

John didn’t flinch at Sherlock’s tone or expression. In fact, Sherlock realized with a twinge of what he could only assume was amusement, he looked rather bored.

“Fine,” said John after a moment. “Tell me then, Einstein, what a ship is.”

Sherlock blinked at John, slightly nonplussed.

“A ship,” he repeated needlessly, and John nodded, eyes wide in mock seriousness. Sherlock was quite certain John knew what a ship was, and he stayed silent for a moment, attempting to figure out whether he was walking himself into a trap. “A ship,” he said again, slowly, “is a seafaring vessel, larger than a boat, designed to transport people or goods.”

John snorted.

“Yes. Very good, Sherlock. Now tell me about the other kind of ship.”

Sherlock studied John, trying to assess the situation, but his friend was giving him nothing. He was positive he had nothing about another kind of ship tucked away anywhere in his mind palace, but he wouldn’t put it past himself to have deleted it. It sounded boring. Just as he was about to reply with a cutting retort, John laughed again, and relented.

“It’s short for ‘relationship,’” John said. “People online ‘ship’ two people they hope will get together but haven’t. Not yet at least.” John coughed. “It could be people from a TV show, or a book, or real life, or… anything really.”

“So ship is a verb,” Sherlock stated, thoroughly unimpressed. He was much more intrigued by the strange, faint blush that had returned to John’s cheeks as he spoke. What was it about this topic that caused him discomfort?

“Basically,” John said, shrugging.

“And this is related to the comment on my website how?”

“Right,” said John, the blush deepening. Interesting. “Part of ‘shipping’ is giving your favourite couple a ship name. Like… like a nickname that combines both of their names together.”

#johnlock

Sherlock’s eyebrows shot up, and he stared at John in surprise.

“So ‘johnlock’ is John and Sherlock?”

John laughed once, and nodded.
“So…” Sherlock continued slowly, suddenly realizing the probable reason for John’s embarrassment. He stopped himself from rolling his eyes yet again at his friend. “So that person was… shipping us?”

“Yup,” John said, shrugging overly casually. “It’s not a big deal, really. People will ship anyone. They just saw a picture or two of us together, and took everything to the extreme.”

People.

As in, more than one.

“Who are these people, and where are they seeing pictures of us together?”

John’s blush returned in full force, and Sherlock just barely refrained from tilting his head to study the other boy more closely.

John was not an experiment.

No matter how fascinating and infuriatingly confusing he could be.

“Tumblr.”

It took Sherlock a moment to realize that the odd sound John had made was, in fact, his answer.

“I beg your pardon?”

John rolled his eyes and shifted, leaning back against the cushions of the sofa.

“My blog. On Tumblr. It’s a website. I know you know what I’m talking about, Sherlock.”

John’s confounded blog. Of course. Sherlock bit his tongue against what would surely have been the kind of reply that ignited incomprehensible hurt in John’s eyes, and asked a question instead.

“And a picture you posted on your blog sparked enough interest for someone to comment ‘pound sign johnlock’ on my website?”

John shrugged. He was always shrugging. Sherlock wished he would at least pretend to be more certain when he spoke. The constant nonchalance was irritating.

“Hashtag,” John corrected. “And people are quite fond of you,” he continued, in what was probably one of the most surprising sentences to ever leave John Watson’s lips. And he liked to say quite a lot of rubbish. “And even more fond of us together for some reason. Johnlock was trending in England for a full minute on twitter yesterday.”

When Sherlock did nothing but blink blankly at the nonsensical words, John waved a hand in the air.

“It means a lot of people online really like us.”

It was a strange thought. Sherlock wasn’t entirely sure what to make of it.

“It literally doesn’t matter, Sherlock,” John said after another long pause. “You’ve never been in the videos anyway, so they barely even know who you are.”

That piqued his interest.
“The videos?” he echoed, and John stared at him for just a beat too long. “What?” he added, defensively.

“And the videos I’ve been posting on my blog.”

John looked as if he was on the verge of doing something extreme. What that would be Sherlock couldn’t quite say, but he very heavily suspected that it hinged on whatever he said next.

“Right,” he replied, quite convincingly.

John’s jaw clenched, and then he let out a breath of air, ending on a laugh.

“Either you’re extremely dense, or an impeccable actor when you want to be.”

Sherlock forced himself not to rise to the bait, instead looking back at John with what he hoped was an innocent expression.

John shook his head.

“Sherlock,” he said, laughing again. He sounded amused now, and Sherlock felt himself relax.

“I’ve literally explained this to you about a hundred times.”

“I assume you’re using the informal definition of the word, as I can assure you, you have not.”

The fact that John didn’t even bat an eye at this statement filled Sherlock with a strange sort of pride. John was used to him.

“Well it’s felt like a hell of a lot. Stop deleting my words.”

Sherlock frowned, hoping this was another one of those instances of sarcasm that John seemed to use so often. He wouldn’t delete John’s words. What a ridiculous accusation.

“Or at least try to pay attention,” John amended, seeing the look on Sherlock’s face.

Sherlock nodded slowly, feeling somewhat chagrined and not entirely sure why.

“Okay,” said John. “I know you know about my blog. And I know you know that people like it, no matter how many times you tell me it’s an absolute waste of my time.”

Sherlock wrinkled his nose, but John ignored him.

“There was something going around on Tumblr called the “accent tag” a while ago. It was like… well, basically people were posting videos to show what their accent sounded like. And I have quite a few followers from North America who wanted me to post one too. So I did.”

Sherlock was trying to follow everything John was saying, he really was. It just all sounded a little tedious, and he wasn’t certain that it wasn’t showing on his face.

“You posted a video of your accent?” he asked, his voice just a touch incredulous.

John shrugged, and his smile was almost shy.

“Yeah. And well, people really liked it. And they wanted me to post a Q&A video. Then after a few of those, they wanted me to do a live Q&A—honestly, Sherlock, the look on your face. Do you seriously not remember any of this? You were in the bloody room when I did the live show, for crying out loud.”
Sherlock wracked his brains for something that sounded remotely familiar. A hazy memory of John talking to his computer surfaced, and Sherlock smiled.

“Of course I remember that, John,” he said. “Don’t be ridiculous.”

John crooked an eyebrow at him.

“You thought I was talking to myself, didn’t you?”

Sherlock cleared his throat and opted for distraction.

“So they liked the live show too?”

The look John gave him in response was reminiscent of his secondary school maths teacher, and so he promptly deleted it, smiling encouragingly back at John.

“Yes,” John said grudgingly, “they seemed to. Quite a bit actually. I’ve got 30 thousand followers on my blog now.”

Sherlock wasn’t sure what the response was supposed to be to that, but he raised his eyebrows and hummed, which seemed to satisfy John.

“Yeah. So now a lot of people are asking me to start a vlogging channel, and I think I might say yes.”

John was clearly rather self-conscious about what he was saying, but Sherlock was drawing another blank. This was the most confusing conversation he had had in months. And he lived with John Watson.

“Vlogging means video-blog,” John added suddenly, as if reading Sherlock’s uncertainty. “They want me to start making video blogs for Youtube.”

Oh John.

Sherlock kept his face carefully blank.

“I see. And you want to do this?”

John shrugged.

“Yeah, I think so. I mean, making the videos for my blog was fun. So I think a vlogging channel could be cool.”

Since when had John turned into the kind of person who thought posting banal videos on Youtube would be “cool?” Sherlock wasn’t sure he liked it.

“What would these videos be about?”

“Just life.”

John’s eyes flicked away from Sherlock, and he shifted again on the sofa. He was avoiding something.

“And?”

“And nothing. Just school, and work, and chilling and… stuff.”
Sherlock had to close his eyes for a moment.

“Stuff, John? Really?”

“You could be in them.”

Sherlock opened his eyes to stare at his friend. John didn’t look like he was joking.

“You probably should be. You’re part of my life, right? And people love the stuff I post about being flatmates with you. I think they’d enjoy it if you did some of the videos with me.”

Sherlock opened his mouth to give some kind of scathing retort, when John continued.

“I’d like it too. It would be fun.”

Sherlock closed his mouth abruptly.

Damn John Watson. Damn him and his inexplicable enjoyment of being Sherlock’s friend.

“Fine,” snapped Sherlock, and John blinked in surprise.

“Really?”

“Maybe,” Sherlock amended quickly.

John’s face brightened.

“Great! Thanks Sherlock. I’m going to start tomorrow, then.”

Sherlock frowned at him in response, and turned back to his computer. John laughed quietly and stood up, clapping a hand on Sherlock’s shoulder.

“Well I’m heading out,” he said. “Meeting the boys for drinks.”

Sherlock didn’t respond, but something suddenly felt too tight in his head.

“I’ll be back late but I’ll try not to wake you up.”

Sherlock waved his hand vaguely at John, still looking at the screen.

“Later, Sherlock,” John said cheerfully, seemingly unaffected by Sherlock’s sudden shut down. Not that it was an unusual occurrence.

“Goodbye,” Sherlock said, but the door had already closed, and John was gone.

Sherlock stared at the door for a long moment, before he rolled his eyes and turned back his computer.

“Johnlock,” he muttered out loud, “how utterly absurd.”

Except.

Now he was slightly intrigued.

Navigating his way to the Tumblr homepage, he tried to remember what John’s blog was called. Probably something completely unoriginal.
When nothing came to mind, he typed #johnlock into the search bar, snorting derisively when over 2500 results popped up.

He had only scrolled down through two of them (“I seriously think it could be real, we’ve got a lot of evidence. @johnlockforeverafter is making a master list! #johnlock.” “OMG DID YOU GUYS SEE THE TEAPOT PICTURE, I CAN’T EVEN ?? #johnlock”) before he came to one that seemed to link to John’s blog itself.

“Personal Blog of John H. Watson,” Sherlock read out loud when he finally reached the right page, shaking his head in disappointment. “Really, John,” he muttered, “you could have done a little better than that.”

Sherlock began to scroll, then stopped abruptly when his own face was staring back at him. The most recent post was what Sherlock could only assume was the “teapot picture,” a picture of John and him, with the caption, “Look who decided to make their own cuppa for once!”

Sherlock clicked to enlarge the photo.

He remembered this. John had taken it recently - only a day or two ago. John had stumbled into the kitchen before a “disgustingly early” morning class, and had been delighted to find Sherlock was there already, with a teapot in his hand. In reality Sherlock had been checking to see whether the inside of the pot would be able to withstand a diluted sample of oxalic acid, but he didn’t see the need to inform John of that. So instead he had flipped on the kettle, and allowed John to pull him into a “selfie.”

John never showed him the pictures he took, so Sherlock hadn’t seen this one before. He stared at it for several long moments. John was in the foreground, his arm extended outwards to take the picture. He was grinning, open mouthed at the camera, his face sleepy but cheerful. Sherlock was slightly behind him, still holding the teapot like an idiot. His hair was rather wild, and he was wearing his dressing gown, and he seemed to be on the verge of rolling his eyes, but he was smiling begrudgingly at John, and there was a light in his eyes that made him seem almost - well yes, he supposed he did look quite happy.

How odd.

What was there to be happy about at 7:30 on a Wednesday morning after a rather hopeful acid experiment had been rudely interrupted and put on hold for absolutely no reason other than sentiment?

Shaking his head, Sherlock continued to scroll through John’s blog. He skimmed through one or two stories, and couldn’t quite see what was so interesting about them. John was a decent writer, to be sure, but who on earth wanted to read about his “hilarious tube experience,” or the fact that Sherlock had forgotten to buy groceries for the fifth time in a row? Which was honestly a little insulting. He had better things to do than buy a loaf of bread. Especially when he knew that John would take care of it anyway. But regardless of what Sherlock thought, people seemed to be lapping it up, judging by the enormous number of little hearts and strange recycling symbols (What on earth was a “reblog?”) attached to each post.

Sherlock was rather taken aback by the number of times John wrote about him. It seemed as though nearly every other post was about, or at least mentioning Sherlock. Seeing as those were the ones with the largest amount of interest, he supposed it made sense that John would continue to cater to his audience, but he wasn’t sure what had prompted John to begin writing about him in the first place. It was all very strange.

Sherlock stopped abruptly when he came across a video. The thumbnail showed a rather off-focus
image of John sitting in their front room, and the caption underneath read, “For those of you who missed it, here is my first ever live show from yesterday! Thank-you @mrsjohnhwatson (no relation) for recording it!”

Sherlock squinted at the screen for a moment before curiosity won over, and he clicked play.

“Right, okay, is this working?” onscreen John squinted at something below the camera. “Yes! Okay, people are saying it’s working, so… hello!” he gave a strange little wave, wiggling his fingers and grinning awkwardly. “Thank-you for showing up to watch me talk about nothing! It looks like there’s… bloody hell there’s already four hundred of you watching. No pressure, right?"

Sherlock caught himself smiling back at the screen, and quickly schooled his features into something resembling disapproval.

“This is quite weird. I don’t know why anyone would want to watch this, but here we are. So, let’s go. Um.” John scratched his ear and glanced offscreen, seemingly at a loss for words. “Maybe… let’s do questions. Let’s do a Q&A, yeah? So… go.”

John fell silent for a moment, staring intently at what Sherlock assumed was some sort of forum on his screen.

“What am I doing this weekend? Erm- studying. Exciting, right? I’ve got three midterms coming up, and my flatmate says I need to actually study for those. I know, he’s crazy. But he’s top of… well, everything, so I guess I should listen to him.”

Sherlock made a noise of satisfaction. Of course John should listen to him. Everyone should always listen to him. The problem was that they so rarely did.

“Okay,” continued onscreen John, “let’s see. Who is my flatmate? His name is Sherlock Holmes. He’s bloody insane.” John’s grin counteracted his words. “Next… what is Sherlock doing this weekend? Uh…” John’s attention darted offscreen. “Sherlock? What are you doing this weekend?”

Sherlock straightened in surprise when he heard his own voice reply from what seemed to be relatively close by. He had taken part in this odd video of John’s? Why did he have no real recollection of it?

“I don’t see how that could possibly affect you, John. You’ll be studying.”

Sherlock and on camera John laughed in unison at the dry tone in Sherlock’s voice. John looked back at the camera and shrugged.

“See? So bossy. Okay… what- oh wow.” John’s eyebrows raised, and he seemed to be reading something quite rapidly. “A lot about Sherlock now… Can Sherlock say hi? Um- I doubt it. Sherlock, do you want to say hi?”

“Not even remotely.”

“Do it for the people, Sherlock.”

“The people are all idiots.”

Sherlock winced at the somewhat embarrassed look on John’s face. He didn’t want to embarrass John. He hadn’t known this was for a video. To be honest, he probably hadn’t even been aware he was talking to John at all.
John finally shrugged on screen, and grinned at the camera.

“Sorry, folks. You’re apparently all idiots. Don’t worry, apparently I am too. Don’t let it bother you. Next question!”

John answered several more questions about himself (“Yes, I love Game of Thrones. Arya kicks ass. No, I don’t actually listen to Taylor Swift all day long forever, thank-you for that, ‘Taylor Swift Fan 89.’ What I said was that Shake it Off is a damn good song. That’s all. Stop asking.”) before suddenly laughing and shaking his head. “Does Sherlock like bananas? What the hell?”

John turned away from the camera again. “Sherlock, do you like bananas?”

There was no audible response, but John’s face twisted in amusement at something as he turned back to the camera, and Sherlock could only imagine the kind of look he would have given John at such a preposterous question.

“Apparently not. What else? A lot of you are yelling ‘Dad’ at me. What does that mean? Dad… Dad… my father… look at my precious son- Oh I’m Dad? Or am I your son? I don’t get it. I’d prefer to be neither, thank-you. Okay let’s see… will I ever do a meet up? You mean meeting up with you guys? No one would show up,” John gave a little snort, “how embarrassing would that be. No, I don’t think I’ll be doing a meet up.”

Sherlock knew he should turn the video off. This kind of drivel wasn’t worth his time. Who were these people asking John such ridiculous and meaningless questions as though they knew him? It was mind-boggling.

He kept watching.

“Some of you are asking if you can send me mail. I think that’s- oh bloody hell, now all of you are asking about mail. Um- well I’m not giving you my address? No offense? Hmmm… oh okay, some people are saying I could get a P.O. box. Really? Well… maybe. I’ll think about it. Stay tuned. Ask me more questions now, else I’m leaving,” John said with a grin, winking at the camera.

Sherlock snorted.


How interesting.

Sherlock leaned closer to the screen.

“Why are you all screaming at me now?” asked John with a short laugh. “I CAN HEAR YOU!” he said in a mock shout. “Johnlock. Okay. You’re all interested. I get it. First of all, I don’t know who came up with that ship name. It’s literally just my entire first name lobbed onto Sherlock’s. Second of all- why are you shipping us anyway? Sherlock probably doesn’t even know he’s got a flatmate at all, let alone having romantic intentions towards me… in other words, no,” John laughed, but his voice was firm, “Johnlock is very much not real. Exclusive, right from the horse’s mouth. ‘What does Sherlock think about Johnlock?’” John laughed again, a little louder, his eyes a little tight. “Sherlock? What do you think about Johnlock?”

Sherlock’s eyes widened in surprise. So it really wasn’t the first time he had heard about it all.
“I think you should stop interrupting me. Go study.”

John rolled his eyes and turned back to the camera.

“There you have it. Now enough about that. Ask me more questions. Um, sure they can be about Sherlock. I can’t promise you’ll get any answers though. Does Sherlock watch Game of Thrones with me? He pretends not to, but I think he secretly loves it.”

Sherlock shook his head. Sure, he sometimes glanced at the television when John was watching, if there was nothing else to do, but he certainly didn’t love any of the programs.

“Does Sherlock want to do a Q&A with me?” John continued, “Not likely. I’ll see if I can drag him in sometime, but don’t hold your breath. Okay! Here’s a question about me. How novel. Am I really going to be starting vlogs? Yeah, I mentioned something about this in the last video. A lot of you seem to want me to, so I’m thinking about it. Can’t say for sure, but not ruling it out yet.”

John winked at the camera again, and Sherlock bit his tongue. What a ridiculous person his flatmate was.

“On that note, I think I’m going to sign off. It’s been half an hour now, and I don’t think my ego needs to continue talking to- holy shit there’s nearly two thousand of you now! That’s insane! Wow, well thank-you, and… I’m sorry. I’ll let you know if I do this again. Say goodbye, Sherlock.”

“Goodbye, Sherlock,” came his own voice from off camera, sounding rather monotone and unimpressed. As if he hadn’t been extraordinarily satisfied with himself for causing the exasperated expression of amusement on John’s face.

John rolled his eyes, smirking, and turned back to the camera.

“Bye, then,” he said, giving a little salute, and the video went black.

Sherlock let out a long breath and sat back.

Well.

That had been… something.

He had known John wasn’t lying about the interest in his blog, despite his disapproving comments about it. He just hadn’t known it was quite this popular.

That Sherlock himself was quite this popular. What a very extraordinarily strange concept.

He wasn’t entirely sure he disliked it.

Clicking quickly away from John’s blog before he got caught up again, he went back to his own website. No matter what John tolerated on his own blog, Sherlock had no need for silly comments on his site. He went over to delete the “#johnlock” comment, when he noticed his viewer count for the day had skyrocketed in the past hour. It had gone from 4 people to over 300- and his comments notification was blinking an astonishing “72” at him. Sherlock frowned, a sinking suspicion creeping over him as he clicked on his comments page.

His eyes widened, and he grabbed for his phone when he saw that every single comment was using the pound sign. Hashtag? He wasn’t sure, but it was unacceptable.

*John. There are comments on my website about you. A lot of them. They’re using that pound sign hashtag you told me about, and not one of them is mentioning my content. Please make this stop.*
He waited for John’s response impatiently, frown deepening as he saw the viewer count flicking higher with every minute.

His phone buzzed several minutes later.

_hahahaha they found you! You’re famous!!_

Sherlock stared at the text for a long moment. Finally another text flashed into his inbox.

_Don’t worry, they’ll get bored soon. Your website isn’t nearly as scintillating as my blog._

Sherlock narrowed his eyes, unimpressed. John was clearly drunk. Sherlock’s website was nothing short of brilliant.

_Nonetheless, this is your fault. Make it all stop._ –SH

The response was immediate.

_I can’t make it stop, Sherlock. Don’t worry about it. Go to sleep. I’m not answering you anymore, goodnight._

_John, this is your doing._ –SH

_It’s your responsibility to make them stop._ –SH

_This is ridiculous! I can’t have them ruining the integrity of my website._ –SH

_Stop ignoring me!_ –SH

_You’re a useless flatmate._ –SH

_And friend._ –SH

_Fine. Goodnight._ –SH

Sherlock threw his phone onto the sofa and leaned back.

What nonsense. He hated all of it.

Johnlock.

Sherlock snorted. Utter rubbish.

He was going to bed.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

John tries vlogging for the first time, and Sherlock reluctantly goes along with it.

Reluctantly, that is, until an unexpected event at a grocery store finds him receiving an invitation to Scotland Yard.

Chapter Notes

Here we go with chapter 2! I hope you guys like it. It was my first attempt at Sherlock's deductions, who knew they would be so intimidating to write.

Let me know what you think of it all, good or bad. Comments are always appreciated! :) xx

“Good morning, Sherlock!”

John could see the suspicion in Sherlock’s face as he turned towards John’s overly cheerful voice—everyone knew that John was not a morning person—but whatever retort had been about to fling from his flatmate’s lips died when he found himself face to face with a camera.

John grinned evilly as Sherlock’s eyes widened, obviously caught off guard.

“Good morning,” he responded, his voice bewildered, and John felt his grin widen.

“What are we doing today?”

Sherlock’s expression of confusion grew more obvious, and he narrowed his eyes in John’s direction.

“What are you doing right now?”

John turned the camera around to himself.

“I think I forgot to tell him I’d be filming today. Oops.” He winked and turned the camera back to his friend.

The momentary halt in attention on him had given Sherlock enough time to gather himself, and he flashed John a weary glance.

“Do please stop that, John.”
“No,” said John in an imitation of Sherlock’s voice, knowing he was being a bit of a prat, “I don’t think I shall. Now tell everyone what we’re doing today.”

When Sherlock didn’t respond, just staring blankly at the camera, John flicked his eyes up to look at his friend. Irritation was written all over his face, but there was something else there too, something uncertain. Was it nerves? Was Sherlock camera shy? John had certainly never seen his flatmate demonstrate that he was any other kind of shy, but he supposed there was a first for everything.

“Look,” he said in his regular voice, “just relax and talk to me. Ignore the camera. I can edit out anything you don’t like later. Okay?”

Sherlock’s expression shifted slightly, and John grabbed onto the hesitation.

“Please, Sherlock? Just try it one time?”

Sherlock was silent a moment and then he sighed heavily.

“Fine. Just one time.”

“Excellent!” John grinned at him. “Now. What are we doing today?”

Sherlock sighed again, moulding his expression into one of long-sufferance.

“John is forcing me to go grocery shopping with him. He doesn’t think I shoulder enough responsibilities around here.”

Sherlock’s eyes glinted as he glanced at the camera.

“Which is absolutely ridiculous, I’ll have you know.”

He paused, and John stayed silent, keeping the camera on him. He hadn’t expected Sherlock to give in to the filming quite so easily.

“Someone save me, please,” Sherlock finally said beseechingly, and John laughed in delight.

“Heh,” said John, still filming Sherlock, “it’ll be good for you to do something all grown-up for once. Much more useful than swanning about here in scruffy clothes, muttering about your experiments.”

Sherlock straightened immediately, looking affronted.

“My clothes are not scruffy,” he said loudly, and John laughed again.

“Alright mate,” he said, scanning the camera briefly down Sherlock’s body, then back up to his face. Sherlock wasn’t wrong- his clothes were most definitely not scruffy. John was pretty sure he had never met a less scruffy person in his life. Today’s outfit, like most days, consisted of fitted black pants, and a well-tailored black sweater, a hint of a maroon collared shirt peeping over the top. All expensive, brand name clothes, like always. “I’ll give you that,” John continued. “You look snazzy.”

Sherlock cast him another withering glance.

John quickly flipped the camera back around to himself before Sherlock could tire of the whole thing entirely.

“Alright, well I’m going to have some breakfast now, and get ready properly so this one doesn’t
“Alright, well I’m going to have some breakfast now, and get ready properly so this one doesn’t outshine me in public, and then we’ll go! See you there.”

John turned the camera off and set it on the counter, ignoring Sherlock’s pointed gaze.

“Fancy some eggs?” he asked, opening the fridge.

Sherlock hummed noncommittally, which most definitely wasn’t a no, so John pulled four eggs out of the container, and set about frying them up.

“Cut some peppers and onions for me, will you?” he said over his shoulder as he fiddled with the finicky old gas stove. When Sherlock didn’t answer, he glanced around, and nearly dropped the pan he was holding to see Sherlock pointing the camera at him.

“Hmm, not so nice on the other end, is it now, John?” said Sherlock blandly, but John could see he was fighting a smile.

John grinned at him and turned back to the stove, barely able to contain his delight.

“Fine then Sherlock. You laze about while I slave over here making breakfast.”

“Alright,” replied Sherlock smoothly.

Sherlock filmed John cooking for another minute or so, before getting bored and wandering out of the kitchen.

John shook his head, smiling to himself. Sherlock could protest as much as he liked, but if there was one thing he couldn’t ever seem to resist, it was being the focus of attention.

When John brought two plates of omelettes into the sitting room, Sherlock had abandoned his creative pursuits in favour of his laptop, leaving the camera lying upside down on John’s chair.

John rolled his eyes and deposited Sherlock’s plate on his friend’s lap, ignoring the sounds of protest, and nudged the camera out of the way in order to sit down.

He turned it on to take a quick shot of his plate, and to pan over to Sherlock (“Put your computer away and eat. I worked hard on that.”), before tucking into his own meal.

They sat in comfortable silence, John looking over now and then to make sure Sherlock was actually eating. After they had eaten, and everything was cleaned up, and John had changed his ratty sweater into one he considered presentable—although Sherlock’s disdainful glance certainly didn’t agree— they left the flat, bickering about the necessity of Sherlock going along with him.

“I just don’t see why I should bother if you’re going to do it anyway.”

“Because you’re a twat, and doing something considerate will be good for you.”

“I most certainly am not a twat.”

“Prove it.”

Sherlock was silent the rest of the walk to the shops, only speaking again when they were standing in front of a rack of shirts in Primark.

“What on earth are we doing here?”

John glanced over at him, laughing at the expression of bewilderment on his face.
“I need a couple new shirts for work.”

Sherlock looked around, blinking slowly.

“Alright,” he said finally. “Again, what on earth are we doing here?”

John hit his shoulder lightly.

“Don’t be a snob.”

Sherlock fell silent again, watching with narrowed eyes as John browsed through the clothing on the sales racks.

When John picked up a white button-up shirt, Sherlock cleared his throat loudly. John looked over at him suspiciously.

“You don’t like it?”

“I said nothing of the sort,” Sherlock said innocently. “I was just wondering whether you were ever going to document this ridiculous excursion. I assume that was the only reason you could possibly have for dragging me here.”

“Oh,” said John slowly. “Right.” He took the camera out of his pocket and glanced around quickly, making sure no one was watching, before turning it on and hitting record. He could see Sherlock watching him out of the corner of his eye, but he ignored him, beaming into the camera instead as he gave a brief explanation of where they were, and panning around their corner of the shop quickly.

“And there’s Sherlock, looking happy to be here.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes, an action he was quite skilled at. But before he had time to reply, another customer wandered vaguely in their direction, and John turned the camera off with a jerk, shoving it into the pocket of the coat he had slung over his arm upon entering the shop.

Sherlock stared at him with one eyebrow raised, but John just shrugged. He could feel his cheeks heating up slightly.

“I need to try these on,” he said by way of explanation, grabbing a handful of shirts at random and hurrying towards the fitting rooms, shoving his coat into Sherlock’s hands as he passed him.

“Mhm,” was Sherlock’s only reply as he followed him, folding the coat across his arm without batting an eye.

Once Sherlock had deemed three shirts John chose as “bordering on visually acceptable,” and allowed him to purchase them, he proceeded to drag John into his favourite clothing store a few streets over.

John gaped in astonishment at the prices around him. He had known Sherlock wasn’t university-student-poor, thanks to his family, but he had had no idea as to the extent of what that meant.

“Bloody hell, Sherlock,” he exclaimed when Sherlock began looking at a sweater advertised for 180 pounds. “You can’t actually be serious.”

Sherlock looked up at him with a blank look.

“I haven’t said anything.”
“No, I mean-” John gestured towards the jumper, then looked around the shop helplessly. “All this.”

Sherlock glanced around, his face still blank.

“Here,” he said finally, holding out the blue sweater he had been examining. “Try it on.”

John shook his head.

“I’m good with my eight quid shirts from Primark, thank-you.”

Sherlock nodded slowly.

“Yes. They’re the very height of fashion. Just try this on for a laugh.”

John took the sweater from Sherlock, intending to deposit it straight back on the shelf, but stopped when the soft material touched his hand.

Sherlock was smirking and John struggled to maintain his resolve, but- it was a nice sweater.

“Fine,” he snapped, ignoring the smug look of satisfaction on Sherlock’s face. “But I’m not even thinking about buying it. This could pay for groceries for a whole year.”

“Of course it could,” Sherlock said mildly.

John stared at himself in the fitting room mirror once he had put the sweater on. He had no idea what it was, but something about it just looked better than anything else he owned.

“Must be woven with Harry Potter spells at that price,” he muttered to himself.

Opening the door reluctantly, John slunk out to find Sherlock holding the camera towards him with a triumphant smile.

“See now, isn’t that better?” he called out, and John stared at him in disbelief.

“What are you doing?”

Sherlock wiggled his eyebrows, still looking at the camera.

“I thought you might like the moment you realize I’m always right to be on record.”

John laughed in surprise, and Sherlock raised his eyes to meet John’s. When he did, his smile stuck, before his face fell into an irritated frown.

“What’s wrong?” John asked quickly, but Sherlock shook his head and stepped back.

“Nothing. Just that sweater. It… doesn’t suit you.”

John stopped short and looked down at himself. He thought he looked rather nice, but he supposed Sherlock did know more about fashion than he did. All the same, the comment stung just a little.

“Oh,” was all he could think to say.

“Here,” snapped Sherlock suddenly, shoving the camera and John’s coat towards him. “Take that off and let’s get rest of this tedious outing over and done with.”
John blinked at Sherlock’s abrupt change in mood, but went back to the fitting room to change. He supposed it wasn’t really that unusual for Sherlock to be in a strop when he wasn’t getting his way.

Sherlock was already outside when John came out, so he joined his friend on the pavement.

“Buy something?” he asked mildly, gesturing towards the bag in Sherlock’s hand.

“Yes,” his friend said shortly, then looked over at John, relenting slightly. “A blazer worth more than your entire wardrobe combined.”

“Right,” said John, forcing himself to smooth out his expression. “How nice.”

“Mmm,” said Sherlock, falling quiet.

John ignored him the rest of their walk, silently convincing himself to remember that Sherlock was really just a big child who didn’t feel like going shopping. He didn’t necessarily know that John felt like punching him in the jaw when he acted like this.

Sherlock only snapped out of whatever thoughtful trance he had fallen into once they had reached the cereal aisle in Tescos.

“Here,” he said abruptly, startling John as he shoved a box of cornflakes in front of his face. “Take these and I’ll get a cart. You seem to have forgotten that one crucial element in grocery shopping.”

John took the box and watched as Sherlock strode his way back to the front of the store, crooking an eyebrow when his friend stopped and waved an elderly woman ahead of him.

When Sherlock returned, muttering a terse “full of germs, all of them” and whipping a bottle of hand sanitizer out of his coat pocket, John couldn’t stop the grin that had spread over his face.

“What?” snapped Sherlock when he noticed John standing there, watching him bemusedly.

“Oh, nothing,” said John with a short laugh. “It’s just nice to see you mixing with us common folk for once.”

Sherlock stared at him, his eyes flickering at the statement.

“Are you going to carry that the entire trip?” he said finally, voice bland. “Or are you going to make use of the disease ridden contraption I took the pains of retrieving for you?”

John shrugged and placed the cereal into the cart, before pausing.

“Wait, since when do you eat cornflakes? Is that why my box always disappears so quickly?”

Sherlock rolled his eyes.

“I have no taste for cornflakes, John.”

John frowned slightly as Sherlock moved down the aisle away from him. John turned to pick up a package of porridge- the only cereal he could ever coax Sherlock into eating- and jogged to catch up with his friend.

Sherlock pushing a grocery cart was rather a sight to behold, his entire lanky body screaming disgruntled yet somehow graceful discomfort.
John pulled the camera back out, grinning to himself.

“We’re at Tescos now, and would you look at Sherlock. The very picture of domestication.”

Sherlock ignored him, but John kept the camera on him for long enough that the taller boy finally turned to him with a scowl.

“That’s enough, John.”

“Not quite yet,” said John cheerfully. “Now why don’t you tell everyone what it’s like for you down here, amidst the unwashed masses.”

A group of teenagers rounded the corner, and John turned the camera off quickly.

“Never mind,” he said, “let’s go get bread.”

Sherlock snorted, but followed him to the bakery without comment.

John watched as Sherlock grabbed the first loaf of bread he saw, and shook his head.

“You don’t like that one.”

Sherlock looked at him in surprise, then down at the bread in his hands.

“I don’t?”

“No,” replied John, taking it away from him and turning to select a freshly baked French baguette. “You only ever eat this kind.”

“I do?” parroted Sherlock, and John looked at him in amusement.

“You do,” he confirmed. Sherlock paused for a beat and then shrugged.

“Alright.”

They continued down the short list John had made that morning, John taking the camera out again briefly on their way to grab milk and yoghurt, when he had made certain no one was looking. The idea of filming in public hadn’t seemed half as embarrassing as the reality was turning out to be.

When they reached the dairy section, and John turned the camera off with a sheepish smile at a woman who had been watching him, Sherlock threw his hands up and sighed loudly.

“Honestly, John, I don’t understand you at all.”

John looked at him in surprise, glancing around at the startled glances they were getting from other shoppers.

“What are you talking about?”

“You and your silly camera,” Sherlock said, his voice exasperated. “If you want to film, then film. If you don’t, then don’t.”

John blinked up at Sherlock. His friend sounded absolutely serious.

“I am filming. Besides, I thought you didn’t want anything to do with it.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes and waved a hand in the air as if dismissing John’s every word as
nonsense.

“It doesn’t matter if I like it. If you enjoy filming, and people enjoy watching what you film, then stop acting as if someone is about to smack you over the head every time you pull out the camera.”

John straightened up defensively. This was rather unfair of Sherlock, really. It wasn’t quite that simple— it was… well, awkward to film yourself in public. He supposed Sherlock couldn’t pick up on something like that, and was just about to say so, when Sherlock sighed again and reached over to pluck the camera from John’s hands.

“We’ll switch. You take the cart, and I’ll film. You’re being ridiculous.”

John watched incredulously as Sherlock turned the camera onto himself and levelled a weary gaze at the device.

“It appears as though John actually requires my assistance on this particular outing.” He rolled his eyes at the camera, before turning it back to John, who wasn’t entirely sure what was happening. Sherlock huffed impatiently, and made a little flicking gesture with his fingers. “Well? Go on, then. Shop.”

John exhaled on a laugh before turning back to his list. Somehow having Sherlock wield the camera didn’t seem quite as embarrassing, and he found himself relaxing.

Sherlock smiled self-satisfactorily as he watched John through the camera. While he wasn’t entirely on board with this new “documenting our lives” venture of John’s, he couldn’t deny the fact that the other boy seemed to enjoy it wholeheartedly. Or at least, he would if he could get over the ridiculous stage-shyness he appeared to have developed the moment they left the flat.

He seemed much more comfortable now though, chatting easily while deliberating over what kind of yoghurt to buy. Of course, that easiness could be due to the fact he wasn’t exactly aware that Sherlock was still filming him.

“I mean, I like passion fruit, but you always act as if it tastes like a vat of poison— which you would actually know, I’m sure, as you mess around with enough stuff to kill an entire nation.”

Sherlock huffed out a small laugh.

“I could have killed you on numerous occasions had I felt like it,” he muttered, low enough for John not to hear. “You hardly notice what you’re eating as long as it tastes vaguely like food.”

“But then the only kind you’ll ever eat is blasted strawberry,” John continued, oblivious as always, “and that’s boring as hell.”

“So get both,” Sherlock said, bored himself. “Who cares?”

John shook his head.

“We can’t afford both Sherlock.”

“You can’t,” he replied without thinking. Which, he supposed, could possibly be taken as slightly unfair, as it was John’s turn to pay.
The muttered retort unfortunately reached John’s ears this time, and he turned around abruptly.

“Sherlock,” John said uncomfortably, and Sherlock quickly turned the camera off at the look on his friend’s face. He reached around John with his free hand instead, and picked up a pot of yoghurt.

“I don’t mind passion fruit,” he said, slotting it into the cart and turning before John had a chance to respond. “What’s next?”

John was silent behind him for a moment, but then Sherlock heard the cart begin rolling again, and he relaxed a little, knowing John wasn’t one to prefer confrontation over pacification. Sherlock was having too much fun to let a silly little thing like money get in the way. Not again.

Wait.

Sherlock paused briefly, running over those words again in his head.

Was he, Sherlock Holmes, having too much fun at a grocery store? How… odd. And unacceptable.

He turned, intending to let John know he was leaving in precisely five minutes whether their errands were finished or not, but stopped when he saw his friend. John was wandering behind him, hands tightly gripping the trolley, a sad frown creasing his forehead as he stared absently at the shelves beside them.

Sherlock froze. Oh.

John was clearly upset about something. What? Could it be Sherlock’s reference to their wildly dissimilar bank accounts? Was John worrying about money again? Or was he regretting bringing Sherlock along today, useless as he was being?

Sherlock quickly brought the camera back up. He may not be much help in selecting the best brand of laundry detergent (who on earth cared about something as tedious as that?), but he could at least assist John’s latest project.

“You look like you’re in pain,” he drawled, aiming the camera at his friend. “Surely cleaning products aren’t that upsetting.”

John whipped his head up, the frown smoothing from his face, a tiny smile appearing in its place.

“They are when I have to find one strong enough to clean up after you,” he retorted, and Sherlock bit back a snort of amusement at John’s quick wit, relieved that he was always so distractible.

“I hardly think-” Sherlock began, but his words were cut off by a sudden sharp shout from the front of the store.

He and John both jumped simultaneously, spinning to face the direction of the commotion. There was quite a lot of yelling now, and while Sherlock couldn’t quite make out the words, a knot of apprehension formed in his chest.

He glanced at John, and they wordlessly began to make their way towards the shouting.

Sherlock realized what was happening before John did, and the sharp hiss of air against his teeth was painful in his ears. He stopped abruptly, shooting out a hand to grip John’s arm, pulling him down towards the ground.
“John,” he said, and something in his voice made John follow him down until they were both lying on the cold floor.

“What-” John said, but Sherlock shook his head sharply, looking back towards the entrance. John’s gaze followed his, and Sherlock felt the moment John understood, so closely were they lying together.

John’s entire body tensed up when he took in what he hadn’t had a chance to see before Sherlock had pulled him down: the people lying prone on the floor, the cashiers huddled underneath their desks, the two armed men waving firearms in the air and yelling at one young shop worker to open up all the cash boxes in the vicinity, while threatening anyone who tried to stop them with a bullet through their head…

John shuddered, and Sherlock tightened his grip on his arm, eyes scanning the situation intently.

He was quite certain they weren’t in any real danger. The men had covered their faces, and their posture indicated confidence and composure rather than the frantic desperation that would lead to a shooting. Nevertheless, he saw no reason to risk their own safety, and he kept a tight hold on John’s arm, firmly anchoring the both of them to the ground.

“Sherlock,” John whispered, and his voice was steady. Sherlock turned his head briefly to look at him, and was surprised to see that John looked entirely calm, if not a little anxious. He shouldn’t be surprised, really. John Watson was the epitome of confidence. The real kind of confidence, not the showy, swaggery kind Sherlock had adopted since primary school. “It’ll be fine,” John said, and Sherlock realized with a start that his own hands were shaking. That John could feel them shaking.

“I know it will,” he responded, willing his body to relax. “It’s just adrenaline.”

John nodded, offering Sherlock a tight little smile, which he reciprocated after a moment.

Sherlock turned back to assess the situation, and was relieved to see that the young cashier had the presence of mind to take as long as she possibly could to open each box, thereby giving the authorities adequate time to arrive on the scene. That or she was scared out of her wits.

Unfortunately the armed men seemed to have had the same thought, as one of them grabbed another cashier, a middle-aged man, and waved the gun in his face, shoving him towards the rest of the cash registers.

Sherlock cursed under his breath as the man moved quickly and efficiently, opening each of the remaining three registers with practiced movements. The men collected the contents of each, waiting a moment longer for the girl, whose hands were shaking so badly she dropped the last tray of money onto the floor with a loud crash.

“Fucking hell,” one of the men exclaimed, his voice angry. Sherlock tensed up as the man reached out and dealt a painful looking blow to the back of the girl’s head with the butt of his gun. She crumpled to the floor immediately without a sound.

John was shaking beside Sherlock now, but Sherlock knew without looking that it was out of anger rather than fear. John would be more concerned with the girl who was clearly going to be fine, judging by the angle of the blow, than with the fact that the men were now exiting the building without pursuit.

Not even a full thirty seconds had passed since their departure before the wail of police sirens became audible. Sherlock exhaled and rolled his eyes, sitting up swiftly and climbing to his feet.
How absolutely useless police were, showing up after the crime had been committed.

He turned to express his distaste when he saw that John was still on the ground, hands clenched tightly into fists. Sherlock let the camera dangle from its wrist strap so that he could lean down and help John up. The shorter boy looked shocked, and his eyes kept darting anxiously to the girl, who was now surrounded by people.

“Are you alright?” Sherlock asked, keeping his voice low. John’s gaze flicked up to him then.

“Yeah,” he said, exhaling heavily, eyes widening as if he was suddenly processing what had happened. “Yeah, I’m okay. Are you?”

Sherlock waved the question away- of course he was alright- and turned towards the police officers who were only now entering the shop.

“They’ll be wanting to speak to everyone, I expect,” said John after a moment, and Sherlock nodded his agreement, already making his way towards the man who appeared to be in charge.

