Fire and Ice

by holmesbros

Summary

Sherlock Holmes is your not-so-typical troublesome teenager enrolled in his final year of sixth form with a tendency to drive teachers away ripping their hair out and swearing off teaching for the rest of their life. Unfortunately, he knows they're likely to be replaced with an even more unexciting and equally obese excuse for a teacher with their own predictable life troubles to accompany them.

So when Dr John Watson introduces himself as the new replacement teacher for his Biology class, needless to say, Sherlock is surprised.
Chapter 1

Mycroft frowned for the fourth time that day. "Again?"

"I'm afraid so, sir." his assistant replied, avoiding all eye contact in order to not be at the end of Mycroft's foul mood.

Considering throwing a shoe at the face of one of his assistants in the hopes it would make him feel slightly better, instead Mycroft ran a hand over his face and sighed. "Fine, call a car around for me." he said with a dismissive hand-wave and heard footsteps hasten away on the stained wooden floors.

With a quick glance to the painting above his desk, and another to the papers of urgent importance he knew were sitting neglected in the drawers of that desk, he shook his head in annoyance. A final hefty sigh left his lungs before he grabbed his umbrella and headed for the door.

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Sherlock scowled in the oversized uncomfortable leather chair and shifted against the lumpy stuffing of the armrests. Ridiculous.

"Mr Holmes has arrived," he hears a high voice announce and immediately mentally plans out all possible escape routes from the head-teacher's office. He is just contemplating the precise elevation angle needed to land onto the next building from the 7x10 single window when his brother enters the room.

Sherlock suddenly feels claustrophobic.

"Ah, Mr Holmes, thank you so much for coming in on such short notice" the plump greying man with the name of Mr Frays announces, and Sherlock entertains himself with the deduction of how Mrs Frays is cheating on her husband with a fireman from East London.

"It was no trouble" Mycroft supplies with a tight smile and squinted eyes. He sits gingerly on the other uncomfortable chair propped directly perpendicular to Sherlock's and makes a point of not looking at his younger brother.

"As you probably already know, Sherlock has been issued with another suspension, this time of three days away from school."

Mycroft barely contains an eye-roll. "I am aware. I would appreciate knowing the reason for your decision." he questions.

Sherlock distracts himself from counting each individual square tile on the ceiling (56 and counting) and interrupts. "This is really of the most unnecessary-"

"Sherlock," Mycroft glances at him, eyes sharp and challenging. Sherlock scowls at him in return and continues talking.

"This is all because of me simply stating the truth. Mrs Jacobsen does have alcoholic tendencies, she also does not understand the syllabus, does not know the meaning of cleanliness and is definitely a poor excuse for a teacher. I do not understand why I am encouraged to not highlight the truth when a teacher obviously incapable of teaching is dictating to me the importance of something as elementary as homework" Sherlock sits back in his seat with a wince at the uncomfortable backrest poking at his spine, turning back to glare at said opposing chair.
Mycroft stands from his equally uncomfortable seat and buttons his suit jacket, interrupting the spluttering head teacher from a predictable outburst at Sherlock's atrocious behaviour and gestures for Sherlock to stand and follow him. "I understand the situation, Mr Frays, I assume the suspension is active from today onwards?"

"I- well," the head-teacher harrumphs in displeasure. "Yes. It is." He stands behind his desk.

"Thank you, I will see to it that Sherlock does not stray from this arrangement." He smiles another false smile and leads Sherlock out of the room without a chance for Mr Frays to respond.

The Holmeses exit via the main entrance and Sherlock purposefully hangs back as soon as they leave, shifting into the smoking area and fishing out a lighter from his coat pocket.

"Sherlock," Mycroft reprimands. "I believe we have had this discussion about smoking before. I believe we have also had discussions about your behaviour before. Must you be so tedious to force me to repeat myself every day?" he walks back over to his brother.

"It's not every-day, Mycroft, stop being so melodramatic" Sherlock taps the ash onto the floor and kicks it with the toe of his shoe.

"I am clearly not being melodramatic, since you have just been suspended for the second time this month. It is only the 10th."

With a sharp exhale of smoke, Sherlock yawns purposefully and turns his head away, clearly done with being in Mycroft's general presence or having to listen to anything he happens to say.

Considering giving up entirely and pulling out a cigarette of his own, Mycroft turns to the path again and begins walking towards the road where a car with tinted windows waits for them both.

With the prelude of heavy footsteps and laboured breath, Mycroft is chased down by a man with cropped hair and a striped blue tie blowing over the shoulder of his pressed white shirt. "Excuse me? Do you have the time?"