“I assume the medical team is standing by,” Sherlock said by way of a greeting, and the man- who had been addressing the rest of the shop goers in what Sherlock could only assume was supposed to be some sort of comforting manner- turned to him with a confused expression.

“How do you figure?”

Before Sherlock could reply, two officers strode up, matching vapid expressions on their faces.
“The perimeter has been secured, Sir,” the taller of the two men said, apparently unaware that his hat was backwards. “Only one casualty, like always. Not fatal.”

Sherlock smiled blandly when the inspector’s gaze flashed to him in irritation. John made a quiet noise of surprise beside him, and Sherlock squared his shoulders.

“Look kid,” said the inspector not unkindly, turning back to Sherlock. “Why don’t you and your friend go and sit over there with the rest of the customers, and we’ll get to you as soon as we can, alright?”

“And why don’t you know yet that it’s always an inside job?”

The inspector opened his mouth wearily then snapped it shut again, looking sharply at Sherlock.

“What on earth are you talking about?”

“It’s obvious,” he replied shortly, and the two officers laughed.

“It’s obvious, is it? How long have you been on the force, then, eh?” asked the brainless tall one.

Something about his attitude, his tone, made Sherlock bristle, but John spoke up before he could say anything.

“I bet he wouldn’t even have to join the force to figure out which way to put his hat on.”

His tone was mild, friendly even, and the inspector snorted. Sherlock bit back a laugh, turning to look at John appreciatively.

The officer in question, however, wasn’t quite so amused. His eyes narrowed as he snatched his hat off his head. All traces of humour left his face, and his eyes settled on John.

“If you both know so much, why don’t you solve the case then, eh? You kids, always showing up all fresh from university and thinking you’re so much better than we are. Probably studying something lofty like law, or physics, eh?”

“Second year pre-med,” said John coolly, and the man barked out a laugh. Sherlock clenched his jaw.

“Good luck with that,” the officer said, flicking his eyes up and down John disparagingly. Sherlock saw John’s head drop, just minutely, probably only a reflex.

“Alright now-” began the inspector, but Sherlock didn’t give him time to finish, turning to the lanky officer.

“I suppose you’re under the incorrect assumption that wearing a uniform and carrying a gun makes you superior to the rest of the population. I can inform you, however, that you are very much mistaken. I’m sure your need for power in a situation stems from your lack of power in your romantic relationships; Judging by the state of your uniform it looks like you’ve been living out of your car for some time- probably got kicked out when your girlfriend realized you were cheating on her. Only online, of course, what other real woman would have you? But she didn’t see it that way, did she? So you’ve turned back to drinking, just like one or both of your parents did before you, and you’re attempting to resolve your feelings of inferiority by putting down someone nearly half your age in the cruel and unnecessary manner of a person with little to no real education, attempting to make himself appear more intelligent than he really is.”

There was a long, shocked silence after Sherlock finished speaking. The officer he had been
addressing seemed to be attempting to turn the same shade of purple as the eggplant in the produce section behind him, and the inspector was staring at him with his mouth slightly open. The second officer must be a mute for all he had contributed to the conversation.

John was staring at Sherlock too, but his look said less “Sherlock your brainpower is astounding,” and more “we’re going to need to have another serious talk about social boundaries when we get home.”

“How the fuck did you know all that?”

Sherlock turned back to the officer wearily.

“Shall I really tell you how I know, or can you just be satisfied that I do?”

The man blustered at him for a moment before the inspector held up a hand.

“That’s enough. From everyone,” he said pointedly at Sherlock.

Sherlock shrugged.

“Now,” the inspector continued, still addressing Sherlock, “you are going to quickly and calmly explain to me how you know this was a repeat offense, and why you think it’s an inside job.”

“Bloody hell, you can’t be serious,” said the second officer.

“Finally.”

“I can, and I am,” said the inspector, nodding at Sherlock to speak.

“Well,” began Sherlock, glancing around, “putting the simple fact that the perpetrators’ words and actions were those of people who have done it all before aside, Scotland Yard isn’t exactly going to send a detective inspector to investigate a first time Tesco robbery with zero fatalities, are they?”

The inspector blinked at him, then laughed once.

“I suppose not. Well done. And the inside job theory?”

Sherlock smiled. This was the interesting part.

“They were relaxed, poised. They weren’t worried about anyone showing up to bother them because they knew you wouldn’t be tipped off until it was too late. Probably an anonymous phone call, just like all the times before? Only it isn’t one of the perpetrators themselves, looking for attention as you probably so wrongly assumed. It’s from someone inside the store, someone who waited until just the right moment to make the call, ensuring they would all get away safely, but in just a dangerously small enough amount of time that it would seem unplanned. The person who made the call was likely the same person who was ‘forced’ into assisting them obtain the money when the young cashier was too frightened to do it properly. That was too practiced to be real. He didn’t work here, and I can assure you he is no longer on the premises. If you ask around, I’m sure you’ll find that no one here had seen him before, and will be unable to locate him now. He would have snuck out a back way while everyone was worrying about the girl’s wellbeing. Which, of course, is another pattern they’ve established. One casualty. No fatalities. They’ve no qualms about violence, but don’t use any more than necessary. They’re well trained in self-control, and know how to hit someone hard enough that they go down instantly, but in just the right spot that they’re not properly injured. Shall I go on?”

“God, no,” exclaimed one of the officers, Sherlock didn’t care which one. He was focused on the inspector’s expression of incredulous admiration, and the small puff of air John had exhaled when Sherlock finished speaking.
“Jesus Christ,” said the inspector after a moment, shaking his head in what Sherlock could only assume was awestruck wonder.

He felt a little buoyant. He had never been at the scene of a crime before, but this was all rather exciting. He grinned around the group, not bothered when no one responded in kind.

Finally the inspector held out his hand.

“Detective Inspector Greg Lestrade. Nice to meet you-?”

Sherlock nodded, ignoring the proffered hand. He jumped slightly when John leaned forward and took the man’s hand, shaking it firmly.

“He’s Sherlock Holmes. And I’m John.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes. What on earth was the point of formalities? Sherlock was busy solving a crime.

Inspector Lestrade nodded pleasantly at John, before turning back to Sherlock.

“Well, Sherlock Holmes, I have to say I am quite impressed.”

“Good God, Sir,” said the short, apparently not-mute officer. Sherlock flicked a dismissive glance over him. Too boring to even bother reading. “This kid’s a bit of an entitled little prick,- no offense- you can’t seriously be encouraging him to waste official police business?”

“Speaking of official police business,” Inspector Lestrade said in response, clearing his throat and glancing at his watch, “you two have been standing here for exactly eleven minutes, with absolutely nothing to show for it.”

The expressions on the two officers faces would have been comical, if Sherlock hadn’t been so eager for them to get on with it and leave.

“I suggest you begin asking around about the second cashier,” Inspector Lestrade said helpfully when neither of them moved, and Sherlock shot a victorious glance at the officers. They both stared at the inspector for just a moment longer, before turning and walking away. Sherlock could hear them muttering to each other, but he had no use for whatever nonsense they were saying.

Inspector Lestrade watched them go, and then turned back to Sherlock.

“As for you, I can’t confirm or deny anything you’ve said to me today.”

Sherlock opened his mouth to protest- because really- but the inspector held up a hand.

“I can, however, request that you and your friend both make your official statements, go home and get a good rest, and then report to the Yard at 9am tomorrow morning.”


Inspector Lestrade nodded, and John exhaled slowly.

Sherlock, however, felt like he was about to burst.

“We can go right now. Whenever you’re ready.”

The inspector laughed and shook his head, running a hand through his hair.
“I appreciate your eagerness, but I think tomorrow would be for the best. I’ll be bogged down with paperwork all afternoon, and you could both probably use a cup of tea and a good night’s rest. You were, after all, just held up at gun point.”

Sherlock scoffed.

“The attention was hardly on us.”

“Sherlock, let’s just go home,” said John, and Sherlock suddenly considered the fact that ordinary people might have found the experience rather troubling. Traumatizing even. He looked over at John sharply, searching him for signs of shock. While he didn’t seem to be any worse for wear, his eyes were rather tight, and his hands didn’t look altogether steady. Sherlock sighed.

“Fine.”

John nodded, his face relaxing slightly.

It didn’t occur to Sherlock until they were back in the flat, that John hadn’t spoken a word since giving his testimony, other than a terse “tea?” flung in Sherlock’s direction the moment they arrived home.

He glanced over at John, who was in the process of filling up the kettle. There was a slight frown on his friend’s face.

“John?”

John looked up at him, and suddenly Sherlock had no idea what he’d been about to say. His mind scrabbled for something, anything, that wouldn’t sound sympathetic.

“You,” Sherlock began, clearing his throat, and wondering why other people found logic so difficult, yet unfathomable matters like sentiment came so easily to them. “You, uh… I still have your camera,” he finished finally, suddenly remembering the small device still dangling from his wrist.

“Right,” said John after a long pause, and Sherlock mentally kicked himself. How utterly useless. But then John’s shoulders relaxed, and he nodded, his face brightening. “I’ll just finish the tea, and then take a look at the stuff we filmed today. I’ll have to shoot a quick goodbye, but otherwise there might be enough to start editing into a vlog.”

“Excellent,” Sherlock nodded, relieved.

John’s eyes flicked over to him suspiciously, but he busied himself quickly with fetching his computer, ignoring his friend’s gaze.

As John set about hooking the camera up to his own laptop, his body still too tense, Sherlock was suddenly struck with an idea. Grabbing the clothing bag he had deposited on the floor behind the sofa, he strode towards the entrance to the flat.

“I’ll be right back,” he said, and John hummed vaguely in response.

John stared at his computer, impatiently waiting for the rainbow wheel to stop turning, for his videos to finish importing. It was taking much longer than he had thought it would, and he
wondered just how much footage Sherlock had taken without John knowing.

When Sherlock swept suddenly out of the flat, letting the door slam shut behind him, John jumped violently, his heart suddenly pounding painfully in his chest.

“Just the bloody door,” he muttered to himself, “calm the hell down.”

He wondered vaguely where Sherlock was going and briefly considered texting him, but turned his attention back to the computer instead, knowing it was no use asking if his friend didn’t want to tell him.

After ten more long minutes of waiting, the videos were finally ready, and John sat back to watch them.

The first few minutes were exactly what John remembered them as; himself being overly cheerful, and Sherlock going along with it reluctantly.

“And here’s Sherlock, looking happy to be here,” his onscreen voice said brightly, before a person behind Sherlock wandered towards them and the video cut off suddenly. John rolled his eyes.

Sherlock was right; he was a bit ridiculous. He vowed to care less when filming in public, absently clicking on the next video.

“John has been in the fitting rooms for approximately seven hours now,” came Sherlock’s sarcastic drawl, the camera coming slowly into focus on half of his friend’s face. John sat up in surprise, unaware that Sherlock had done some vlogging of his own. “He rudely left me sitting out here,” continued Sherlock, “assuming that I had nothing better to do than waste my life waiting around for him to finish trying on ghastly shirts.”

John snorted, leaning forward as he watched.

“Nearly finished,” came John’s faint voice suddenly from off camera, and Sherlock’s eyes flickered away. The camera turned to face the fitting room doors, moving lower until John assumed it must have been sitting in Sherlock’s lap, which is why he hadn’t noticed it.

“I should hope so,” said Sherlock as John emerged from one of the doors.

“Er, Sherlock,” John said rather awkwardly, “is this one alright?”

Sherlock was silent for long enough that John squirmed just watching it, despite the fact that he already knew what his friend would say.

“Adequate,” came Sherlock’s response eventually, and the shot cut off abruptly as John’s shoe came sailing towards the screen.

John was glad he had missed, now that he knew his camera had been at risk.

He was curious now, clicking quickly on the next clip. This time they were in a different set of fitting rooms, and the shot came on halfway through some sort of monologue by Sherlock, the camera aimed steadily at one of the fitting room doors.

“… thinks clothes don’t matter, but of course they do. Clothes are your business card, a greater judge of character than any other type of first impression. They demonstrate how you think of yourself, and how others should think of you too, and as soon as John puts that sweater on, he will quickly come to realize that I was right. As I always am. Really, he should just listen to me about every great life decision. Or-”
Sherlock’s voice cut off mid eye-roll-inducing-rant as the door opened, and John stepped out.

“See now, isn’t that better?” Sherlock said, his voice full of self-satisfaction. On-screen John looked at him in surprise.

“What are you doing?”

There was a low rumble of laughter, and the camera shifted slightly.

“I thought you might like the moment you realize I’m always right to be on record.”

John was startled by the expression on his own face as his on-screen self burst into laughter. There was a warm look of affection that he wasn’t sure he had ever seen himself make before. Especially not when in the process of being mocked.

Midway through his laugh, there was a strange noise from behind the camera, and the view of John tilted again. The camera moved back slightly, and he could hear himself asking what was wrong. Sherlock’s voice was oddly disjointed when he spoke.

“Nothing,” he said. “Just that sweater. It... doesn’t suit you.”

The camera kept running for just long enough to see John’s face fall embarrassingly quickly, before the screen went black.

John frowned. Watching that back had been even more awkward than it had been to actually live it.

He quickly clicked through the next few videos- his own quick attempts at filming, followed by Sherlock’s take-over. He laughed as he watched the footage his friend had taken without his knowing, shaking his head at Sherlock’s constant muttered commentary. He distantly wondered why he took so much amusement from being made fun of, why watching the clips Sherlock had filmed for him made him smile so widely his cheeks hurt, why Sherlock’s voice was as comfortingly familiar as that of his mother’s.

Perhaps they really did spend too much time together, as his teammates on the university rugby team were so fond of claiming.

But of course Sherlock was familiar, he reasoned. He was his best friend- his flatmate for crying out loud. It would be absurd if they didn’t spend a large amount of time together.

The sudden loud shout from his computer made him jump, his attention landing back on the screen in front of him.

The camera began to move forward before John even realized what he was watching.

The view was sideways, and bouncing with Sherlock’s movements, but it came to a halt as they rounded the corner, blurry as it tried to focus.

No.

The screen grew slowly clearer, until it finally focused on the two men in masks who were occupying a corner of the screen. Three people stretched out on their stomachs were visible on the other side.

John felt his heartbeat stutter.
Sherlock had filmed the bloody robbery.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Sherlock is delighted to discover he had inadvertently filmed the entire robbery. John is... not so delighted. But he decides to use Sherlock’s enthusiasm to his own advantage.

Of course, when that enthusiasm finds him dragged to a strange apartment building in the middle of London at 3am, he’s not quite so sure of his decision.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the lack of a chapter last week! It was Easter, I got busy, I got distracted, I had to work a ton, I forgot... so many excuses. But here is chapter 3 finally! I hope you enjoy it.

Next week I will be in Amsterdam, so I can’t promise an update unfortunately, but after that it should be more regular. Please stick with me :)

Let me know what you think of this installment!! xx

“Get on the fucking floor,” a man yelled, pointing a gun directly in their direction, and John stared, transfixed at the video on his computer screen. He didn’t particularly want to watch this happen again, but he couldn’t take his eyes away. Why the hell hadn’t he seen a man pointing a gun at them when it happened?

The camera shifted again and John realized that, of course, his view had been blocked by Sherlock’s body.

“John,” hissed Sherlock, and, watching from the safety of the sofa, John could now hear the momentary panic in his friend’s voice.

As the rest of the scene unfolded, and John witnessed the crime for the second time that day, he could feel all the tension and terror of the moment begin to wind through his body.

He hadn’t allowed himself to feel it when it had happened, intent on keeping calm and making sure he and Sherlock would make it home safely. And afterwards, well there had been no point in panicking then, had there? They were safe, and he had to keep Sherlock from being sent to prison for sheer dick-headedness. He had blocked it out while giving his statement, while walking home, while making tea- he had no reason to worry anymore, so why bother?

They hadn’t been hurt, nothing had happened to them. Even the girl who had been hit was
absolutely fine.

So why were John’s hands shaking now, his pulse beating so loudly in his ears that he could barely hear the film still playing on his computer?

He couldn’t stop watching. He remembered how, throughout the entire ordeal, he had been imagining the worst. Imagining a gun going off, a puddle of blood seeping into the floor around him, a life slowly and quietly being extinguished. He had imagined going home to an empty flat afterwards, trying to adjust to life without a flatmate. Without a best friend.

He barely noticed when Sherlock re-entered the flat, but he did his best to hide his reaction to the video from his friend.

Sherlock was talking enthusiastically about something, but his voice cut off suddenly when he turned towards John, who was sitting as still as he could on the couch, eyes glued to the screen.

“John?” Sherlock’s voice was tinged with concern, and John managed a nod in his direction.

“Yup,” he responded, hoping it was an appropriate answer.

And then Sherlock was sitting beside him, leaning close to watch the video too.

Of course he was. Sherlock had loved every moment of the event.

“That was the moment I knew they weren’t going to hurt us,” Sherlock murmured, pointing as the camera tilted again, and a distinct exhale could be heard from his on-screen self.

John could hear himself saying something on the video, but he forced himself to focus on Sherlock’s voice beside him instead as he continued speaking, low and calm in his ear, his weight pressing comfortingly into John’s side.

Sherlock swept back into the flat, satisfied at having carried out his mission. It was only when he was halfway through extolling the merits of genial landladies that he noticed John was being rather strange. He hadn’t even responded when Sherlock declared their own landlady “not entirely dull.”

Instead he was sitting at his computer, staring at it as if it held the story of his own death.

“John?” asked Sherlock quickly, growing even more alarmed when his friend’s eyes didn’t even lift to meet his.

“Yup,” John nodded absently, still staring almost blankly at the computer screen.

Sherlock moved forward to see what he was looking at and- oh. _Oh._

He had filmed the robbery.

How extraordinary. This was absolutely _wonderful._ Now he would be able to study the event in detail before going to meet Inspector Lestrade the next day. It was- Sherlock cut off his own thoughts when he remembered John.

John had been tense ever since leaving the store, and re-watching the crime unfold before him had clearly tipped him over the edge into some kind of post-event-related stress reaction.
Sherlock may not be well versed in matters of sentiment and human interaction, but he could damn well counteract the effects of a panic attack or some such episode.

He sat down quickly beside John, leaning heavily into his side to provide reassuring contact. He ran through various possibilities of assistance, trying to gauge how John would react to each. He didn’t seem overly distressed, just somewhat anxious. It could well be he was merely reliving the event in his mind, taking it to new extremes as he watched.

Sherlock shifted his attention to what was taking place on the screen.

“That was the moment I knew they weren’t going to hurt us,” he said, unthinkingly, pointing at the screen.

John’s head turned slightly at the words, and Sherlock decided to keep going. To provide a distraction.

“The way they held themselves indicated that they had complete control over themselves, and were in no way intending to begin a shooting frenzy. We were safe.”

John’s body relaxed a little, his weight leaning towards Sherlock.

“In any case, had they broken character and shot in our direction, the way in which I placed my body would have blocked you from the bullet, thereby protecting you from any harm.”

Sherlock felt John freeze against him, and he held his breath. Was that the wrong thing to say?

John turned towards him, eyebrows raised, a slightly wild look in his eyes.

“Which didn’t happen, obviously,” Sherlock continued quickly. “Because we were both safe the entire time.”

“But you would have died,” said John, his voice steady.

Sherlock paused, considering the possibility.

“I suppose,” he supplied finally. “Depending on the trajectory of the bullet, and the time it took for medics to arrive on scene.”

John laughed.

Odd.

His expression didn’t look amused.

“I didn’t die, John,” Sherlock said slowly, suddenly wondering whether his friend was on the verge of something dramatic. “I didn’t even get hurt. No one did, really. Everyone is fine. We’re fine.”

John nodded along with what Sherlock said, but his face still looked stricken with some thought.

What was the problem? Was it something Sherlock had said? Was it- was John really this upset over the possibility that Sherlock might have died, had something which didn’t happen happened?

“I’m fine,” Sherlock repeated after a long moment of silence. “I’m fine, John.”

Those words seemed to cause John to snap out of whatever he had been on the verge of falling
“Right,” he said, blinking suddenly and shaking his head slightly. “Right. You’re fine. I’m fine. We’re all fine. Everything is fine.”

“Yes,” agreed Sherlock helpfully, unsure of how to react now that John was being relatively normal again.

They both looked at each other for a rather awkward moment, before Sherlock glanced down and prodded at one of John’s hands with his index finger. He made his voice teasing when he spoke.

“You’re shaking. You were scared for me.”

“I’m not,” said John, clenching his hands into a fist to steady them. “I wasn’t.”

“Mhm,” replied Sherlock, raising an eyebrow at his friend, allowing a hint of a smile to peek through on his lips.

John held steady for another second, before he huffed out a laugh, shaking his head and leaning back against the sofa cushions.

“Alright yes, I was worried. I didn’t know where I’d be able to find another sarcastic whingebag with a superiority complex.”

Sherlock felt his smile widen just a touch.

“I’m sure my brother would have sufficed in a pinch.”

John laughed for real now, and Sherlock allowed himself to relax. Everything was fine. John had said so.

Just as Sherlock was about to lean back towards the computer, eager to see just how helpful the videos could be, there was a soft rap at the door. It opened before either of them could respond, and Mrs. Hudson, their elderly landlady and downstairs neighbour, poked her head in.

“Hello loves,” she said fondly, bustling in without invitation. John stood up to greet her, offering her tea immediately, and Sherlock wondered where it was, exactly, that everyone seemed to have learned this.

He was quite certain the importance of hospitality had never been mentioned to him.

Then again, his mother had been an impeccable hostess. So, on second thought, it was altogether more likely that he had just deleted it all.

“I shan’t stay but a mo, John, thank-you. I just wanted to bring this up. I was cleaning out some of my storage space, and found this. It must have belonged to my late husband, but it’s still rather nice. I thought I’d pop it up here in case either of you wanted it!”

She held up a sweater cheerily, and Sherlock looked away to stifle a smile at the way John leaned forward sharply to study it.

“That is nice,” he said, his voice slow. “Perfect condition too.”

“Yes, well my husband was a bit of a neat freak,” Mrs. Hudson replied with a wave of her hand.

“Also a drug smuggler,” replied John drily. “Fancy taste for someone like that.”
“You can never tell what someone is truly like by their sweater, John,” Mrs. Hudson replied seriously. “That’s what I always say.”

“Right,” said John politely, quickly taking the sweater when she thrust it at him for the third time.

“Anyway, I’ll be going then loves!” chirped Mrs. Hudson, her face bright again. “Cheerio!”

When she had gone, as abruptly and happily as she had come, John turned to Sherlock with one eyebrow raised.

“Funny, that,” he said.

“Hmm?” Sherlock asked, staring out the window as if intrigued by something taking place outside.

“I was just saying, it’s interesting that Mrs. Hudson’s husband seems to have shopped at the same stores you do.”

“Oh? I’d hardly call that interesting John.”

“Sherlock.”

Sherlock refused to turn around.

“Yes?”

“I can’t keep this.”

“Take it back down to Mrs. Hudson then, or throw it out,” Sherlock said in an exasperated tone, flinging both arms in the air. “It’s of no interest to me.”

“I.”

“John,” said Sherlock, turning around suddenly. “Mrs. Hudson wanted to give it to you. No one asked her to, now did they? I suggest you take it as what it was intended to be and nothing else.”

John was staring at him, clutching the blue sweater tightly.

“And what’s that?”

Sherlock shrugged.

“A gift to a friend. I’m going for a walk.”

And with that he left, before John could protest again. Before the strange feeling that had descended onto Sherlock’s chest upon seeing the look on John’s face as he held the sweater had time to take hold.

John spent the next half hour convincing himself that money was just money, and Sherlock’s money was absolutely none of his business, and that if his flatmate wished to spend nearly 200 quid on him, that was his prerogative. Absolutely fine.

Except…
Bloody hell that was a lot of money.

John had just taken out his phone to text Sherlock, to tell him that he better not have thrown out the receipt, because he was going to return the jumper, when a text buzzed.

I’m hungry. –SH

John snorted at the abrupt statement, the sweater momentarily forgotten.

And…?

And… I’m hungry. I thought that to be a rather stand alone statement. –SH

John turned off his keyboard’s autocorrect, knowing it was the quickest way to irritate his friend.

well whag do u wnt me to do about i8

The response was immediate. Sherlock was somehow both incredibly hard to read, and very predictable.

It’s rather astonishing that you get any views at all on your blog, if that’s the kind of shoddy writing you’re prone to. –SH

ur a prck :)

Ha. Ha. –SH

John rolled his eyes, flicking his keyboard settings back to normal. Sherlock was obviously bored, wherever he was.

Where are you?

Out. –SH

Hope you have your wallet then, I’m eating without you

Why?????? –SH

John laughed at the dramatic response.

Because my roommate is out

I’m coming home. Don’t be ridiculous. I hope you ordered Chinese. –SH

I did, it was delicious

John ambled to the kitchen to grab the Chinese takeaway menu from the counter. If Sherlock was willingly asking for food, John wasn’t going to say no.

When Sherlock didn’t reply immediately, he typed again.

I spilled some of the sweet and sour chicken on the couch but luckily I had that ratty old sweater from Mrs. Hudson to mop up the mess

John was just about to dial the takeaway number when another message popped up on his screen.

I know you’re joking John, and I don’t find you funny in the slightest. –SH
John heard the front door open downstairs while he was finishing up the order, and then Sherlock’s long, even strides made their way up the stairs.

John hung up the phone as Sherlock entered the flat, and hid a smile as his friend’s eyes flicked around the room.

“You didn’t eat,” Sherlock said finally, his eyes moving to John’s.

John raised an eyebrow.

“I’m very good at cleaning up.”

Sherlock looked at him for a moment with narrowed eyes, before a corner of his lip twitched, and he turned away, sinking dramatically onto the sofa instead.

“Really, John,” he said drily, “you should switch that blog of yours for a comedy show. You’re a riot.”

“I’ll take it under consideration,” John said, still hiding a smile. He saw Sherlock’s eyes dart to the jumper, folded on the chair, and felt a strange flash of emotion when his friend’s shoulders relaxed slightly. Did Sherlock really think John would have used it to mop up a spill? “I ordered you fried rice and ginger beef.”

Sherlock looked up at him, and nodded wordlessly, and that was that.

By the time they had both eaten, and John managed to make a small dent in his endless course assignments, his head was pounding with exhaustion.

He stood up and stretched his arms above his head, joints popping with the motion. Sherlock started from his spot on the sofa and glared at him in annoyance.

“‘Night,” John said, stifling a yawn. Sherlock hummed in reply. It was only when John had reached the stairs that his friend spoke.

“Don’t forget we have to go to Scotland Yard tomorrow.”

John paused, one foot on the stairs.

“Right,” he said after a moment, clearing his throat. “You know, Sherlock, I think the inspector was just being polite.”

He heard Sherlock stand up behind him, striding towards him quickly.

“What do you mean?”

John turned, and the frown on Sherlock’s face made him put his hands up in what he hoped was a calming manner. His friend’s expression would be frightening, if John hadn’t seen it before.

“Why do you think that? What did he say?”

Sherlock’s frown deepened as he spoke, stopping just a foot away from the bottom step where John was standing.
John watched his friend for a beat, tempted to savour the moment. Sherlock was superior and condescending a good majority of the time, which would get old very quickly if John didn’t know how to ignore it. And if it wasn’t interspersed with moments like this.

Sherlock chewed at his cheek as he studied John’s face.

He was worried.

It had taken Sherlock most of their freshmen year to admit that John, just possibly, was better versed in human interaction than he. It had been like pulling teeth, but finally, miraculously, he had begun to defer to John in matters of socialization.

He was getting better, John had to admit. Freshman year had been patching up one long awkward misunderstanding after another, but his friend seemed to be getting the hang of judging what might be considered going too far. Now the trick was getting him to care.

“John?” Sherlock prompted, and John bit back a smile.

“I’m quite certain I’m of little use to Scotland Yard, Sherlock,” he said after a moment.

Sherlock’s features relaxed, and he sighed.

“Oh, is that all? I thought you were referring to the inspector’s invitation to his office tomorrow.”

“I was,” John said slowly, and Sherlock’s eyebrows knit together again.

“But-” Sherlock suddenly broke off as understanding flooded his face, and he rolled his eyes with a huff. “I see. I thought you meant they didn’t need my assistant. Which is in fact very much not true. You do, however, have every intention of not accompanying me to Scotland Yard tomorrow. Don’t deny it, I can see it in your face. You believe they were being polite in extending the invitation to you. You’re not mistaken- well done John, excellent deduction- but you have quite typically missed one very important fact.”

John debated turning around and going to bed without another word, but settled for giving Sherlock a blank look of indifference.

“And what’s that,” he said, his voice inflectionless.

“That I won’t go there without you.”

John straightened at that. Sherlock’s tone was careless, the words flung out as if they were obvious, but his jaw was tight, and one hand was bunched into the side of his dressing gown. Sherlock was nervous.

John wondered, for a brief moment, if it was wise to allow himself to be Sherlock’s security blanket, before dismissing the thought immediately.

“Why?”

Sherlock huffed for a moment, and John let him. He knew he wasn’t going to get the real answer, but it was nice to bait his friend sometimes. He knew Sherlock wasn’t as unfeeling as everyone said, just emotionally barred. John found a vaguely twisted sense of enjoyment in watching his friend struggle with unravelling his own emotions. It was only fair, he told himself, considering all the times Sherlock had referred to his intelligence as “incredibly inferior.”

“Brilliance shines brighter when contrasted with dark.”
“Goodnight, Sherlock,” John said, immediately turning and heading upstairs.

“They’ll kick me out if you don’t come,” Sherlock amended quickly, and John turned to face him again, biting back a smile.

Sherlock looked as if the words pained him.

“I’m sure you’re under no illusions as to people’s opinion of me,” Sherlock said, rolling his eyes.

“They generally think you’re a bit of a twat,” responded John calmly, and bit his cheek in amusement at Sherlock’s irritated glance.

“I’ve no time for pleasantries, and that seems to irk people. I’ve found that I am much less likely to be summarily dismissed if I have a more… socially pleasant counterbalance.”

“Is that so?” John asked cheerfully, enjoying the way Sherlock was fidgeting uncomfortably where he stood. “So what you’re saying, basically, is that you need me to come with you.”

“I don’t need any-” Sherlock responded immediately, but the pained look on his face as he bit back his words stopped John from leaving. “Yes,” Sherlock said after a long moment. His words were clipped, and his face showed just how little he enjoyed asking for help. “It would be rather advantageous to me if you were to come along tomorrow.”

“Please,” John said, and Sherlock clenched his teeth. “Please, John,” John prompted pleasantly, “please will you help me be more likeable.”

“Please,” Sherlock got out finally, and John clicked his tongue.

“I’m sure you can do better than that,” he said in mock disappointment, trying to see how far he could get. “Please John, I need you John, you’re incredible John, I can’t do anything without-”

Sherlock stepped closer to the stairs.

“Please John,” he said quietly. “I need you, John.”

John’s words died in his throat. He stared down at his friend in surprise, and then in slight consternation when he realized Sherlock meant it.

John’s stare flashed down to the way his friend’s hands were still knotted up in his dressing gown, the way his finger was tapping mindlessly against his thigh… the way his eyes stayed unblinkingly on John’s.

John’s eyes met his.

Sherlock stared at him fixedly, his eyes wide and serious. John swallowed hard, and Sherlock’s gaze flicked down to his throat then back up. The look sent a flash of something painful through John’s chest. For a split second, he couldn’t breathe.

Then Sherlock licked his bottom lip. The movement was fast enough that John wouldn’t have noticed it had he not been staring at his friend so intently.

It was enough to break whatever strange moment they had stumbled into though, and John cleared his throat, looking away.

“Yes, well,” he said, clearing his throat a second time for good measure. “Right. Okay.”
Sherlock didn’t move.

“Only since you asked so nicely,” he added quickly, and Sherlock’s posture shifted into a more comfortably familiar picture of irritation.

Sherlock wheeled around, stalking back to the sofa without a second glance. John laughed just a beat too late and turned back towards his bedroom.

“Goodnight!” he called down the stairs, his voice overly cheerful.

There was no response.

John was jolted out of sleep by a thud downstairs, followed by a loud exclamation. He glanced at his phone and groaned, tempted to cover his head with his pillow and go back to sleep. The footsteps heading rapidly up the stairs, however, seemed to have other ideas.

The door burst open without preamble, and John pulled his covers over his head.

“Go away,” he said, and he heard Sherlock hesitate in the doorway.

“But John-” he began, and John cut him off with another groan.

“No. Whatever it is, I don’t care. It’s 2:30 in the morning. Go away.”

“John-”

“No, Sherlock.”

“John, I know how to find them.”

The barely hidden excitement in Sherlock’s low, insistent voice made John pause. His brain was still working at half-speed, so he pulled the blanket down far enough to see his flatmate. Sherlock’s eyes were bright, the shadows underneath just beginning to be noticeable. His hair was wild, as if he had been running his hands through it all night. He probably had.

“Find who?” John asked, curiosity getting the better of him.


John sat up at that, staring at Sherlock.

“What the hell are you on about?”

“I can find them,” Sherlock said, and he bounced a little on his feet. “I can find them, and bring them to Scotland Yard before anyone even knows what’s happening.”

John’s mind was racing.

“You can’t seriously be suggesting that you go and chase down a pack of criminals, on your own, in the middle of the night.”

Sherlock scoffed, shaking his head impatiently.

“Of course not, John, don’t be ridiculous.”
John huffed out a relieved breath, and slid back down to his pillow.

“Well good. Then please get-”

“I’m suggesting you come with me.”

John froze, counting backwards from ten before he let himself respond.

“No.”

Sherlock eyed him warily, then shrugged.

“Very well. I’ll go on my own then. Goodnight.”

John rolled his eyes.

“Goodnight.”

Sherlock nodded and turned, closing the door firmly behind him. John heard his footsteps fade away as he made his way downstairs. There was a brief silence, and then the front door to the flat closed loudly.

“Oh bloody hell,” John snapped into the darkness, untangling himself awkwardly from his covers as he jumped out of bed. He pulled a pair of jeans on, and grabbed a sweater from where it lay on his desk, before opening the door and running downstairs. By the time he had yanked his sweater on, and managed to locate an old pair of running shoes, he was sure he’d have to chase Sherlock down through all of London, but when he opened the front door his flatmate was standing at the bottom of the stairs, staring up at him from the building’s entrance.

“Shall we?” Sherlock said mildly, opening the front door and gesturing outside. John stared at him for only a second before steeling himself and joining his friend, ignoring the knowing smirk Sherlock was doing an abysmal job at hiding.

“Here,” the taller boy said, tossing something towards John. John reached out to catch it on reflex, and felt his heart falter a moment when he saw it was his camera.

“What the hell Sherlock? You could have broken it.”

“But I didn’t.”

John narrowed his eyes slightly, but Sherlock wasn’t looking at him anymore, so he decided to ignore him instead.

John stood silently while Sherlock hailed a taxi, saying nothing as he gave an unknown address to the driver. They sat in silence together for several minutes before Sherlock spoke up.

“You know John, it really would be easier if we could skip the whole charade where you pretend you don’t follow me everywhere.”

“Shut up.”

Sherlock, quite uncharacteristically, shut up.

Ten minutes later John found himself staring up at a rather nice apartment building in the middle of London.

“Sherlock,” he began tiredly, but his friend was already making his way to the intercom by the
front door, only pausing to throw a demanding “start filming” over his shoulder.

John rolled his eyes, debating whether to leave the camera shoved deep into his pocket, or to take advantage of the fact that Sherlock was jumping into the whole vlogging idea with both feet. The circumstances were a little off, perhaps, but John was sure he could spin the enthusiasm into regular day-to-day filming. Maybe.

John took the camera from his pocket, and panned the street while Sherlock dialled a number into the intercom.

The buzzer rang three times before a voice came crackling over the speaker, and John pointed the camera over to Sherlock.

“Hello?”

“Annie?” Sherlock responded, and John whipped his head around to stare at him. He had never heard Sherlock speak like that, sounding so open, and anxious, and… young.

“Who is this?” the girl, whoever she was, sounded suspicious.

“It’s Aaron. Aaron Hooper. Molly’s little brother?”

John opened his mouth to inquire just when his chemistry project partner had acquired a brother, and why exactly that brother was Sherlock, but Sherlock shoved a hand over John’s mouth.

“Molly’s brother?” the girl still didn’t sound friendly- and who could blame her, it was 3am- but she sounded slightly less likely to call the police now, which John was grateful for. He was sure that would change quite quickly. “I didn’t know Molly had a brother.”

“Of course she has a brother,” Sherlock said with a small little laugh just verging on hysteria. “I’m her brother.”

There was a pause. John wasn’t sure whether he should hope that the girl wouldn’t fall for the clear ruse, or that she would.

“Right. Well… what are you doing here in the middle of the night?”

“Yeah,” said Sherlock, his face twisting in regret. John stared at him. “I’m so sorry. It’s just that I went out with some friends tonight- well, not friends really, because I got drunk, and they left me at the club, and I didn’t know what to do, because my parents will murder me if they knew where I was, and that I’ve been drinking. And I was going to call Molly to come get me, but then I realized she left her phone in my pocket when she wore my coat this morning, and her last text was your new address, and it was just down the street, so I figured- well I figured if my sister hangs out with you, you must be wonderful, because she’s wonderful, and- and-” Sherlock’s voice was thick with unshed tears and panic. John didn’t know whether to be terrified, or to applaud. “And I just didn’t know where else to go. I’m so sorry,” Sherlock’s voice faded into a whisper, and there was a long silence. Finally a sigh came over the speaker.

“I’m in 404. You can sleep on my couch. But if you puke on anything, I’m calling your parents.”

“Thank-you,” Sherlock breathed. There was another pause, and then the door buzzed open. Sherlock grasped the handle and walked inside confidently, glancing over his shoulder to make sure John made it in before the door locked behind them.

When John caught up to him at the lifts, Sherlock’s smirk was too much to ignore.
“What the hell was that?”

“What?” asked Sherlock innocently, stepping into the lift as the doors opened.

“That little boy lost routine. Where the hell even are we?”

Sherlock glanced at him.

“We’re visiting Annie.”
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Sherlock and John solve the case.

Chapter Notes

Guess who's terrible at regular updates? (Moi!)

Turns out life's distracting, who knew.

Sorry about that!!! I guess I can't promise to update every week (clearly), but I can and DO promise that this fic will 100% get finished! I love it too much to even think of dropping it partway through. So please stick with me :) :) xx

John turned off the camera as the lift began to rise. Sherlock flicked him an irritated glance.

“Make sure you film when we’re inside.”

“Why?”

Sherlock didn’t respond, and John didn’t press him to. He did, however, turn the camera back on Sherlock once they had left the lift and made their way to apartment 404.

Sherlock knocked twice, and the door opened almost immediately.

The girl inside looked strangely familiar. She opened her mouth to say something, but stopped abruptly when she saw them standing there.

“What’s going on?” she said finally, her voice only vaguely wary.

“My mummy and daddy will be ever so mad at me, won’t you let me in?” Sherlock deadpanned, and the girl’s face hardened.

“What the hell?”

John nudged Sherlock aside and put on the most charming smile he could muster.

“We just want to talk, okay? Molly Hooper really is a friend of mine,” he added, hoping the connection Sherlock had mentioned wasn’t a bluff.

The girl eyed them warily before stepping back and motioning for them to come in.
“I’m only saying yes because I know who you are,” she added warningly, and John shot her a surprised glance. He was sure she was familiar, but enough that she would know him too?

Sherlock didn’t seem at all affected by her admission. He strode inside the flat, glancing around with a highly satisfied expression.

“Beautiful place,” he intoned, and Annie scrubbed a hand over her face.

“Yeah, okay. I hope you didn’t come here to discuss real estate.”

“Is it new?” Sherlock continued without showing signs of hearing her, and the girl flicked him an irritated glance.

“Yeah, I moved in last week.”

“Looks expensive for a student,” Sherlock responded, and she hesitated. John glanced between them, not sure what was happening.

“A little,” she shrugged finally. “I work a lot.”

“Ah yes,” said Sherlock, a slight smile creeping onto his face. “Where is it you work again? Tesco’s, was it?”

Annie’s face froze, and John turned to Sherlock so quickly he nearly dropped the camera.

Sherlock’s expression had faded back into a veneer of indifference, but his eyes glinted dangerously as he took a step closer to the girl. John felt rather sorry for her.

“They must pay awfully well for a part-time job, hm?”

“I solved it,” Sherlock said without unnecessary preamble, holding a memory stick out as he strode through Detective Inspector Lestrade’s office door.

The man jumped, looking up from his desk with an irritatingly startled expression. Why didn’t people just pay attention?

“Bloody hell you scared me.”

The inspector paused, his tired eyes – worked late last night, came in early this morning, little to no personal life – focusing as he seemed to notice Sherlock properly.

“I know you. Why do I know you?”

Sherlock bit his tongue, trying to remember that, technically, this man was a superior. Not his superior, but someone’s. And, according to John, that kind of thing mattered.

“Sherlock Holmes,” he said, plastering a smile onto his face, “and John Watson. From the burglary at Tesco’s yesterday.”

“Ah yes,” the man’s face cleared. “Where’s your friend?”

Sherlock shifted impatiently, gesturing to his left, but his response died in his throat when he realized that John was not, in fact, there.
“He—” Sherlock began with a frown, but cut himself off when the shouting from somewhere behind him finally registered. He listened for a moment to the indistinct noises and then sighed. “He seems to have been caught up.”

“What—”

Lestrade’s question was interrupted by the timely appearance of an angry looking – *extreme overconfidence to compensate for self-doubt, power complex, sexually and emotionally frustrated, expecting a raise that will never come* – woman.

“Sir, this *kid,*” she began, gesturing furiously towards Sherlock, who smiled blandly at her, “and his friend just barged their way inside, demanding to see you. Anderson managed to stop the other one, but this one seems to think you were expecting him,” she scoffed, waiting for the inspector to laugh along with her.

Instead the man wiped a hand tiredly over his face and stood up.

“Yes, that’s right, Sergeant Donovan. Please have John Watson sent up, if you don’t mind.”

The woman’s face fell comically quickly, and she sent Sherlock a curious glance. He winked at her, and she narrowed her eyes.

“Of course, Sir,” she said finally, turning to leave.

Lestrade waited for her to leave, before closing the door behind her.

“Well then,” he said, gesturing vaguely to a chair, “get on with it.”

Sherlock frowned, making no move to sit down.

“We’re waiting for John, you said it yourself.”

The man looked back at him with surprise, then settled himself back behind his desk.

“I thought he was just…” the man trailed off when Sherlock’s frown deepened. John was not *just* anything. “Right, right. We’re waiting for John.”

They fell into silence.

“At least sit down,” Lestrade said after a few moments. Sherlock considered it, but decided to stay where he was. Standing offered him a better vantage point.

Lestrade stared at him warily, then looked away, pretending to read something on his computer screen. Sherlock could see the man’s increasing discomfort, but he did nothing to assuage it.

Finally, four minutes and twenty seven seconds later, Sherlock lifted his head from where he had been studying Lestrade’s shoes (*expensive but old, well kept, probably a gift from someone important who is no longer in his life- romantic partner possible, family member more likely*).

“John’s here.”

The man looked up at him in surprise, opening his mouth to ask how exactly Sherlock knew that, when there was a hesitant knock on the door. Sherlock rolled his eyes and turned to pull it open.

“Really, John,” he said, stepping aside to let his friend in, “stop worrying. The door says Lestrade, how on earth could you be in the wrong place?”
John seemed about to speak, but stopped in favour of a brief glare in Sherlock’s direction, turning instead to address the detective behind him.

“Hello, Sir. So sorry for the interruption.”

“Not at all,” the man replied, and Sherlock was surprised that his voice held no trace of sarcasm. “It’s a pleasure. Come in. And please, for the love of god, would you both sit down?”

John glanced between them.

“Was he towering?”

Sherlock crossed his arms in irritation when Lestrade laughed.

“That’s one word for it.”

John turned and sat firmly in one of the chairs in front of Lestrade’s desk, staring pointedly at Sherlock until he finally rolled his eyes and sat down beside the blonde boy.

There was a brief pause, during which both John and Lestrade shifted in such a way that Sherlock supposed the situation must be somewhat awkward. When it appeared that neither of them were going to be helpful, Sherlock sighed, and held the memory stick out to the inspector.

“What’s this?” the man asked, staring at the stick but making no move to take it.

“Your case,” said Sherlock, placing it on the desk and nudging it forward.

Lestrade looked between Sherlock and John for a moment, before shrugging and leaning over to slot the stick into a USB port on his computer. He clicked on the first video file that appeared, and settled back in his chair. Sherlock waited. It only took Lestrade eleven seconds to realize what he was watching, and when he raised his wide eyes to Sherlock, the boy nodded, both in approval, and confirmation.

“This is-”

“Yes,” Sherlock interrupted him.

“You mean you-”

“Yes.”

John kicked his heel lightly, and Sherlock frowned, wondering whether interrupting a pointless conversation was one of those things he wasn’t supposed to do.

Lestrade paused the video.

“Hang on. You’re telling me that you two actually managed to film the robbery?”

Sherlock saw no reason to reconfirm something he had already confirmed twice – and which the man was perfectly capable of seeing with his own two eyes – so he stayed silent. John, however, was never one to pass up the opportunity to utilise his power of polite and inane conversation.

“Yes, sir. We were filming each other, just playing around, and Sherlock didn’t realize he left the camera on while everything was happening.”

Sherlock huffed at that, still annoyed with himself for not having been more intentional with the
filming.

Lestrade nodded slowly, eyes still wide, before turning back to the screen.

“That’s not the interesting part though,” Sherlock said quickly. “Watch the next ones.”

Lestrade raised an eyebrow at him, but complied. As he got further into the clips, his face grew more and more incredulous. When he reached the end of the final video, the office was plunged into silence. Sherlock tapped a finger impatiently against his leg, but stayed quiet after a warning glance from John.

“So,” Lestrade said finally, after weeks of silence, turning back to face the two boys. He looked as though he was floundering for words. “So,” he repeated. “You mean to say that you— you actually solved it.”

“Yes.”

“And not only did you solve it, you filmed it.”

“Correct,” Sherlock confirmed. There was a strange fluttering feeling in his chest, and he could feel a smile attempting to work itself over his face.

“And these two men,” continued Lestrade, turning the screen slightly towards them, “are currently sitting downstairs in a holding cell.”

“They are.”

The detective blinked rather stupidly at him for a moment, and then let out a long breath.

“How in the bloody hell did the pair of you manage all that in one night?”

The smile finally broke free, curling slowly across Sherlock’s lips.

Finally.

“After I realized I had filmed everything, I studied the footage carefully for anything I might have missed. It was then that I noticed that the girl, the cashier who was struck down, had a university pin stuck to her uniform. Our university. John was sleeping, but his lab partner, Molly Hooper, was not, so I sent her a picture of the girl in question using his phone.”

John turned to look at him then, most likely about to protest. Sherlock ignored him.

“It was quite a happy coincidence when she responded back saying she knew the girl well, and sent me her name and address. Her new address, which was situated in an area of London that no one on a student budget could ever dream of affording, suggesting she recently came into quite a large sum of money. It was only a matter of convincing her to admit to her involvement in the scheme – it seems the three men would bribe a cashier ahead of time at every location, targeting young girls in need of money and low on morals – and from there, based on her information, it was easy to track them down, film their confession, and bring them in. It was all quite simple, really.”

John flashed him a look, and Sherlock cleared his throat.

“I’m sure you would have found them too, eventually,” he added generously.

Lestrade stared at him. This was getting tiring.
“How did you get them to confess?”

Sherlock could see John very much not looking at him out of the corner of his own eye.

“We asked,” Sherlock supplied.

John cleared his throat. Lestrade narrowed his eyes. Sherlock widened his.

“How did you get them to confess?” the inspector asked after a pause. When neither boy responded, he sighed. “Fine. I won’t ask, but only if you can promise me nothing illegal took place.”

Lestrade’s face was completely serious. Sherlock hesitated, his ludicrously violent threats, and the men’s absurdly terrified responses to each flashing through his mind.

“I can promise you that nothing illegal actually took place.”

John kicked Sherlock’s ankle again, much harder this time.

“Nothing illegal,” John said quickly.

Lestrade studied both of them for a long moment.

“Before I go down and talk to those men, I need another promise from the both of you.”

Sherlock froze. No. No, no, no, he wouldn’t do it. He would not promise what Lestrade was about to ask him to promise.

“I need you both to promise that you will never, under any circumstance, go running around London chasing armed criminals on your own again.”

Sherlock relaxed. He opened his mouth to ask whether Lestrade wouldn’t be wiser to amend the obvious gaping loopholes in his desired promise, but then realized it was in his own interest to keep quiet about them.

“Of course, Sir,” John said immediately. Sherlock fought the urge to roll his eyes. Good John.

“Fine,” he responded, and could feel John looking at him in surprise.

“Right,” said Lestrade with a nod, standing up from his desk. Let me go book them, then. Thanks to the both of you.”

“Sir,” Sherlock said quickly, suddenly remembering, “seeing as the video footage belongs to us, can we post it online?”

Lestrade frowned, pausing where he was by the door.

“What?”

“John has a YouTube channel,” Sherlock replied, and he heard John make a small sound of surprise behind him. “We could edit out names, and blur faces if necessary.”

Lestrade considered it.

“I suppose that would be alright,” he answered slowly. “Let me get back to you on that. Don’t post anything before I’ve given you the go ahead, understood?”

Sherlock nodded, and boys both followed Lestrade out of his office, and downstairs to the front
desk.

“I’m afraid this is where I leave you,” the detective said, turning around to face them. “Here,” he said, holding out his card. “Take this. I have a feeling I’m going to regret giving you my number, but something tells me you would have found it even if I hadn’t.”

Sherlock’s lips twitched in a ghost of a smile as he pocketed the inspector’s card.

“Be safe, boys,” Lestrade said, turning to go. “And thank-you, sincerely, for all your help.”

They watched him leave, and then Sherlock rounded on John, passing him the camera from where it had been stowed in his coat pocket.

“Quick, film now, while no one’s looking.”

John looked at him with a bemused expression.

“Film what?”

Sherlock was struck, for just a moment, by how simple it must be to be John. In the nicest way possible.

“Film an ending for your vlog,” he said, trying to keep the “of course” out of his voice.

John raised his eyebrows, but took the camera from Sherlock. He turned it onto himself, but before he hit record, he frowned at Sherlock.

“Well get in here then,” he said, tugging at Sherlock’s arm.

Sherlock was too surprised to protest, and let himself be pulled into frame.

John pressed record.

“We’re here at New Scotland Yard now,” John began, his voice hushed. “And we’re almost certainly not supposed to be filming. But Sherlock solved the case, and we’ve talked to a detective inspector, and…” John trailed off. “And it’s all a bit insane, to tell the truth,” he finally said, laughing quietly. “Anything to add, Sherlock?”

“We,” said Sherlock shortly.

“What?” said John in his normal, off camera voice.

“We solved the case,” elaborated Sherlock. John’s eyes lit up, and he stared at him for a moment, a strange expression on his face, before turning back to the camera.

“We solved the case,” repeated John, his voice happy. *Because of Sherlock.* “And now we’re going to go, before we get caught and chased out by-”

As if someone had heard his words, there was a sudden, sharp “*Excuse me,*” from behind them –*Sergeant Donovan again* – and they both jumped in unison.

“Bye!” John said to the camera, his face caught between guilt and laughter. Before anyone could say anything else, they both turned and walked as quickly as they could for the front doors.

Once they were outside, Sherlock let out a deep breath he hadn’t known he’d been holding, and John leaned against the brick wall with a loud laugh.
The fluttering in Sherlock’s chest was threatening to explode out of him, and he turned to his friend.

“John.”

John looked over at him, still grinning.

“Yeah, Sherlock.”

“This is it.”

“This is what?”

Sherlock could feel the air, and the words, and the increasingly irritating fluttering feeling compounding inside him, and he felt like he needed to scream, or run, or burst into insane laughter. None of which were valid, or rational options.

“That was- that was incredible, John. We did it. We *did it*. We took a single, accidental piece of evidence, and from there we, we unravelled it all. We procured an answer where no one could find one. And I don’t… I don’t want to go back to any of those tedious classes ever again, I never want to hear a single word from another idiot professor’s mouth again. I just want to do *this*. This is it, this is it for me, John.”

Sherlock could feel himself babbling, but he couldn’t seem to stop the stream of words. John’s face was still bright, but he was studying Sherlock carefully.

“You want to be a detective?” John asked, but not in the way Mycroft would have said it, as if Sherlock had just asked to join the circus.

Sherlock shook his head.

“Detectives are idiots. The police are even worse. And they’re all caught up in ridiculous paperwork, and legalities.”

“And who likes paperwork and legalities?” John scoffed. Sherlock nodded, ignoring his friend’s tone.

“Exactly. I want to do the interesting part, the part where you uncover the truths in places no one thought to look. I want to be the person everyone else calls when they are unable to figure things out themselves.”

“So you want to be Batman.”

John smirked, as if he was being particularly clever. Sherlock ignored him.

“I want to be…” Sherlock’s mind was racing with the possibilities. The future had never looked anything but dull and mind-numbing, but now- now he was *excited*. “I want to be a consulting detective.”

John hesitated.

“Is that a thing?”

“No!” exclaimed Sherlock. “Isn’t that wonderful, John? I will literally be the world’s only consulting detective.”

John was staring at him, and Sherlock suddenly took note of his friend’s expression. It was the
one that said *Sherlock is doing something inexplicable again.* He never knew how to respond to that expression. It was usually followed up with a subtle shake of the head, and a quietly muttered “bit not good, Sherlock.”

Sherlock felt his chest deflate a little.

“Is that- is what I’m saying not good?”

John blinked, and then his eyes widened, and he shook his head.

“No, no. You’re fine. It’s… good. It’s good, Sherlock. I was just-” John laughed and shook his head again. “I was just thinking I haven’t seen you like that before.”

Sherlock felt strangely shy.

“Like what?”

“So excited. You’ve been so excited, all night.”

Sherlock wasn’t sure how to respond, so he didn’t.

If John didn’t approve of his plans, he would probably do them anyway. It would just take a lot of the fun out of it. He *wanted* John to approve.

John grinned up at him.

“Stop looking so anxious. It’s good, Sherlock. Okay? I’m glad you’re excited. And you *would* come up with a brand new career out of thin air.”

“John, we’re not even 50 meters above sea level, I would hardly call this *thin air.*”

The shorter boy responded by punching him in the arm.

“Whatever. Let’s go home, Mr. World’s Only Future Consulting Detective.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes, and turned towards the street to hail a taxi. He didn’t want John to see the smile that was creeping over his face.

“This was *it.* He had finally found it. Consulting Detective.

It was the first thing in his life that didn’t make him want to claw his eyes out at the thought of the future.

Well.

That and John Watson, of course.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Sherlock gets roped into doing a live show with John. He doesn't hate it.

Chapter Notes

I'm back!!

I could give lots of excuses for the - incredibly long and annoying - delay (like moving back to North America after a year in Europe, and starting 3 jobs, and looking for a place to live) but, let’s be honest, I was also just being a little lazy.

Also... I got a little lost with this story. I don't feel quite clever enough to write a long-lasting Sherlock Holmes story. But I love these characters in this setting, and I'm not giving up on it!! (Thank you to those of you who encouraged me to write more!)

Anyway, this is just a short chapter to let you guys (those of you who are still left) know that I haven't abandoned the story. There will be more, and there will be #johnlock. Promise.

Let me know what you think of this mini installment.. and if any of you have any ideas or prompts or suggestions I'd absolutely love to see them!

Thanks everyone, enjoy xx

Ps I'm posting this on my phone at work, so I hope all the formatting is okay! Let me know if it's not and I'll fix it when I'm home xx

“And we’re on!” John cheered from the sofa, adjusting his computer screen towards himself. “Hello again everyone. If you don’t know who I am – and why should you? – I’m John.”

Sherlock was in the kitchen, focusing on the human skin cells – John was entirely too careless with his epidermis – under his microscope, and not listening to his flatmate prattle on in the lounge.

“Sherlock, get in here!”

Sherlock closed his eyes.

What on earth had possessed him to agree to appear in this video?
“I’m busy.”

He could almost hear John’s eye roll.

“Well get unbusy, and come say hello. You promised.”

Sherlock clenched his teeth. He had promised. And while he wished the promise could be negated on the basis of the sheer annoyance factor in John’s needling, on-camera whine, he doubted anyone else would agree.

“Fine,” he snapped, straightening up and stalking over to where John sat. When he reached the sofa he paused, staring down at his friend, suddenly unsure.

John smiled up at him and patted the cushion beside him.

“Come on in, everyone wants to say hi.”

Sherlock sat cautiously beside John, peering at the computer screen on his lap. His and John’s faces stared back at him.

“Where are they?”

“Who?”

Sherlock frowned.

“The people.”

John laughed, and Sherlock fought the urge to stomp away.

“You can’t see them. They can see us, but we can only read what they’re typing. There’s too many of them for us to see them all.”

Sherlock raised an eyebrow.

“Ah,” he responded distastefully. This was ridiculous.

John turned back to the screen.

“So,” he said with a grin. “This is the famous Sherlock Holmes.”

“I’m famous?” Sherlock asked in surprise, and John nodded, winking at the camera.

“I doubt you find that hard to believe.”

Sherlock narrowed his eyes, but John had already moved on by the time he realized his friend was joking.

“This is your chance, everyone. I doubt he’ll do this again, so ask him whatever you want to know.”

“That seems a rather dangerous proposition,” Sherlock said dryly as he watched the questions begin to flood in. John laughed, and shrugged.
“Just pick some you like. You don’t have to answer everything, that’s impossible.”

“I don’t like any of them.”

John sighed.

“Alright, I’ll pick the questions, and you answer them. First one… what are you studying at uni?”

“I refuse to discuss something as disinteresting as that.”

“He’s doing a joint honours degree in Chemistry and Psychology,” John replied smoothly, nudging Sherlock with his elbow. “Yes, that’s an odd combination, and virtually impossible to complete. No, it’s not regularly offered. Yes, special exceptions were made. No, he won’t explain to anyone how he got it to happen. Yes, we’re all in awe.” John rattled the answers off without looking at the screen, his voice verging on sarcastic, and Sherlock’s mouth crooked up in a smile.

“Next,” continued John, “what do you want to do after uni?”

“I don’t see why I should tell them,” Sherlock sniffed, feeling rather flustered. Why ever had he agreed to this? “If they’d like to discuss the content on my website, however, I’d be happy to oblige.”

John looked at him for a moment, and then turned back to the screen.

“If any of you have read Sherlock’s website, do you have anything to ask him?”

Sherlock had the feeling John was humouring him, but he ignored it, staring instead at the comments that were still streaming across the chat box.

“There!” he said triumphantly, pointing at the various “I have,” “me,” “I did for some reason,” that were beginning to come in. “They’ve read it.”

“Yeah,” said John dryly, “and they want to know whether it’s a joke or not.”

Sherlock whipped his head to look at John, but his friend was smirking.

“There’s a good one,” John said, ignoring Sherlock’s glare. “Someone wants to know why you know so much about acid corrosion.”

Sherlock frowned doubtfully down at the screen as the question disappeared.

“Why wouldn’t I know about acid corrosion?”

John let out a sound that was something between a sigh and a laugh, and Sherlock had the distinct feeling that he was frustrated. He straightened up and cleared his throat.

“I take great interest in chemistry, and all the various components that subject has to offer. Studying acid corrosion offers an intriguing and useful way to not only discover the effects of different types and dilutions of acids, but also a possible method of disposing of a wide variety of objects, should the need ever arise.”

Sherlock glanced over at John, and was pleased to see that his friend was smiling again, no trace of irritation on his features.
“What kind of objects?” he asked in his regular voice, his eyes on Sherlock.

Sherlock shrugged.

“Many metals, weapons, traces of bodily fluid, plastic items, human flesh, hair, or co-”

“Sherlock!”

Sherlock jumped when John cut in with a bark. He glanced quickly at his friend, and was relieved that his face was mostly amused.

“He’s joking,” John said hurriedly, turning to grin at the computer, and Sherlock realized that he had probably not chosen the most appropriate subject to elaborate upon while broadcasting over the internet.

“Of course,” he said, plastering a smile over his face. “Chemistry is merely one of my courses of study, and acid corrosion happens to be a part of that. Any experiments I may conduct are strictly under health and safety guidelines, and condoned by the school.”

The lie flowed smoothly, and he heard John snort quietly beside him.

“Naturally,” his friend said with a decisive nod, and Sherlock fought back a smile. “Now that grumpy pants here is talking, let’s take some more questions,” John said brightly after a moment. Sherlock rolled his eyes. “Hmm, let’s see,” mused John. “Okay, Sherlock, let’s start with an easy one- what’s your favourite song?”

“Light in the Darkness,” Sherlock said immediately, and then froze, his heart leaping into his throat. John glanced at him warily, probably feeling him tense up, but kept his tone light.

“Who’s that by? I’ve never heard it.”

Sherlock cringed inwardly, cursing himself for naming one of his own compositions. He couldn’t very well respond with his own name, now, could he?

“Erm-” he began, kicking himself as he scrambled for a way out of it. “I meant-”

John crooked an eyebrow at him, and Sherlock wondered if he had guessed at the faux pas.

“I meant Dark Horse,” he blurted finally as his mind latched onto something vaguely similar in title, his voice loud in relief. John’s face remained blank, but Sherlock could have sworn he had heard something like that playing once when-

“By Katy Perry?” John suddenly said, a baffled grin spreading over his face, and Sherlock relaxed.

“Yes, John,” he said gravely, and John let out a snort of laughter.

“You’re telling me that your favourite song – you, Sherlock Holmes – is Dark Horse, by Katy Perry?”

Sherlock tried to bring up any information whatsoever on this Katy Perry figure, but he was drawing a blank. From John’s behaviour, she probably wasn’t in Sherlock’s typical repertoire.
“Yes,” he replied after a moment, the word coming out slightly more questioningly than he would have liked. John looked delighted, and Sherlock knew he’d be regretting this for quite some time. Only, as John laughed again, his eyes bright, and began elbowing Sherlock in time to what he could only assume were the lyrics to said song – oh god, why hadn’t he picked something, anything else – Sherlock couldn’t quite bring himself to care.

“Well-” said John finally after what felt like an age, “that’s given me quite a bit of ammunition for the future, so thank-you for that. Let’s have some more questions. Like… oh! That’s a good one. What’s your favourite Pokémon?”

“What’s a Pokémon?”

John laughed.

“Where are you even from?” he asked, and Sherlock blinked at him. John knew where he was from. What a strange question. He was opening his mouth to respond when John cut him off.

“I’m not literally asking, Sherlock,” he said, shaking his head. “I just can’t believe you’ve never heard of Pokémon.” He paused, cocking his head slightly. “Actually, on second thought, I definitely can. Next question.”

Sherlock was sure he should be getting annoyed with this bizarre, rather embarrassing, and entirely pointless exercise, but he realized with a start that he was – almost – enjoying himself. He was utterly confused, but he didn’t hate it. Especially not with how much enjoyment it was clearly giving John.

“Natasha wants to know if you’ll be her dad,” John said, cutting into his reverie, and it took a moment for Sherlock to piece together the sentence. When he had, it made just as little sense as before.

“Huh?” he asked eloquently, and John nodded firmly.

“My sentiments exactly. Say hi to Adam.”

“Hi to Adam,” Sherlock repeated dutifully, frowning, and John waved at the camera.

“Okay, we’ve been talking for nearly half an hour now, and answered approximately one question properly, so let’s quickly do a few more before we end it. There are-” John paused, a quick inhalation of breath causing Sherlock to look over at him. John’s eyes were wide. “Bloody hell,” John breathed, then cleared his throat. “Sorry,” he continued with a wince, “it’s just that there are nearly ten thousand people watching us now, and I really wasn’t expecting that.”

Sherlock raised his eyebrows in surprise, peering to look at where John was pointing on his screen.

“Who on earth is interested in watching this?” he asked in amazement at the number, which was slowly but surely climbing towards ten thousand. He bit his lip when the words left his mouth, but John shook his head.

“I have absolutely no idea. But,” he said quickly, drawing his shoulders back and flashing a smile to the computer, “we’re very grateful to everyone who is! Aren’t we, Sherlock?”
Sherlock pushed back the desire to say something derisive, and settled on a vague humming noise, which he hoped people would take for assent.

John was still talking, but Sherlock’s eyes were fixed on the viewer counter. Each of those numbers was a person. An idiot, to be sure, but a real, live, flesh and blood person. And they were all willingly watching Sherlock. Most of them were there for John, of course, but so far no one seemed to be complaining about Sherlock’s presence either. They were even asking him questions, and seemed interested in his response.

This was utterly unheard of.

Unless- unless John was shielding him from the unsavoury comments. There must be some, Sherlock was sure of it.

“Okay, Sherlock?” John asked, and Sherlock shook his head dazedly as he looked back at his friend. A flicker of concern passed over John’s face, but he continued. “Ten more questions, and then we’ll go, yeah?”

“Yeah,” repeated Sherlock, barely registering what John had said.

John continued with the questions, and Sherlock was sure he answered somewhat intelligently, but the remainder of his time was too focused on the chat section to be properly aware of what they were saying.

He could feel his eyes growing wider and wider as the comments streamed in, and the viewer count continued to rise.

There was some drivel, of course, but the comments were, for the most part, remarkably positive.

He kept reading, his eyes darting instinctively to the less than complimentary ones, but even those were clearly the work of bored and lonely pre-adolescents, eager for any kind of attention: shut up. / ur boring leave. / your roommate is so weirdd!! / they’re so shagging – Sherlock choked at the last one, feeling his cheeks heat up embarrassingly quickly. John turned to look at him questioningly, but he just shook his head, biting his tongue and praying John hadn’t noticed the comment.

“Anyway,” John said, turning back to the computer, “we’re going to go now! Thank-you so much to everyone watching- and to everyone who is now begging us to stay.” he added with a laugh. “You’re all very kind. But I think that’s just about all the ego inflation either of us needs for today. Especially this one,” he said with a jerk of his thumb in Sherlock’s direction. Sherlock rolled his eyes. “But make sure you keep checking my blog, because there’s something exciting coming soon! And I promise we’ll do another one of these. Hey, Sherlock?”

Sherlock hesitated, and his friend elbowed his side.

“Say you’ll do it,” John needled teasingly, “you know you’ve loved it.”

Sherlock glared at the boy beside him.

“Fine,” he said stiffly after a moment. “I suppose it hasn’t been altogether intolerable.”

John turned back to the screen with an expression of mock incredulity.
“You hear that, guys? We aren’t altogether intolerable to his majesty! What praise.”

Sherlock smiled begrudgingly as John gave him a mock little bow, and his friend smiled back widely.

“Say bye now,” he said, and Sherlock turned to the computer with a huff, suddenly feeling rather silly again.

“Goodbye,” he said, waving awkwardly, and John laughed.

“Bye!” he said, clicking a button and smiling at the computer for several seconds until the image of them went blank, and the chat stream came to a stop. “Well!” he said brightly, closing his laptop and turning to Sherlock with a grin. “You survived. It wasn’t too horrible, was it?”

Sherlock shrugged noncommittally, and his friend knocked his knee against Sherlock’s, still smiling happily. The movement was small, nothing more than a teasing tap, and the contact was gone before he could even blink, but –

But.

A thousand nerve synapses exploded through his body, all of them honing in on that tiny spot where John’s knee had brushed against his, and his leg was burning. Why? John had touched him before. There had been hundreds of mindless little touches, each as insignificant as the last – a hand brushing against a shoulder, a foot against a leg, a finger against a finger. He had never given any of them a moment’s notice. None of them had ever been anything, and neither was this one.

Sherlock swallowed thickly, his mind strangely blank. He could hear the sound of his heart thudding slowly in his chest.

“Sherlock?”

Sherlock looked up dazedly to find that the world had not, in fact, slowed to a halt. John was peering at him curiously, and the strange rushing sound that had filled his mind for a moment was gone. He cleared his throat.

“Yeah, it was –” Sherlock blinked. “It was fine.”

John raised an eyebrow at him, and Sherlock was suddenly stricken with the fear that he was going to ask again, try to dig deeper, and he would have absolutely no idea what to say.

“So, Katy Perry, eh?”

His friend’s smile was teasing, though his eyes were still curious, and Sherlock could have cried for the gift that was John Watson.

Yes, John. Tease me now, distract me, drag this strange, indecipherable moment away into the past where it belongs.

“I heard it in a shop,” Sherlock said finally.

“Right,” said John. “Lucky thing you thought of it right then, rather than having to admit that your favourite music artist is yourself.”
Sherlock looked at him sharply. John’s eyes were mischievous now, and his grin had turned knowing.

Of course he knew. Clever John. He may not be Sherlock’s rival in matters of the mind, but he was a damn good contender when it came to matters of Sherlock himself.

Before he had a chance to answer, John was laughing.

“You arrogant git,” he said, but his voice was fond. “You’re lucky I didn’t expose you to the world.”

Sherlock could feel his mouth curving up, and he fought to keep it down.

“I don’t have any idea what you’re talking about,” he said, inserting as much of the Holmes haughty attitude into his voice as he could.

“Of course you don’t,” responded John, winking at him. “Anyway, I’m hungry. What do you feel like?”

“I’m not hungry,” replied Sherlock automatically, but John walked away without showing any signs of having heard him.

“I think there’s stuff for a stir fry, that sound good to you?”

Sherlock huffed in response – John never listened. He could hear his flatmate prepping the food, so he dragged his laptop out from where he had shoved it under the couch and set himself to completing a rather mind-numbingly boring assignment on molecule formation. When he finished that, he went over to his website and added a quick update, noting that his viewer count was still steadily climbing by the day. He wasn’t sure whether to be pleased or irritated by that fact. His fingers tapped against the keyboard as he contemplated the pros and cons of allowing himself to be sucked into John’s sudden little campaign for Internet fame. Before he realized it, he had navigated to John’s blog, and was staring at a new picture of himself.

It appeared to be a screenshot of the live chat they had just finished, and the caption below read “Thank-you to everyone who watched the latest one of these, featuring the one and only SHERLOCK!! He secretly loved it, so make sure to come back next time, I’m sure he’ll be making more appearances. Click on the link to watch the full show (thanks again to @mrsjohnhwatson, much appreciated, still no relation).”

The picture was blurry, but John’s face, with its wide smile was clear enough. Sherlock was smiling too, caught in the process of turning to look at John. If you didn’t know better, he would appear happy.

Hm.

“How on earth did you post this?” he called into the kitchen. “Your computer is in here, and you’re cooking.”

He heard John snort.

“It’s called multitasking. And I used my phone.”
“It all seems like rather unnecessary effort if you ask me,” Sherlock retorted. There was a pause, and then John’s head poked around the entranceway from the kitchen.

“First of all, no one did. Ask you.”

Sherlock frowned.

“Secondly,” John continued before Sherlock could respond, “it is a bit of an effort. So I was thinking you could be my PR manager.”

Sherlock opened his mouth and then closed it. John’s face was inscrutable. He wasn’t serious. He couldn’t possibly expect Sherlock to-

How ridiculous.

Of course, it might be nice for John to need him a little. Sherlock needed so much from him, and there was a little part of him, one he did his best to delete, that wondered what, exactly, John could possibly be getting out of this friendship.

So it might be nice.

“I’m kidding, Sherlock,” John said, breaking into his thoughts. “You can relax. You look like you’re going to have an aneurysm.”

Sherlock breathed out a laugh and looked away.

“Of course not,” he said airily.

He bit back against the sudden, sharp taste of bitter disappointment. How very unnecessarily sentimental of him.

“I would have said no anyway,” he said quickly.

“Probably not,” John responded.

“Of course I would have,” Sherlock huffed, turning away so John wouldn’t see how his cheeks burned.

“Okay,” said John lightly, turning back into the kitchen.

Sherlock quickly went back to his computer, trying to occupy his mind before he could dwell on how very right his friend was: Of course he wouldn’t have said no to John. He could never say no to John.

The worst part was that John knew it.

“Supper’s ready,” John called from the kitchen, and Sherlock could hear plates being taken from the cupboard.

“I’m not hungry,” he called back stubbornly.

A moment later John emerged, carrying two heaping plates of stir fry. The smell of teriyaki made Sherlock’s stomach growl loudly, belying his words, and John shoved a plate into his hands.

“I’m sure you're not,” he said, a little too sarcastically for Sherlock's liking, “But how about you have a few bites, just for kicks.”
Sherlock rolled his eyes.

“It’s as if you don't know me at all, John.”

John turned the television on.

“I know, it's sad really. All this time as flatmates and we're still practically strangers.”

Sherlock took a bite of stir fry. It was really quite delicious. It only needed-

“Here,” said John, handing him the salt.

Sherlock smiled.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Sherlock figures something out about John's blog, and John tells him why he's wrong.

Then Sherlock all but breaks into Lestrade's house, and John trails behind.

Chapter Notes

I know, I know, I know, another long wait for another short chapter.
Better than nothing though, right?
... right? ....
(Please still love me.)
(And kudos.)
(And keep reading.)
(I love you all.)

It took Sherlock about a month to realize what was happening. Which, in John’s opinion, was even better than he had been hoping for.

He was sitting on the sofa attempting to write the last half of a paper that was verging on being desperately late when he saw the realization wash over Sherlock’s face.

“John.”

John jumped. It was the first thing Sherlock had said all day. John had sensed something was wrong, watching his friend withdraw more and more into himself throughout the afternoon. He looked up to find Sherlock staring at him with an expression of consternation.

“Yes?”

“Your… blog.”

Sherlock said the word with a grimace, and John shook his head.

“What about it?”

“You’ve been gaining momentum quite rapidly in the past couple of weeks.”

John shrugged.
“Yeah, I guess. I’ve got just over 100 thousand followers now.”

Sherlock blinked, in that way of his that said he was doing his best to respond appropriately, but really wasn’t sure how.

“Right,” he said after a moment. “Very… good.”

John hid a grin. “Thanks.”

“This popularity,” Sherlock continued, “you enjoy it.”

John shrugged again.

“It’s something you hope to do more of. To continue this Internet business, and to garner more… followers.”

“You are correct,” said John seriously.

“And you’ve been doing this through videos. And pictures. And stories. Often involving me. Which people seem to like.”

John almost stepped in to help him out, but thought better of it and merely nodded in affirmation instead.

“People like ‘shipping’ us. That’s what you said?”

“Yep.”

“Right,” Sherlock cleared his throat. “So, essentially, you are gaining popularity by taking advantage of the fact that people like to pretend that we are… in…” Sherlock stopped, blinking rapidly.

“In what?” John said, putting on his best I’m-an-idiot face.

Sherlock frowned, and swallowed, swiping a hand through his curls in irritation. John allowed himself to smile, just a little.

“In… in love, John,” Sherlock finally spat out. “You’re getting famous because you allow – encourage! – people to pretend that we’re in love.”

His voice was much more angry than the situation required, which John knew meant that he was incredibly uncomfortable. He tamped down on the amusement that threatened to spread across his face, and turned to give his flatmate his full attention.

“I don’t encourage anyone to do anything. I just post about my life, which you happen to be a big part of.”

“But I-”

Something passed across Sherlock’s face then, and whatever argument he had been about to spew died on his lips.

“Oh,” he said quietly, and stared at John.

“People like to think that we’re together, yeah. And no, I don’t do anything to stop them. But, Sherlock, people are going to talk no matter what anyone does. So we might as well give them
something interesting to talk about.”

Sherlock’s frown deepened.

“But you’re not gay.”

John shifted awkwardly as his oft-peddled phrase from his first year of university was spouted back at him. It had been a strange year, and John’s head hadn’t quite been in the right place. The teasing – which he could now see for what it was, instead of the malicious taunts he had taken it for back then – had died down the more he played it down. “I’m not gay,” was more or less gone from his repertoire now. It sounded different, and not altogether pleasant coming from Sherlock.

“Yeah. Well. That’s neither here nor there.”

“Why?”

John chewed his lip.

“I don’t know. I mean, it used to bother me, when people said that. But I just… got over it. Who cares what anyone else thinks, as long as I know the truth?”

There was a strange glint in Sherlock’s eyes, and John felt suddenly nervous.

“Of course. Why bother with integrity when your international fame is on the line, right? Don’t want to disappoint your fans. Shall we snap a photo right now? Put your arm around me, perhaps? We can get in close, give them something interesting to talk about.”

John’s stomach fell.

“Sherlock, that’s not-”

“No, no, I understand, John,” his flatmate said with disturbing joviality. “It’s perfectly clear. I don’t blame you in the slightest, you need to get something out of our friendship. I should have known, really. It was too good to last, after all.”

“Woah,” said John, raising his hands against the sudden vitriol. “What the hell are you on about?”

“This!” exclaimed Sherlock, gesturing rather wildly around them. “All this. Everything about our situation.”

*Our situation?*

Sherlock’s eyes were wide, his brows drawn together. John could see the pulse in his neck jumping erratically.

He took a deep breath.

This wasn’t Sherlock expressing sudden anger at John’s interest in the online world.

This is what he did when he felt overwhelmed; he lashed out at whatever – or whoever – was closest. Which was, more often than not, John.

“Sherlock,” he said calmly, his hands still up. “Whatever you think I just said, it probably wasn’t what I actually meant. I’m sorry.”

Sherlock paused.
John watched as his friend took in the situation, his eyes roving over John. It would have felt intrusive if he wasn’t entirely used to it by now. He would be lying if he said he minded.


“No, it’s fine-”

“It isn’t. I should probably go to bed, I must be overtired.”

John raised his eyebrows. Sherlock was avoiding his eyes now.

“Sherlock, stop.”

“Goodnight.”

John reached out to grab his friend’s arm as he began to walk away, but Sherlock stepped around him and disappeared down the hallway and into his bedroom, closing the door with a bang.

John stared after him.

What the hell had just happened?

He debated knocking on Sherlock’s door, but decided against it in the hopes that he really was going to get some sleep for once.

_It was too good to last, after all._

What was too good to last? Their being flatmates?

John let out a long breath of air and flopped onto the sofa.

“I guess it was inevitable,” he muttered out loud. “He went for so long without a temper tantrum, had to let it out eventually.”

He looked around guilty after he said it.

That wasn’t fair.

Sherlock wasn’t a child who needed reprimanding. No matter how often it felt like he was babysitting him.

John smirked.

There was a rather loud thud from the direction of Sherlock’s room, and John’s smile fell.

What had he said? That John needed to get something out of their friendship? As if John wouldn’t have been lost a long time ago without Sherlock? As if he wasn’t completely aware of how much…

John sat up.

He must know. He _had_ to know.

For Christ’s sake, John literally followed the man around London.

He knew Sherlock was prone to ignoring anything and everything regarding himself, but to go so
far as to assume that his friendship wasn’t the most important one John had ever had? That was too ridiculous.

John stood up and strode briskly over to Sherlock’s door before he could lose his confidence.

“Sherlock?” he called, knocking against the doorframe. There was no reply, so John tried the doorknob.

There was something heavy blocking the door.

He heard a cough.

“Sherlock,” he said again, “move out of the way and let me in.”

There was no response.

John turned and slid down until he was sitting against the door.

“I’m sorry.”

“You already said that,” came Sherlock’s muffled voice from the other side of the door. “I hate repeating.”

“I know. Sorry.”

There was a pause.

“You’re not funny,” said Sherlock. John smiled.

“I am sorry though, that you think I’m using you for my blog. I’m not. I would never do that. But I could also never post anything about my life without including you in it. It just wouldn’t work.”

“It wouldn’t?”

John rolled his eyes.

“Of course it wouldn’t, you berk. You’re my flatmate, you’re always here.”

“Right. Of course.”

“Also-”

John stopped, shaking his head at himself. He cleared his throat.

“Also, you’re my best friend. So. That too.”

It was silent.

John shifted against the door, stifling the urge to go to his room and lock the door until everything was back to normal.

“You’re utterly brilliant. Which you know, of course. But it makes it- it makes it interesting. Even your disgusting experiments. I mean, you could clean up after yourself a little more, not going to lie. But nothing is ever boring around here. Because of you.”

Sherlock still didn’t answer. John wondered if he had maybe fallen asleep. Thinking that made it easier to keep speaking.
“I know I’ve said it before, and you told me it was rubbish, but I would have been a mess these first couple years of uni if I hadn’t met you. I was a mess. You distracted me from my thoughts. You made it okay to get up in the morning instead of near impossible.”

John paused, wanting desperately to stop talking. But somehow he couldn’t.

“I don’t know why you’ve got it into your head that I don’t get anything out of this friendship, but that’s not even close to the truth. Because you saved me. Your friendship saved me.”

The silence stretched out, long enough to give John just enough time to feel sufficiently embarrassed.

And then Sherlock shifted against the other side of the door.

“Oh John, always so prone to overdramatizing everything. Be careful not to say too much without a camera present.”

John closed his eyes and leaned his head back in frustration.

“Sherlock, I—”

“I’m kidding.”

Sherlock’s quiet interjection made John pause.

Sherlock didn’t really do ‘kidding.’ Of course, he didn’t really do awkward and badly worded apologies either. Maybe this was his way of defusing the situation.

“Wanker,” said John experimentally.

“Idiot,” came the immediate reply. John grinned.

They sat there for a while, quietly, on either side of the door, and John couldn’t help but think how odd it must look. But it didn’t feel odd.

“John,” said Sherlock after a while. His voice sounded vaguely dreamy, as if he had been drifting off.

“Mm?” hummed John, suddenly realizing how heavy his own eyes felt.

“What you said was—”

Sherlock trailed off.

John waited but his friend didn’t continue.

“Good?” he supplied, and he heard Sherlock exhale.

“Yes. It was good.”

“Okay. That’s good. I meant it all.”

“I know. I… thank-you. I’m sorry for the outburst.”

John smiled at words, half bitten off in Sherlock’s desire to get through the apology.

“Don’t be sorry, it doesn’t matter. Are we good?”
Sherlock didn’t answer and John frowned again.

“Sherlock? Are we good?”

There was suddenly a shuffling noise, and the door behind John opened, leaving him to topple backwards.

“Bloody—”

“You know I need you.”

John paused from where he was attempting to scramble to his feet, and looked up at his flatmate. Sherlock was staring down at him with his wide, searching, impossibly coloured eyes, and something in John’s chest twisted painfully.

He stood up carefully, tilting his head in question.

“What?”

“I hate repeating myself in the best of times, which this is not.”

“Right,” said John, and then stopped.

Sherlock bit his lip and looked away, not meeting John’s eyes.

“Maybe we need each other,” said John finally. Sherlock’s eyes darted to his. He waited.

“You believe that,” his friend said after a long moment, his voice surprised, and John nodded firmly.

“Of course I do.”

Sherlock blinked.

John smiled and shook his head.

“I’m exhausted Sherlock, I’m going to head up to bed. We’re good, yeah?”

Sherlock blinked again, then nodded slowly.

“We’re good,” he said, his voice faint. “Goodnight.”

“’Night,” said John.

He fell asleep that night thinking about Sherlock’s face when John had said he needed him too.

“John, John, wake up. Why do you insist on staying in bed so long? It’s such a waste of time.”

John blinked his eyes open blearily to find Sherlock peering down at him worriedly.

“Go away,” he muttered, and pulled the covers over his head. A moment later they were yanked back off him rather unceremoniously, and light flooded his face. “Oh for- Sherlock. Piss off!”
“It’s already so late John, we must go. Daylight is wasting.”

“Daylight? It’s barely 7 o’clock. Get lost.”

“But John, look.”

John opened his eyes again, only to close them quickly as a fistful of papers were shoved in front of them.

“Don’t you see? We have to go, immediately.”

John took a deep breath.

“Sherlock. Get that out of my face, and get out of my room.”

“But it’s extremely impor-”

“Out of my face, out of my room.”

“But, John-”

“Out, Sherlock.”

There was a brief moment of silence, and then he heard Sherlock move to the door.

“You’re obviously in need of a moment to collect yourself, so I’m going downstairs. We’re leaving in twenty minutes.” Sherlock paused and eyed John seriously. “I’ll make tea,” he added, and then swept out of the door.

John groaned, and threw his pillow at the door.

“Very mature,” Sherlock’s voice floated up from the stairwell.

John lay in bed for several long moments, wondering whether it would be considered murder if he strangled Sherlock with his own dressing gown.