Mycroft turned to address the dishevelled man, only to be met with a soft exhale of "Oh, I-sorry," the man shook his head in what seemed to be confusion, and looked to the floor, then straight back into Mycroft's eyes.

"The time is 1:21" Mycroft replied without checking his watch.

The other man awoke from his daydream "Thank you, sorry...erm"

"Greg?" Another voice interrupted, another teacher exiting the school with her arms full of folders. "Aren't you supposed to be teaching now?" she questions.

Greg, Mycroft registers with vague interest.

Greg's eyes widen again, cursing quickly and thanking Mycroft once more before flying into the double doors of the school's reception and disappearing.

This is when Sherlock appears again, smelling of smoke and staring at Mycroft expectantly.

With another frown, Mycroft decides he has had enough of this place today and leads the way back to the car.
Sherlock stares pitifully at the ceiling and wishes for something interesting to happen in the next five minutes. Of course, nothing does, and he stays there with his thoughts for the next three hours.

\emph{Knock knock.}

"Eat something." Mycroft's muffled voice demands through the door.

Sherlock scowls at the sound. "Go away."

He focuses of the sound of footsteps leading away into the library before he looks over to his collection of framed taxidermy spiders with a sigh.

Three days away from school, for Sherlock, is the worst punishment possible. He has barely anything to deduce to keep him occupied, having already inferred all knowledge possible about Mycroft's servants and secretaries and gained only boring unimportant information about adulterous crimes and strange sexual fetishes.

On the third day, he considers heading into town and immediately dismisses the thought. \emph{Dull.}

With the final decision of breaking back into the school and spending the day in the chemistry lab he packs his coat pockets full of some of his best test-tubes, not intent on making do with the chipped school-provided ones; and leaves through the back door.

With well-practised ease, he slips in past a herd of younger students and blends into the crowd, surpassing the receptionist, turning up his coat collar and making a bee-line for the second floor steps.

\emph{Text Message: from Mycroft}

\emph{What are you doing? MH}

Sherlock grins and shoves his phone down as far into his deep pocket as it will go, returning to picking the lock of the laboratory door.

He pushes the door-handle sharply up and then pushes down, the door springing open as he slides his tools back into his coat, heading straight for the hydrochloric acid.

When Sherlock returns home later on with singed eyebrows and fingertip holes burnt through his leather gloves, Mycroft simply raises an eyebrow and returns to his phone call with the prime-minister.

Sherlock sees Mycroft again later on in the library, where he interrupts Sherlock's research into the world's most deadliest toxins.

The older Holmes brother entered silently, as he always did, though with eyes trained to the movements and speech of Mycroft Holmes, Sherlock sensed him immediately. He also deduced a change.
"You've been promoted" He stated into the silence.

"I have." Mycroft responded, settling into the chair opposite and straightening his pocket square.

"Aren't you hypothetically the British Government by now?"

Mycroft raised an eyebrow. "Slight exaggeration, Sherlock"

"No it's not," He said from behind his book, a quick glance up to his brother's face confirmed that he was right.

"I have to go away for a few days." Mycroft said eventually, dusting off invisible lint from his trousers.

Sherlock stared at him for a moment. "North America"

Mycroft smiles mockingly, "South."

Sherlock scowls at him and then berates himself for allowing his brother to outsmart him. Again.

"Why are you telling me this?" Sherlock drawls, flipping a page nonchalantly.

"Because I don't want to have to fly home on an emergency jet because you cannot control yourself for more than two days without being reprimanded for something or other."

"It's not my fault everyone is so-"

"People are dull, Sherlock. There is no getting around that fact, real people are just another one of those unfortunate things that we have to deal with in life."

"Boring" Sherlock stated, flipping over another page to make a point.

Mycroft silently agreed. "So, if you could try your hardest not to eviscerate anybody within the next three days, I would be much obliged." Mycroft squinted in the way that Sherlock knew was his brother's version of a smile.

"Laters" Sherlock states loudly, imitating slang in the hopes it would make Mycroft leave. It did, and he settled nicely back into his book of toxic chemicals.

Hearing the news of Mrs Jacobsen's inevitable refusal to teach the 'horrific Sherlock Holmes' any longer, Sherlock celebrated internally and simultaneously deflated, as this meant she was likely to be replaced with an even more unexciting and equally obese excuse for a teacher with their own predictable life troubles to accompany them.