He firmly decided that Sherlock couldn’t order him around, and he would not be at his friend’s beck and call. He closed his eyes to go back to sleep.

Twenty minutes later, John was downstairs, showered and dressed, and glaring at Sherlock over a mug of rather tepid tea.

“I don’t know what you’re grumbling about,” said Sherlock imperiously. “You’re the one who left your tea too long.”

“I want you to know that I got up because I wanted to.”

“Oh, of course,” responded Sherlock with one eyebrow raised. “And you’re going to follow me out to find a cab now because you want to as well. Don’t forget your coat.”

John flashed two fingers at Sherlock, who ignored him entirely, and they soon found themselves sitting in the back of a cab, with rock music blaring loudly from the front seat.

It only occurred to John to ask Sherlock where they were going when he didn’t recognize the address his friend had given the driver.

“We’re going to see Lestrade,” said Sherlock, as if it was the most obvious answer in the world.
“Who?”
“The Detective Inspector, do keep up. And take this.”
John took his coat from Sherlock absently, staring at him.
“That wasn’t the address for Scotland Yard though.”
“No.”
Sherlock was looking blankly out the window, one finger tapping against his leg.
“Then where are we going?”
Sherlock didn’t answer.

“Bloody hell, Sherlock, are we at his house?”
Sherlock strode past John and knocked sharply at the front door.
“Sherlock,” John hissed. “How do you even know his address?”
“Please.”
John jogged over, intending to pull his friend away from the door and back to the car, but the door opened before he even reached the steps.
The detective looked haggard, and he stared at them both blankly.
“What?”
“This is murder,” Sherlock said, thrusting a newspaper in front of the detective’s face. He sounded disturbingly enthusiastic. John looked at him sharply.
Lestrade pulled away from Sherlock, and grabbed the paper out of his hands.
“What?” he repeated, his voice darker.
“This is the fifth unexplained death in the past two months from the same area, with the same cause of death. It’s murder.”
John moved up until he was a step below Sherlock.
“Sherlock,” he murmured, watching the detective’s face warily. “We should go.”
“I just want to know why it’s taking Scotland Yard so long to solve this incredibly violent case, despite the amount of evidence they’ve procured, as well as why they haven’t made the relevant public aware of the danger, considering that the victims are all from the same basic demographic, and geographical area.”
John paused in his futile tugging on his friend’s arm.
Lestrade looked at Sherlock for a long moment.
“Fine,” he sighed finally, running a hand over his face. “This is the stupidest thing I’ve ever done, but… come in.”

Sherlock’s face brightened, and he pushed past Lestrade and into the house, his body practically buzzing with excitement.

John stared at the detective.

“Well?” Lestrade asked, gesturing at the doorway.

“Why on earth are you letting him in?” John asked bluntly, and Lestrade blinked in surprise.

“Aren’t you his sidekick or something? Shouldn’t you be backing him up?”

“I’m not his bloody sidekick, I’m his flatmate. And yes, as his flatmate, I’m here to back him up. However, also as his flatmate, I feel it’s my duty to tell you that he’s insane.”

Lestrade laughed once, and shook his head.

“Then he’ll fit right in around here, because I feel like I’m losing my mind.”

John shifted, frowning, and Lestrade’s smile faded.

“Just come in,” he said, heading back inside, “it’s freezing out here.”

John followed the detective down the hallway and into the kitchen.

“Look,” said Lestrade as he flipped on the kettle and took out three mugs, “I’m not saying I’m giving him a badge. But you two were pretty damn helpful last time. And if I’m not mistaken, he’s more than a bit clever. Plus he’s right: it’s taking us far too long to solve this. We’re stuck. Fresh eyes, and a bright mind might be just what we need.”

“A seventeen year old uni student is just what you need,” said John flatly, raising an eyebrow.

“No,” responded Lestrade, reaching for the whistling kettle on the stovetop, “What we need is a good, solid lead, and we need it fast. And if you and Sherlock can give us that, far be it from me to stop you.”

“Tea?”

Sherlock’s voice from behind him made John jump. Sherlock moved to the counter where John stood and tilted his head as he watched the detective pour steaming water into the waiting teapot.

“Do you not want any?” the man asked, pausing as he reached for the tea bags.

“Of course I do,” said Sherlock, frowning. “But why is it always tea? Is there an English rulebook I was never given?”

Lestrade stared at him, his face baffled.

John rolled his eyes.

“Just because you’re an inconsiderate host doesn’t mean everyone else has to be. Most people like to offer their guests a beverage.”

“Even the uninvited ones?”
Lestrade burst out laughing. “No. Not usually the uninvited ones. I get extra points for that.”

Sherlock’s frown grew deeper, but John cut him off before he could open his mouth.

“There aren’t any actual points Sherlock. The inspector is just being polite.”

Inspector Lestrade snorted again, and shook his head.

“You two are quite the pair, aren’t you?”

Sherlock narrowed his eyes.

“Alright,” said Lestrade, setting the teapot and mugs on a tray, and blatantly ignoring the penetrating glare Sherlock was directing at him. “Let’s go into the front room.”

John followed the detective down the corridor, feeling somewhat like he was back in Primary school on the way to see the headmaster, as Sherlock traipsed along behind him.

“Take your coats off, sit down,” Lestrade said as he poured the tea.

“No,” said Sherlock sharply, cutting his eyes at John before he could move to unbutton his coat. “We’ll be leaving quite shortly, it’ll save time to keep them on.”

John sat down slowly, watching his friend out of the corner of his eye. He was up to something. That was the key: knowing when Sherlock was up to something.

Now if only John could figure out what it was, then they’d really be getting somewhere.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Sherlock's determination to be a part of Scotland Yard's current murder investigation, whether he's welcome or not, ultimately puts John in the path of a danger that he never foresaw.

Chapter Notes

Okay this one took quite a while again, but you’re going to have to forgive me because a. it’s the longest chapter of the story so far, and b. SO. MUCH. HAPPENS.

It was a tricky one, I have to tell you, so I hope it all makes sense. I did my best to research, but I’m not entirely sure how much of all the crime stuff is accurate- so if you could just suspend your disbelief while reading this, that’d be great. I hope you enjoy! Let me know what you think, and please take a look at the (rather long but important) note below:

*In case anyone has noticed… I made a mistake with John’s and Sherlock’s ages. Apparently I don’t pay attention to what I’ve already written, because according to past chapters, they are both nineteen, and both are simultaneously in their second and third years of university. Oops.

I’ve gone back and fixed everything so that it lines up with what I’ve actually had in my mind the whole time: Sherlock is currently seventeen (nearly eighteen), and John is twenty. They are both nearly halfway (it’s the end of November, and Christmas break will start midway through December) through their second year of university, and met at the beginning of their first year (Sherlock started when he was sixteen). I had Lestrade mention their ages, just to make sure it was clear. As you’ll see in the next chapter, (mild spoiler) we’ll be discovering a bit about how they first became friends, so this timeline is relevant.

I hope that clears everything up! Let me know if you find any other mistakes about this, and I’ll go back and fix it.

ALSO, I have absolutely nothing against Hackney, or any other place I might have described. I don’t live in London, and I’m pretty sure I’ve never even been near Hackney. If you’re offended at all, please blame Google.*

Enjoy, and good luck to everyone in the middle of exams! Here's a study break for you xx

Sherlock could see John watching him out of the corner of his eye as they sat down in Lestrade’s front room, still wearing their coats. He stifled a smile. John was wary now, but he would be grateful once he saw the footage from the hidden cameras Sherlock had installed on both of their
coats.

Hopefully. John often seemed to have different ideas about what was or was not okay when it came to Sherlock.

Or perhaps Sherlock’s sense of morality was just somewhat looser than his friend’s.

Either way, he wasn’t entirely sure how to predict John’s reaction to hidden camera footage from his coat.

Whatever he might say, Sherlock was positive it was a brilliant idea. John would just have to come around.

He ignored the inspector as he rambled on about everything the force had found on the case to date. It was unnecessary. What Sherlock needed was to go out there and see for himself, speak to people, look at the crime scenes. Listening to Lestrade talk was useless.

“Right, yes,” said Sherlock, cutting into whatever latest clue the detective had found. “That’s all very helpful and useful,” he added, knowing it was the polite thing to say.

John made a noise in this throat – a *Sherlock-we-already-forced-ourselves-into-his-house-can’t-you-at-least-behave-now* kind of noise – and Lestrade frowned.

Apparently not polite enough.

“I… appreciate the update,” he tried, glancing between John and Lestrade. The detective raised an eyebrow, but John’s face relaxed a bit, so he decided to continue down that track. “But I believe it would be even more advantageous – and… kind – if you could take me out to the latest crime scene. And all the rest of them.”

Lestrade raised both eyebrows now, his mouth opening slightly. He seemed to be attempting to bluster.

John’s attention swung entirely onto Sherlock.

“Sherlock…” he began quietly, leaning forward.

“Oh, you’re right,” said Sherlock quickly, realizing his blunder. “What I meant to say was, if you could take us out to the latest crime scene. John will, of course, be joining me.”

John sat back.

“That’s not what I meant,” he muttered, but Sherlock ignored him, focusing back on Lestrade, who still hadn’t said a word.

“We can go right now if you’d like,” he said generously, and Lestrade blinked back to life.

“If you think I’m taking two teenagers to visit multiple crime scenes, in some rather dangerous areas, you’re even more deluded than I thought.”

“I’m nearly eighteen and John will be twenty one next year,” said Sherlock, drawing himself up indignantly. “As if age even really matters at all when it comes to intellect.”

Lestrade paused.

“I thought you were both in second year at uni together.”
Sherlock nodded, and Lestrade’s eyebrows shot up.

“You’re seventeen?”

Sherlock didn’t bother to respond. Lestrade stared at him for a moment, and then nodded, eyebrows still raised.

“Well. Fair enough then. But age *does* matter when it comes to taking people into the scene of a murder. Not to mention legality.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes, flicking his hand in the air dismissively.

“Boring and pedestrian.”

There was a brief silence.

John shook his head.

And then Lestrade laughed loudly, making Sherlock jump. He stared at the inspector.

“The law is boring,” the man said, running a hand through his hair.

Sherlock and John exchanged a glance, and John shifted uneasily.

“My entire profession, the system upon which our country depends, is boring and pedestrian.”

The detective was still laughing.

Sherlock wondered whether he was having some sort of breakdown.

“Sir-” John began politely, and Lestrade looked back at them.

“I’m sorry,” he said, running a hand over his face. “I needed that,” he added, laughing again.

Sherlock looked back at John, who was watching the inspector.

Suddenly the man clapped his hands together and stood up.

“Right,” he said decisively. “I can’t let you into the crime scene, I think you know that. I can, however, leave this room to make a phone call to my sister. She usually likes to chat, so I may be a while. While I’m gone, do not look in that file on my desk there. It would be a breach of the law were I to give you access to the notes and photographs inside.”

Lestrade raised his eyebrows at Sherlock, who narrowed his eyes.

“Of course,” he nodded slowly. He could see John looking between them, still frowning. *Oh, John. Do keep up.***

Lestrade nodded briskly, and left the room.

“Why-”

“He’s leaving so that we can read the file without implicating him, John,” Sherlock cut his friend off, standing up and going to the desk in the corner of the room.

He heard John make a sharp sound in the back of his throat.
“Yeah I got that, ta very much.”

Sherlock grinned down at the desk.

Rule number one in Sherlock’s life: stop underestimating John. It’s always a mistake.

“I wanted to know why the hell he would do that.”

Sherlock paused.

Why?

He turned to look at his friend, who had moved to his side.

“Probably because he realized I can be of some help to him.”

“He doesn’t know you. You’re not a detective. You’ve solved one case, a month ago.”

Sherlock frowned.

“Why are you stating the obvious?”

John frowned, as if it was Sherlock who was being tiresome.

“I’m not saying you’re not brilliant and all that,” John waved his hand in the air vaguely, “I’m just thinking you’re a bit of a gamble for a Scotland Yard detective to risk his career for.”

Sherlock opened his mouth indignantly, but John cut him off.

“Not to mention you can be a bit of a tosser.”

Sherlock blinked.

John grinned.

“Shut up.” Sometimes words failed him when it came to John.

The shorter boy’s grin grew, and Sherlock rolled his eyes, turning away from his friend and looking down at the file in front of him.

The notes on the cases were detailed, and carefully organized. Sherlock was pleasantly surprised as he scanned through them, getting a better grasp on what Lestrade had already said. The photographs were even better.

“Bloody hell, are those bodies?”

Sherlock rolled his eyes again and ignored John, who continued to comment on the files, his voice growing more and more incredulous as the scenes grew more graphic with each death.

Sherlock leaned closer to the desk as he turned the pages, drinking it in. It was so fascinating. The deaths were gruesome, and horrific to be sure – he had no interest in the end of another person’s life – but the thought of looking at these scenes, compiling the evidence, reading the signs, and then using it all to interpret and apprehend whoever was behind it: that was exhilarating.

All the deaths had occurred in or around Hackney, and every victim had been what the newspapers liked to call “down on their luck;” namely, homeless. Most of the bodies had been discovered in dumpsters in back alleys, or dark corners under bridges.
Sherlock frowned. What on earth would compel someone to murder members of the homeless community? What kind of motive could they possibly have, other than the hope that it would take longer to notice them missing?

“Is it like a cleansing thing gone wrong?” John murmured beside him, and Sherlock jumped.

“What?” he asked, turning to look at his friend distractedly.

“The deaths,” John said quietly, pointing at the photographs gingerly, as if afraid they would spring to life in front of him. Well, Sherlock amended darkly, spring to death. “They’re all homeless. Do you think it’s someone trying to, you know, clean up the streets?”

Sherlock raised his eyebrows, looking back down at the papers.

He flipped back through the pages, glancing at each one rapidly, before he came to the witness interviews. He was sure he had seen – there.

He slammed the papers down on the desk. John jumped.

“John!” he exclaimed, and John looked at him, startled. “You’re brilliant!”

“Of course I am,” said John flippantly, before frowning. “Why?”

Sherlock laughed, setting the papers carefully back into the file folder, and arranging it back the way it had been before.

“You may not see things very well yourself, but you’re excellent at allowing me to see them. You’re like… like… a conductor of light.”

Sherlock beamed at his friend, who stared at him blankly.

“Cheers,” he said drily. “Now what are you on about?”

“There,” said Sherlock, flipping the file open to the top page, and pointing at the line he had noticed earlier, and thought nothing of. “Thinking of what you just said, what do you notice about that boy’s witness statement? The one at the top, who was at the scene of the first crime.”

“’It’s a terrible shame’, ” John read, “’that it should happen to these people. They’re everywhere. It’s a disgrace that the government isn’t doing anything to help them; it’s inevitable, really, that they should fall to crimes such as these. They’re desperate’.”

John looked up.

“Well spoken for a young bloke from Hackney, isn’t he?”

“Rather,” said Sherlock, nodding delightedly. “Anything else?”

“Well he says “crimes” in the plural, but this was taken down after the first reported murder, wasn’t it?”

Sherlock nodded encouragingly.

“And…” continued John slowly, “he makes it seem as though the murders are being committed by other homeless people. But they couldn’t be, could they?”

“Why?”
John looked back at the file. Sherlock watched him intently. This was nearly as fascinating as the crime in front of them.

“Well, the deaths are all the same – same rough time of day, same area of dumping ground for the bodies, same stab wound – so it must be the same person doing it. But the type of knife that they managed to match the wounds to is a decorative hunting weapon, something that’s displayed more often than used. I Googled it just now and it’s not rare, but it’s usually very expensive. It’s not the sort of thing you’d easily find around the streets, or at a market. So unless this is a very well connected street person, it must have been someone wealthy enough to get his hands on a knife like that.”

“Yes,” said Sherlock fervently. “Oh, John, you’re even better at this than I thought.”

John flashed him a look that Sherlock could only assume was irritated. Sherlock deleted it.

“So is this witness the murderer then?” asked John.

Sherlock smiled at him.

“What?” John asked. “Sherlock, what?”

“Only one way to find out.”

“Sherlock…”

His smile grew. He turned and headed for the door.

“Sherlock, we can’t just leave-”

John was cut off as Sherlock left the house, leaving the door open behind him. He knew his friend would follow him.

He was at the street, arm raised towards the taxis, when he heard the door to Lestrade’s house close behind him. John was beside him a few moments later.

Sherlock turned to look at him, waiting for him to protest.

“Well?” John said, raising an eyebrow and gesturing towards the taxi pulling towards them. “Let’s go then.”

***

John was absolutely positive that this was a terrible idea. Sneaking around, behind the back of a Scotland Yard detective – one who had been particularly gracious on their behalf already – to interview a possible murder suspect?

It was ridiculously stupid.

But Sherlock was buzzing.

John could practically feel the excitement coming off him in waves.

And he couldn’t bear to say no when his friend looked like that. He didn’t want to be the cause of
his face falling, his mood turning. Not again.

Sherlock was fiddling with his phone as they headed towards Hackney. It was only once they were a few minutes away that he looked up to rattle off an address to the driver.

Unfortunately, that address was in the opposite direction. The driver rolled his eyes, glancing between the road and his meter.

“How’d you find him then?” John asked, partly because he was curious, and partly because he was bored.

“His name and age were on his testimony, all I did was use Mycroft’s access codes to search through the secondary school databases in London until I found his last registered address. Which is from two years ago.”

“How many databases were there?”

Sherlock shrugged.

“I narrowed my search down to independent schools, so I only had to look through about seven before I found him. There are only two Richard Brooks in the right age range in England, and only one lives in London.

John raised his eyebrows, caught between impressed and vaguely disturbed.

“Wow. You’re kind of scary.”

Sherlock turned back to his phone, but John caught the hint of a smile on his lips.

“So he’s from Knightsbridge. What was he doing in Hackney, at the scene of a murder then?”

Sherlock looked over at him with a smirk.

“Exactly what I’d like to know.”

They rode the rest of the way in relative silence.

Well. Sherlock was silent.

John attempted a conversation, and was quickly shut down by his friend’s apparent lack of interest in anything and everything he had to say.

Which was annoying to say the least, and not altogether a new occurrence.

John pulled out his phone and punched out a tweet.

“chasing a mad man around London again… at least he bothered to put on pants this time, unlike last week”

He studied it for a moment before sending it with a small sense of retribution. He hadn’t addressed the pants incident properly anyway, maybe making it public would finally shock Sherlock into some kind of sense of indecency. Lord knows nothing else had so far.

“Sherlock you can’t just drag me out of class to go and look at pond scum samples with you! And in your dressing gown no less!”

“Why not?”
“Because that class is important!”

“Nonsense. You’re bright enough, you can read the notes and catch up easily.”

“That’s not the point. You can’t tell me something is urgent whenever you feel like it. That defeats the point of saying it’s urgent.”

“It is urgent. I urgently need pond scum. Who cares whether you’re supposed to be in class, and I’m supposed to be wearing pants?”

“I care about my – wait, what? You’re not wearing pants?”

“Nope.”

The two of them had dissolved into laughter, and they had spent the rest of the afternoon trudging through the parks of London, obtaining samples of pond scum, and making faces at anyone who stared at them strangely. They must have made a ridiculous pair; Sherlock, tall and rumpled, in a dressing gown and long wellies, and John, hair combed neatly, outfit ironed carefully but smeared with algae.

He stifled a smile now, not wanting Sherlock to think he was pleased with the silence. The no pants tweet would serve him right, the stuffy git. Not that Sherlock even knew or cared about Twitter. John shook off a faint feeling of guilt – if Sherlock wanted to pull him out of a lecture and wander around London with no pants on, he could suffer the consequences – and decided to set up an account for his flatmate. If nothing else, John could tweet for him. He smiled somewhat vindictively. That could be fun.

His phone buzzed and he looked down again as the retweets slowly began to come in.

“@johnhwatson you checked his pants status then?”

“@johnhwatson you would know eh :)”

“@johnhwatson omg where are you, I’m in London too!!!”

“@johnhwatson #johnlock”

He bit his tongue against the sudden urge to laugh that was bubbling up in his throat. These people were insane.

He had probably been asking for it though, mentioning Sherlock’s pants on the internet.

Not that he really knew whether Sherlock was wearing pants or not. It was just an assumption.

“Sherlock, are you wearing pants?”

Sherlock looked away from the window for long enough to pierce John with a look of withering disgust before turning back to stare outside.

John made a face at his back, knowing full well that his friend could see his reflection in the glass. It made him feel both childish and a little better.

He shot out another tweet as they drew nearer to Knightsbridge, then slipped his phone back into his pocket, not bothering to wait for the comments.

“Update: wasn’t actually sure re Sherlock’s pants. Have now asked him. He declined to
He spent the rest of the drive decidedly not looking at his friend. When they finally pulled up at the right address, John was in something of a bad mood.

“Don’t you think the police will have thought to thoroughly question a suspicious witness of a violent crime? I doubt you’re smarter than the entire police force combined, Sherlock.”

Sherlock didn’t move his eyes from the rather auspicious house in front of them to reply. It was the fourth time John had asked, and the first that Sherlock had answered.

“You’d be surprised.”

John huffed in annoyance, folding his arms across his head.

“Yes, actually, I would be surprised to find that you had outwitted all of Scotland Yard.”

Sherlock looked at him then, his forehead creased.

“Why are you angry with me?”

John paused. Sherlock watched him closely, face utterly confused. After a moment John sighed. Sherlock probably hadn’t even realized he had been speaking to him for the past half hour.

“I’m not angry with you. Let’s go.”

“They have questioned him,” said Sherlock, still focused on him, “and quite thoroughly according to the notes. But there’s always something they might have missed, or he may have lied about. There’s always something.”

Sherlock’s eyes were bright, his hands gesturing enthusiastically as he spoke, and John smiled despite himself.

“Alright then, genius, get on with it then.”

Sherlock spun without another word, and marched up to the front door, ringing the bell decisively.

“Oh by the way, John,” he said, turning to him. There were footsteps inside, coming towards the door. “I’ve installed cameras on our coats, so don’t take yours off. That should help with your vlogs. You’ve been promising an upload for weeks now; don’t expect people to hang onto your promises alone for too long.”

John stared at him, his mouth open slightly.

Sherlock turned back just as the door opened, his face morphing into earnest innocence.

“Good morning Mrs. Brook,” he said with a sheepish smile to the woman standing in front of them. Her face was blank as she regarded them, her foot tapping just so slightly against the door. “Ever so sorry to disturb you, but we were wondering if Richard was available?”

Her face changed at his words, mouth lifting into a surprised half-smile. Her eyes darted over the two of them, and she raised her eyebrows.

“Are you at King’s College with Richie too?”

“Queen Mary’s actually,” said Sherlock with a smile.
The woman frowned slightly.

“Then how – oh!” she said, her face brightening. “Are you part of the outreach program?”

Sherlock didn’t bat an eye. His ability to lie was a little scary, actually. John suddenly wondered how often he himself was lied to by his rather mad flatmate.

“With the homeless,” Sherlock responded eagerly, not giving the statement enough inflection to make it a full out question.

“Yes,” she answered, beaming at them now. “Isn’t it wonderful what an initiative you young people are taking. I’m ever so proud of Richie, he spends nearly all of his evenings over there.”

“He’s quite an inspiration,” replied Sherlock, still smiling his simpering smile at her. “Is he home?”

“Yes of course,” Mrs. Brook said, stepping aside and waving them in. “Come on in, I’ll call him down.”

“Oh, don’t trouble yourself,” said Sherlock, striding towards the spiral staircase across from the entranceway. “We’ll just go up to his room.”

“Oh, I – “ Mrs. Brook stopped, watching as Sherlock bound up the stairs two at a time. “Alright then,” she finished, turning to John with a shrug. “You’re friends of Richie’s then?”

John hesitated, his willingness to lie somewhat weaker than Sherlock’s.

“I think Sherlock knows him quite well,” he managed lamely, attempting a smile.

“John!” called Sherlock from the top of the stairs. “Do hurry up, now.”

“Sorry,” mumbled John, but Mrs. Brook just smiled.

“See if you can get him to go out for a while, I’m sure he’d love it. If he’s not handing out drinks and sandwiches and whatever else it is you kids do, he’s alone up in his room.”

“Right,” answered John as he headed up the stairs, wondering how on earth Sherlock was going to talk his way through this.

“How are we playing this then?” he asked as he drew up to his friend.

“Playing it?” Sherlock asked innocently, glancing around the landing. He cocked his head, looking all the world like John’s childhood dog, and then confidently turned left. “This way. Keep your coat on.”

John clenched his teeth, remembering Sherlock’s earlier revelation and making a mental note to talk to him about things like privacy and a person’s right not to be secretly filmed in their own home. They walked down a rather long corridor before Sherlock stopped. “Here we are.”

“How do you know?”

Sherlock raised an eyebrow, his hand halted in midair on the way to knock on the door in front of them.

“Really, John. I should have thought you’d be done asking that by now.” He was using that cocky, self-important voice of his that John hated.
John sardonically raised an eyebrow back.

“I’m not saying I don’t believe you, I just like hearing how you do it.”

Sherlock’s gaze stayed on him for a long moment.

“Oh,” he said finally, blinking and turning back to the door.

“Whoever is loitering outside my door, please just make up your mind. I don’t much care whether you’re coming or going, but this whole hovering about business is taxing.”

A high, lilting voice came from behind the door, and John took a step back reflexively. Sherlock gave him a withering glance, and he quickly moved forward again.

“Hiya Richie,” Sherlock called cheerfully, his Innocent and Friendly persona slipping into place, “I was hoping I’d catch you.” John turned towards him slightly, hoping the camera on his coat – the bloody secret camera on his coat, good lord were they needing that privacy talk – would pick up the rather disturbing transformation his friend was currently going through. Maybe seeing how utterly ridiculous he was for himself would help John’s case.

John watched as Sherlock’s shoulders slipped down, his back softening as his posture relaxed. His face curled into a butter-wouldn’t-melt-in-my-mouth smile – which, John noted in relief, he was easily able to distinguish from Sherlock’s genuine smile – and he clasped his hands together in front of his torso, twisting them anxiously.

There was silence, and then they heard someone coming towards the door.

It was flung open on a slight, pale boy with messy, dark hair. He was wearing sweatpants and a dressing gown, and looked as if they had just awakened him from an unearthly deep sleep. He blinked at them both owlishly for a long moment. He looked to John to be somewhere between his and Sherlock’s ages, but he couldn’t be sure.

He glanced at Sherlock, who was studying the boy closely.

The silence began to get awkward. John cleared his throat.

The boy flicked his attention over to him, and his eyes grew wide.

“Wait,” he said, looking between John and Sherlock. “Wait, you’re- you’re not-” he covered his mouth with two hands, eyes crinkling with a grin. His voice was reedy and rhythmic, almost childlike, and vaguely Irish. John shifted uncertainly. Who the hell was this kid?

The boy shook his head and lowered his hands. He was still smiling, but his cheeks flushed now and he looked embarrassed.

“I’m sorry, it’s just- you’re John and Sherlock.” He gave an odd giggle at the words.

John felt Sherlock start in surprise.

The boy’s flush deepened, but a glint came into his eyes.

“Got any pants on, Sherlock?” he said, his voice mischievous. Sherlock made a strange noise in his throat.

Suddenly John understood.

“You follow me online,” he said, his voice flat with disbelief. Sherlock jerked around to stare at
him, and he resisted the urge to gloat.

“Of course I do! You’re my favourite blogger. Your live shows are *hilarious*. When will you be posting your first vlog? I thought it was going up ages ago.”

John could still feel Sherlock staring at him, and he cleared his throat again, unsure of what to say. He knew he had quite a lot of followers, but he had never been *recognized*.

“Oh I’m sorry,” said the boy sheepishly – Richard, John amended, he was Richard – sticking his hand out. “I’m just such a fan. I never expected you both to show up in my bedroom.”

Sherlock was still silent, and John turned to him with a sigh.

“Surely my blog’s success can’t be *this* much of a shock to the system.”

Sherlock blinked. He looked confused.

Richard giggled again, and Sherlock’s eyes snapped to focus, turning back to look at the strange boy in front of them. His mask of friendliness was gone. John felt suddenly nervous.

“Your knowledge of who we are is surprising, but inconsequential. We didn’t come to simper over John’s blog. We came because we read your testimony about the murder in Hackney three months ago, and I have questions.”

The boy was watching Sherlock intently, his mouth twitching at the corners.

“Oh he’s just like you say he is,” he said in delight, turning to John.

John felt a smile begin to grow on his face, despite his best efforts to keep it at bay. Richard was odd, to be sure, but… he was a *fan*. John had never contemplated having fans before, not really.

It seemed a very silly thing to say you had, fans.

Followers, he decided, was a better word.

“Well, I—”

“The murders,” Sherlock said loudly, cutting him off. Richard jumped, and turned back to Sherlock with wide eyes. John looked at him too, warily. A strange movement caught his eye, and he looked down. Sherlock’s hand was in his coat pocket, and he was discreetly fumbling with something. John narrowed his eyes.

“The murders, Richard,” Sherlock repeated more calmly, giving no sign that he was doing anything untoward. But his hand was still in his pocket, and John had a suspicion that there was some kind of plan taking place, one that he was entirely unaware of.

The words seemed to take a moment to sink in, and then Richard’s face was falling almost comically quickly.

“Yes. The murders. How absolutely horrible, don’t you think?” he gave a dramatic little shudder, and John suddenly had an image of him as a cartoon character. “It’s just dreadful. I still have nightmares about it.”

“So you really saw it happen?” he asked, and Richard’s eyes grew wider.

“Well, yes. I told the police all about it, I thought you had read the report?”
His face grew quizzical and he turned back to Sherlock.

“Why did you read the report?”

Sherlock flicked his hand in the air impatiently.

“Irrelevant.”

Richard tilted his head slightly, watching Sherlock.

“How,” he said after a moment. “Interesting.”

John could almost feel something unspoken passing between the two of them, Richard and Sherlock.

Sherlock’s back grew stiffer, and Richard’s mouth quirked into a vague approximation of a smile. Then he blinked, and the moment was gone.

“What did you want to know about it? The murders?”

“Murders,” repeated Sherlock. “That’s exactly what I wanted to know. You spoke about them in the plural in your testimony.”

“Did I?” asked the boy without skipping a beat. “How strange, that was only the first one. I was ever so upset, I must not have known what I was saying.”

“Mm,” replied Sherlock. “And blaming it on the homeless?”

“That’s the current theory, is it not? Besides, I saw someone running away, and they were obviously not well off.”

“Yes, which you mentioned in your testimony. You did not, however, mention why exactly you were so conveniently placed so as to be at the scene of the crime mere moments after it happened, yet just too late to actually see anything committed.”

“Strange, I didn’t realize I was being interrogated. I believe I was entirely cleared of all suspicion by the police. Or did you skip that part when you were snooping around someone’s office?”

John’s eyes darted between the two of them in fascination. Sherlock was being his usual intense self, looming over the shorter boy, and yet Richard’s voice was even, his demeanour entirely unruffled.

“I was volunteering,” Richard said after a moment, when it became clear that Sherlock wasn’t going to respond. “We had just finished, and I was heading to catch a taxi. I heard a shout and when I turned the corner, there was a man on the ground, and another running off. I called the police. I told them what I saw. That’s it. Which, I’m assuming, you already knew.”

“We did,” Sherlock confirmed.

“Right,” said Richard, rubbing a hand over his mouth. “Right. Well. That’s all.”

John shrugged and made to apologize for the intrusion, but Sherlock put up his hand.

“No. It’s not.”

“It’s not what?” Richard asked, and John heard his voice waver.
“It’s not all. There’s something else,” Sherlock said, voice low, stalking closer to the boy. Richard was losing his calm veneer now, and he took a step backwards, tugging at his hair. John felt sorry for him. “What are you not telling us? What did you not tell the police?”

Richard swallowed hard, blinking rapidly.

“Nothing,” he said, attempting a smile, “there’s nothing else.”

Sherlock moved closer, until he was staring down his nose at him.

“You were emotionally compromised at the scene of the crime. That’s… understandable considering the circumstances, I suppose. But now it’s just us. There’s… nothing to be wary of. You should tell us what you know.”

Richard laughed nervously, looking to John, who couldn’t help smiling at Sherlock’s attempt to be understanding. The smile seemed to calm Richard, who looked back to Sherlock with a determined expression.

“Fine. Fine, there was something else. I was… frightened. I didn’t know what to do. I was kneeling by the body, and there was blood all over my hands, and the police thought it was my fault, and…”

Richard broke off, face twisting into a grimace. His hands were shaking, John noted.

“I panicked. I told them everything I could think of to get them off my back. It was true!” he amended quickly. “It was all true. I wouldn’t lie to the police. But… I didn’t tell them everything. I didn’t want to have to speak to them for any longer than necessary, I wanted to go home.”

“Of course,” murmured John, disliking the frantic cadence of the boy’s voice, the wide set of his eyes. “No one is blaming you for anything.”

Sherlock flicked John an irritated look.

“Yes, yes, you were frightened, you’re a good boy, we all understand. Now get on with it.”

“Sherlock,” John mumbled.

“I… I think I recognized the man who was running away.”

“And?” said Sherlock, moving even closer. “Who was it?”

“His name is Jamie. He’s always around, never fails to take a meal when we’re handing stuff out. He likes to talk. He seems nice. But- but I’m sure it was him.”

“How sure?”

Richard frowned, looking down at his hands, but before he could answer there was a voice from downstairs.

“Sherlock?”

John jumped.

That sounded like – surely it wasn’t –

“Lestrade,” Sherlock confirmed, nodding at John. “I suppose that’s our cue to leave.”
“Sherlock, are you up there?”

“Is that the detective?” asked Richard incredulously. “Is he-”

Sherlock cut him off.

“He’s not here for you, relax. Now, the name. Jamie, you said? Jamie who? I need a last name.”

Richard’s eyes narrowed slightly, and he glanced between Sherlock and John once more.

“Winters,” he said finally. “Jamie Winters. He’s usually hanging around St. Thomas Square, on Mare Street, or over by the Picture House. He’s a little older than I am, probably around your age,” he said, nodding at John.

“Sherlock Holmes,” came Lestrade’s voice, much closer now. “You and John had better get your arses down here immediately or I’ll drag you down by your poncy hair, so help me God.”

Richard smirked.

“Got you on a leash then, does he?”

Sherlock rolled his eyes and turned around, walking back down the hallway.

John hesitated, feeling slightly awkward.

“Look,” he began, “sorry about all that.”

“Oh stop,” said Richard, waving his hand in the air. “Don’t apologize. I’ve no idea what it was all about, but it was rather exciting. I never expected to meet you, let alone have you and Sherlock show up in my house.”

John smiled, feeling even more awkward. Richard was grinning at him.

“Could I – would it be terribly silly of me to ask for a picture?”

John stared.

“A picture?”

“With you?” Richard prompted, digging in his pocket and producing a mobile phone.

“Oh,” said John, staring at the phone rather dumbly. “I… suppose so. If you really want one.”

“I do,” said Richard, beaming. He moved beside John, and held the phone out in front of them. John smiled weakly as Richard snapped the photo, but the other boy was practically glowing with delight.

“Thank-you ever so much, that’s fantastic. Thank-you. It was lovely to meet you. Both of you.”

“Right,” said John, a little dazed.


“Uh oh.”

“Bye then,” said John, heading towards the stairs.
“Goodbye John Watson,” called Richard, his voice like a song. “I hope to see you and Sherlock again.”

John could see Lestrade glowering at Sherlock by the front door, and he ran quickly down to join them.

Lestrade glared at him when he reached the bottom, then turned to Mrs. Brook.

“I’m ever so sorry for my…” began Lestrade politely, waving a hand towards John and Sherlock. “For them.”

“No trouble,” she said, frowning slightly.

“We’ll be out of your hair now, please excuse us.”

Mrs. Brook called something after them as they hurried down the front steps, but none of them stopped to listen.

“Get in,” Lestrade said firmly, unlocking his car.

Sherlock and John both climbed into the backseat and waited silently. John felt ten years old. Lestrade got in a moment later and turned around to look at them.

“What the bloody hell was that all about? Running off from my place without notice, then texting me an hour later with the address of one of our witnesses?”

John’s eyebrows shot up and he turned to look at Sherlock.

“You texted him? That’s what you were doing in your coat?”

“You noticed?” asked Sherlock, looking pleased. “Well done.”

John stared at him for a moment longer before throwing his arms in the air and turning back to the front of the car.

“Oh for-” Sherlock rolled his eyes and leaned forward. “If you’ll both stop being so dramatic for more than two seconds, you’ll find that it’s really rather simple. We noticed something strange about Richard Brook’s testimony, we went to go talk to him about it, I texted you so that you were kept in the loop. It’s not that difficult to understand.”

“Yeah, that would make sense except for the fact that you’re not detectives,” Lestrade snapped back.

“As if-”

“Stop, Sherlock,” John interjected, watching Lestrade’s rapidly darkening face. “We shouldn’t have gone over there. I’m sorry.”

Sherlock stared at him until John nudged him sharply with an elbow.

“Fine,” he huffed, folding his arms over his chest and slouching down in his seat. “We shouldn’t have done that.”

Lestrade eyed him for a moment, until John spoke again.

“That’s as close to an apology as you’re going to get, I’m afraid.”
Lestrade grunted in response and turned to face the front of the car.

“This better not happen again,” he said as he started the car up and pulled away from the curb. “I can’t have you two putting yourselves in danger. If you think there’s something you can do to help, just tell me. I’ll listen. I’ve listened so far, haven’t I?”

John met his eyes in the rear-view mirror and nodded.

“Yes, sir,” he mumbled, wishing he could slouch down and ignore the detective like Sherlock was doing.

“This is your last chance,” Lestrade said. “No more of this. I can’t have it.”

They sat in uncomfortable silence for quite some time before Lestrade spoke again.

“By the way, Sherlock, I’ve been meaning to ask.”

Sherlock sat up a little.

John could see a slight smile on Lestrade’s face.

“There’s a strict pants-wearing policy at the Yard. Do you think you’ll be able to stick with it if you continue to lend your help?”

John laughed, and the detective joined him a moment later. Sherlock’s eyes widened, and he stared at the man in front of him.

“What?” he managed to choke out before his eyes narrowed, and he turned to John accusingly. “You… you posted about my pants? On the internet?” He whipped his head back around towards the detective. “And you follow him?”

Lestrade shrugged.

“I ran a background check on the both of you. When John’s blog and all that showed up, I thought it might be a handy way of keeping tabs on you both.” He paused, and looked at them in the mirror. “Also, apparently my niece is a big fan. She’d like a picture with you sometime.”

“Right,” stammered John, “sure.”

Sherlock shook his head disparagingly and held his hand out to John, who wordlessly placed his mobile on Sherlock’s outstretched palm. He watched as his friend’s eyes scanned quickly over his twitter feed.

“I see,” Sherlock said with a sigh. “Well, I have to say, John: I’m not surprised your readers are inclined to believe we’re romantically involved if this is the kind of drivel they’re used to.”

This time it was John’s turn to stare at Sherlock. He could feel his cheeks heat up as Lestrade laughed again.

Sherlock looked back at him, the corner of his mouth crooked up in a smirk.

“Best be careful,” he said, raising one eyebrow.

John rolled his eyes and turned to look out the window. He could feel Sherlock’s eyes on him for the rest of the drive back to Baker Street.
It was early afternoon by the time they arrived back at the flat. Sherlock flopped onto the sofa the moment they got in, and promptly disappeared into his head. John could see it in his expression that he had checked out, so he flipped the kettle on, and settled down with his laptop.

Around two o’clock, his phone buzzed.

“It’s Lestrade,” Sherlock said, and John jumped at the sudden absence of silence. “He’s texting to give you permission to post your grocery store robbery vlog.”

Sherlock’s eyes were still closed, his fingers steepled to his chin in his I’m thinking pose.

“How could you possibly know that? You’re bluffing.”

John saw Sherlock smile a little at his words.

“Am I?”

John ignored him and got up to look for his mobile. It took him an embarrassingly long couple of minutes before he realized.

“You took my phone, didn’t you?”

Sherlock didn’t respond, other than to extract John’s phone from somewhere underneath himself on the sofa and slide it onto the table.

“You’re an idiot,” said John, snatching his phone away.

“Sometimes,” murmured Sherlock in acknowledgement. “Just for fun. To see what it’s like for you.”

John shook his head, huffing out a laugh despite himself. He switched the phone on and saw that Sherlock hadn’t been lying: as long as he kept peoples’ names and other personal information out of it, he was allowed to post his first vlog.

He grinned at the screen and quickly grabbed his laptop from where he’d deposited it on the floor. He’d had the video edited and uploaded privately for weeks already. He watched it again now, looking carefully to make sure he hadn’t missed anything.

“Oh, just post it already.”

John flicked his eyes to Sherlock, who was still prone on the couch, but now watching him with one eye.

“You really have no reason to be nervous.”

“I’m not nervous.”

“Mmm,” hummed Sherlock. “Everyone will love it. Well. Everyone who already enjoys your content will find this equally enjoyable, and a lot more exciting.”

John stared at his screen. It was all lined up, the video uploaded, the title and description ready to go; all he had to do was publish it.

Sherlock sat up, staring intently at him. John glanced over.

“What?”
“Nothing,” his friend said, shaking his head. “I’m just watching you.”

“I can see that. Why?”

“This is intriguing.”

“Again… why?”

Sherlock leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees and clasping his hands in front of him.

“Your online personality provides you with inner turmoil.”

“Yeah, okay Ghandi,” John laughed.

Sherlock’s expression didn’t change, but John got the distinct impression he was rolling his eyes at him.

“That’s hardly a Ghandi reference. I’m merely saying that despite the fact that you so clearly enjoy doing it, you also stress about it to the point that it causes anxiety.”

“It does not.”

“Then post it.”

“You realize this video will open up a lot more discussion about you, right?”

This time Sherlock really did roll his eyes.

“Post it.”

“Fine,” John said defiantly, clicking “publish” a little harder than necessary.

The screen froze for a moment, and then a message appeared, congratulating him on his successful upload.

John looked at it for a moment.

“Well, shit.”

“Good,” said Sherlock, standing up and grabbing John’s laptop away from him. “Now leave it alone.”

“Oi!”

Sherlock held the computer above his head and walked out of the room. John stared after him, trying to decide whether he was bothered enough to follow him.

It turned out he wasn’t. Instead he sent out a quick tweet and blog post about his first vlog’s successful upload, and by the time he was done, Sherlock had returned, sans laptop.

“Let’s go get some dinner.”

“Dinner?” John repeated.

“I know you heard me. Get your coat. You can choose the place.”

John raised an eyebrow but decided not to comment. He chose Thai and Sherlock, surprisingly,
They were already in the restaurant, waiting for their food to arrive, when John realized something.

“Are you distracting me?”

Sherlock paused in the middle of a long diatribe about the varying levels of cleanliness of Asian restaurants in London.

“Distracting you?”

“Yeah, you know, keeping me busy.”

“For what purpose?”

“I have no idea. You’re you, it could be about anything couldn’t it?”

Sherlock frowned slightly and his eyes narrowed, apparently seriously considering.

“I suppose I might try to distract you from something I was planning if I knew you wouldn’t approve.”

“That would be my first guess.”

“But I’m not planning anything.”

John gave him a side look.

“You’re Sherlock Holmes. You’re always planning something.”

Sherlock looked pleased at the assessment.

“Why do you think I’m distracting you?”

“You suggested dinner, you let me pick the place, you haven’t argued with me once, and you’re not even looking at your phone.”

Sherlock tilted his head.

“Is that abnormal?”

“For ordinary people? No. For you? Most definitely.”

Sherlock continued to look at him for a long moment, before letting his gaze fall to the table.

“Ah.”

John frowned.

“I didn’t mean that as a bad thing.”

Sherlock nodded.

“I’m sure.”

“No, I’m serious.”
“It’s not a bad thing that it’s abnormal for me to behave in a way that is entirely usual and even expected from everyone else?”

“Well I didn’t say you’re usually bad company. You’re great company. You’re the best company I know.”

Sherlock smiled and looked back up at him.

“Now I’m quite sure that’s not true.”

“It is. You’re just… different company.”

“That sounds more plausible.”

“Of course it is. Stop being a sap, you know I like spending time with you. I wouldn’t still be living with you if I didn’t.”

Sherlock’s smile grew. John shook his head. “And now I’m fairly certain you’re just looking for compliments.”

“Of course not,” scoffed Sherlock, the smile still in place. “I would never do that.”

“Right,” said John sarcastically.

Sherlock continued to carry on the conversation as the food arrived, and throughout the meal. John watched him suspiciously, but Sherlock just continued to smile and talk, even going so far as to take John’s phone out of his hand at one point to keep his attention.

“Sherlock,” John spluttered, grabbing for his phone. Sherlock just pushed him away and slipped the phone into his pocket.

“I was under the impression that it goes against decorum to use your phone while engaging in pleasant conversation.”

“You always use your phone when I’m talking to you.”

“I said pleasant conversa- ow!” Sherlock broke off to rub his head as John sat back down, feeling rather vindicated.

“You hit me,” Sherlock grumbled.

“You deserved it.”

Before Sherlock could retaliate, his phone buzzed loudly from where it lay on the table. John watched as Sherlock’s entire body changed, his eyes darting across the screen. His whole being seemed to thrum with excited energy, and he stood up so quickly he knocked his chair out from under him. It fell with a loud clatter, and John sent an apologetic look to the other diners.

“Will you sit down?” he hissed, tugging at his sleeve.

“We have to go.”

John stared at him in exasperation.

“We’re not even finished eating. What happened to our pleasant conversation?”

“It got boring. Come on.”
Sherlock strode from the restaurant, not even sparing a glance at the waiter, who was hovering anxiously, as if terrified that John too was going to leave without paying.

John sighed in irritation and hurried to settle the tab, hoping Sherlock wouldn’t have already left – with both of their phones – by the time he made it outside.

Thankfully he hadn’t, and John emerged to find his friend beckoning him impatiently from inside an idling taxi.

“John, we need to go.”

John slid inside the car, not even waiting for the other boy to move over. He hid a smile as Sherlock scrambled to make room for him.

“You owe me fifteen quid.”

Sherlock waved an imperious hand at him as the taxi started off.

“Currently irrelevant.”

John thought of all the times his friend had covered him when he was late on rent, and didn’t push it.

He could see Sherlock sinking further and further into thinking mode as they drove, and so he kept silent, not even commenting as they drew closer to Hackney for the second time that day. It was only once he had paid the driver, and they were both standing, shivering on the curb that he spoke up.

“Shepherd,” he said quietly, glancing around. His friend started slightly, as if just remembering John was with him. “What are we doing here?”

It was only 4:30, but already the sun was setting, the streets around them darkening. The air was cold, and there was a bit of a sharp wind. John pulled his coat more tightly around him.

“We’re just checking something.”

“We’re looking for Jamie Winters, aren’t we?”

Sherlock looked at him in surprise, and John barely suppressed a frustrated sigh.

“Yes, well done.”

John ignored his praise, studying their surroundings more closely instead. They stood in front of a darkened storefront, the windows shattered and covered with cardboard. There was a small side street to their right, and he could see figures moving about at the far end in the dingy light. It looked like barely half the lamps were working on this street, and he fought the urge to roll his eyes. How stereotypically dodgy could a place get?

“I don’t know if this is the best place to be when it’s dark.”

Sherlock clicked his tongue, and looked down at his phone.

“Nonsense, we’ll be fine. We won’t be here long anyway.”

“How do you know he’ll even be here?”
“Brook told me.”

John looked at him in surprise.

“Richard Brook?”

Sherlock didn’t respond, instead turning and heading purposefully for the alley. John followed him cautiously as he approached a man standing alone in a doorway.

“Jamie Winters?” Sherlock demanded, and the man shook his head. Sherlock immediately turned and continued down the street until he reached a small cluster of people standing near the corner of the curb. “Jamie Winters?” he inquired again.

“Who are you?” answered a thin, wiry looking man. His face was pinched, and he appeared to be wearing several layers of sweaters.

“Ah, excellent,” said Sherlock, turning his whole focus onto the man. “I need to speak with you.”

The rest of the group began to slowly fade away, disappearing one by one like spirits into the night, until it was just the three of them left. John shivered, looking around warily as Sherlock spoke.

“I was told you might have some insight as to who has been committing the recent murders in this area.”

The man shifted uneasily, frowning.

“Again; who the hell are you?”

“Irrelevant,” said Sherlock. “How do you know Richard Brook?”

The man’s eyes widened almost imperceptibly.

“I already talked to the police, I cooperated. Everyone around here has. Why should I talk to you?”

“Richard claims to have seen you at the scene of the first crime.”

Jamie’s expression changed at those words, his eyes lighting up as if he had reached some kind of understanding.

“I know you,” he said slowly. Sherlock tilted his head.

“I very much doubt that.”


Sherlock looked at John, his face mirroring the surprise John himself was feeling.

“And he would be-?”

“John Watson. The one with the blog.” Jamie’s lip curled as he spoke, and he thrust his hands into the front pocket of his oversized sweater.

Sherlock jerked back as if he had been hit. Which seemed rather dramatic, if you asked John.
“Why- how can you possibly know that?”

“You think a bloke like me can’t be interested in his blog?”


“What’s going on?” John asked, nudging Sherlock with an elbow.

“Call Lestrade,” Sherlock murmured, so low that John barely heard him. “Now.”

John took a slight step back, moving behind Sherlock just enough that his left hand was obscured from Jamie’s vision. He slipped the hand into his pocket, frowning when he couldn’t find his phone. Suddenly his heart sank.

His phone was in Sherlock’s back pocket.

“You are clever, aren’t you?” Jamie said, watching them both with interest.

“I am, yes,” replied Sherlock calmly. John moved beside him, kicking gently at Sherlock’s ankle to get his attention.

“You’ve got my phone,” he whispered.

Jamie frowned.

“What was that?”

“John is cold,” Sherlock replied blandly. “Now who told you about us?”

Jamie raised one eyebrow, his eyes darting around.

“No one. I told you; I read his blog.”

“I don’t believe that for a second. Someone tipped you off about us. Told you we’d be here, told you to look out for us.”

“Why would they do that?”

“Either to warn you,” said Sherlock, stepping closer to John. John jumped when he felt Sherlock grasp his wrist tightly between his fingers. “Or to hire you.”

“Hire me?”

Sherlock took a step back, tugging at John’s arm.

Jamie stepped forward, keeping pace with them. “Hire me to do what?” His hands were still in his pocket, but he drew one out slightly, his fingers curled around something.

It happened quickly and slowly all at once.

Sherlock turned to pull John towards the lit street behind them. Just as his friend’s back was turned, Jamie pulled his hands out of his pocket, his right hand grasped tightly around the hilt of an ornate blade.

Without thinking, John wrenched his arm out of his friend’s grasp and stepped toward Jamie, his arm already reaching out to knock the blade out of the man’s hand.
Jamie frowned, lurching back.

“Not you,” he hissed, trying to step around John.

Suddenly John understood.

“Not him,” he answered, pushing Sherlock behind him as hard as he could and throwing himself towards Jamie.

There was a shocked shout, and then Jamie was moving.

John saw the blade rather than felt it. It didn’t make sense to him why his body was suddenly caving in on itself. Why didn’t his knees want to stay locked? Why wouldn’t his legs hold him up anymore? Even his heart seemed to be protesting, beating much more rapidly than it usually did. He felt a burst of warmth in his side, followed by a jarring thud as his body collapsed to the ground.

He could hear Sherlock yelling something, and there was a loud, repeated slamming noise. Then someone was running away, their footsteps erratic.

“Ambulance-” came Sherlock’s frantic, fractured voice in his ears, difficult to hear over the sound of his own breathing. He could hear some of the words, but their meaning was nonsensical. What was Sherlock calling the ambulance for? “…was stabbed … bleeding … hurry the hell…”

“It’s alright,” he tried to say, but nothing more than a moan came out. His eyes were acting funny, flickers of black and white dancing across his vision.

He felt Sherlock crouch down beside him, and it was only then that his mind caught up with his body.

A deep, gnawing pain flared up his side, splintering into his stomach and up through his neck. He gasped in surprise and looked down, shocked to see that Sherlock’s hands were covered with blood where they were pressed into his side.

The pain was pulsing steadily; a point of sharp agony, surrounded by waves of searing heat, like ripples in a lake.

His mind was slowing down, and his eyes kept trying to close. He suddenly realized his body was going into shock.

He looked up, trying to tell Sherlock not to worry, and froze when he saw the tear running down his friend’s cheek.

Sherlock was crying.

He, John, was bleeding on the ground in some godforsaken side street in bloody Hackney – and Sherlock was crying.

John closed his eyes.

Shit.

***
Everything was frozen.

Time had stilled. There was a strange thudding sound in Sherlock’s ears, and something warm was underneath his fingers.

*John,* he tried to say, but his lungs couldn’t work up enough air for the word to come out.

*John, John, John.*

“*John,*” he whispered, and he felt something shift beneath his hands.

He could feel something wet, and there was red. Red everything.

“*John,*” he whispered again. “*John. No.*”

There was a loud sort of noise coming from behind him, like someone shouting.

Sherlock was suddenly very cold. He wasn’t wearing his coat.

He looked down, blinked past the red, and saw that he had, at some point in the past few minutes, taken his coat off and covered – John.

It was John under his hands. John covered in red.

“*No,*” he breathed, pressing his hands down harder, desperate to stop the flow of blood.

Something bitter and vile was rising up in his throat, and his lungs were refusing to cooperate, and he was suddenly quite sure he was going to lose consciousness.

Sherlock blinked slowly against the black that was suddenly threatening to flood his vision, but before he was pulled under, something circled his wrist.

Something soft, and warm, and *alive.*

“*Sherlock?*” John’s voice was weak, but it was there. Sherlock scrubbed an arm over his eyes and focused down at his friend. “*Sherlock, it’s alright.*”

Sherlock shook his head wordlessly, all of a sudden unable to speak.

“I’m okay.”

“You’re not,” Sherlock whispered.

“It only grazed me, I think,” John said, looking down at himself. “I think I moved away in time.”

Sherlock shook his head rapidly, hands grappling for a better hold on his friend’s side.

“No, it hit you, you’re hit, you’re bleeding so much, no, you-” he could hear himself babbling for the first time in his life, and it was a relief when John cut him off.

“*Sherlock,*” he said firmly, tapping his arm. “*Listen to me. It sliced right through my side. I don’t think it could have hit any major organs, it’s too far over, it probably just hit my external oblique muscles. I’m at risk for internal bleeding, infection, or simply too much blood loss, but it’s most likely not critical. Just keep your hands where they are, you’re doing great.*”
John’s voice was breathy, and weak. Sherlock frowned, the words nonsense. There was too much blood for it not to be critical. John may be pre-med, but he was clearly in shock.

“I barely feel it anyway,” John added in a whisper, and Sherlock’s mind was made up.

He opened his mouth to explain the concept of shock to John, to tell him to lay still and stop expending energy, but the words came out wrong.

“I’m so sorry.”

John paused in his attempt to sit up, and looked up at him, eyes wide. The colour was slowly draining from his face as the blood continued to flow.

“Why?”

“It’s all my-” Sherlock cut himself off. John didn’t need his self-pity right now. They both knew whose fault it was. He shook his head, pushing John gently back down. “I’m just sorry.”

“Come off it,” whispered John, his eyes fluttering shut. Sherlock’s chest clenched painfully.

“Stay awake,” he said sharply, and John opened his eyes again.


Sherlock felt like laughing. John was lying here, bleeding out over his friend’s hands, and he was still taking care of Sherlock.

“Stop it,” he said, “just stay awake.”

The sound of sirens drifted towards Sherlock’s ears, and he felt something inside him collapse in relief.

“Just a little while longer, John. They’re almost here.”

“I know,” said John, blinking fiercely. “I’m okay. It’ll be fine.”

The ambulance was there now, and Sherlock was suddenly aware that Lestrade was behind him, hands tight on Sherlock’s shoulders. He wondered how long he had been there. He could hear the detective speaking rapidly, probably berating Sherlock for his stupidity. He ignored him. He didn’t need anyone else to tell him how infinitely idiotic he had been. He was quite cognisant of that fact himself.

The paramedics were around them, trying to push Sherlock away.

“No,” he snarled, hurling himself back over John, hands pressed tightly to his friend’s side. “I’m not leaving him.”

“Sherlock,” said John, his voice hoarse now. “Let them. They need to. Please.”

Sherlock moved immediately, his body reacting to John’s words before his mind had even processed them.

The men moved then, throwing Sherlock’s coat to one side, and cutting open John’s jumper, – his favourite jumper, Sherlock noted absently – equipment at the ready.

John’s eyes were closed, but he was answering their questions weakly.
Sherlock was vaguely aware of something being draped over his shoulders, but he didn’t tear his eyes away from John for a moment, getting up unsteadily to follow them as they carried him on the stretcher to the ambulance.

“Sorry,” said one of the paramedics gently, laying a hand on Sherlock’s shoulder.

Sherlock blinked at him quizzically, realizing he had been speaking to him for a while.

“What?” he asked stupidly, heart thudding dully at the man’s words.

“Sherlock,” said Lestrade, tugging at his shoulder now. “They need to take him to the hospital now. Come on.”

Sherlock pulled away.

“I’m going with him,” he said sharply, trying to duck around the man in front of him. The medic was too quick for him, and shut the door of the vehicle.

“He’s just a kid,” the man said, and Sherlock didn’t understand, until he realized that he was speaking to Lestrade. “He can’t ride in the back.”

“Come on, lad,” said the inspector, grabbing Sherlock’s arms. “I’ll drive you.”

“I wasn’t distracting you for this, John,” Sherlock shouted at the ambulance, the need for John to know this fact suddenly overwhelming his mind. “I didn’t plan this, I promise.”

“I’m sure he knows,” said Lestrade, tugging at him. Sherlock attempted to pull out of the detective’s grasp, but he was holding him tightly.

“I didn’t plan this, I didn’t plan this, John, I didn’t. I would never plan this.”

“Sherlock,” said Lestrade loudly, shaking Sherlock and forcing him to face him. “John knows. He knows. We’ll drive right behind them now. Alright? You’ll be there the same time he will.”

The words sank into Sherlock’s consciousness slowly. The ambulance was already pulling away.

“Let’s go then,” he said, turning briskly and striding towards Lestrade’s car.

He waited impatiently for the man to unlock the car and let them inside. Everything inside him was screaming to hurry, hurry, hurry.

“How did you know it was this one?”

Sherlock turned to Lestrade, who was watching him closely.

“What?” he snapped.

“How did you know this was my car?”

Sherlock stared at him.

How did he know?

Sherlock blinked. The data was all there – expensive yet practical make, distinctively blank around the license plate, scuffs around the tires and bumper where he had pulled into or away from the curb just a little too quickly, flecks of mud on the detective’s pants that matched the puddle the car was parked beside, not to mention the just barely hidden lights protruding from the
front dash – the answer was clear, but the words wouldn’t come.

He just knew.

“It was obvious,” he said, his voice angry. “Now can we please stop wasting time with the trivial, and get going? Or should I take a taxi?”

“Oh,” said the detective rather stupidly. “Alright then. Let’s be off.”

They drove for several minutes in tense silence, before Lestrade spoke.

“I called John’s parents.”

“Mum,” said Sherlock automatically, kicking himself for not having thought of that first.

“Right,” agreed Lestrade. “I called his mum. She’s on her way.”

Sherlock didn’t respond. Of course she was on her way, her son had been stabbed.


“His sister’s coming too.”

Well, that was ridiculous.

“Right,” snorted Sherlock. “I’m sure she is.”

Lestrade glanced at him, but said nothing. It was another few minutes of silence before he spoke again, his voice quiet.

“Relax, Sherlock. He’s going to be okay.”

Sherlock forced himself to stop clenching his hands. Blood rushed back into his palms where his nails had been digging into the skin. He took a deep breath.

“How do you know?”

“Well, he was still able to talk when they took him away. That’s always a good sign, in my experience.”

Sherlock resisted the urge to close his eyes. That screamed distraught, and he had already embarrassed himself enough.

“But he could die. He was stabbed. With a knife. There was blood everywhere. He could die.”

Sherlock bit his tongue before he could continue the idiotic stream of observations.

Lestrade glanced at him sideways from the driver’s seat. Then, without a word, he reached over and flipped on the police lights, leaning hard on his horn.

The cars parted quickly on either side of them, and they sailed down the street much faster than before.

“John can’t die,” Sherlock whispered before he could stop himself, staring down at his blood-covered hands.

“He won’t,” Lestrade replied steadily as they pulled up to the hospital.
But he could, thought Sherlock. And it’s entirely my stupid, mindless, selfish fault.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

John's unconscious mind remembers Sherlock.

Chapter Notes

I know it doesn't further the plot, but I just love this chapter. I hope you do too! I have another chapter that I'm reallyyy hoping to have finished for Christmas, but if I don't quite manage it... Merry Christmas everyone! Stay happy and safe xxx

August 25th, 2015. 2:00pm.

John could hear them arguing before he had even rounded the corner. He stopped a moment, unsure whether he should interrupt. He could hear the school receptionist’s friendly voice, familiar to him from a childhood with her son, but the second voice eluded him. It was young, he could hear that much, and a male – and very upset.

“I just don’t understand why I still haven’t been given a flatmate. I have my own place, and the price is reasonable. I’ve met with several candidates. While most were entirely unsatisfactory, I grant you that, I had assumed that at least one of them would find my flat agreeable.”

John leaned forward, trying to hear more clearly.

“As I’ve told you several times, the students you’ve met with weren’t… entirely convinced it was the best place for them.”

“But that’s ridiculous! It’s a place to live, isn’t it? That’s what they wanted, wasn’t it? I understand that their brains may have trouble comprehending a satisfactory solution to their own problems, but honestly, what on earth could be the problem?”

John was beginning to suspect the problem. He took a step forward until he was able to see the front office.

The man – well, boy really – standing there was tall, ridiculously so, but his youth was apparent in his face. His voice too, despite its haughtiness, was that of a teenager. John had the distinct impression that the boy was trying to appear older than he was, and wondered why, exactly, a teenager was looking for a university flatmate.

“I’m very sorry that this hasn’t worked out the way you wished, but-”

“You’re not sorry at all. It’s your incompetence that has led to this, and I would like to speak to
someone higher up than you.”

John winced. He saw Mrs. Stamford draw herself up in her chair, the polite tilt of her head gone.

“Mr. Holmes. Have you ever considered the fact that it isn’t your flat that the other students found unacceptable?”

She drew in a settling breath, and John saw the boy’s hands move slightly behind his back, digging into the fabric of his long coat.

“Perhaps, rather than your flat that they dislike, it’s your own-”

The hands twitched, clutching tightly at the coat, and John had a sudden flash of his sister, years ago, before she was too cool to take comfort in her older brother. She used to grab onto John’s shirt in just the same way, as if everything would be okay, as long as she held on tight enough.

John was walking forward before he knew what he was doing.

“Morning,” he said, as cheerfully as he could manage, and both people at the front desk jumped, turning to him in unison. They looked at him blankly for a moment before the secretary’s face brightened.

“John! Good morning, how are you, love?”

“Good, cheers,” he said, glancing curiously at the boy who now appeared to be doing everything he could to be invisible. “Alright?”

The boy looked at him for a moment and then turned away again.

“Mmm,” he mumbled in response.

“Oh,” said Mrs. Stamford, her voice somewhat deflated. “John, this is Sherlock Holmes. Sherlock, John Watson. He’s a fellow first year student.”

John blinked in surprise, looking over at the boy, who was very much still a boy.

“You’re starting at uni?”

Sherlock – what kind of a name was Sherlock? – looked back at him, this time meeting his eyes. His gaze washed over John, taking him in slowly. John shifted awkwardly.

“Sertraline or escitalopram?”

John froze, cold flooding his body. How could he possibly know that? He did such a good job of hiding it -

“I beg your pardon?”

He could hear the shock in his own voice. Mrs. Stamford sighed behind the desk, and Sherlock looked away, shaking his head.

“Nothing. I just – never mind.”

And with that, the boy turned and walked away without another word, leaving John staring after him, feeling as if he’d just been smacked in the face.

After what was probably much too long, the woman behind him cleared her throat. John turned
back to her feeling rather bemused.

“So…” he began, trailing off when he had no idea what to say. He was tired again, and he debated just leaving and going back home to sleep.

Mrs. Stamford nodded apologetically.

“That’s Sherlock for you. He can rattle even the best of us. He’s a bit… different. Apparently incredibly bright, but not too adept in manners. He knows things. Things about other people that no one has any business knowing. Just looks at them and knows. He’s done it to me a hundred times now- in fact he’s scared off about ten potential flatmates already. It’s a shame, really; there aren’t a lot of people looking for student living this close to the start of the semester, and his place is quite lovely. If someone could stand his company, I’m sure it would be a fine place to live. It’s too bad he left it to the last minute to advertise, one would think he’d be smarter than that with all those brains of his.”

John nodded slowly in response, unsure of what to say to all that. Fortunately, Mrs. Stamford loved to talk, and didn’t so much mind whether or not you answered. She smiled and leaned forward, patting his hand where it lay on her desk.

“I’m sorry dear, I’m sure you’re not here to chat about others’ tardiness. What can I do for you?”

“I just came to-” John paused, then shook his head ruefully. “I came to ask if there were any flatshares available for the year. I was going to stay home, but my mum’s place is a bit far. Just decided today.”

Mrs. Stamford laughed.

“I supposed no one can be perfect, can they? There are two places wanting a flatmate at the moment. One is Sherlock’s of course, and the other is… let me see, I can’t remember the name of the student who posted it. I’ll have to go find that for you, won’t be a mo.”

She made to get up, but before she had even managed two steps, John blurted out the first thing that came to his mind.

“I’ll speak to Sherlock.”

The woman’s eyebrows rose in surprise, and she sat back down at her desk, staring at him.

“You will?”

John shrugged, wondering why he had said that, and why Sherlock had had to go and clutch at his own coat, all the world like a frightened child.

“Sure.”

“About his flat?”

“What else?” he asked, but Mrs. Stamford was frowning.

“Well…” she hesitated, and John leaned forward. Mrs. Stamford wasn’t one to hesitate. “I said he was different, as I’m sure you could see… and the problem is that not everyone likes different. And he interviewed several other students about the flat. And… not all of them are as kind as you are.”

John straightened up, staring at her.
“What did they do?”

“Oh, I don’t know as they did anything,” she said hurriedly. “It’s only… well people don’t much like it when someone knows things about them, do they? And people can say cruel things when they feel threatened.”

“How?” hummed John, shoving his hands into his pockets. “So he’s made himself some enemies before classes have even started.”

She made a sympathetic face, before brightening.

“I know you wouldn’t be like that, of course dear. I was just warning you that he may not be entirely receptive at first. But I’m sure he’ll come around. He does need a flatmate, after all.”

“Right.” John was regretting this more with every second.

Then again, the boy had been kind of… interesting. And it’s not as if he had to agree to living with him. No harm in looking at the place.

“So I’ll set you up an appointment to meet with him then, shall I?”

“Oh, uh, yeah. Thanks. That’d be great.”

“Not a problem,” she beamed at him. “I do hope this works out. You would be very good for him, I think.”

“Mrs. Stamford,” John sighed, “I’m not a saint.”

“Oh shush,” the woman smiled, waving him off. “You’re as good as I’ve ever met. Besides my Mike, of course.”

“Of course,” John agreed seriously. “Say hi from me, will you? I haven’t seen him in ages.”

“Well you’ll see him soon enough I suppose, when classes start next week.”

John tried to smile at that, but his lips didn’t seem to want to stay up.

August 26th, 2015. 9:30am.

John stood outside the door of 221B Baker Street, his hand poised to knock. He didn’t know why he was hesitating. He was tired; it had been a struggle to get out of bed that morning, and he very nearly hadn’t come. Now that he was here, it all seemed a bit… much.

“Well?” a voice called dryly from above him, and John craned his neck to look up. Sherlock was leaning out of an upper floor window, staring down at John with an amused expression. “Are you coming up, or did you feel like a bit of camping out today?”

“I’m coming up, of course,” said John, still looking up.

Sherlock raised one, elegant eyebrow at him, before disappearing inside.

John frowned and opened the front door. He found himself in an entranceway facing a long
narrow staircase with a corridor to the right, and he hesitated, looking about curiously.

A moment later, an older lady appeared in the corridor.

“Oh! I thought I heard someone coming in. Hello, dear. Are you looking for Sherlock?”

John opened his mouth to reply, but a shout from above cut him off.

“Leave him alone, Mrs. Hudson, he doesn’t want to talk to you. You’ll scare him away like you did the rest. Up here, John.”

John stared at her, aghast.

“No, no, really, you weren’t—”

The woman laughed and waved his protests off.

“Oh, don’t mind him, that’s just Sherlock. He doesn’t mean a single word of it.”

She glanced towards the stairs, then back at John, lowering her voice as she spoke again.

“He really does mean well. He just doesn’t always know how to communicate that. You seem like a nice boy, I’m sure you’ll get along splendidly.”

John wasn’t sure how he couldn’t seem like any kind of boy at all to her yet, but he nodded. He already felt off-kilter, and he hadn’t even entered the flat.

“Right, thank you Mrs. Hudson. I’ll just…” he pointed awkwardly at the stairs.

“Yes, yes, off you go! Have fun! Sherlock,” she added, raising her voice, “be nice.”

“Nice is tedious,” came the reply from above, and John’s lips twitched. He was certainly intriguing, this Sherlock.

John made his way up the stairs, and Sherlock opened the door a moment before he reached it.

“You barely slept,” the other boy said immediately, his eyes raking up and down John. “Mrs. Hudson,” he called down, not giving John a chance to respond. “Bring us some tea, will you?”

“I’m not your housekeeper, Sherlock,” came Mrs. Hudson’s voice.

“And some biscuits too,” Sherlock responded, ignoring her stipulation. “John hasn’t had any breakfast.” Sherlock eyed him again, and then leaned over the railing. “Maybe some toast if you have any. He didn’t eat last night either.”

John stared at Sherlock in disbelief. Who the hell did he think he was, taking advantage of his landlady like that, not to mention the assumptions he was making about John?

Sherlock looked back at him, and sighed.

“I suppose you think I’m rude.”

“A little,” John said, deciding that if Sherlock could be blunt so could he.

“Well,” said Sherlock, and then stopped, shrugging. “That’s probably true. Do you still want to come in?”
John nodded, and Sherlock waved him inside.

They both stood awkwardly in the entrance to the front room. John looked around. The flat was extraordinarily messy, but beautifully laid out, and much larger than he had expected.

“How can someone like you live here?” asked John, without thinking.

“Someone like me?”

“Someone so,” John waved vaguely towards the other boy’s person. “You know, young. How old are you anyway?”

Sherlock sniffed, and drew himself up to his full height. He was a good several inches taller than John.

“Not that it’s pertinent to the situation, but I’m sixteen.”

John raised an eyebrow.

“Exactly.”

Sherlock didn’t answer for a moment, before he sighed and rolled his eyes.

“It’s my brother’s place. He doesn’t use it. My parents’ one condition for allowing me to live off campus was that I live here, and I find myself a flatmate. They don’t want me to be lonely.” He said the last word with disgust, as if such a concept was above him.

“But how are you already going to uni?”

Sherlock shrugged.

“I’m a genius. What else should I be doing?”

John eyed him thoughtfully.

“So you’re sixteen, currently living alone in London, and about to start at Queen Mary’s.”

“Yes. Well done. You have accurately repeated the facts.”

John narrowed his eyes.

“If you’re going to be a prat, I won’t even bother looking.”

“If that was already too much for you, then you probably shouldn’t.”

John turned away with a sigh.

“Bloody hell, you’re difficult, aren’t you?”

“So I’ve been told.”

John clenched his teeth, then turned back to the boy. He fully intended to leave, only… only Sherlock’s right hand was entwined in his bloody shirt, just like with his coat. Despite his apparent bravado, Sherlock seemed oddly nervous. John took a deep breath.

“Look. There’s no need for this. I’ve come to see the flat, not attack you. Let’s start again, shall we?”
Sherlock looked surprised.

“Really?”

John nodded, knowing it was probably a terrible idea.

“Right,” said Sherlock. He cleared his throat, blinking several times. John wondered if he was mentally resetting. “My bedroom and the bathroom are just down there, and there’s a second bedroom up those stairs behind you.”

Sherlock pointed around the flat, then gave a little shrug.

“What do you think?” he asked, clasping his hands together in front of his body.

John tried to respond, but his mouth betrayed him, and the words that came rushing out were the ones that had been bouncing around his head all night, ever since he had first met the tall, pale boy in front of him.

“How did you know?”

Sherlock’s gaze narrowed.

“Know what?”

“How?” John stopped. He couldn’t make himself say it. He settled with gesturing silently towards himself.

“Oh,” said Sherlock, face lighting in understanding. “I… just knew. The shadows under your eyes, the dragged gait, the thin frame, the way your lips keep twitching, as if smiling is just too much effort. Your voice. Your hands.” He shrugged. “Everything.”

John’s heart was trudging through molasses. He took a deep breath, trying to fill his lungs.

“My voice?” he asked, but it came out as a whisper, and he quickly cleared his throat, flushing.

Sherlock sighed again.

“Your voice sounds like you’ve just woken up. Now, that’s understandable at the present, given that it’s morning. But yesterday it was the middle of the day, so you should have had some kind of interaction before the receptionist and me. Unless you really had just woken up. But in the afternoon? That’s unusual, until you look at your eyes. They’re bloodshot and heavily shadowed; you clearly sleep terribly, and had probably only got up very recently when you happened upon us at the front office. That isn’t the behaviour of a well-adjusted, healthy person of your age.”

Sherlock stopped, looking at John warily, probably waiting for his reaction. John felt like he couldn’t move.

“And my hands?” he asked quietly.

“You bite your cuticles, and there are marks on your palms where you’ve clenched your hands too tightly and the fingernails punctured the skin. Given your otherwise steady demeanour, and the fact that I haven’t seen you clench them once since you’ve arrived, I’m assuming those are from abstract moments of great stress; nightmares, or panic attacks, or something along those lines.”

John’s chest was constricting, and he couldn’t answer. He felt entirely exposed, as if Sherlock had taken a scalpel, and very neatly cut him open, picking out each little secret bit that John kept
hidden away. He opened his mouth to tell Sherlock to sod off, but nothing would come out.

Sherlock tilted his head, looking at him curiously.

“It’s merely a chemical imbalance, John,” he said, leaning minutely closer. “So you take some pills to balance it out? That’s nothing to be ashamed of. It just means your brain is wired a little differently. Mine is too. Normal is boring.”

And with those words, John could breathe again. He met Sherlock’s gaze. The other boy flinched, just slightly, and John nodded slowly.

“Okay,” he said.

Sherlock smiled hesitantly. “Okay?”

“Yes, okay.”

“You’re not angry?”

John paused.

“Angry about what?”

“About what I just said.”

John shook his head, and found that he meant it.

“No. It was superbly creepy, terribly embarrassing, and frightfully brilliant. But I’m not angry.”

Sherlock’s eyes lit up.

“Frightfully brilliant?” he repeated, and John felt a faint urge to laugh.

“I’m sure you know that.”

“Of course,” Sherlock assured him. “It’s just that people don’t usually like it when I do that.”

“I didn’t much like it either. Doesn’t mean it wasn’t brilliant.”

“You’re not going to tell me to piss off?”

John’s lips tugged upwards.

“I’m not making any promises for the future, but at the moment; no.”

Sherlock looked much more pleased at not being told to piss off than John thought he should.

Looking away, he took a deep breath and walked further into the sitting room. He looked around, nodding his approval.

“I’ll clean up, of course,” Sherlock said, shifting quickly into a new topic. “And I’m sure we can find space for some of your things.”

John smiled, and he found that it wasn’t hard at all.

“It’s lovely.”
Sherlock stared at him for a moment.

“You like it?”

“I love it,” John nodded. And he did. He felt oddly at home, despite Sherlock’s clutter. He could see himself actually wanting to spend time out of his room here. “I’m glad I came.”

Sherlock eyed him dubiously, before raising his eyebrows.

“You are glad.”

John laughed without thinking.

“I know, that’s what I said.”

“And you…” Sherlock said slowly, “you could potentially see yourself living here?”

“Yes,” said John, before he could stop himself. He paused, considering, then nodded again. “Yes, I could.”

“With me?” Sherlock asked abruptly, as if forcing the words out. His eyes flicked over to the window, studiously not meeting John’s.

John watched him for a moment, giving the question the deliberation it deserved. Could he live with Sherlock, this strange, abrupt, rude boy who seemed to know everything about everyone without even asking; who had just sucked all the air out of John’s lungs in one blow, and then, just as quickly, given it back?

The answer that came to him immediately was surprising: Yes. Yes, he could see himself sharing a flat with Sherlock. The boy knew what John didn’t tell anyone. It was uncomfortable, and embarrassing, and rattling. But – and this was the clincher – Sherlock didn’t seem to care. He didn’t seem to give a flying donkey’s arse whether John took depression and anxiety medication, or whether he had trouble sleeping at night and could barely drag himself out of bed in the morning, or whether the thought of laughing and smiling and having anything other than the briefest of polite conversations with people made something in the pit of John’s stomach turn to ash. He knew all that, and yet he still wanted John as a flatmate. He wasn’t treating him with kid gloves, the way his mother did. He was being blunt, and brash, and a little rude… and John loved it.

“Yes, with you,” John said, and Sherlock’s eyes were back on him, wide and unblinking. “Did you think I’d kick you out of your own flat?”

“No, I-” he seemed hesitant now. “I just think you should know that I play the violin.”

John blinked.

“Okay.”

“Sometimes at night.”

“Are you any good?”

“I’m incredible.”

John shrugged.

“Then, okay.”
Sherlock frowned at him.

“Sometimes I’ll ignore you.”

“Sometimes I’ll ignore you back.”

“Sometimes I’ll be out for days,” countered Sherlock.

“Sometimes I’ll stay in bed all day so I won’t notice,” retorted John.

“Sometimes—” began Sherlock.

“Shut up,” said John.

Sherlock stopped talking, and John offered him another smile.

“Right,” said Sherlock slowly. “Right, okay. So. We’re flatmates. Good.”

John nodded, his smile growing of its own accord.

“Good.”

September 4th, 2015. 8:15am.

John couldn’t move. He kept trying to sit up, to get out of bed and get ready, but he couldn’t.

His lungs were empty, and his limbs were heavy, and he felt as if he could close his eyes and disappear.

His alarm went off again – for the fifth time now – and he smashed at the snooze button, knowing he was dangerously close to being late for his first day of uni.

First day of pre-med.

John covered his head with his quilt.

That was too much. People would understand. All he had to do was tell them he’d caught a bug, or had food poisoning, or anything at all involving vomit, and they’d let it be.

He could start tomorrow. That would be better, tomorrow wouldn’t be so hard. Or maybe next week. That would be okay.

There was a brief, cursory knock at his door, and then Sherlock was barging in. John jumped so hard it hurt his head. (Or maybe his head had already hurt.) He hadn’t heard anyone coming up the stairs.

“Mrs. Hudson brought tea and scones up, and told me to let you know that she’s not your housekeeper, so don’t get used to it, she just wanted to make something special for the occasion.”

Sherlock was talking too quickly, and John didn’t respond.

“We have to leave in fifteen minutes, so you’ll probably want to get up now.”
John stirred at that.

“We?”

There was a pause.

“First year orientation starts at 9. I thought… I thought we could go there together. But we don’t have to.”

It was Sherlock’s first day too. And he was only sixteen.

John pulled the blanket off of his face and blinked up at his flatmate.

“Together?”

Sherlock shrugged.

“If you want.”

No, John did not want. He didn’t want to go at all, he didn’t want to get out of bed. But maybe it would be better, if neither of them had to do it alone.

Sherlock smiled at him and his bottom lip wobbled, just a bit.

John sat up.

“Alright.”

Sherlock brightened and turned to leave.

“Excellent, I’ll be downstairs. I’ll save the scones until you’re down.”

“No, you don’t have-”

The door closed on John’s words. He sighed. Sherlock kept making him eat. It would have been annoying, if it hadn’t actually worked.

He sat on the edge of the bed and steeled himself to get up.

All he had to do was get dressed. One thing at a time. That wasn’t so hard.

It was only when he stood up that he noticed that his medication bottle was sitting on the bedside table, beside a glass of water and a post-it note:

‘Normal is boring.’

---

**November 17th, 2015. 9pm.**

John watched from the settee as Sherlock paced back and forth across the sitting room.

“I don’t understand,” said Sherlock for what seemed like the twentieth time. “Why can’t they just be rational?”
“I don’t know,” said John quietly, feeling helpless.

“They’re all idiots, their brains are miniscule, they’re worthless.”

“Sherlock,” murmured John, shaking his head. “Bit not good.”

“Why?” Sherlock said, whirling to face John, and it was more of a cry than a question. “Why is that not good? Why can I not speak the truth? Why must I pretend to be less intelligent than I am? Why must I coddle people who don’t understand? Why does no one ever like-” Sherlock’s expression flashed with something akin to panic, and he abruptly stopped speaking.

John sat up.

“Why does no one ever like what?”

Sherlock shook his head and turned to the window.

“Nothing. It doesn’t matter. The point is that all of humanity is mind-numbingly boring, and my brain won’t shut up, not even for a second. And I. Can’t. Stand. It.”

Sherlock fell silent, staring out of the window. His chest was moving rapidly. John stood up and moved to his side.

“I know, Sherlock,” he said, and put a hand on his friend’s arm. Sherlock was shaking, just a little.

“No you don’t,” said Sherlock dully.

“No,” amended John, “I suppose I don’t. But I do like you.”

Sherlock went still. They stood quietly, looking out at the street below. After a few minutes of silence, Sherlock’s head fell forward, and he leaned his forehead against the windowpane.

“I was wrong,” he said, so quietly it was almost a whisper.

“That’s a new one. Wrong about what?”

“About humanity. I forgot an important addendum.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes. I should have said that all of humanity is mind-numbingly boring, except for John Watson.”

John smiled, and bit the inside of his cheek.

“And Sherlock Holmes,” he added.

Sherlock shook his head, still leaning against the glass.

“I don’t count.”

John frowned.

“Why don’t you count?”

“I said all of humanity.”

There was a beat, and John started laughing before his friend had even spoken again.
“I’m clearly a superior race, John,” said Sherlock, and John could hear the smile in his voice.

*December 16, 2015. 6:25pm.*

“I just don’t see why I have to go at all.”

“Because they’re your family, Sherlock.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes.

“Sherlock, they love you. And it’s Christmas.”

“So what? My mother *adores* Christmas, my father loves anything my mother loves, and Mycroft hates everything. It’s always ghastly.”

John closed his computer and turned to face his flatmate.

“Fine. Don’t go. Stay here, all alone.”

Sherlock pulled a face.

“I don’t see why you have to go, either.”

John sighed.

“Because,” he repeated, “it’s my family. And it’s Christmas.”

“So we have to be miserable?”

John shook his head and stood, heading for the kitchen simply for something to do.

“Why can’t we both just stay here?” called Sherlock.

Something inside John shouted at him to say yes.

“Because I’ve promised my mum that I’ll come home, and Mycroft threatened you.”

“But this is home now,” retorted Sherlock. “So if you stay here, you aren’t breaking any promises.”

“You know what I mean,” said John, rolling his eyes as he searched through the fridge for something edible. “You’re just being childish.”

“You’ll start taking your meds again.”

John stopped what he was doing, hand frozen on the fridge door handle.

“I know you’ve been off them for a month now. I know you’re happier when you don’t have to take them.”

“Sherlock,” John said quietly.

“I know talking about your family makes you anxious, so it only stands to reason that—“
“Sherlock,” John yelled, and the force of it surprised even him. Sherlock went silent. John slammed the fridge door closed, and went back into the sitting room. “Sherlock, shut up.”

“I’m just trying to-”

“You’re just trying to manipulate me,” said John fiercely, cutting him off again. “You’re just trying to use something embarrassing against me, so that I’ll do what you want.”

“No,” said Sherlock, shaking his head firmly. “No I’m not.”

“You are.”

“John, think,” said Sherlock, his voice earnest. “You stopped taking your medication two months after moving in here with me. You sleep better, you eat better, you laugh. You’re happier here. I’m not trying to embarrass you, because there’s nothing to be embarrassed about. I’m just trying to make you see.”

John stared at his friend. Technically, it was all true.