So when Dr John Watson introduced himself to the class, first thing on a Friday morning, weather raging outside the shut wall of windows, needless to say Sherlock was surprised.

Surprised at the difference of this seemingly unimpressive man. Ex-army doctor. wounded in action. flesh wound. bullet through left shoulder. relieved from duty and straight back in to education, to convince himself he had purpose in life? Unmarried. Stumbled upon teaching, found this job through a mutual friend. Mr Stamford. Met through training in a hospital. Strained relationship with family...
Sherlock frowned at the lack of data he was able to deduce from such a distance, his palms itched at the wish to know more about this stranger infiltrating his life.

"Okay, so I'd like you to pair up, please. It will just make this next task easier. Anyone pisses around with the bunsen burners, you're out. Got it?" Upon hearing the general murmur of agreement, he sent a satisfied nod to the students and returned to the seat behind his desk, hovering but not sitting down.

When Sherlock was predictably reminded that he would be working alone again by the vacant stares he was receiving from the eyes around him, he stretched back in his seat and then pulled his textbooks closer on his desk to send a clear message of the wish to be left alone.

When Dr Watson returned his sight to the class, and was met with the intense eyes of the infamous Sherlock Holmes, he startled. Realising that Sherlock was the only student without a pair, he frowned, but said nothing and launched into the explanation of the experiment.

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John had tried extremely hard not to feel intimidated by his role of being elected as the new biology teacher of a class containing Sherlock Holmes. He'd heard about him, of course he had. The student from hell, apparently.

From first impressions, John didn't really see what the fuss was about. While a little intense and isolated, Sherlock wasn't the demon from hell he'd heard stories about and had been expecting. In fact, he hadn't heard a word from him for the first three lessons he had taught him for.

It was at the end of that third lesson, actually, that he'd even spoken to him directly at all.

It was a rule of thumb that most students were usually desperately running for the doors of the classroom as soon as the bell rang signalling the end of the class, but Sherlock waited until the end, distrustful of his surroundings and slow in movement.

John tried not to make it obvious he was watching the young man and turned his eyes to the papers on his desk students had handed in at the end of class. Sherlock in turn bought his paper up and slid it onto the top of the pile, pursing his lips with a frown when John thanked him.

He turned to leave and hesitated, his coat swinging around as he made dead eye-contact with John.

"You want to talk to me" he said, deep voice just on the edge of silk, completely without emotion and so downright true that John contemplated if he was hallucinating.

Dr Watson barely managed a confused 'huh' noise in reaction before Sherlock was crowding back around him, marching straight up to his desk.

"You want to talk to me but are considering whether to ask me to stay behind since there is no actual reason that I should be asked to stay after class." he narrowed his eyes. "You feel sorry for me"

This last statement made Sherlock seem more angered as his face scrunched up in accusation. John shook his head, wondering if his face was such an open book or if this was the way that Sherlock generally communicated, forceful and intrusive.

"Why?" he demanded. "You don't know me."

"Mr Holmes," John started, "Sit down please"
"Why should you care?" he repeated again in rapid fire questioning, not budging from the spot his feet were mounted on.

"Mr Holmes-

"Sherlock." he said. "Mr Holmes is my brother." he said with a voice full of disgust.

"Okay...Sherlock. Take a seat." John was suddenly aware of how small he felt stood next to Sherlock. The teen was skinny, just on the edge of lanky, with an angular face and alien-like features. Somehow, this didn't make him look as entirely unattractive as it should have.

Sherlock sniffed and sat backwards on to one of the lab chairs, crossing his legs and raking his eyes over John to the point where he felt self-conscious.

"Which other A-levels do you take? Apart from Biology?" John inquired.

"Chemistry, Physics, Forensics, Philosophy."

"Five?!" John exclaimed. "I didn't know it was possible to take five A-levels." he frowned.

Sherlock merely blinked in response and turned his head towards the window.

"Do you have many friends in this class?" John asked finally, to which Sherlock's head snapped back around to face him.

"Friends?" he scoffed. "I don't have friends."

"You...don't have friends?" John repeated.

"Yes. Do try to keep up." he snapped.

"Do not take that tone with me," John raised his voice slightly, to which Sherlock had no reaction, and turned his gaze back to the open window.

John sighed. "How are you finding the class so far?"

"Mildly stimulating" Sherlock drawled.

"Okay. Okay, good. That's good" John swallowed, not sure how to respond. What was going through this man's mind?

"Afghanistan or Iraq?" Sherlock asked suddenly.

"Excuse me?"