John thought of going home. He thought of his mother’s weary attempts at Christmas spirit, and his sister’s cheerful wildness, and his father’s vacuum of absence. He thought of leaving Baker Street, and leaving uni, and leaving Sherlock.

“There. See? I know you’re not stupid,” said Sherlock, watching his face intently. “I knew you would understand. You can say all you want to about family, and Christmas, because you’re too good- but you don’t want to go home anymore than I do.”

John frowned. He had to go home. Didn’t he?


John opened his mouth, but he found that he couldn’t speak. There was a sudden aching pain in his side, and his head felt like it was cracking in half.

He stared at Sherlock wordlessly, his mouth open but nothing coming out.

“Stay here, John. Please stay. Don’t go,” repeated Sherlock, but all the colour was draining out of everything now, and John watched him in horror.

“Stay here, please stay, don’t go, stay here,” Sherlock continued, and John felt like he was falling.

Today.

John opened his eyes slowly, blinking against the blinding light. He wasn’t sure when he had got into bed, but he must have, because here he was.

Only this wasn’t his bed.

There was a strange beeping noise beside him, and he could hear movement all around. The ceiling was startlingly white.

His head was still pounding, and his side throbbed painfully to the same beat.
He tried to reach up and rub his eyes, but he found that he couldn’t move.

There was a sharp inhalation of breath.

“John,” came a fractured whisper.

The pain was overwhelming, and John couldn’t respond. He tried shaking his head, but all that happened was a tear forced its way out of his eye and down his cheek.

“John,” came the whisper again, and everything in him tried to respond to that voice, but he couldn’t.

And then there were footsteps, and a soothing murmur, and someone was fiddling with something beside his bed.

“Easy now,” came another voice, one right beside him. There was a faint clicking noise, like the pushing of a button, and everything went dark again.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

John is in the hospital.

Chapter Notes

I had two more chapters of this nearly finished right after Christmas and then, Merry Christmas to me, my computer crashed. And I lost… everything. It was heartbreaking to say the least. So this is an entirely rewritten version of this chapter. I hope you like it. Please send me some love, because I'm still trying to get over the loss of everything I've ever written (besides the stuff I backed up of course.. which was not as much as it should have been) for the past 9 years. Yes, I had my old computer for 9 years. The crash was inevitable. But it still hurts :

Anyway, enjoy! xx

When John woke up again, everything was a little clearer. Instead of the piercing heat in his torso, he was just numb all over, and his head felt as though it were stuffed with cotton balls. The world came back to him slowly, and he blinked laboriously several times before his eyes would focus.

"John," came a voice, though not the one he expected. He turned his head until he could see the man standing in the corner of the room.

"Mycroft?" he croaked, his voice hoarse. The man nodded a greeting at him, and stepped closer to the bed. John began to sit up, before falling back against the pillow with a hiss when everything in his body protested the movement.

"Don’t move too much," said Mycroft, his voice bored as he pressed a button that raised the head of John’s bed into an inclined position.

John squinted at him.

"What are you doing here? Did something happen? Is Sherlock okay?"

Mycroft held up a hand, the other resting on the ever present umbrella.

"Nothing has happened to Sherlock. Though I can’t be sure that he is, in fact, ‘okay’." The man shook his head and passed a weary hand over his eyes. “The never-ending dramatics of Sherlock Holmes: you were injured, but my brother was the one who fell apart.”

John frowned, and shifted uncomfortably.
“What do you mean fell apart? Where is he?”

“I believe he is sleeping. I will send someone to alert him of your consciousness.”

John closed his eyes as Mycroft drew a mobile phone out and began tapping out a message.

“How long have I been out?”

“Nearly three days,” responded Mycroft, and John quickly opened his eyes again.

“Three days? Jesus, what happened? Surgical complications?”

A flicker of approval crossed Mycroft’s face, and he nodded, depositing the phone back into his pocket.

“It appears that you were bleeding internally, and, while they were working to stop the bleeding, you had an allergic reaction to one of the local anaesthetics. Your body went into anaphylactic shock.”

John stared at him incredulously, but Mycroft ignored him.

“You then developed a postoperative fever, and they had to monitor you quite closely for signs of infection.”

John held up a finger then, and was surprised when Mycroft fell silent.

“So basically,” John said slowly, trying to process what Mycroft had just told him. The strange muffled feeling in his head made that difficult. “Everything that could have gone wrong… did.”

Mycroft raised an eyebrow.

“It would seem you’re quite the complicated person, Mr. Watson.”

“Bloody hell,” John said, exhaling heavily and rubbing a hand gingerly over his eyes.

The door opened then, and John looked over quickly. His eyebrows raised in surprised when it was not Sherlock who walked through.

“Oh John.”

“Hi mum,” he said weakly as his mother rushed over to his bed and folded him carefully into her arms. He flicked his eyes over to Mycroft in irritation, but the man merely smiled politely.

“Your mother and sister arrived just as you were taken into surgery, thanks to Detective Inspector Lestrade’s quick thinking in contacting them.”

John rolled his eyes, but pressed a kiss to his mother’s cheek.

“I’m fine, Mum.”

When she pulled back, stroking a hand over his hair, he wasn’t surprised to find that she was crying.

“Oh sweetheart, we’ve been so worried. So worried.” Her voice was steady, but he could feel her hand shaking just slightly against his head.

“It’s okay,” he repeated, “I’m alright now.”
“What the hell were you doing?” she said, ignoring his reassuring words entirely, and John blinked at her.

“Uh…” he began, looking quickly to Mycroft. He had no idea what anyone had been told, and he had no desire to get himself or Sherlock into hotter water than they probably already were.

“The attacker was nothing more than an angry drunk, Mrs. Watson,” said Mycroft smoothly, clearly sensing John’s uncertainty. “As Sherlock informed you earlier, he and John were merely volunteering-”

“To hell with that,” said John’s mum fiercely, cutting over Mycroft. John looked at her sharply. “I don’t believe a word of it. Those boys are a bad influence on each other. There’s no way John would have been in this mess otherwise. He doesn’t run headstrong into trouble like this.”

There was a snort from the doorway, and everyone turned. John grit his teeth at the sight of his sister standing there, but he quickly relaxed his expression when he realized that she appeared to be quite sober.

“Come on, Mum,” said Harry calmly, “we all know John can be a bit of an idiot. It’s not really so surprising that it finally caught up to him.”

“Harriet,” said his mother warningly, but John shot Harry a grateful smile. She smiled back at him, and moved farther into the room. She always seemed to float wherever she went, airy and light, like flowers in the breeze. She went to stand beside their mother, and directed her gaze to the bed.

“Hiya John,” she said brightly.

“Hey Harry,” he responded, searching her face carefully. He was relieved to see that his initial assessment had been right; her eyes were clear, and she was entirely steady.

“You alright then?” she asked him. Her voice was casual, but she reached a hand out and squeezed his ankle, and he could see that her expression was strained.

“I’ve felt better, but I’ll live,” he responded, and her smile shifted into something more genuine. “You didn’t have to come.”

“Of course I did,” she said, frowning slightly. “You’re hurt.”

John nodded slowly.

“What about Sherlock. Is he alright?” he asked, trusting his sister’s assessment more than Mycroft’s.

Harry shrugged, but it was their mother who answered.

“Of course he’s alright,” she said, and John took a deep breath, turning back to her. Her face was upset. “He isn’t the one who was stabbed .”

“I know, but-”

“In fact,” she continued, cutting over top of his protest, “I’m quite certain that this wouldn’t have happened at all if he hadn’t been involved.”

“Christ, Mum,” John said, staring at her. “It’s not Sherlock’s fault.”

“Well it’s certainly-”
Before she could finish her accusation, Harry put a hand on their mother’s shoulder and squeezed. Their mother jumped at the sudden touch, turning to her with a frown.

“Mum,” said Harry, shaking her head. “Sherlock didn’t get John hurt. John knows how to get himself in and out of trouble, regardless of who he’s friends with. He’s been doing it for years. This isn’t Sherlock’s fault. I’d say it was probably more the fault of the man who held the knife.”

Everyone was silent for a moment. John could see that even Mycroft’s attention had snapped to Harry, and he was staring at her in surprise.

“Harriet,” said their mother, her tone dangerously calm. John had the distinct impression that this was not the first time they had had this discussion. “He is my son. And while I’m sure Sherlock is a fine young man, if this is the kind of thing that happens when he is in my son’s company, then something needs to change. John deserves better than this.”

“Of course he does,” responded Harry without heat. John might hate her coping mechanisms, but he had always admired her ability to stay calm in the face of their mother’s temper. He had never been nearly as successful. “I can’t think of many people who deserve to be stabbed in a back alley. But Sherlock deserves better than this too. Just look at him,” she said, gesturing at the doorway, and John turned his head in surprise to see that Sherlock had appeared there sometime in the last few seconds.

He looked awful. His face was paler than its usual indoor pallor, and the shadows under his eyes stood out almost shockingly. His hair looked as though he hadn’t washed it in days. His stricken expression made it clear that he had heard at least some of John’s mother’s words, but his eyes were fixed on John.

“Sherlock?” John asked quietly, and his friend jumped slightly. John sighed. He could imagine the sort of things going through Sherlock’s mind, and he was sure that three days of panic and stress had given him ample time to work himself up into quite a state of self-loathing. “You okay?”

Sherlock’s face paled, but he nodded noncommittally.

“He’s been through hell waiting for John to wake up, Mum,” Harry continued. “Just like we have.”

Sherlock’s sudden presence seemed to get Mrs. Watson’s attention, and she took a deep breath.

“I’m sorry, Sherlock,” she said, and John didn’t miss Sherlock’s flinch. “I didn’t mean - well, I know you and John are good friends. I just think that perhaps you and John should… well. I don’t know. I just don’t want you both getting each other into trouble.”

“I’m twenty, Mum,” said John sarcastically, finally getting up the nerve to speak. “What are you planning to do, move me back home?”

“If I need to,” she said absently. John swallowed against the bitter taste in his mouth at the thought of leaving Baker Street.

“I don’t think-” John began angrily, as Harry gave a loud sigh, but they were both cut off by Mycroft, who cleared his throat calmly, and stepped into the middle of the room.

“Pardon me for interrupting,” he said, his voice as bland as always, “but I believe this is a conversation better had once John has had some time to convalesce. His doctor did say to keep the stress levels down. Perhaps for now we could go and speak to his medical team about his recovery, Mrs. Watson?”
John’s mother looked properly chagrined, and she nodded immediately.

“Yes, of course. I’m sorry, John.”

“It’s fine,” said John, with a wave of his hand. He was eager for Mycroft to take his family out, so that he could speak to Sherlock. “Why don’t you go have some tea, Mum? I’m sorry I worried you.”

His mother leaned over to kiss his forehead.

“Don’t be silly, darling. You just rest. I’ll be back a little later.”

John nodded, and watched gratefully as Mycroft ushered his mother out the door.

Harry, however, stayed firmly by his side.

John waited until his mother was out of the room, before turning to his sister.

“Harry,” he said bluntly, “please get lost for a while.”

She raised an eyebrow at him.

“That’s a bit rude,” she said mildly.

“I said please,” John retorted, and Harry laughed.

“You did,” she allowed. Her gaze darted to Sherlock, who was still standing at the foot of John’s bed, his eyes steadfastly trained on the floor, then back to John. “Are you going to sort that out, then?” she asked, and John made a face at her. She studied him for a moment, and then shrugged. “Alright, I need a drink anyway. Of coffee,” she added quickly when John’s expression darkened.

She headed to the door, pausing by Sherlock for a moment to pat his shoulder. He looked up at her, startled, and she smiled.

“Cheer up,” she said. “He’s okay now.” And then she was gone, flitting out the door, and shutting it quietly behind her as she went.

It was silent for a few moments as John studied Sherlock.

“I didn’t plan that,” said Sherlock suddenly. The broken silence made John jump.

“What?”

“I didn’t plan it. I wasn’t distracting you,” said Sherlock, and his voice was strained.

John ran a hand through his hair, wincing when the movement pulled on his injury.

“What are you talking about?”

Sherlock leaned forward, his hands clasped together anxiously.

“At the restaurant, when I was carrying on the conversation. You said I must have been distracting you from a plan, but I wasn’t.”

The conversation drifted hazily into John’s mind. It had been nothing, a throwaway comment at best. John nodded slowly.
“Okay.”

“I didn’t plan to corner Jamie Winters. I swear it. Richard Brook texted me his location while we were eating, that’s the first time I even thought to go find him that night.”

John nodded again, but Sherlock’s face was taut.

“I tried to tell you before they took you away. I didn’t want you to die thinking…” Sherlock broke off, his face stricken.


“I was distracting you, John, but it wasn’t because I was hiding something from you. I just wanted you to have a pleasant evening without worrying about the reaction your first video was going to get.”

John paused.

“You were distracting me from the video?”

“Yes,” said Sherlock miserably, “and I’m sorry. I won’t ever distract you again. I won’t ever do anything that… that… I won’t ever do anything again.”

John let out a breath and shook his head.

“Stop, stop. It’s okay, it’s fine. I get it, Sherlock. I never thought you planned any of it to happen.”

Sherlock eyed him warily, looking like he had more to say, but John shook his head again.

“I promise. Before the attack part, it was all rather exciting anyway.”

Sherlock’s face relaxed, just slightly.

“Well,” he said hesitantly, “okay. But I can start packing up your room if you’d like.”

“My room?” John asked, confused by the sudden shift in subject.

“If that would make it easier while you’re in here,” said Sherlock stiffly, gesturing vaguely towards John. “That way you can just go straight home once you’re discharged.”

John frowned, utterly lost.

“What are you talking about?”

Sherlock shifted uncomfortably, his eyes jumping around the stark white room, and John sighed.

“Sherlock, if you’re implying that I’d actually like to move out and go back to my mum’s place, you’re an even bigger idiot than I thought you were.”

Sherlock’s eyes darted to his at that, affronted.

“I just thought maybe you’d - your mother said we should get some space, and I think she’s right.”

John narrowed his eyes, wishing he could get out of bed and shake some sense into his friend.

“No, you think it’s your fault I’m here.”
The other boy took a step back, his hands still gripped tightly together. After a moment he shrugged, and said nothing.

John’s frown grew.

“Sherlock I - would you stop backing away like a frightened cat, and come over here?”

His friend at least had the grace to look sheepish as he moved to the side of the bed.

“Sit down,” John ordered, and Sherlock dragged Mycroft’s chair over from the corner and perched himself on the edge. John eyed him for a moment before he spoke again. “Whatever you’re thinking, whatever you’ve been thinking since I got hurt, I want you to know that it’s probably utter rubbish. You may be a genius, but you’re also a bit of a pillock.”

Sherlock’s eyes darted to his at that, his brows drawn together. John smiled.

“You’re not actually the centre of the universe. You realize that, right?”

Sherlock looked slightly miffed, but John continued firmly.

“I’m not moving out. Don’t be a martyr about it, and don’t try to convince me I’d be better off. I’m staying at 221B, you’re still my best mate, this wasn’t your fault, and my mum will get over it. End of story. Got it?”

It was quiet as Sherlock processed John’s words. John watched as his friend sat there, staring blankly back. He waited, because he knew that’s all he could do; he could almost physically see his friend retreating into his mind, turning the words over and over until they turned into something he could understand.

After nearly two minutes, Sherlock blinked rapidly, and sat up straighter.

“Oh,” he said, tilting his head and looking directly at John. “You really mean to stay.”

“Yes,” said John, rolling his eyes. “I really do. Of course I do.”

“But-“ began Sherlock, but he was cut off by Harry slipping back into the room. John was glad for the interruption. His side was beginning to throb again, and arguing with Sherlock was taking more energy than normal.

“Hi,” said Harry, her voice soft. “Am I interrupting?”

“Yes,” said Sherlock shortly, frowning. John turned to rebuff him, but Harry just laughed.

“Sorry,” she said, not looking very sorry as she perched on the armrest of his chair. Sherlock blinked up at her, his face comically shocked. “What’s up?”

“I was just telling Sherlock to ignore Mum, basically,” said John, closing his eyes and rubbing at his temples. His head was aching, and he wondered how difficult it would be to get a nurse to slip him some more drugs.

“Oh yeah,” said Harry, sighing. “I know she’s just scared for you, John, but… well, I’m sorry, Sherlock. You shouldn’t listen to what she’s been saying.”

Harry’s words seemed to imply that this wasn’t the first time Sherlock had been on the receiving end of their mother’s strident opinions, and John frowned.

“Well, if I hadn’t-” Sherlock began, but Harry cut him off again.
“Stop it,” she said firmly, and John opened one eye with amusement to see her looking down at Sherlock sternly. “I like you. John likes you. Our mum, believe it or not, doesn’t hate you. She’s just stressed, and when she’s stressed she… says things she shouldn’t. You’re not to blame for any of it, so don’t act as if you are. Alright?”

Sherlock closed his mouth and turned to John, his eyes wide. John smiled at him and spread his hands out in a small shrug.

“She’s a bit better now, anyway,” Harry continued, as if the previous exchange hadn’t taken place. “I showed her the video and she calmed down.”

“The video?” John asked, at the same time as Sherlock made a strange noise in the back of his throat and whirled back to face Harry.

“Yeah,” Harry said, glancing between the two boys. “Sherlock’s video.”

Sherlock was shaking his head rapidly now, staring at Harry pleadingly.

“You didn’t show him?” Harry asked the curly-haired boy, and he sighed heavily.

“No. I was planning on deleting it before he knew anything about it.”

“Why?” said Harry, scrunching her nose at him. “He’ll love it. John,” she said, turning to her brother. “Sherlock posted a video on your channel. The channel which, by the way, all my friends in my portfolio course at college are obsessed with. They seem to think you’re… fit. Or something.”

John stared at her in confusion.

“But I’ve only got one video,” he said slowly.

“Well, two now,” said Harry with a smile. “But they follow your blog too.”

“Why?” asked John, disbelieving.

Harry shrugged

“I told them to.”

“You did?”

Harry let out a sigh.

“Of course I did. Now listen. We’re talking about Sherlock’s beautiful video.”

“It wasn’t beautiful, it was practical,” mumbled Sherlock, but Harry ignored him in favour of pulling out her phone and tapping something onto the screen.

“Here,” she said after a moment, holding it out to John.

John took it, ignoring Sherlock’s protest, and pressed play on the video Harry had loaded up for him.

The screen was black at first, before it came to life, Sherlock’s face coming slowly into focus. His eyes were slightly wild, but he looked composed for the most part, and much more freshly showered than he was now.
“Hello,” he said formally, and John smothered a smile. “My name is Sherlock Holmes. I am John Watson’s flatmate and university classmate.”

The Sherlock on the screen paused just long enough for the Sherlock sitting beside John to bury his face in his hands with a dramatically loud moan. Harry patted his back comfortingly.

“It appears as though some of you have been a bit alarmed by the news bulletin that was put out last night about John.”

John looked up sharply at that, but Harry waved his attention back to the video.

“I’m afraid it’s true. John was, in fact, admitted into hospital as the result of a random attack in Hackney. While the news story didn’t share many details, judging by the rabid ways in which you have been trying to contact him, you have all assumed the worse.”

On screen Sherlock paused again, frowning into the camera.

“You can all stop commenting about it on my website, by the way. It’s an academic venue, not a place for hysteria.”

John laughed, but on screen Sherlock’s face was very serious.

“Because of this, I’ve taken it upon myself to inform you of what’s happening. John was injured, and taken into surgery. While there were some complications—”

Sherlock’s voice on camera cracked, and John made very sure not to look at the boy beside him.

“—he is recuperating well, and being monitored carefully. The doctors believe he will fully recover without problem.”

The Sherlock on the screen blinked and took a deep breath, his eyes shifting away from the camera.

“I don’t really understand John’s online personality. I don’t see why he feels the need to broadcast his life to the internet. I don’t understand why all of you enjoy watching it.”

Sherlock shrugged and looked back at the camera.

“But he loves doing it. And, for whatever reason, he decided to drag me along with him. I used to hate it. I resented him for displaying my every move for anyone to see. But then… well.”

Sherlock frowned a little, and leaned closer to the camera.

“So really, the point I’m trying to make, is that I am not someone who is prone to having friends. I’m not used to it. But John is. And he somehow decided to be my friend. So that is why I’m here,
talking to a camera in the hospital bathroom like a complete idiot. Because you, like me, have seen what kind of a person John is. And because he’s going through something difficult right now. And as someone who supports everyone around him unquestioningly, I think he deserves that same kind of support from those of us who don’t deserve it from him. So let’s support him now, okay? Stop messaging him in a panic, stop commenting on everything you can find, badgering him for answers and blogs and tweets.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes, and John smiled.

“Instead, tell him why you enjoy his content so much, why you follow him online. Send him well wishes and… smiley faces.”

Sherlock’s voice was vaguely disgusted, and John was nearly certain he was clenching his teeth.

“Send him the ridiculous kind of thing that I find absolutely inane, but which he will most certainly enjoy. Alright? Be there for John Watson, the way he’s there for me. You,” corrected on-screen Sherlock quickly. “The way he’s there for you.”

He paused again, and then shrugged.

“So… yes. That’s it. Alright. Go on, then.”

Without warning, the screen went black. John felt frozen in place.

After a moment Harry tugged her phone out of his hands. He looked up at her dazedly, and she nodded towards Sherlock.

“So lovely, isn’t it?” she asked brightly.

Sherlock was not moving, still folded over his lap.

“Yeah,” said John absently, watching his friend. His eyes felt hot. “Lovely.”

Sherlock finally looked up at that. His face was flushed, and he avoided John’s eyes.

“I just… I thought it would be easier to inform everyone at once. It was probably silly. I had intended to delete it, I’m sorry.”

John was shaking his head before Sherlock had finished speaking.

“It wasn’t silly,” he said, and his voice was fiercer than he had expected. “It wasn’t at all silly. It was… thank you, Sherlock.”

Sherlock’s eyes rose to meet his then.

“I just needed to do something,” he said, his voice barely more than a whisper. “I couldn’t just sit there, waiting. I had to do something.”

“It was perfect,” said John quietly. “So perfect.”

Sherlock coughed, and Harry’s hand moved to his shoulder.

“You should delete it, now that you’re awake,” said Sherlock, hands wound tightly together.

John shook his head.

“I’m not deleting it.”
Sherlock’s face twisted, and he looked down at his lap. John could feel Harry watching him, but he waited, his eyes on Sherlock.

Finally his friend looked up again.

“Don’t ever get hurt again,” he said, and his voice was hoarse.

John shook his head.

“I won’t.”

“You promise?” asked Sherlock, leaning forward just a little.

John smiled despite himself.

“I don’t know if I can promise, Sherlock—”

“Don’t leave Baker Street,” said Sherlock, pressing on as if John hadn’t spoken.

“I already said I wouldn’t,” John said.

“I know,” Sherlock answered, but his hands were twisting in his shirt. “I know you did. So just… don’t. I couldn’t - if you - I wouldn’t -” he choked off, frustrated, and shook his head, looking away.

“I won’t leave. I do promise that. Okay? I’ll be at 221B until you’re absolutely sick of me,” John said, attempting at a lighter mood, suddenly very aware of his sister’s presence.

“Then you’ll be there forever,” mumbled Sherlock, and John’s smile was wrenched away. His lungs were void of air, and there was a raging pit of fire in his stomach.

“Okay,” he managed finally.

He saw Harry smiling out of the corner of his eye.

Sherlock turned back to him. His eyes were wide.

It was silent for a long moment.

“I tweeted for you too,” said Sherlock suddenly, and the moment was over. John took a breath.

“You tweeted?”

Harry laughed, then, turning her phone to face John.

“He did. Loads. Updates on how you were doing. And smiley faces.”

John glanced at the screen in surprise, then back at Sherlock.

“You tweeted smiley faces?”

Sherlock wrinkled his nose.

“It was your account. It seemed like the thing to do.”

John stared at him for a moment, and then laughed. Sherlock gave him a tentative smile. John laughed again, but this time it sent a sharp spike of pain through his body, and the laughter turned
into a low moan.

“What is it?” asked Harry, standing up quickly. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” said John, attempting for nonchalance, but failing. He had been so caught up in the startling sight of Sherlock confessing to emotion both on and off camera, that he hadn’t even noticed how much pain he was in again. The pain meds were wearing off rapidly now, and his head was suddenly a buzzing, pounding mess. “I’m fine.”

“Don’t be stupid, John,” said Sherlock, back to his abrupt self. He stood up and made quickly for the door. “I’ll fetch the nurse,” he said, and was gone.

“I’m fine,” said John again, gritting his teeth.

Harry shook her head, and reached over to hold one of his hands.

“You’re so dumb, John,” she said, squeezing his fingers. “You don’t have to say that all the time.”

“I don’t,” he responded quickly, and she rolled her eyes.

“You do. You’re John Watson, and you’re always fine.”

She paused, and squeezed his fingers again.

“Sometime you should try admitting how you really feel.”

“But I’m-”

“Sometime. Not now.”

John looked at her in confusion, but then Sherlock was arriving with the nurse, and everything faded soon afterwards, blending together into one big, happy blur.

He tried to keep his eyes open after that, but they kept closing against his will.

“I’m okay,” he attempted to say, but it came out rather garbled.

He fell asleep a few moments later, to the sound of Harry’s and Sherlock’s voices.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

John begins to recover from his injury back at Baker Street.

Chapter Notes

So, I hope no one minds that there’s a little bit of Christmas in here! And there’s going to be a lot more next time: I had a whole Christmasy chapter written before The Christmas Computer Crash, and I just loved some of it too much to let it go, so that’s going to be in the next chapter (because this turned into something of a mammoth chapter, and so I’ve had to split it up into two parts… which means it won’t be long at all before the next update!).

Also, I’m sure you’ve noticed, but I’ve had to increase the chapter count. I thought I had it all planned out for twelve, but this story has sort of developed a life of its own, and now I actually don’t know how long it will be. I’ve set it at 18 for now, but it might have to change again. Sorry!

Anyway, I just want to say thank you all for being so lovely with all your kudos and comments, I’ve really loved seeing it all. I hope you enjoy this installment, and please leave me more comments - I love every single one xx

**Edit: I’ve noticed that some of my formatting seems to be a bit wonky on mobile, particularly the "comments" section at the end. I can’t seem to fix it, so I hope it doesn’t make it too annoying while reading, sorry! xx **

See the end of the chapter for more notes

@johnhwatson’s Twitter Account Archives, November 29th - December 1st, 2016:

This is John’s flatmate, Sherlock Holmes. Here is a video I made. You should all watch it. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqliIGEjHyk - 9:00am 29/11/2016

John is still unconscious, but doing well :) - 9:59am 29/11/2016

John has a fever. The doctors are monitoring it, but who knows how competent they really are. I shall ask my brother to intervene. - 11:15am 29/11/2016

My brother has informed me that it is not prudent to insult the medical staff. -11:19am 29/11/2016
I think it’s imprudent of him to consume three large muffins for “mid-morning tea time” but to each his own. - 11:20am 29/11/2016

John has overcome the fever, no thanks to my brother’s uselessness. The doctors say he will be fine. :) :) - 12:45pm 29/11/2016

To clarify: the doctors have said John will be fine. Not my brother. He is very much not fine. - 12:47pm 29/11/2016

:P - 12:48pm 29/11/2016

I was told that signified some sort of humour, but I just feel disgusted. - 12:49pm 29/11/2016

They have pumped him with drugs all night, everything seems to be under control. According to his doctor. So who knows what the truth is. - 12:13am 30/11/2016

Hospitals are very loud at night. - 1:30am 30/11/2016

:( - 1:31am 30/11/2016

John woke up briefly. He was confused. He is sleeping again. - 4:37am 30/11/2016

I can’t sleep. - 4:40am 30/11/2016

John’s family is here. -.- My brother assures me this is for the best. - 8:44am 30/11/2016

John’s sister, Harriet, has informed me that I am doing an excellent job of updating you all, but that I am perhaps oversharining. - 10:04am 30/11/2016

She has also said that I should respond to your tweets. - 10:05am 30/11/2016

Despite your enthusiastic response to that suggestion, I shall not be responding to any of your tweets. - 10:10am 30/11/2016

@vinniex because responding to strangers on the Internet is a waste of my time. - 10:12am 30/11/2016

@mew.squared I am not your father. Nor, to my knowledge, is John. Please refrain from addressing us as such. - 10:14am 30/11/2016

@lilgirlblue He is fine. I appreciate your concern. Please stop yelling at me to respond because I won’t. Goodbye. - 10:15am 30/11/2016

Harriet has now told me that by responding to your tweets about not responding to your tweets, I am, in fact, responding to your tweets. I shall now stop. - 10:20am 30/11/2016

John is still unconscious, but stable. - 12:25pm 30/11/2016

No change. - 4:01pm 30/11/2016

Still no change. - 7:52pm 30/11/2016

Still no changes. Harriet thinks I should try to sleep. Goodnight. :) - 11:42pm 30/11/2016

I can’t sleep. - 12:10am 1/12/2016

It’s December. - 12:12am 1/12/2016
John loves December. 12:15am 1/12/2016

Harriet has procured my brother from some dusty corner, and he has forced me to take a sleep aid. Please contact Detective Lestrade. >:( - 1:32am 1/12/2016

This is illegal. >:( >:( - 1:35am 1/12/2016

I don't think it is working and I am mad. John is finedjfd ;;;:::::((())):: - 1:52am 1/12/2016

I slept for 5 hours before I managed to fight it off. You really should have contacted Scotland Yard for me, you're all entirely unhelpful. - 7:04am 1/12/2016

Harriet tells me John is awake. - 9:18am 1/12/2016

I can confirm that John is, indeed, awake. - 9:25am 1/12/2016

:) :) :) - 9:27am 1/12/2016

John is asleep again, but they say he is “out of the woods.” - 10:42am 1/12/2016

Harriet says that is also a “Taylor Swift song” that John likes. I hope she is wrong. - 10:45am 1/12/2016

You are all telling me she is right. Oh, John. - 10:51am 1/12/2016

John is going home. His real home, not his mum’s home. Ha! - 2:05pm 1/12/2016

I apologise, Harriet. - 2:11pm 1/12/2016

John is home. - 7:07pm 1/12/2016

:) - 7:08pm 1/12/2016

***

Sherlock lay on the sofa, his body sprawled carelessly over every inch of available space. His eyes were closed, both arms covering his face. He appeared to be, for all intents and purposes, asleep.

He wasn’t.

John had been home from the hospital for five days now, and Mrs. Watson and Harry had been gone for two.

Sherlock was determined to make sure they didn’t need to come back.

Mrs. Watson had been skeptical of a seventeen year old boy’s ability to nurse her son back to health, but Harry - and Mycroft, surprisingly - had convinced her that Sherlock was more than capable of making sure John stayed in bed as much as possible, took his tablets, and ate healthy, easy to digest food. The latter point had been driven home to her when Mycroft pulled out his phone on the spot and ordered daily organic catering to be delivered to the flat for the next two months.

“Besides, Mum,” Sherlock had heard Harry mutter, “it’s not as if John doesn’t do everything
Sherlock says anyway."

He wasn’t sure whether that had helped or hindered their case, but it had turned his face an embarrassing shade of red, and he’d had to leave the room. The Watsons had, however, left the next day, with promises to check back in the next week, and threats to make it sooner if they didn’t receive daily progress reports.

That was three days ago, and Sherlock already felt as if he hadn’t slept in a month. John wasn’t a difficult patient, not really. It was just a lot of work, looking after someone. It was a good thing, Sherlock reflected lazily, that the semester was about to end. He didn’t mind missing a week or two of classes, but John was likely to have an aneurism if he wasn’t able to catch up on everything he missed.

Sherlock frowned, and texted Mycroft that they were going to need someone to bring them all their notes every day. That, at least, would give them both something to do.

Mycroft responded immediately, and Sherlock could read the sarcasm in the brief words.

*Sherlock Holmes, interested in his classwork? I’m thrilled.*

Sherlock rolled his eyes.

*You should be. You’ve been hounding me my whole life to pay more attention to school.*

*Trust you to make it my problem when you finally do. Who knew that all this time, all it would take was an injured John Watson to kick you into action.*

*Please? John needs the distraction.*

Mycroft took longer to answer this time, and Sherlock tapped his fingers against his leg impatiently until an answer finally arrived.

*I have contacted one of your classmates. She has agreed to deliver your notes to you every evening.*

Sherlock raised his eyebrows, surprised both at Mycroft’s sudden willingness to help, and the fact that he apparently had a classmate who didn’t detest him.

*Who??*  

*You’re welcome.*

Sherlock rolled his eyes again.

*Who, Mycroft?*  

Sherlock could almost hear his brother grumbling when he finally answered.

*Molly Hooper.*

Sherlock frowned.

*... who??*  

A moment later his phone rang. He answered it quickly, not wanting the noise to wake John.

“What?”
Mycroft made an irritated sound in his ear.

“Really, Sherlock. Your manners are appalling.”

Sherlock ignored him.

“Who is Molly Hooper, and how did you find her?”

Mycroft sighed loudly.

“She’s in John’s courses, and appears to know you as well. Although I find that hard to believe, based on her very immediate and willing response.”

Sherlock wrinkled his nose. Molly Hooper? The name rang some sort of a bell, but he couldn’t place it for the life of him.

When he didn’t immediately answer, Mycroft spoke again.

“She said something about you impersonating her nonexistent brother during an investigation, and buying her coffee as an apology.”

It was to his brother’s credit, he supposed, that he didn’t press for more details. Although he did sound rather skeptical.

“Oh!” exclaimed Sherlock, suddenly remembering. “Yes. She’s John’s lab partner. I’ve met her once or twice.” He paused. “I don’t recall buying her any kind of beverage though.”

“Perhaps you deleted it,” said Mycroft sarcastically, and Sherlock made a face at his phone.

“Why did you call me?”

“You’re welcome, Sherlock,” said Mycroft mildly.

Sherlock hung up the phone and closed his eyes.

A moment later he opened them again, and tapped out a quick thank you to Mycroft, before retiring back to his original position on the sofa.

He let himself relax as silence continued to reign over the apartment. John was still sleeping. He had taken another dose of medication about an hour ago, and the drugs, which were quite strong, usually knocked him out for several hours. He was often still rather bleary for a while after waking up too. So, while he wanted to make sure he was awake and alert if his friend needed him, Sherlock allowed half of his brain to slowly wind down. He let it lazily drift along the notes of a new composition he was working on, the other half of him listening, ready to jump up if John should call.

And then, a moment later, Sherlock was on his feet. He was already halfway down the corridor when he paused, replaying the last few seconds in his mind. John hadn’t called out, and yet - there it was again. The strange noise that his brain had picked up on before he had. Too soft to be a cry, but too sharp to be a sigh or a breath.

He paused outside his bedroom door - for he had insisted that John take his room for the time being, unwilling to watch his friend struggle up and down the stairs - and listened. When the noise reached his ears for a third time, he opened the door and poked his head through.

John was still sleeping.
Sherlock looked around the room for any possible source of the noise, confused.

He was just about to move quietly over to the window, thinking it was perhaps merely a bird, when John moved in his sleep. He made a half-hearted effort to roll onto his side, before his injury stopped him, and he fell back onto the bed, his face crumpling, and a quiet groan leaving his lips.

Sherlock froze.

He was entirely unsure how to deal with a situation like this. He stood where he was in the middle of the room, staring down at his sleeping friend. His body was on high alert, tensed and anxious, and his mind was racing for a possible solution.

When John shifted uncomfortably again, the same pained sound coming from his mouth, Sherlock finally moved.

“John,” he hissed, shaking John’s shoulder gingerly.

John struggled slowly awake, his eyes fighting to open. He stared at Sherlock blankly for several seconds as his mind caught up to his body. His eyes were glazed over with the tablets he had taken, and his expression was unguarded.

“Hi,” he said sleepily after a moment, a smile spreading over his face.

“You were hurting yourself,” murmured Sherlock apologetically, letting go of his friend’s shoulders.

“No wasn’t,” slurred John, shaking his head slowly. “‘m fine.”

“Okay,” said Sherlock, shrugging and backing away. “I just wanted to be sure you were alright. I don’t want you to pull your stitches.”

“No, no, no,” said John, reaching out a hand towards Sherlock. “Don’ go now. It's lonely.”

Sherlock looked down at him skeptically.

“You’re sleeping,” he said, his voice still hushed.

John waved a lazy hand in the air, his eyes half shut.

“Not sleeping now. You woke me up. Stay here, Sherlock.”

Sherlock was quite sure chests were not supposed to ache the way his suddenly was.

“Please?” asked John, and he smiled languidly up at him.

Sherlock had to hold his breath for just a minute before he could answer.

“Okay,” he said slowly, and lowered himself uncertainly down until he was kneeling beside the bed.

John turned his head to face Sherlock.

“Hi again,” he said, and Sherlock rolled his eyes.

“Hello.”
John blinked at him for a while, every movement slow and clumsy.

“\"I feel like a pile of bricks,\" he whispered suddenly, and Sherlock jumped. \"Everything is too heavy.\""

Sherlock tilted his head worriedly.

\"Is it bad? Are you having a reaction to the drugs?\"

John didn’t answer immediately, instead reaching one hand up into the air and twisting it about slowly, following its movements with his eyes. Sherlock watched him, a bit confused.

\"But when I do that, I feel like I’m floating,\" said John after a moment, his voice dreamy, and it took Sherlock a few seconds to realize that had been his answer.

\"So… not bad then?\" he asked carefully.

John turned back to him and laughed.

\"Bit not bad,\" he said, and laughed again, pulling a smile out of Sherlock. Drugged John was… interesting.

\"Are you hungry?\" asked Sherlock, just for something to say.

John made a face, and Sherlock didn’t press the subject.

They fell silent, John continuing to watch his hand as he drifted it back and forth through the air. Sherlock watched John instead. His friend’s face was relaxed, a small smile playing on his lips. His lips were chapped. Sherlock wondered idly if John used chapstick. Then he wondered what John’s chapstick tasted like. His own was just mint, but he thought John would probably choose something like cherry or vanilla.

\"I dreamt about you,\" John said suddenly, pulling Sherlock out of his musings. It took him a moment to process what the other boy had said, and when he did, he saw that John was looking at him intently. \"You were sad.\"

\"Oh,\" said Sherlock stupidly.

\"Mmmm,\" hummed John. \"I didn’t like it. I dream about you a lot, but it’s nicer when you’re happy.\"

Sherlock bit his lip and wondered whether it would be unethical to perform an experiment to see just how honest a medicated John could be. His mind was already pulling up lists of prompting questions and leading statements when John’s hand landed unexpectedly on the top of his head.

Sherlock froze.

John’s hand rested lightly on his head for a beat, before his fingers began to gently card through his curls.

Sherlock couldn’t move.

\"I did this in my dream,\" John whispered. Sherlock’s heart was pounding painfully slowly, the stupid thing. \"Stopped you from being sad.\"

Sherlock had never really thought about his hair as being particularly useful. It was rather
annoying, really, with all the upkeep it required. People seemed to like it though, and it had often helped him charm them into doing what he wanted.

Now, though.

Now Sherlock was fairly certain that each follicle was suddenly embedded with nerves, and every single one was aflame.

John continued to run his fingers lightly through his hair, and Sherlock sat there, frozen, hardly able to breathe.

What was wrong with him? He had experienced irritating inefficiencies in his body before - like the way it seemed to absolutely require food and sleep to continue functioning normally - but he had never been so utterly out of control of it.

“Your hair is soft,” said John. “Feels nice.”

Sherlock closed his eyes.

Nice.

Nice had never seemed like such a preposterously despicable word before. Nice. How utterly useless. Nice was nothing in the face of the all consuming fire that was engulfing Sherlock from the scalp down. Nice was a mere distraction.

This? John’s hand inexplicably running through Sherlock’s hair?

This was alive.

“Don’t be sad, Sherlock,” John said, his voice more serious than before.

This was terrifying.

Sherlock didn’t open his eyes, for fear that he would suddenly, and incomprehensibly, do something dreadful like cry.

“I’m not,” he managed to say, but his voice was little more than a breath.

“No?” murmured John. “Sometimes I think you are.”

“Maybe sometimes,” Sherlock said, and then wondered why he had.

“Why?”

Sherlock shrugged. A horrible feeling was coming over him, getting stronger and stronger with each pass of John’s fingers through his hair. There was a hollow pit in his stomach fighting for attention, and his eyes behind his closed eyelids felt alarmingly hot. He knew he should move away from John, retire to the safety of the front room, but he couldn’t have left if he had wanted to.

“Sherlock?” John asked again after a moment.

Sherlock wondered whether perhaps he was also, accidentally, compromised by John’s medication, because there were words struggling to the surface. Words he knew he should never say, but had always been there.

“I’m alone,” he said, and then immediately wished he hadn’t. His voice was filled with emotion he
didn’t even know he felt. John’s hand stilled in his hair.

“You’re not alone. I’m here.”

Sherlock could hear the slight hurt in John’s voice, and he quickly wracked his brain for the words that would make sense, that would turn it alright again.

“I’ve always been alone,” he said instead, and now he was convinced that something was wrong with him. Why was he saying these dreadful and meaningless things? They had no business cluttering up the room like this, interrupting John’s lovely fingers in his hair. “Everything is so loud, and no one else can hear it. I’m lost.”

He was clenching his teeth, and suddenly noticed, a moment later, that his hands were in fists as well.

The words were beginning to sound like a truth he had always known, but never wanted to look at.

The world was screaming loud, and it hurt his head, because it never went away. He was adrift on a current of sound, and no one could ever pull him to shore.

“Sherlock,” John said firmly, his hand no longer in Sherlock’s hair, “look at me.”

Sherlock was surprised to find that he was shaking. He opened his eyes and looked up at John without meaning to.

“You’re not lost,” said John, and his eyes were still a little foggy, but his voice was clear. “You’re not lost, Sherlock.”

Sherlock shook his head wordlessly, and suddenly felt so achingly tired.


And then, all of a sudden, he was right.

The world was still loud, painfully so. The colours and sounds and lights were buffeting about him, all around - but it was different somehow, because now Sherlock was in the eye of the storm. And suddenly John was there too. And the storm couldn’t touch them when they were in there together. John made it calm.

For the first time in his life, it was calm.

And now he understood why he was so determined to keep him around, why he had been so hellbent on making sure John Watson was his flatmate from the moment he saw him. Because John was a rock, and Sherlock had been looking for something to hold on to all his life.

He heard himself gasp out a strangled laugh, and then he was crying.

“Hey now,” he heard John say in surprise, but the words were distant.

John’s hand was a light pressure on his head again, pushing slightly, guiding it towards the bed. Sherlock let him, let his body curve over until his face was pressed against the quilt.

“You’re okay,” said John, his fingers back in Sherlock’s hair. Sherlock let the words wash over him.
You’re okay.

You’re okay, Sherlock.

It doesn’t matter who agrees, because John thinks so. John thinks you’re okay. So you’re okay.

***

Sherlock was lying on the settee when John walked in, and he fought the urge to get up and run away.

He had woken up on the floor of the bedroom a couple hours earlier, face smushed against the bed, John’s hand tangled in his hair.

It had taken him several long moments to orient himself, and when he had remembered where he was, he left the bedroom as quietly and quickly as he could.

He felt raw now, exposed. It was uncomfortable, so he busied himself with the computer on his lap, and ignored John entirely.

Or, well, he pretended to ignore John.

Really he was watching him carefully, looking for signs that his friend might be exerting himself too much, that walking from the bedroom to the front room was putting him in danger of collapsing or tearing his stitches open.

When he sat down, gingerly but steadily, on the armchair across the room, Sherlock relaxed.

“Feeling alright?” he asked after several long minutes of silence, finally looking up from his computer. John jumped and looked over at him.

“Yeah. Fine. Bit groggy, but not bad. You?”

Sherlock tried to think of an answer that would both reassure John, and simultaneously erase the strange crying scene from his mind, but he was spared having to say anything when the doorbell rang downstairs.

“That’ll be Molly,” he said, jumping up and heading for the stairs.

John watched him go with a frown.

“Molly?” he called behind him, voice tinged with confusion.

Sherlock waved Mrs. Hudson away as he ran down the stairs, and flung the front door open.

Molly stood on the front step looking anxious.

“Oh,” she said, stepping back when Sherlock opened the door. “Hi.”

She was holding a big carrier bag, which she thrust into the open space between them.

“Here’s yours and John’s notes,” she said.

“Thank you,” Sherlock said, taking the bag from her hand. He had been eager to get away from
John’s potential questions, but he felt just as awkward down here with Molly.

“No problem,” she said with a little shrug.

The sky was dark already, and the streetlamps cast funny shadows against her face. She shivered a little as she stood there.

“Would you…” Sherlock began hesitantly, trying to think of how John would handle this.

“Would you like to come up?”

Molly’s eyebrows shot up.

“Oh,” she said, and then stopped.

Sherlock attempted a smile, hoping it looked genuine.

Tea, he thought suddenly. John always offered tea.

“I can make you a cup of tea if you’d like.”

“Yeah alright,” she responded after a brief pause, and Sherlock ushered her inside.

He followed her up the stairs, hoping that he hadn’t made a horrible mistake. But John greeted Molly happily, and she seemed to relax a bit once she was sitting down.

Sherlock busied himself in the kitchen, trying to avoid conversation for as long as possible. When he finally brought out the tray with tea and a plate of biscuits he had nicked from Mrs. Hudson while the kettle was boiling, John’s eyebrows shot up faster than Molly’s had at the invitation in.

“Molly, take a picture, quick,” he said sarcastically. “You’ll never see this again.”

Molly laughed, but John was the one who took the picture, before anyone else could react. Sherlock was certain it would appear online within the next hour or so, and he scowled at them both, dumping the tray down unceremoniously beside John and retiring quickly to the settee.

“Oh come off it,” John said, grinning over at him. “We both know you’re not host of the year. But this is lovely, thanks Sherlock.”

“I thought it appropriate to thank Molly for kowtowing to my brother’s wishes,” Sherlock said, folding his arms against his chest.

John gave him a look, but Molly responded cheerfully.

“Oh, it’s no trouble. The office has arranged to have everything collected for you, all I need to do is pop in and pick it up.”

“And then travel entirely out of your way to deliver it all to us,” Sherlock added pointedly, and Molly gave a little start.

“It’s not that far out of my way,” she began, but Sherlock cut her off.

“It might as well be across the city for all the public transportation you have to take,” he said, frowning at her. “You could have told Mycroft no.”

Molly’s cheeks were getting red, and John was glaring at him.

“It’s really not a problem,” she said, shaking her head. “Honest. I don’t mind.” She paused, and
then turned a quizzical glance on Sherlock. “Besides - does anyone ever tell your brother no?” she asked with a slight shudder.

Sherlock smiled involuntarily at her expression, then quickly rolled his eyes.

“No nearly enough for his own good.”

“Needless to say, we’re very grateful, Molly,” John intercepted, and the conversation was carefully steered to a safer topic.

Sherlock stayed where he was on the settee, arms folded tightly, and watched the two of them as they talked, feeling more and more out of his depth. They tried to draw him into the conversation, but he had nothing to add to John’s opinion of popular television shows, or Molly’s view on cats as opposed to dogs. Instead, he watched, brow furrowed, as they talked animatedly about every inane topic under the sun.

It was absolutely foreign to him, this type of social interaction, and he didn’t understand why they both looked so pleased and interested.

Of course, John was interesting, but he was also unfailingly polite, and had no qualms about taking part in a discussion about his favourite kind of fizzy drink.

Invariably, the conversation eventually turned to John’s blog. Molly, it seemed, was a “fan.”

“I don’t know how you do it, really,” she said enthusiastically, shaking her head. “I’ve had a blog for years, and I can’t seem to get more than about thirty people to follow me. And four are my cousins.”

John laughed self-deprecatingly, and Sherlock rolled his eyes.

“I just do it for fun. I don’t really try to get followers, they just sort of… happen.”

“Well you’re a very good writer,” simpered Molly. “And you do have-” she cut off, gaze darting over to Sherlock for just a moment.

Sherlock sighed.

“You do have a devastatingly dashing flatmate, John,” he said knowingly, and smirked when Molly’s face flushed a deep red.

“That’s not what I was saying,” she said, rapidly shaking her head.

“I know,” John assured her, cutting his eyes at Sherlock. “Everyone knows Sherlock is insane; they’re all just waiting to see what he’s going to do next.”

Sherlock frowned at him, but Molly gave him a small smile.

“I was going to say you have a lovely best friend,” she said quietly, and Sherlock closed his mouth against the acerbic retort he had been ready to make.

John looked at him triumphantly, and then back at Molly.

“I mean, that video he made,” Molly continued, eyebrows raised earnestly. “It was - well, it was…” she trailed off.

“Unexpected?” John supplied drily. “Out of character?”
Sherlock slunk down lower on the settee, still scowling at the pair of them.

Molly laughed and shook her head.

“Sweet. It was really sweet.”

John turned his head and winked at Sherlock, so quickly he almost would have thought he had imagined it, were it not entirely beneath him to be prone to fits of hallucination.

“It was, wasn’t it,” responded John, giving no sign that he was aware he had just caused Sherlock’s brain to glitch out for a full second. His face brightened then, and he pulled his mobile out of his pocket. “Say Molly, I’ve got an idea. Come here.”

Sherlock narrowed his eyes as he watched John and Molly take several pictures together, each sillier than the last.

“Sherlock, you too,” said John after a minute or two. Sherlock shook his head and folded his arms even more tightly across his body. John raised an eyebrow at him, then shrugged. “If you’re just going to sulk, I’ll come over to you.”

Sherlock stood up quickly as John began to raise himself slowly from his chair, wincing slightly.

“Oh, stop it, John,” he said irritatedly, moving over to stand awkwardly beside the chair. Molly smiled tentatively up at him.

“Come on then,” said John, smiling brightly. “You’ve got to lean down to get into shot.”

Sherlock leaned down begrudgingly, but he refused to smile as John snapped several pictures of the three of them.

“Fine,” sighed John after a moment. “I suppose that’ll have to do.”

Molly laughed and straightened up, moving back to her - Sherlock’s - chair.

“Give me the link to your blog, Molly,” said John. “I’ll post it with these pictures.”

Molly’s eyebrows shot up.

“Will you really?” she asked. Sherlock stalked back to his place on the settee and closed his eyes, leaning his head back against the cushions.

“Of course!” John said, already tapping something out on his screen. Sherlock continued to ignore them as they nattered on about blogs and other such nonsense.

When Sherlock’s phone buzzed a moment later, he pulled it out to look without thinking. When he saw simultaneous notifications for both John’s twitter and blog waiting on his screen, he shut it off quickly, feeling flustered. What exactly had possessed him to put all of John’s social media accounts on notification, he had no idea - but he also had no desire for John to be aware of what he’d done. He looked up to see his friend watching him with one eyebrow raised.

“Mycroft,” Sherlock blurted out, gesturing to his phone. John nodded slowly before turning back to Molly, but Sherlock couldn’t help but notice the small smirk tugging on the corner of his friend’s mouth.

He frowned at his own carelessness, and vowed not to say another word until Molly had left. Clearly, another person’s presence in the flat was turning his mind to mush.
He was successful for approximately eleven more minutes, until the topic of John and Molly’s conversation turned to Christmas break, and what their families liked to do for the holidays.

“My mum was ever so upset when I told her I wasn’t going home this year,” John was saying, shaking his head, and Sherlock sat up rapidly.

“What?” he asked sharply, and Molly jumped at his sudden inquiry.

John looked over at him, and when he spoke it was almost hesitant.

“I said I’m spending Christmas here,” he answered. But the words didn’t make sense because surely that’s not what he had meant to say?

“Are you going home for Christmas?” Molly asked politely, looking at Sherlock. He stared at her blankly, trying to dissect the strange buzzing noise in his head that had come from John’s words.

“Sherlock?” John prompted, and Sherlock swallowed.

“I…”

What did John mean? He was staying here? At Baker Street? Alone?

John should not be alone for Christmas.

“I’m staying here too,” Sherlock said finally, his voice faint.

John tilted his head, a strange expression on his face, but didn’t comment.

“Oh how lovely,” said Molly with a smile. “I’ll be at my mum and dad’s. Not quite as exciting as spending it with friends, but it’ll be nice too.”

Sherlock nodded at her, not really hearing her words.

“I don’t know how exciting it’ll be here, but it’ll be fun to vlog, at the very least,” said John with a small laugh, and Molly responded enthusiastically. Sherlock promptly tuned her out, and spent the next thirty minutes until she left staring at John’s right foot, doing everything in his power not to force her out the door so that he could speak to John alone.

“Right,” said John as soon as Sherlock returned from showing Molly out. “Out with it then.”

Sherlock frowned at him, struggling to find the words to speak around the hope that was lodged in his throat.

“What do you mean, saying you’re staying for Christmas like that?”

John shrugged slowly.

“I mean… that I’m staying for Christmas. I thought with my injury and all, it would be easier to stay here. More comfortable.” He hesitated. “You don’t have to stay too. I was meaning to talk to you about it, but then it just came up with Molly.”

Sherlock shook his head, frown deepening.

“Of course I’ll stay too, what are you talking about? Don’t you remember last year? And all the other disastrous years of Holmes family Christmases I’ve told you about? Anything at all would be better than that.”
“I’m touched,” said John drily.

Sherlock rolled his eyes.

“Don’t be ridiculous, John. You know very well that while anything would beat going home again, I would prefer to be here with you above all else.”

The words came naturally, but the moment they were out of his mouth Sherlock bit his tongue, his body tensing.

John looked surprised, but a smile was spreading over his face, and Sherlock hoped it was okay for him to have said that.

His friend didn’t answer immediately, instead opting to give Sherlock a look that was both searching and highly uncomfortable. He wondered if that was how people felt when he deduced them. Only - more awestruck, of course.

After a moment, John gave a little shrug of his shoulders and looked down.

“Good,” he said quietly, “me too.”

And that was that.

***

Christmas time was quiet at 221B Baker Street, which John had been expecting.

What he hadn’t been expecting, however, was to come out of his - Sherlock’s! Good lord, he was going to have to remember to move back upstairs before he got too comfortable - bedroom one morning, to find that the flat had been decorated, and rather beautifully so.

There was a small, simply lit tree by one of the windows, and the entire front room was practically swimming with garlands and lights. There were even small paper snowflakes stuck on the windows, and the whole place smelled like cinnamon and cloves.

“Bloody hell,” said John in surprise, looking around the flat. “Sherlock?”

“Only me, dear,” said Mrs. Hudson, coming down the stairs. “I just dropped off some fresh sheets in your room.”

“Mrs. Hudson, did you do this?” asked John bewilderedly.

“No, no, not me,” Mrs. Hudson exclaimed, moving over to John and patting his arm. “It was all Sherlock! Isn’t it lovely?”

John nodded wordlessly, staring at the tree. The light from the window was shining through the snowflakes and branches, creating intricate shapes across the floor. John very suddenly felt something like a lump in his throat.

“Is he baking?” he asked faintly, glancing at the kitchen. It appeared as though Sherlock had drawn the line at the kitchen; it was as messy as ever, various experiments and clutter lining the countertops and table.
“Sherlock baking,” laughed Mrs. Hudson. “That would be remarkable, wouldn’t it? I think he just tossed some spices and apple peels into a pot of water on the stove.”

John stared at her.

“Why?”

Mrs. Hudson patted his arm again.

“I told him to. Gives it a nice, festive feel, doesn’t it? This place hasn’t been this nice since the year before Mycroft moved out.”

John felt himself blush a little at that, lamenting his and Sherlock’s appalling housekeeping abilities, despite his own best efforts.

Just then the front door burst open, and Sherlock came bounding up the stairs.

“Oh,” he said, stopping short at the sight of John and Mrs. Hudson standing in the middle of the front room together. “Er-” he began, shifting an armful of carrier bags. Sherlock, doing the shopping. John wondered whether he was hallucinating. “Hello.”

“Sherlock, this is… this is amazing,” John said seriously.

Sherlock’s face flushed, and he shrugged, looking uncomfortable.

“It was nothing. Mycroft arranged most of it.”

“But… why?”

John wasn’t one to look a gift horse in the mouth, but this was entirely unexpected.

“I just - I just wanted it to be a nice Christmas.”

“But you hate Christmas.”

Sherlock looked at John.

“You don’t.”

The lump in John’s throat was growing bigger, and he did his best to shove it down.

“Thank you.”

He was aware of Mrs. Hudson’s watching eyes, but he kept his gaze on Sherlock, whose face was even more red than before.

His friend shook his head, speaking faintly.

“Of course, John. Anything.”

John couldn’t have stopped the smile from spreading over his face if he had wanted to. Sherlock, however, was looking more uncomfortable by the minute, so John made a quick decision.

“Right,” he said, heading carefully for the camera sitting on the mantelpiece, still conscious of the stitches that pulled painfully if he wasn’t mindful. “Time for a flat tour.”

“What?” asked Sherlock quickly, and his voice sounded horrified.
“We can’t let all this work go to waste,” said John with an expansive gesture around the flat. “Besides, I’ve heard it’s the kind of thing people like to watch.”

“Why?” Sherlock didn’t look any less disgruntled, and John had to laugh.

“I’m not sure, really. Makes us seem more real, I guess?”

Sherlock deposited the carrier bags in the kitchen with a loud thud, shaking his head.

“Ridiculous.”

“Hi guys!” said John brightly, turning the camera towards himself and ignoring Sherlock completely. “It’s official: I’m alive! And I’m ready to show you around our flat. Because Sherlock, in a shocking turn of events, has decorated for Christmas.”

John was aware of Sherlock’s discontented muttering behind him, but it didn’t stop him from dragging his flatmate around with him, forcing him to show off what he’d done.

By the time they had finished filming, even Sherlock was smiling.

***

Comments on John and Sherlock’s Christmas Flat Tour

donnezousunbaiser: this is the cutest thing ever, SO DOMESTIC <3 <3
ellie.r.f.j.92: I’m going to cry. I can’t. I love the tree, Sherlock!
Christmas_crafts: Great video! Check out our channel for lots of Christmas craft tutorials!
Molly-Hooper: Love it, John! Well done :) xx
    johnh watson: Thanks Molly! All the credit goes to Sherlock!
    SHolmes: As always.
    johnh watson: I want everyone to know that Sherlock created that ^^ account solely to make unnecessary comments like this one
    johnlockforever: OMG HI SHERLOCK!!! <3 <3 xxxxxxxoxoxoxoxxxoxox
    SHolmes: Good grief. Logging out.
    johnlockforever: he noticed me ahhhh xoxoxox
    johnh watson: I’m sorry to say he’s probably avoiding you. But thanks for watching! :)
flyaway_butterfly: how did you make those snowflakes??
    johnh watson: … to be honest I have no idea. I’ll have to ask Sherlock.
    SHolmes: YouTube tutorial. Very simple. I dare say even you could manage it.
johnhwatson: don’t be rude to viewers, they won’t come back.

SHolmes: I was speaking to you.

phanhreakingtastic: just kiss already

SHolmes: comment deleted by channel owner

Chapter End Notes

Shout out to MariD96 for the fantastic YouTube video whose link I borrowed (obviously that is not meant to be the video that Sherlock posted in this story. I put it in here as a joke for those of you who actually clicked on it. Although it should also be canon).
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Christmas at Baker Street

Chapter Notes

I’m back! A second update in less than a week!! It’s almost like I’m being efficient or something. I’m sorry to say that you should probably just enjoy it while it’s happening, and not get used to it.

Just a quick note on the weather in this chapter: I’m completely making it up. I realize that London is not at all prone to heavy snowfall, and I have no idea when the last white Christmas was there. I do, however, remember a pretty good white Christmas near Manchester in 2004 or so, and so that’s the information I went with. Poetic license and all. Plus it’s snowing like crazy where I live, and it inspired me.

Also in my story Redbeard is just Redbeard, and he’s a dog. Hope that’s okay (see the notes at the end of the chapter for a picture of my inspiration for the Redbeard object).

Anyway, without further ado, here’s the rest of the Christmasy part of my story. Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sherlock, in an unprecedented turn of events, slept in on Christmas Eve. He was so disoriented when he woke up that he entirely forgot their current bedroom set up, and went crashing down the stairs in a panic, looking for John.

John, of course, was fine, and looked up in surprise at Sherlock’s sudden - and loud - arrival in the front room.

“Alright?” he asked mildly, and Sherlock stared at him, his heart beating wildly, for so long that John’s easy expression tightened, and he half stood up. “Sherlock? Are you okay?”

“Yes,” said Sherlock quickly, shaking his head and rubbing his hands over his face. “Yes, yes, I’m fine. Sorry.”

John sat back down, still staring at him.

“What was that all about, then?”
Sherlock let out a breath.

“Just - woke up too quickly.”

John crooked an eyebrow at him, but didn’t comment on the way his chest must be rising and falling much too quickly. Sherlock was half-certain that John could hear his still thunderous heartbeat - although that was preposterous and much too sentimental.

“You slept late,” was all John said, and Sherlock sank down into his chair. “You’ve been working too hard.”

Sherlock frowned.

“I haven’t been working at all,” he said, which was true. He hadn’t even glanced at the course work Molly had faithfully brought over every day until the end of the semester. John, of course, had already finished all of it, and was looking forward to the chance to catch up on his exams.

John shook his head, oblivious to Sherlock’s disgruntled thoughts.

“Looking after me,” he clarified. “You’ve barely slept the past couple weeks.”

“That’s not true,” responded Sherlock quickly. He didn’t want John to develop some absurd notion of guilt. “I haven’t minded.”

“I know,” said John, tilting his head at him. “Which is - incredible, really. I hope you know how much I appreciate it.”

Sherlock looked down. He tried to scoff at the words, but the sound got stuck in his throat, and he made an embarrassing sort of croak instead.

“No, really,” said John, leaning forward earnestly. “Thank you, Sherlock. You’ve been amazing.”

Sherlock’s voice didn’t seem to be working, so he continued to stare at his lap.

“But I’m fine now. My stitches are out, and my tablets will be finished in a couple of days. I don’t want you to worry about me anymore.”

Sherlock looked up at that with a frown. Surely he couldn’t be serious. Not worry about him? That was ridiculous. He was fairly certain that he would always be worrying about John.

“I’m serious,” said John, raising his eyebrows at him. “Sleep more, eat better, look after yourself. I’ll be fine.”

Sherlock could tell by his voice that he wasn’t going to let this go, so he made a noncommittal noise, and nodded halfheartedly.

“Good,” said John with a smile that said he didn’t believe Sherlock at all. “Now. Tea?”

They spent the rest of the day reading, and eating the biscuits that Mrs. Hudson and her sister brought up at regular intervals.

Sherlock’s phone buzzed at some point in the afternoon, and he pulled it out to find a notification for John’s blog. Making sure that his friend wasn’t paying attention, he clicked on it, curious.

A picture of himself and John was the first thing he saw, one from a day or two ago, in front of the tree. The caption underneath simply read Taking a mini-break from the internet for a quiet flatmate holiday. Happy Christmas everyone!
Sherlock smiled down at the picture for much longer than he would have liked to admit.

In the evening, John lit a fire and tried to coerce Sherlock into playing Christmas carols.

Sherlock wrinkled his nose at his friend.

“Those are so pedestrian, John. I’m not defiling my violin by playing *Jingle Bells*."

John laughed.

“I’m not asking for Jingle Bells. I just want to hear something festive.”

“Turn on the radio,” responded Sherlock dismissively, leaning over to plug in the Christmas lights.

“The radio is boring. I want to hear you play something festive.”

Sherlock raised an eyebrow.

The conversation was making his hands tremble a little, and he shoved them into his dressing gown pockets. John heard him playing all the time, but he so rarely played for someone.

“Please?” prompted John. “Just one song? For Christmas?”

Sherlock snorted.

“Fine then,” said John, grinning. “Not for Christmas. For me.”

Sherlock stared at him for another moment, before letting out a long-suffering sigh.

“Fine. Just one. And nothing about bells.”

John nodded smugly, and settled down in his chair.

Sherlock clutched at his violin, trying to hide the fact that his fingers were still shaking.

This was ridiculous. There was absolutely nothing to be nervous about. John wanted to hear him play, and he wasn’t likely to notice if there was a mistake or two.

Taking a deep breath, he drew the bow carefully across the strings.

The first couple notes wavered slightly, but then the music took over, and Sherlock closed his eyes.

The haunting tune of Coventry Carol filled the room, and Sherlock let himself be swept away in it.

When it came to an end, rather than allow the flat to fall silent, he kept his eyes closed and transitioned smoothly into Mary Did You Know. That was followed by Ave Maria - which wasn’t really a Christmas song, but John probably thought it was - and soon, before he knew it, he had flown through his entire repertoire of the only seasonal songs he could abide. As the last few notes faded out, he came back to himself. He could hear the sound of John breathing, and the fire crackling. He felt worn out, as though he had put something important of himself into the music. The room felt full, and meaningful.

He didn’t open his eyes.

Instead, he waited a moment, then began playing again.
It took a few seconds, but then John laughed out loud as he recognized the tune that Sherlock was now coaxing out of the instrument.

When the song was over the air wasn’t so heavy, and he opened his eyes this time.

John was grinning widely at him, and he couldn’t help but smile back a little. He felt strangely vulnerable.

“You played Jingle Bells!” John exclaimed.

Sherlock tried to make his voice sound bored, and was glad when his friend didn’t acknowledge how breathy it really was.

“A pedestrian song for a pedestrian mind.”

“Of course,” said John, still beaming. His eyes were glowing in the firelight, and Sherlock stared at them. They were rather beautiful. “Well this pedestrian mind loved it. All of it.”

Sherlock put his violin away in order to avoid answering.

“I’m afraid I’ve got nothing to add to the evening,” John continued, though he didn’t look all that sorry. “You’re the only one with any kind of talent in this flat.”

“Don’t be silly,” answered Sherlock. “You’re doing well in all your classes.”

John raised an eyebrow.

“Also,” added Sherlock when John declined to comment, “you make a very good cup of tea.”

John laughed for much longer than the words were worth.

“Well then,” said John, wiping his face and standing up. “I suppose it’s my turn to contribute.”

Sherlock watched him as he went into the kitchen and set about making tea.

He’d been doing that more and more lately - watching John when he wasn’t looking - ever since the odd hair-stroking-and-crying episode that neither of them had ever mentioned again. He wasn’t sure why he kept watching, really. It was rather a strange thing to do. But - and this was even more strange - he found that he didn’t want to stop.

John looked over then, and caught Sherlock watching him. He felt his face flush, but John held his gaze. After a moment he smiled, and Sherlock, as ever, found himself helpless to do anything other than smile back.

***

The next day Sherlock’s mum had their Christmas dinner delivered to the flat. Which was good, as neither of them had thought to make any other plans. Sherlock wasn’t surprised, really.

He was surprised, however, when John’s mother sent something over too.

“I thought she didn’t want you to stay here,” said Sherlock, frowning.
“She didn’t,” answered John with a shrug as he tugged open the box and peered down at the Christmas pudding inside. “I suppose she still loves me, though.”

They ate in silence, Sherlock’s mother’s impeccable cooking suddenly reminding them that all they’d had to eat for the past two days was mince pies and chocolate biscuits.

When they had finished every last scrap of food, and Sherlock was uncomfortably full, they both collapsed into their respective chairs, ignoring the mess they had made in the kitchen.

John flicked the telly on, ready for the Queen’s Christmas afternoon message, but neither of them put much effort into watching it. Sherlock could feel his eyes drooping, and he wished he hadn’t bothered to get dressed, yearning instead for the comfort of his dressing gown.

“Want to play a game?” asked John suddenly, and Sherlock’s eyes snapped open.

“Hm?” he mumbled coherently, wondering what on earth would possess John to suggest that, after their last cards debacle.

“A game,” repeated John. “We always play games on Christmas. Don’t you?”

Sherlock shrugged lazily.

“My family does, I suppose. I don’t usually join them.”

John snorted.

“Of course you don’t, you unsentimental sod.”

Sherlock frowned, and closed his eyes.

“Well, I’m afraid you won’t be let off the hook today. You’re playing a game with me, whether you like it or not,” John said decisively. Sherlock ignored him. He could hear John getting up and moving around, but he didn’t bother to look. He was pleasantly drowsy, and for once he was content to sit and do nothing.

After a few minutes, he felt John nudging his leg.

“Piss off,” he mumbled, but John persisted.

“Come on,” his irritating friend insisted. “It’s Christmas, and I didn’t stay here to listen to you snore. Wake up.”

“I do not snore,” Sherlock responded, opening one eye.

John was standing in front of him with a deck of cards in one hand and, inexplicably, a bottle of champagne in the other.

“What’s that for?” he asked, nodding towards the champagne, and opening his other eye.

“We’re playing snap,” John answered, which was supremely unhelpful, as Sherlock had never heard of a version of the game that required alcohol. “And we’re going to make it a drinking game.”

Ah.

Sherlock sat up, curious despite himself.
“How?”

“I thought that would get your interest,” said John with a laugh. Sherlock watched as John sat down on the floor and began to shuffle the cards.

“How is snap a drinking game?” Sherlock asked again.

“Come down here and you’ll find out.”

Sherlock looked down his nose at the suggestion, but John didn’t budge. With a weary sigh he rolled his eyes and slid down to sit across from his friend.

“Okay,” said John with far too much delight in his voice, “how this works is that we play snap… and we drink.”

“Your talent for the creative astounds me,” said Sherlock drily, but John just laughed.

“Oh come off it,” he said. “This is good champagne, Mum sent it over with Harry when she was delivering the pudding.” John paused and rolled his eyes. “Typical. Anyway, it’s not as if we need an excuse to have it, but this’ll be fun all the same.”

Sherlock gave him a dubious look, but then John was climbing back to his feet.

“Shit! I nearly forgot, how stupid am I?”

Sherlock watched as John disappeared from the room, reappearing a moment later with three wrapped packages. Sherlock stared at them in dismay. Presents.

“My mum sent these over for us,” said John cheerfully, depositing two of them on the floor beside Sherlock as he lowered himself back down. “And this one’s from me,” he finished, placing the third one in Sherlock’s lap.

Sherlock stared down at the terribly wrapped parcel in his lap, and made no move to open it.

“Go on,” said John, nudging his knee. “It won’t bite.”

Sherlock picked up the present from John’s mother instead, stalling for time. It turned out to be a pair of black gloves. Not very expensive ones, but sturdy and soft. He found himself unexpectedly touched as he turned them over in his hands.

“Sorry,” John said, somewhat awkwardly. “I know they’re not exactly…” he trailed off, but Sherlock shook his head.

“They’re lovely. Your mum didn’t have to get me anything.”

“Harry picked them out,” said John in explanation, and gave him a sheepish half-smile.

“What did she get you?” asked Sherlock, turning the attention away from himself, and hoping that John wouldn’t notice if he just neglected to open the second gift.

“A hat and a scarf,” said John, holding them up. Sherlock noted that the scarf matched his eyes, and wondered if John’s mum had thought the same thing when she bought them. “She’s nothing if not practical, my mum. Harry got me a journal.”

“My mother has informed me that my family’s gifts will be given to us in person next week,” said Sherlock in response, rolling his eyes. “Apparently she needs to ‘see the look in someone’s eyes’ when they open her presents, or something equally as absurd.”
John laughed.

“That’s nice of her,” he said, smiling warmly. “Now open mine.”

Sherlock sighed and looked back down. The package wasn’t especially large, but the shape was odd, and the weight of it on his lap was intriguing.

He reached down and ran a finger over the ribbon that tied the thing together.

“Don’t worry,” said John. “It’s not too sentimental.”

Sherlock crooked a smile at that, but it didn’t soothe the pit of worry gnawing in his stomach. He was no good at this, no good at gifts and feelings. What if John gave him something awful? He couldn’t let John know that he hated it, but he was awful at acting when it came to his flatmate, and he would end up hurting his feelings.

But John wouldn’t get him something awful. Of course he wouldn’t. It was bound to be something lovely, and thoughtful, and so very John, and that was even worse. Because how could Sherlock be expected to react properly, when faced with lovely gifts from John Watson? He was going to say something stupid, and-

His inner monologue was interrupted when John tapped on his knee.

“It’s okay, Sherlock,” he said, reading Sherlock’s mind in that strange way of his. “Stop panicking. You don’t have to say anything about it, just open it and leave it at that.”

Sherlock took a deep breath, and nodded.

He unwound the ribbon slowly, and fiddled with each piece of tape. He was sure John must be bursting with restlessness by the time he had pulled nearly all of the paper off, but his friend sat patiently, waiting.

When he finally tugged the last bit of wrapping away, and the small, rather heavy object tumbled into his hand, all the air was sucked out of the room. He stared down at it and willed himself with every last ounce of strength he had not to give way to the sudden hot tears gathering behind his eyelids.

It was a small, carved statuette of a dog, its nose in the air and tail lifted, as if paused in the middle of a discovery. It stood on a little wooden base, upon which was carved the simple inscription “Redbeard.”

This wasn’t picking out something in a shop. This was not just lovely, or thoughtful. This was… this was so very real, and so very much more than anything Sherlock had ever expected to be given, and the presence of that was making it very difficult for him to breathe.

“He was an Irish Setter, wasn’t he?” asked John quietly. Sherlock nodded numbly, still staring at the small figurine. “I thought-” began John, but then his voice faltered. “I just thought maybe you’d like something to remember him by. My uncle is a decent woodworker, so I asked him to make this for you. But- maybe that was stupid.”

Sherlock couldn’t speak, but he looked up. He knew John could see the tears in his eyes, but he had to show him, tell him, let him see.

John inhaled sharply, and leaned forward, his face lined with concern.
“Sherlock, I- I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have got that. I didn’t mean-”

“No,” Sherlock cut him off, shaking his head. “No, John, stop.”

John, obediently, stopped.

Sherlock was still shaking his head, but now that John was quiet, he couldn’t think of the words he needed to say.

“Thank you,” he said finally, his voice hoarse and embarrassing.

John just smiled warmly at him in response, and Sherlock had to get up and go to the other room for a few minutes before he could look at his friend again.

John didn’t say a word when he returned, but he stood up to watch as Sherlock placed the little dog in the middle of the mantelpiece, and rested his hand on Sherlock’s back for just a moment.

“Want some tea?” he asked softly, and Sherlock nodded absently, still staring at his gift. He knew that this was something he could never expect to repay, and the knowledge of that felt both heavy and light, and he wasn’t exactly sure why.

It was only once John had switched on the kettle that Sherlock realized something, and he whirled around.

“Oh! John!” he said, feeling both horrible and superbly stupid. “Your gift!”

John jumped, and looked over at him with a curious expression.

“What?”

“Your gift, John,” said Sherlock, striding out of the room and towards his bedroom, secretly glad for a distraction. He extracted the little parcel from the bottom of his chest of drawers, where it had been hiding for quite some time, and returned to the front room.

John was sitting in his chair now, and he quirked an eyebrow at Sherlock when he came back in.

“Did you actually get me something? I thought you were just being dramatic.”

“Of course I got you something,” said Sherlock with a sniff, before shoving the package unceremoniously into his friend’s hands, his heart giving a nervous little flutter as he did so. He had been rather excited to give him this gift, but now that he was suddenly faced with the reality of watching John open it, he wanted nothing more than to dive head first into the settee and not come back out until the whole thing was behind them.

John opened the gift efficiently, without fuss, and then spent some time examining the bag that was inside.

“It’s tea?” he said finally, looking up, the ghost of a smile on his lips. Sherlock shrugged awkwardly.

“If you’re going to insist on drinking it constantly, it may as well be a somewhat decent kind.”

“Decent?” John repeated, his eyebrows raised. “Sherlock, this is more than decent. This stuff costs a bloody fortune. You can only get it in-”

“France,” finished Sherlock stiffly. “Yes. I’m aware. It took me two months to track down.”
The smile disappeared from John’s face.

“Two months? Couldn’t you order it off the Internet?”

Sherlock was suddenly struck with the idea that maybe he had done something strange again, and just a bit not right.

“I… I wanted to get it straight from their gardens, not from the shop’s website. This is their newest blend, it’s not in stores yet. They packaged this one early for you.”

John still wasn’t smiling, but his expression was making Sherlock feel slightly more hopeful.

“You tracked down the growers?”

“Yes.”

“And you got them to send me an early sample of their new tea?”

Sherlock scratched the back of his neck, wishing very much he had just got John another jumper, like Mycroft had suggested.

“You like tea,” he said after a moment. And then John was smiling again, and finally.

“You… you absolute sap,” said John, his voice tinged with something that Sherlock would almost call affection. John was grinning now, and standing up, and coming towards Sherlock. “You pretend to be so above it all, but really you’re just brimming with it.”

Sherlock suddenly felt a little nervous.

“Brimming with what?” he asked as John stopped just in front of him, still clutching the bag of tea.

“With sentiment,” replied John, and then he pulled Sherlock into a tight hug.

Sherlock tensed up automatically at his touch, but John’s arms around him didn’t move, and, after a moment, he let himself relax into it.

It was rather nice, he decided, being hugged by John. It wasn’t horrid and uncomfortable, like all the other hugs he had been treated to over the years; it was all warmth, and hard, tensed muscles, and soft jumpers. It was a study in juxtaposition, and Sherlock quite liked it.

Of course as soon as he had decided that, John let go and stepped away, leaving Sherlock feeling oddly bereaved.

“You’re not even denying it,” said John smugly, and it was all his fault when it took Sherlock’s brain an embarrassing few seconds to catch back up.

“Well,” he said vaguely, and then stopped and sat down. John just laughed.

“Time for a game of snap?” he asked as he cleared the tiny pile of gifts off to the coffee table.

***
One bottle of champagne and nearly a whole bottle of red wine - which he found rather revolting - later, and Sherlock was quite sure they shouldn’t be drinking this much alcohol.

Or, to be exact, he shouldn’t. John seemed alright.

Although Sherlock’s opinion appeared to be slightly compromised by the soft, almost slow-motion quality that had taken over the evening.

They had long since given up on snap. Once John had realized that Sherlock’s reflexes all but disappeared after three glasses of champagne, and he was just slapping at John’s hand whenever it was in the vague vicinity of his, the game had been quickly shut down.

Sherlock remembered that. He remembered the cards being taken away, and more champagne being poured.

He was a little hazy on how they had both ended up lying on the floor in front of the fire, playing some strange version of a juvenile game which John had called “almost Truth and Dare except without any dares, and if you don’t answer a question you have to drink.” It was very confusing. John kept talking, and Sherlock kept having to drink.

“Come on,” John was saying, his voice heavy with laughter, “you can do better than ‘what is your favourite song’.”

“But I want to know,” said Sherlock, because he did.

“Okay,” said John. “But next time you have to ask a better one.”

“Mm,” hummed Sherlock vaguely.

“My favourite song then… hmm, that would have to be…” John stopped and let out what Sherlock could only describe as a giggle. “Probably that song you were playing the other night when I yelled at you to shut up and go to bed.”

Sherlock frowned.

“Strange reaction to your favourite song.”

John giggled again. Perhaps he wasn’t entirely unaffected by the drinks.

“You wrote that one, yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“What was it?”

Sherlock opened his mouth to answer, before shutting it again. Because he was slowly remembering - and really, he was never going to drink again, if this is what it did to his faculties - that this particular song in question had been written late one night about a month after John had moved in. His new flatmate had brought him a cup of tea “just because he looked a little low,” and a strange burst of something warm had filled Sherlock’s chest.

“Just something,” he said finally, because how could he say ‘just a song I wrote about you, John, don’t worry about it’?

“Ha!” crowed John. “That’s my question then. You have to answer.”

“I can just drink,” said Sherlock stubbornly, turning his head to frown at John. His friend was
“I can just drink,” said Sherlock stubbornly, turning his head to frown at John. His friend was smiling at him, and his face was closer than he had expected.

“No, you’ve used up all your passes,” said John, shaking his head firmly, the grin still in place.

“That wasn’t a rule,” responded Sherlock, feeling something like panic begin to well up in his chest.

“It is now. You’ve got to answer. It’s Christmas.”

Sherlock swallowed.

“This is the safe Christmas space,” continued John, his voice slow and lazy. “You can say anything, right here, right now. And nothing bad will happen.”

Anything.

Sherlock clenched his teeth.

“It’s called ‘Light in the Darkness,’” he said suddenly, without meaning to, and then closed his mouth abruptly.

A strange look passed over John’s face.

“That’s the one you were talking about in the live chat.”

“Was it?” Sherlock asked, hoping John would drop this soon.

“You said it was your favourite song, too.”

“Did I?”

“What’s it about?” asked John, clearly ignoring Sherlock’s reticence.

“Is that another question?” asked Sherlock, pleased that his mind had finally supplied him with an out. “Because it’s my turn.”

“Fine,” answered John with a pout. “But I’m not going to drop this.”

Sherlock made a face at him, trying to come up with a topic that would sufficiently distract John from this line of questioning.

“Okay,” he said, his face clearing. “How old were you when you had your first kiss?”

He felt triumphant for approximately 2.6 seconds, until John’s expression shifted, and his stomach dropped.

“Is Sherlock Holmes asking me about my first kiss?” asked John, and his voice was quieter than before.

“Yes,” said Sherlock, somewhat defensively. “Why can’t I?”

“You can,” said John with a little laugh. “I just didn’t think it was the kind of topic you’d like, based on all your other questions.”

“What was wrong with my other questions?”

“Nothing,” said John, shaking his head. There was a funny smile on his mouth. “They were
very… wholesome.”

Sherlock could feel his face pulling into a pout, but John laughed again, and reached a hand out. His thumb rubbed firmly over Sherlock’s forehead, as if erasing the frown, and Sherlock suddenly felt a bit ill.

“Don’t look so put out,” John was saying, but Sherlock could barely hear him. “I wasn’t having a go at you. It’s a great question. My first kiss, let me think… I must have been about fourteen. It was quite sloppy, and probably very disappointing for the other person involved.”

John laughed, but his thumb was still pressed between Sherlock’s eyebrows, his fingers resting lightly against his head, so he didn’t respond.

“My turn,” said John, not moving his hand. “What is ‘Light in the Darkness’ about?”

Sherlock tried to shake his head, to refuse to answer, but the alcohol and John’s thumb were making his brain fuzzy.

“You,” he whispered, then closed his eyes and covered his mouth with one hand.

John didn’t answer, but then his thumb moved, tracing a faint line down Sherlock’s nose before disappearing entirely. The touch left fire in its wake.

“Your turn,” said John quietly after a moment.

Sherlock opened his eyes. John was smiling at him, so he said the first thing that came to his mind.

“Who was your first kiss?”

“Oh,” said John, the smile disappearing. “Well. That would have been… just one of my friends from school I suppose.”

“Who?”

John swallowed, and the sound was loud in the quiet room.

“Safe Christmas space,” said Sherlock, and John’s lips quirked up for just a second.

“Allan Smythe,” he whispered after a long moment, and then it was his turn to close his eyes.

The words left Sherlock frozen. He couldn’t have heard right, the alcohol was playing tricks on his brain.

“But-” he began, but John spoke again suddenly, cutting him off.

“But ‘I’m not gay.’ I know. I know. That doesn’t- it’s not-” John exhaled loudly. Sherlock stared at him, and when John opened his eyes, it made him jump. “When was your first kiss?” asked John abruptly, and it took a moment for Sherlock to catch up.

“That’s…” he said slowly, “still to be determined.”

John’s eyes widened almost comically.

“You haven’t kissed anyone?” he asked, his voice still hushed.

Sherlock shook his head, feeling prickly, and embarrassed, and nervous.

“Because,” he answered, rather put out that John would ask him that. “Because it’s me.”

“What does that mean?” asked John with a frown.

Sherlock wanted to move away, end the game.

“It means… well, you know me, John. How many people do you think have been lining up to kiss me?”

Shame was flooding through him, red hot, and he was half-sure he was going to be sick. John should understand what he was saying.

Except John looked upset, and he was moving now, his face getting closer and closer to Sherlock’s, and Sherlock felt stricken with panic, because what-

John’s lips brushed softly over Sherlock’s forehead, and his fingers stroked at his hair. It was just a moment, and then he was gone, back in his place on the rug. He was smiling now, looking as if nothing was unusual.

Only, something had happened inside of Sherlock at the touch of John’s lips on his skin, something sharp, and dreadful, and very, very terrifying.

“That’s because you’ve only known idiots,” said John, but Sherlock couldn’t do anything other than stare at him.

“Sherlock?” asked John after several long minutes of silence. He was frowning a little, and Sherlock was suddenly propelled into action. “Sher-

“Wine,” he said loudly, cutting John off. “You’re out of wine.”

He climbed unsteadily to his feet and headed into the kitchen, ignoring John’s protests, and the way his head was spinning. There was a half-full bottle of… something in the fridge, so he grabbed it, and brought it back into the living room. John was sitting up now, and he frowned at Sherlock.

“I didn’t mean to-”

“Here,” said Sherlock, pouring the liquid into John’s glass.

John closed his mouth, and took the proffered glass.

“Thanks,” he said quietly.

“My turn to ask a question,” said Sherlock, attempting to sound nonchalant. He sat down on the hearth across from John.

“We don’t have to keep playing,” said John, and there was something sad and worried on his face.

“I want to,” answered Sherlock, a spark of something a little like desperation igniting in his chest. “Why did you kiss a boy?”

John’s face was indecipherable now, and he sighed.

“I don’t know,” he answered, his voice surprisingly steady. “I guess because I wanted to.”
“But you like kissing girls,” said Sherlock, wishing he could just stop, but also needing to know. Because none of this made sense, none of this was adding up to the John Watson he had carefully calculated and deposited into his mind.

“I do,” said John, and Sherlock could almost see the hint of a smile. “But- Sherlock, you know it’s possible to like both, right? Or just one, or neither, or a mixture of everything. It’s not all just… black and white. You know that, right?”

Sherlock stared at his friend. He must be drunk. That was the only explanation.

“It’s all fine,” added John.

“Okay,” Sherlock managed. John mustn’t have known what he was saying, Sherlock decided.

“My turn,” said John lightly. “What’s one thing about me that really annoys you?”

Sherlock blinked at the abrupt change of subject.

“Nothing,” he said with a shrug, wondering how John could act as if everything was completely normal, when nothing at all was the same anymore.

“Oh come off it,” said John with a laugh. “There’s no way that nothing I do annoys you.”

“Fine,” said Sherlock with a huff. “Then, I suppose you could… well you could nag me a bit less about cleaning up.”

John raised an eyebrow.

“Or, here’s a thought, you could actually clean up without being nagged.”

“You’re not allowed to edit my answers.”

“Fair enough,” said John, smiling easily now. Sherlock let himself relax, just a little.

John’s gaze swept past Sherlock, to the window, and his eyebrows shot up.

“Oh wow,” he said, getting up and moving to the glass. “Sherlock, come here.”

Sherlock stood up unsteadily and made his way over to his friend’s side. He was very aware of John’s presence beside him, and he almost missed what he was supposed to be looking at.

“It must have been snowing for hours,” breathed John, and Sherlock’s eyes finally focused on what was below: the street was covered in thick snow, and it was still coming down steadily. The sky, despite the time, was white and heavy. “Let’s go down!” said John, excitedly.

Sherlock turned to him dubiously.

“Why?”

“Because!” said John, and his face was practically alight with elation. “It’s Christmas, and we’re both here, and it’s snowing.”

And so Sherlock found himself shivering on the front steps ten minutes later, watching as John took off into the snow with a loud whoop.

There were no cars on the road, and hardly any people, and Sherlock couldn’t help but smile as John threw himself down in the middle of the street.
“Sherlock!” he yelled happily. “Come join me!”

Sherlock sighed, knowing he had all but no choice, and obeyed.

It was quiet, down in the snow, like the whole city was holding its breath.

John and Sherlock lay there for several long minutes, watching the snowflakes whirl through the sky, landing as quickly and silently as they appeared.

“It’s so beautiful,” whispered John, and Sherlock couldn’t do anything but nod in agreement. “I love the snow,” John continued after a moment. “I can’t remember the last time we had a white Christmas.”

“2004,” said Sherlock automatically. He felt John turn to look at him, so he continued speaking, staring up at the white sky. “It began snowing late on Christmas Eve, and there were approximately three inches of snow by 8am on Christmas morning. It warmed up the next day, and all the snow was gone by the evening of the 26th.”

He could hear John laughing quietly, but he didn’t turn to look.

“Trust you to know,” said John warmly, and Sherlock let his mouth pull into a smile. “And did little Sherlock like the snow that Christmas?”

“Well I was nearly five, so I would assume so.” Sherlock paused, an image suddenly flashing through his head. “I remember Mycroft pulling me on a sled, and dumping snow on my head. We built a huge snowman, and then Redbeard knocked it over. I think I cried.”

The weight of the memory pressed on his chest, making his breath come out in funny puffs. He watched as the white vapour danced up through the air and evaporated into the night.

“That’s probably one of the cutest things I’ve ever heard,” said John, and Sherlock finally turned his head to look at him. He was smiling widely at him, his cheeks and nose red with the cold. Sherlock smiled back, ignoring the shivers that were trying to break out over his body. “I wish I had known you then.”

Sherlock had a sudden mental picture of a miniature John, blonde and cherub cheeked, and his smile widened.

“I was four and you were seven, John. I doubt we would have been friends.”

“Of course we would have been,” said John stubbornly. “I would have helped you throw snow back at Mycroft.”

An ache filled Sherlock then, a strange longing for something he had never known.

“I didn’t have very many friends when I was younger,” he said, his voice quiet in the night. “Not unlike now.”

“You’re a very introspective drunk, aren’t you?” asked John, but his voice was kind.

“Am I still drunk?” asked Sherlock in surprise, and John laughed.

“Perhaps not, but you are lying in the middle of the road.”

“So are you,” Sherlock pointed out.

“I’m open? You’re the one who was touching my face,” Sherlock retorted without thinking, and John’s eyebrows flew up.

“I’m sorry,” the blonde boy said after a moment. “I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.”

Sherlock looked away, cursing his own stupidity.

“I wasn’t- I was only joking. I didn’t mind it.”

As he said the words, he realized they were absolutely true. And he suddenly wished that John would do it again. The thought was so bizarre that he exhaled in a little huff, and looked back at John in surprise.


As they lay there in the quiet, Sherlock became gradually aware that his body was wracked with shivers and his fingers were rather numb. He hadn’t thought to wear gloves, as he hadn’t exactly been expecting to find himself lying in the snow.

“Shall we go in?” asked John, reading his mind once again. He nodded, and watched as his friend stood up decisively, and held out a hand to help him up.

Sherlock took it gratefully and let John pull him to his feet.

“I can feel how cold your hands are through my gloves, Sherlock,” John chided. “You should have worn the pair from Mum.”

Sherlock only responded by shivering, and John gripped his hand harder.

“Oh, come on,” said John, rolling his eyes, and pulling Sherlock towards the house. Once they were back inside John, still holding Sherlock’s hand, turned around and reached for the other one.

Sherlock was too surprised to stop him, and he stared at their joined hands as John covered his hands with both of his own.

“Here,” he said, rubbing his soft gloved hands briskly back and forth over Sherlock’s. “Oh, hang on a minute,” said John after a moment, letting go. He took his gloves off and shoved them into his coat pocket, and then reached for Sherlock’s hands again.

Sherlock jumped at the feeling of skin against skin, but John was too busy cringing to notice.

“Bloody hell, Sherlock, your hands are like ice. For a genius, you’re pretty thoughtless.”

Sherlock was used to jibes like that from him, and he didn’t respond, instead watching as John’s fingers whisked over his own, careful and methodical, just like John. He could feel the warmth slowly seeping back into his hands.

“My dad used to do this for me and Harry after we’d been sledging,” said John, and Sherlock looked at the top of his head where he was bent over their hands. The other boy’s voice was steady, but the rarity with which he ever talked about his father told Sherlock that this was important.
“So you’re saying you see yourself as my father?” he asked, keeping his voice as light as he could.

“No, Sherlock,” answered John seriously, his voice taking on a strange deep, gravelly timber. He looked up at Sherlock. “I am your father.”

Sherlock stared at him, baffled, and John began to laugh, letting go of his hands.

“Now get up the stairs, and clean the kitchen, young jedi,” he continued, in the same odd voice. He was breathing heavily, and Sherlock crooked an eyebrow at him, hesitating.

“Er- what?”

“And when you’re finished with your chores, we’re going to begin your Star Wars education,” John added, laughing again, and Sherlock came to the conclusion that he was quoting science fiction at him.

“Right,” he said slowly, turning towards the stairs.

John was still laughing when they reached the landing, and Sherlock shook his head at him.

“I think you are still drunk,” he said, and John nodded cheerfully.

“Probably! Fancy some tea?”


An hour and two minutes into Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope - John had spent nearly ten minutes explaining the very important difference between watching these films chronologically versus release date, which all seemed very confusing and pointless to Sherlock - and Sherlock’s eyes began to droop.

“Stretch out with your feelings,” said an old man on the screen, as the protagonist was blindfolded and pelted with improbable laser beams from a floating orb.

“See, Obi Wan is teaching Luke how to use the force, which is- Sherlock!”

Sherlock’s head jerked back up from where it had been slowly drifting down to his chest.

“I’m watching,” he said, blinking quickly.

John laughed.

“You’ve got to pay attention, else you’ll be lost for the next movies. And there’s a lot of them.”

“How many?” asked Sherlock with trepidation.

“Well the eighth one was just released.”

Sherlock turned to look at John with horror.

“Eight?”
“And more on the way,” John said with a wink. “Why do you think I took so long rearranging the room? You’ve got to be comfortable for Star Wars.”

Sherlock stared at him to see if he was joking, but his expression didn’t budge, and Sherlock flung himself back against the settee cushions.

“I’m sorry, John, I just don’t know if I can last for eight movies.”

John grinned, and poked Sherlock’s shoulder.

“Poor innocent youth, corrupted by alcohol and his older, worldly university flatmate.”

“Shut up,” said Sherlock, flapping a hand in John’s direction. He stood up and turned for the kitchen, ignoring John’s sound of protest. “I’m going to get some water.”

“Don’t you dare!” said John indignantly, reaching out to pull him back. He caught at his arm in the air and tugged, toppling him back over on the settee. Sherlock was caught off guard, and he landed heavily on top of him. John huffed out a breath in surprise. Sherlock struggled half-heartedly for a moment, careful not to jostle John’s right side, but his friend was still holding onto his arm and he felt very tired.

“Stop thrashing like that,” laughed John. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Fine,” grumbled Sherlock, suddenly giving up. He kicked his legs up onto the settee, and let his full weight sprawl against John’s chest. To his surprise, John didn’t protest the way he had expected. Instead, he made a small noise, and went still.

Sherlock lay awkwardly for a moment before wiggling his shoulder against his friend.

“Is this what you wanted?” he asked sarcastically.

“Mmm,” hummed John, just as sarcastically. “I’ve been waiting for a heavy great lump to drape himself across me all day.”

Sherlock snorted and made to sit up, but John put a hand on his shoulder.

“Hang on,” he said, shifting into a more comfortable position. “Okay,” he said after a minute, tugging gently.

Sherlock leaned back down hesitantly, unsure of why, exactly, he was doing so. As he settled into position, John cleared his throat and moved his arm around Sherlock’s shoulders, tucking him neatly against him.

Sherlock held his breath, waiting for John to start laughing, and push him away again, but it didn’t happen.

Instead they simply went back to watching the movie. Though how John could concentrate was beyond Sherlock entirely.

Something dramatic was happening on screen involving two of the protagonists dressing in shiny white plastic suits, and an anxious humanoid droid trying to tell them to be careful, but Sherlock had absolutely no idea how it pertained to the storyline. Or, to be honest, what the storyline even was.

Everything in Sherlock was focused on the points of contact between their bodies; nothing else in the movie, in the room, in the world mattered.
An intimidating man in a black cape and masked helmet, who Sherlock identified as the character John had been impersonating earlier, was striding through the hallways of a large, confusingly structured space ship, but all Sherlock knew was that he could feel John’s breath against his neck.

A large bear was attacking some nazi-like henchmen, but all Sherlock heard was his own heartbeat in his ears as John’s arm shifted lightly across his shoulders.

Someone screamed, but John was scratching his forehead and his arm brushed against Sherlock’s ear.

Guns were being fired, and John tapped a finger absently against Sherlock’s arm.

Sherlock felt tense, and raw, and he was certain that nothing about this was exactly normal behaviour between flatmates. He was also certain, though he wasn’t sure how, that John was very aware of him too.

A standoff was taking place in the film now, but Sherlock was almost positive that neither of them knew what was really happening.

As time went on, however, he could feel John relaxing beneath him, his breath coming slower, tickling the hairs on the back of Sherlock’s neck.

Sherlock closed his eyes and forced himself to calm down. It had been far too long to move, or say something without it becoming strange and awkward, so he decided to just let it be. It’s not as if it was particularly… unpleasant. In fact, he thought as he let his body slowly unwind, it was rather nice. He had never been held like this.

His head was aching a bit from the champagne and wine, so he kept his eyes closed.

“Obi Wan used to be Darth Vader’s teacher,” whispered John suddenly, and Sherlock stayed still only through force of will. He could feel John’s face very close to his. “They haven’t met since Darth Vader betrayed the jedis. This is a very dramatic scene.”

Sherlock didn’t respond, and he felt the ghost of a laugh drift over his neck.

“I’m glad you’re taking this all to heart,” added John, and Sherlock could hear the smile in his voice. He was struck with the sudden desire to lean his head against John.

“I’m tired,” murmured Sherlock, letting his head fall back just a fraction.

“That’s okay, you can sleep,” John said, his voice even closer than before. “I’ll just make you watch it again, and again until you love it.”

Sherlock smiled, and his head drifted further back. The room was warm, and he felt very heavy. John’s fingers were swirling patterns on his arm, and he could feel it all through his body.

Sherlock let his head tip back the rest of the way until he was resting against John’s shoulder. He shifted, turning his head a bit- and paused. His ear was pressed against John’s chest now, and he had discovered something. He could still hear the film, but it was nothing more than background noise, fading in and out of his consciousness. He didn’t care what the space superheroes were doing; he could hear John’s heart beating.

It was fascinating, the sound of another person’s blood pumping through their body. And it was made all the more interesting by the fact that this was John. This was what kept him alive, kept him seeing and breathing and laughing and caring. The thought sent a shiver through Sherlock’s body, and John’s arm tightened reflexively on his shoulder.
Sherlock could feel a smile spreading over his face, and he was powerless to stop it; this was the most wonderful feeling he had ever experienced.

“What’s so funny?” whispered John.

“Nothing is funny,” answered Sherlock, though he was surprised to find that the words came slowly, as if he was already half asleep. “I’m just happy.”

John didn’t answer right away, and Sherlock felt himself slipping further and further towards sleep.

Just before he lost himself entirely, John’s whisper floated over him, curling through his hair and soaking into his skin.

“Me too.”

***

John woke up slowly, the early morning light flooding through the windows prodding at his awareness.

He was warm and comfortable, despite a stiffness in his neck, and there was a comforting sort of weight across his chest. He didn’t feel like moving, so he stayed where he was. He yawned, his eyes still closed - and was met with a mouthful of what was very distinctively Sherlock’s hair.

He opened his eyes in confusion and looked down, suddenly becoming aware of where he was. His neck was aching because he had fallen asleep on the settee, and that very heavy, very warm weight sprawled across him was… Sherlock.

John’s heart faltered as he stared down at his still fast asleep friend.

He remembered it happening now, the memory coming in that hazy kind of dream-like quality that accompanied alcohol. He remembered pulling Sherlock down on top of him, remembered settling in, remembered leaning close to whisper in his ear, so close he could smell his shampoo. He remembered being so content he almost couldn’t breathe when Sherlock had whispered that he was happy, before falling asleep on his chest.

The rest of the night was coming back to him too, and John closed his eyes when he remembered how he had acted. Wiping away Sherlock’s frown? Holding his hands? Kissing his forehead? Telling him about Allan.

John bit the inside of his cheek, feeling a fleeting sense of panic at his own behaviour.

And yet - “I didn’t mind it.”

John opened his eyes again.

Sherlock hadn’t minded it. Had divulged secrets of his own. Had cuddled up against him.

The younger boy shifted against him, and made a small sound in his sleep, and John frowned. It was suddenly difficult to breathe again.
John had felt something, he wasn’t going to deny that. He had been swept up in the atmosphere of Christmas, which he adored, and the relief of not being in pain, and the champagne, and their gifts, and their honesty and… and everything about Sherlock, really. It had been lovely, and homey. Even now, he couldn’t say that the thought of pulling Sherlock closer and not letting go wasn’t appealing.

Sherlock was so guarded, even bordering on cold with everyone else. He kept his feelings tightly wound up within, wrapping himself in a veil of cynicism and sarcastic jokes. But now, looking down at him as he slept, so vulnerable and so young, John wondered how everyone couldn’t see right through it all, see right through to the anxious, lonely, sweet, funny person he really was.

John knew he was one of the only people Sherlock had ever really opened up to. He knew that Sherlock called him his only friend. He winced as a flash of guilt swept over him: he didn’t want to take advantage of this boy’s trust. He so rarely gave it to anyone; who was John to take that and turn it into something else?

He knew that if he asked, Sherlock would leap. He knew that Sherlock would grasp onto the fact that someone, anyone, was thinking of him in that way, regardless of whether he himself actually wanted it or not. Or even really knew what he wanted at all.

“You haven’t kissed anyone?”

“You know me, John. How many people do you think have been lining up to kiss me?”

John sighed, and brushed a hand gently over Sherlock’s curls.

That was why he couldn’t.

He couldn’t do that to Sherlock.

He couldn’t take this friendship which meant so much - everything, really - and turn it around, just because he wanted to. He couldn’t risk doing that to his best friend.

A buzzing noise filled the air, and Sherlock twitched on his chest. John watched as his friend woke up.

He could see the moment when Sherlock realized where he was. His body went still, and his breath caught, for just a moment.

John waited.

Finally, taking a deep breath, Sherlock turned and looked up at him. He blinked sleepily, before an embarrassed little smile crooked over his lips, and John’s chest hurt, because why.

“Good morning,” Sherlock said, his voice croaky.

John smiled back.

“Morning,” he said quietly, not willing to break the bubble they were in, not just yet. Not when Sherlock looked so peaceful. Not when it meant stepping away and not looking back, not even once.
Sherlock continued to look at him with that same little smile, and John was struck with the realization that he very much wouldn’t mind kissing him.

The thought was both surprising, and not surprising at all, and he wondered why he had never noticed it before.

Sherlock was, after all, striking. Beautiful, even.

“What’s that noise?” asked Sherlock after a moment, and John looked around.

“I think it’s your phone,” he said, and Sherlock’s eyes cut in the direction of his mobile, which was sitting on the side table.

“Oh, right,” he responded, but neither of them made any move to get up.

The light through the windows was soft where it filtered through the branches of their Christmas tree, and it hit Sherlock’s hair in such a way that it looked as if it was glowing. A sleepy angel with deep cheekbones, and a fuzzy halo of curly hair.

John laughed at himself, while he reached out to touch Sherlock’s face at the same time.

He let his fingertips skim gently over his cheek for just a heartbeat of time.

*It could be real. It could be this, always.*

And then Sherlock’s eyes fluttered closed, and John remembered.

He couldn’t. Not like this.

“You’d better answer it. They keep ringing back,” he said, clearing his throat when his voice came out little more than a rasp.

Sherlock opened his eyes again, a tiny frown pinching his eyebrows together.

John held his breath and tucked a curl behind Sherlock’s ears.

Not like this.

“You’re heavy, you great lout,” he said, injecting as much teasing joviality into his voice as he could muster. “Get off me now.”

“Oh,” said Sherlock, shaking his head a little. “Right. Right, sorry.”

He pushed himself up awkwardly, the frown on his face deepening. John grinned at him, though his mouth kept trying to slide back down.

“Who keeps calling you?” he asked brightly. “Must be important.”

Sherlock didn’t answer as he stared down at his phone. John could see his hands trembling, and it took everything in him not to reach out to him.

This was better. Better for Sherlock.

“It’s Detective Lestrade,” said Sherlock suddenly, his voice confused. “He’s texted me.”

“Oh yeah?” John stood up, curiosity getting the better of him. “What’s he said?”
Sherlock moved, and John got the distinct impression he was trying to shield the screen from his view.

“IT’s about… well it’s about Jamie Winters,” he said, not meeting John’s eyes.

John started forward.

“That’s the guy who stabbed me,” he said loudly, trying to read Sherlock’s phone. His friend turned again, holding the phone away.

“Yes,” he said. “Lestrade had me write a testimony when you were in the hospital.”

“I know,” said John. “I had to write one too once I’d woken up.”

Sherlock nodded.

“He was just messaging to tell me that he’s been caught. And that,” Sherlock paused and looked down at his phone. His voice turned wondering. “Well, he wanted to tell me that I was right: Jamie Winters was the one responsible for the murders of those homeless people.”

“Yeah?” answered John, a shiver running down his spine. His side began to ache at the memory of the alleyway, the knife slicing through the air towards him. “That’s good he’s caught, then.”

“Yes,” murmured Sherlock, still staring at his phone.

“What else did he say?” asked John.

“He said… he said Jamie Winters wanted to give me a message.”

“A message?” John repeated, bewildered. “Why would he give you a message?”

“I’m not sure,” said Sherlock, his voice absent. John had the impression that he was trying not to smile.

“Well what was the message, did Lestrade say?”

“Yes,” said Sherlock, finally looking up. His eyes were wide. “It was just one word.”

“Which was…” John prompted when Sherlock stopped speaking again.

Sherlock paused and glanced at his phone before looking back at John.

“Moriarty.”

There was a beat.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” asked John, frowning.

Sherlock’s lips were twitching, and there was something in his eyes that looked like excitement.

“I have absolutely no idea. But we’re going to find out.”

Sherlock turned and strode busily from the room.

John frowned as he watched him go.

“Of course we are,” he said sarcastically, and Sherlock’s laughter floated back to him from the
other room.

John sighed, and went to get his coat.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, well apparently my computer doesn't want me to put a picture in. Which is annoying, because it's really cute. Anyway, if you go to 221B Baker Street on Google Maps, where you can look around the flat, you'll find the little dog statue I'm talking about on one of the lower shelves on the bookshelf to the left of the fireplace. I just love that Sherlock has it. So I decided that this is how he got it - in my story anyway :) Sorry I couldn't get the picture in here!
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

John and Sherlock gain popularity, and meet Mary.

Chapter Notes

Soo...

I'm back?

It appears as though trips to Africa + new jobs + moving + the worst case of writer’s block known to mankind tend to result in long delays between chapters.

All I can say is thank you, thank you, thank you to anyone still reading this. I maintain my promise that I'm going to see this thing through to the end, no matter how long it takes me!

I love you all, please don't hate me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

---

Daily Mirror Online

January 20th, 2017

“Vlogging” Detective Duo

For most, solving crimes and catching criminals is the stuff of television programs and news reports. For Sherlock Holmes, 18 year old university student at Queen Mary University of London, it’s a near every day occurrence.

Holmes and his flatmate, fellow university student John Watson, 20, have been doing some amateur sleuthing for the past few months - and they’re good at it. After inadvertently assisting Scotland Yard with a robbery case in October of 2015, Holmes and Watson struck out on their own, solving a handful of smaller cases which had not caught the attention of the police force.

Of course in this digital age, the pair uses social media to advertise their sleuthing services, and to broadcast the details of each case they take part in: their website (run by Holmes), blog, and YouTube channel (both run by Watson) are gaining Internet popularity as their adventures continue, with Watson’s YouTube channel - consisting of “vlogs” [video blogs] following their
daily lives, as well as their detective pursuits - already having nearly a quarter of a million subscribers. Links to the social media accounts are available at the end of this article for any interested parties.

One satisfied client of the duo, 16 year old Eva Blackwell of Kingsbury High School, claims to have been referred to Holmes’ website by a friend. “Things kept going missing at school, and the headmaster wasn’t doing anything about it,” says Blackwell. “My friend told me about Sherlock and John, and they responded right away after I first emailed them. They managed to find out who was nicking [sic] everything, and they got all the [missing items] back too. They’re brilliant!”

This and five other similar cases have been detailed on the duo’s social media platforms over the past five months, and a statement on the website assures followers that the two are “ready and willing to solve any crime you can send [their] way.”

While Chief Superintendent Pitts of Scotland Yard declined to comment on their activities, Detective Inspector Gregory Lestrade claims to know the young men, saying, “While their intentions are good, and they’re clever, intuitive kids, they need to know when enough is enough. And, frankly, this is enough. It’s not safe for kids to be running around, thinking they can solve crimes on their own.”

When asked to comment on DI Lestrade’s assertion, Holmes merely responded with a link to the video detailing the robbery case they assisted on in conjunction with Scotland Yard. Watson, however, wrote back saying that while the pair respect the inspector’s concerns, and are more than willing to work alongside him and his colleagues if necessary, nothing they are doing is “against the law, and all [they] are doing is helping people nobody else wants to help.”

It seems that for the time being the London public can rest assured that, should the police decline to assist them with their every day concerns, there are two young university students who would be more than happy to give them a hand. Sherlock Holmes and John Watson, we’ve got our eyes on you.

***

Daily Mirror Online

February 18th, 2017

Boy Sleuths Do It Again

We first reported on Sherlock Holmes, 18, and his faithful sidekick John Watson, 20, the young men who have taken small London crime cases into their own hands, just last month. Already, the two have come into public attention again, after filming and posting a “vlog” [video blog] on their YouTube Channel, depicting their successful attempt to discover who was behind the crude vandalism spree across major London landmarks. Holmes declined to comment on their achievement, but Watson is quoted as saying that they owe their success to Holmes’ “brilliant brain” …… Click here to read more.
London’s Digital Detectives

Sherlock Holmes, 18, and his friend John Watson, 20, are quickly becoming household names. The pair are involved in amateur detective work which they chronicle on several social media platforms (links available at the end of the article). Their notoriety is becoming quite impressive, and their subscribers continue to climb with each case they solve. Their most recent case, titled “The Speckled Blonde” on the latest “vlog” [video blog], was notable in its... Click here to read more.

May, 2017

“Bloody hell,” John breathed, not sure whether he was about to laugh or hyperventilate. Sherlock looked up from where he was sitting across the room.

“What?”

John turned to look at him, his eyes wide.

“I’ve hit a million subscribers on YouTube,” he said after a moment, exhaling on a laugh. The words felt surreal, and he had the sudden urge to throw his laptop across the room and hide under his bed until everyone forgot about him. “And M.E.M. has just asked me to do a collab video with her.”

Sherlock looked at him blankly for several long seconds.

“Who?” he asked finally.

“That girl I was telling you about, Mary Morstan? She does impressions and different characters, and those really cheeky videos about celebrities and politicians and all that?”

Sherlock continued to stare back, and John rolled his eyes.

“I’ve shown you her videos before. Anyway, doesn’t matter. She’s really big, she’s got nearly three million subscribers, and she’s just asked me to do a video with her.”

Sherlock frowned.

“Why?”
John shook his head, looking down at the email he had received only minutes before.

“I have absolutely no idea. Apparently a collaboration could be ‘mutually beneficial for each other’s Internet brand’.”

Sherlock snorted, which John ignored.

“What is that supposed to mean? Do you have an Internet brand?”

John shrugged and looked back at him.

“Not sure. Flatmates with an annoying sod, maybe?”

Sherlock scowled, but John could see the corner of his mouth twitching. He grinned cheerfully at him and turned back to his computer screen.

“What are you going to say?” Sherlock asked, voice blank.

“I’ll say yes, of course,” answered John, already attempting to compose a reply. “This could be really amazing for my channel.”

Sherlock made a strange noise, and John waited for the sarcastic response he was sure would be coming. He glanced up, his fingers pausing on the keyboard, to find Sherlock frowning down at his own hands.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

John rolled his eyes.

“What, Sherlock?”

Sherlock looked up at him after a moment with what John could tell was some effort.

“I just- I was just thinking that I wouldn’t have to be on your channel anymore.”

John’s mind raced, trying to find some kind of connection, but he came up dry.

“What? Why?”

Sherlock shrugged and looked back down at his hands, and John suddenly realized he was trying to appear nonchalant.

“I just thought that if you’re getting the exposure and followings you want now, and this Mary girl can get you even more, then you won’t have any use for me to be on it.” He paused and then cleared his throat. “Finally.”

John couldn’t help but smile. Sherlock could be so transparent.

“Right. Well, you don’t have to be on it if you don’t want to. But I hope you still will. Sod exposure and viewers, it’s fun doing videos with you.”

John turned back to his computer, pretending not to notice Sherlock’s little blink of surprise, or the way his mouth curved up just a little bit at the corners.

John was still being careful, doing his best not to get swept up in the whirlwind that was Sherlock
Holmes, the way he had at Christmas time. It was hard when all he really wanted to do was fall until he couldn’t find the way up again. But - and this was becoming his mantra these days - it was better this way, for Sherlock.

Was it?

John chewed his lip. He hoped it was better. It must be better. Sherlock barely had control of his emotions as it was, he didn’t need someone coming and making it even more confusing than it had to be.

“Okay,” the other boy said after a few minutes, and that was that.

***

Two months, four cases, three articles, and several thousand more followers later, Sherlock watched John from the settee as the other boy raced around the flat, doing his best impression of a headless chicken. He could admit that all the attention was making him feel rather suffocated, but John was taking panic to a whole new level.

“Sherlock, could you please get off your lazy arse and move all your crap?” he asked, rather frantically, for what seemed like the millionth time.

Sherlock rolled his eyes - again - and sat up.

“John, if I didn’t know better, I’d say you were getting ready for a date.”

John stared at him in exasperation.

“Just because I want it to be tidy doesn’t mean it’s a date!”

“Why didn’t you just go to her place to film?”

John threw his hands up and walked into the kitchen, as if too exasperated to look at Sherlock anymore. Sherlock watched him go. He had been doing that a lot, leaving the room in the middle of a conversation, or avoiding eye contact, or just staying in his bedroom altogether.

Sherlock wasn’t stupid. He knew why John was distancing himself: Sherlock had gone too far at Christmas, had allowed sentimentality to overrule his brain for a few hours. He had succumbed to unacceptable feelings, and had let his own confusion cloud his judgement and create something where there wasn’t anything. He had frightened John, and he deserved any snubbing he was given.

It wasn’t that John was being unpleasant - he was still perfectly friendly, almost as if nothing had changed. He was just more careful, less likely to hold eye contact or share any physical touch, no matter how small. It was more of a… fading away. A slow but steady denial of whatever it was
that Sherlock had deluded himself into pretending was there for a moment. John was being kind, really. At least he hadn’t left. Yet.

“It’s not as though you’d go to hers, is it?” came John’s voice suddenly, and Sherlock blinked, surprised to find that his friend had returned, and was looking down at him expectantly.

Sherlock stared at him for a moment, attempting to rewind the last few minutes and decipher what he meant.

“Oh,” he said when it finally clicked into place. “You want me here?” He cringed at his choice of words, but John just shrugged and smiled.

“Of course. We’re a pair, aren’t we?”

Sherlock, thankfully, was spared having to answer by the sound of Mrs. Hudson talking to somebody at the door.

It would have been almost comical how quickly the blood drained from John’s face, were Sherlock not so focused on remembering to “be pleasant, polite, and keep deductions down to a minimum.”

“Relax,” he managed to say, standing up. “She reached out to you. It’ll be fine.”

“I know, I know, I know,” said John quickly, as though reassuring himself. “It’ll be fine. I know. It’s just - she’s so-”

“Hello!” came a bright voice from the doorway, and Sherlock and John wheeled around in unison. The girl standing there beaming at them was not at all what Sherlock would have imagined. She was so very… nondescript. Nothing about her screamed I have hundreds of thousands of fans online who follow my every move as though my life were not the terribly dull and mundane thing it really is.

“I’m Mary,” the girl was saying, and John strode forward to shake her hand jovially. Sherlock watched with distaste as the girl’s eyes flicked over John’s body. He wasn’t sure he liked her. In fact he was quite certain he didn’t - especially now that she was in his house, virtually uninvited. Well, perhaps that wasn’t strictly true, but he still -

“And this is Sherlock,” supplied John, snapping Sherlock out of his downward mental spiral.

“Hi Sherlock,” Mary said, stepping forward and offering her hand out to him. “It’s lovely to meet you. I’ve seen your face so much it feels like I already know you.”

“I’m afraid I can’t say the same to you,” Sherlock answered, shaking her hand. “I haven’t seen a single one of your videos.”

John’s face blanched, and Mary blinked at him for several long moments. Sherlock was just beginning to wonder whether he should apologize when Mary burst out laughing.

Sherlock eyed her warily, trying to ascertain whether she was mentally unstable.

“Well that’s lovely to hear!” she said, grinning widely. “Collabs can be so awkward, everyone trying to be polite and say nice things to each other. I wish I could just come out and say that I don’t give a rats arse about half the people I do videos with.”

Sherlock felt his shoulders relax minutely.
“Thankfully,” she continued, “that’s not at all the case for you two. I adore your content, John. No matter how many videos of mine you may or may not have watched,” she added with a wink at Sherlock. He stared at her blankly in response.

He wasn’t sure how to feel about this Mary. He could usually come to a - often overly judgemental, according to John, yet [nearly] always correct nonetheless - decision about a person within moments of meeting them. He wasn’t sure how he did it, but he couldn’t remember a time when he hadn’t. He supposed his brain processed information faster than normal, or perhaps he was just miles more observant than anyone else.

There was a feeling he got, upon meeting an individual, where everything else got quiet, for just a moment, and his brain zeroed in - and then he just knew. It was almost as if the knowledge floated right off the person to him, like plucking words from the air around them.

He had felt it with John, felt it more strongly than with most - good, rugby player, kind eyes, attentive, good, friendly, older brother, good, scared, medical student, good, less boring than most, strong, good, good, good, good, good, good ...

But now, with Mary… there was nothing.

Well, not nothing. He was getting craves attention, and cunning, and smart, and dislikes the flat loud and clear, like flashing beacons. But the rest, the information he could sense just below the surface - he couldn’t focus for long enough to read it. He kept getting distracted by the amount of times she was glancing over at John.

There was something about the way she was looking at him that made Sherlock feel too hot. He couldn’t put his finger on it, but it was altogether unpleasant.

“...know challenges are silly,” Mary was saying, her voice light, “but they’re fun to do for collabs, and they usually get good views.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes. Of course she would be focused on the views.

“Definitely,” said John, nodding decisively as if she had taken the words right out of his mouth. Sherlock restrained himself from rolling his eyes again. “We can set up over here, and film on the settee.”

“Perfect,” Mary said happily, heading over and unpacking the bag she had brought with her. “I brought enough stuff for three of us,” she said as she worked, glancing up to where Sherlock was still standing, motionless. “I was hoping we’d all do it together…” she let the words hang, and Sherlock wrinkled his nose. He hated unfinished sentences.

“Of course!” John asserted, looking at Sherlock too. “You’ll do the videos with us, right Sherlock?”

Sherlock frowned and opened his mouth to refuse, but instead of “absolutely not,” the words that came out sounded a lot more like “yes, if you’d like me to.” He wasn’t one to believe in nonsense like mind control, but if anyone could be capable of possessing such a skill, it would be John.

John beamed, and Mary clapped - clapped - in delight.

“Excellent, this will be so good. I have such a good feeling about this,” she exclaimed.

Sherlock grit his teeth.

He then proceeded to grit his teeth for the remainder of the afternoon, enduring not only what
Mary had dubbed the “what am I touching challenge,” but also John’s equally inane “name that tune challenge.”

Sherlock won both.

( “Alright, this is something quite small, from the-”

“It’s a bar of soap.”

“You haven’t even felt it yet.”

“It’s a bar of lavender and vanilla soap. Next.”

“How on earth-”

“I can smell it. Obvious. Boring. I do hope at least one of these will be somewhat decent, I’m ready to jump out a window.”

“Sherlock!”)

“That was lovely!” said Mary, standing up and - for absolutely no reason Sherlock could see - brushing off her knees as John turned the camera off. “I think these will turn out really well.”

“Me too, we got some great stuff,” said John, smiling widely. Sherlock huffed, and was pointedly ignored.

“So we’ll aim to post them this Saturday then? Does that give you enough time?”

“Absolutely,” said John, his voice still maintaining high levels of what Sherlock had dubbed ‘Internet John.’ “That’s perfect.”

“Thanks for being such a good sport, Sherlock,” Mary said, swinging her gaze around and catching him in the middle of a rather undistinguished moment of face pulling. She paused and raised an eyebrow as he quickly rearranged his face into something resembling polite detachment. “It was great to meet you.”

“And you,” he answered. He could feel John glaring at him, so he stood and moved to look out of the window onto the street below. He heard John make a small, irritated noise in the back of his throat, but he stayed where he was, listening as they left the room and made their way downstairs. He watched as John bid Mary goodbye on the front steps, frowning as Mary’s hug lingered, and frowning even deeper when John watched her until she had rounded the corner entirely.

By the time John returned, he had flung himself onto the settee. He folded his arms as John entered the room.

“That was tedious.”

John’s gaze flicked over to him for a moment, before he strode into the kitchen and flicked the kettle on.

Sherlock slouched down lower where he sat, and raised his voice.

“Those videos were ridiculous.”

John took out two mugs from the cupboard, and headed towards the fridge. Sherlock frowned.

“Mary is absolutely inane.”
John set the milk jug down with a thump and squared his shoulders. Sherlock sat up a little straighter. He watched as John took a deep breath before turning towards him.

“Thank you for filming with us, Sherlock. I know it wasn’t very exciting for you, but I really appreciate you being a good sport.”

Sherlock opened his mouth, biting retort on the ready, but the words died on his tongue. He blinked.

“I- what?”

John smiled slightly, no doubt gloating over Sherlock’s idiotic reply.

“I’m glad you’re a part of the videos. I was worried you wouldn’t be, so I’m happy you said yes.”

Sherlock blinked at him again.

“Oh,” he said finally.

John nodded and turned back to the tea.

Sherlock watched him as he moved about the kitchen, his brain stuck on John’s words. His friend didn’t seem to be holding himself awkwardly, and he hadn’t tugged on his ear once while speaking - which he tended to do when lying - so it must have been genuine.

_I’m glad you’re a part of the videos._

_I’m happy you said yes._

Sherlock unfolded his arms. He felt a little better.

John’s phone buzzed twice while they were having their tea. Sherlock didn’t pay it much mind until John barked out a laugh and turned towards him.

“Mary says to tell you thank you very much, and she likes you.”

Sherlock replayed the information over in his mind, and quirked one eyebrow doubtfully.

“Are you sure?”

John laughed again.

“I’m quite sure, look.”

Sherlock peered at the phone screen John was offering him.

_Hiya! Was lovely to meet you both today. Tell Sherlock thank you very much for going along with our silliness._

_And -_

_He’s an odd bloke, isn’t he? I like him._

Sherlock sat back with an affronted huff.

“Odd bloke,” he muttered, and John rolled his eyes.
“Oh come off it, you know you’re odd. You pride yourself on being odd.”

“I do not.”

John levelled his gaze at him.

“‘I only know this song because I heard it once while I was testing out the durability of human skin after death.’”

Sherlock shrugged.

“Well I did. It was for science.”

“‘I can tell you’ve got some sort of food because I could hear you licking your lips when you took it out of your bag, and your stomach keeps making noises.’”

Sherlock frowned as John quoted him again.

“That was just common sense. She was practically drooling.”

“You were blindfolded!”

“My ears weren’t.”

John shook his head, but he was grinning.

“Unbelievable.”

“I assure you it’s quite true.”

“And you say you’re not an odd bloke,” John said with a laugh.

Sherlock sniffed and turned away.

“I never said that. I merely protested her use of the word.”

“Oh, shut up.”

Sherlock eyed him. He didn’t look like he was actually annoyed. Sherlock took a chance.

“You shut up.”

“Tosser,” John fired back.

“Cochon,” retorted Sherlock.

“Nice try, I know that one. I did study French in school, you know.”

Sherlock smiled.

“Oui, et tu n’es pas stupide comme les autres, mais tu n’es pas aussi brillant que moi. Et tu sens comme le boeuf et le fromage.”

John stared at him for a moment, his lips moving silently as he tried to work it out.

“I’m not - I - hang on, did you just call me beef and cheese?”

Sherlock laughed.
“Très bien, Jean. Pas mal.”

John narrowed his eyes.

“Tais-toi, Sherlock.”

Sherlock laughed again; he couldn’t help it. John looked rather pleased with himself, for all his attempts at looking annoyed, and Sherlock suddenly wanted to hug him.

He settled for kicking his leg, which John promptly returned.

“You’re an ass,” said John, but his voice was fond.

Sherlock smiled smugly.

“Je sais. Et tu l’aimes.”

John paused for a fraction of a second.

“That’s it,” he said, and proceeded to beat Sherlock’s head with a cushion until he conceded.

Sherlock couldn’t remember the last time he had laughed so hard, and the thought filled him with a sudden and profound sense of happiness. John wasn’t carefully holding himself back, and it felt almost normal again.

“Do you ever wish you had stumbled on someone else in the hallways that day?” he asked, and John paused with the cushion in midair.

“What day?”

“The day we met.”

John set the cushion down.

“Of course not. Do you?”

Sherlock shook his head vehemently.

“Never.”

John’s expression shifted slightly, and if Sherlock had considered himself well-versed at reading emotions, he would have said he looked almost sad. He met John’s eyes questioningly, and they looked at each other in silence. Sherlock could hear John’s breathing. He wondered what would happen if he -

But then John grinned and reached over to push at Sherlock’s head, and the moment passed.

“Who else would hoard questionable specimens in the fridge for me to find if not you?”

“I don’t hoard them,” Sherlock said, pushing his hair out of his eyes. “I store them for further experiments.”

John smiled and shook his head.

“You’re so lucky I’m such a tolerant, saint-like person.”
“You didn’t sound very tolerant this morning.”

“Of soaking pig’s hooves in the bathtub? No. You’re right. I have zero tolerance for that.”

Sherlock shrugged and pulled out his phone, navigating to that Mary girl’s YouTube channel. It couldn’t hurt to do some research, even if it was a bit after the fact.

“Whatever you say, Saint Jean.”

Chapter End Notes

I feel like this chapter is a little scattered, and ends a bit too abruptly, but I don’t have a beta, and I really just wanted to get something posted!! I apologize. Let me know how/if you think I could improve this, and I'll gladly tidy it up a bit.

Also, I'm sorry if the French isn't great. I'm not fluent yet, but I did my best!

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