"Don't be so tiresome as to ask me to repeat myself" Sherlock sighed.

John paused. "Afghanistan. Sorry, how did you-"

"I thought so" Sherlock smirked to himself.

"Right," John patted his knees and stood, lifting the stool he was sitting on and shoving it back behind the tables. "Okay, well, I just wanted to know you were okay, I suppose" John scratched his head. If he was honest with himself, he didn't even know why he'd wanted to speak to Sherlock alone, was it to see if he lived up to the hype? To see if he matched all those rumours floating around the staff room?
Sherlock stood without a word, burying his hands in his pockets and heading for the exit.

"Are you?" Dr Watson called, last minute, before Sherlock opened the door.

"Am I what?" he replied, monotonous.

"Okay? that is."

Sherlock watched him for a few seconds, and then pushed down the handle. "How would I possibly know that?" he questioned, and then left with a click of the shutting door, leaving Dr John Hamish Watson completely and utterly confused.

John spent the rest of the afternoon in a daze.

As soon as he entered the staff room there were eyes on him. He headed straight over to the coffee machine, brushing shoulders with Greg Lestrade who instantly asked him what all of the other teachers were probably thinking.

"Oh hey John, how's it going mate? How's your new biology class going?"

"You mean the one with Sherlock Holmes in, right?"

Greg nodded, munching on a biscuit he'd just dipped in his tea.

John pulled a face to himself, trying to think of an accurate word to describe Sherlock Holmes. "It's...different " he supplied. "I don't really know what to expect if I'm honest, mate" John ran a hand over his face.

"Yeah I get that, I'm his tutor" Greg said with a laugh. "You'll get used to him eventually."

"Really?" John lead him over to the blue chairs in the corner, next to Mike Stamford.

"The thing is about Sherlock Holmes," he starts, "is you'll never really know if you're teaching him or if he is teaching you"

"That's a pretty accurate description" Mike interrupts. "Have trouble with Holmes, John?"

"He's not as bad as everyone told me he would be" John reasoned with them both.

"Give it another week" Greg laughed to Mike, raising his mug in the air.

Mike laughed and nodded back to him.

John worried at his lip with his teeth and let his head fall back in his seat, trying to push down the panic swirling around in his stomach.

Sherlock immerses himself in Dr John Watson from the second he leaves the classroom, fingers typing relentlessly on his mobile phone trying to find anything and everything on this man.

He finds an old army portrait, a news article published 3 years earlier, and a personal blog that has been password protected for 10 months or less.

Instead of attempting to hack into the blog (he still needed a bit more practise in online hacking
skills, annoyingly), he sat back on the stairs at the back entrance of the building near the car park and reflected on their conversation in the classroom.

Dr Watson had shown unexpected caretaker qualities towards Sherlock, which threw his deductions off-guard. No teacher had ever asked him if he was 'okay', the thing that threw Sherlock off even more was that he wasn't even sure how to respond to that question. _Irrelevant._

Sherlock had also deduced that Dr Watson had only recently recovered slightly from a psychosomatic limp, associated with his injury in Afghanistan. _Obvious._ Although the man still had a slight uncertainty to his step.

Sherlock tried to tame the numerous codes of data whizzing around his brain by recognising them and storing them in a new file created in his mind palace for his new biology teacher Dr John H Watson. _What does the H stand for?_

Becoming overwhelmed with information and frustrated at himself for not being able to handle it or store it effectively, Sherlock headed out the double doors into the drizzle of rain, to light a cigarette and pretend that today had not happened.

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John eventually escaped questioning an hour later, patted his pockets down for his car keys and ran to avoid the automatic doors closing on him as he dashed to the car park in the steady rain.

He caught the sight of a figure out the corner of his eye, a tall man in a dark coat pressed with his back solidly against the brick wall of the back building. John had to squint through the rain to see if he recognised him.

Surprised to see anybody that wasn't a teacher around at this time after-school at all, John startled slightly when he recognised the alabaster skin and dripping wet dark curls, head angled away and exhaling a cloud of smoke.

For a reason he couldn't fathom, John barely held himself back from marching straight back over to Sherlock, but instead clambered into his car and turned on the windscreen wipers.

Sat sodden in his damp clothes, John watched from afar as Sherlock stamped out a cigarette underneath his shoe, turned up his collar against the wind and rain and stalked away towards the main road, a silent and lone stick figure in the haze of stormy weather.

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"Why are you phoning me? We never phone each other" Sherlock accused as soon as he picked up the phone to his brother's caller ID.

"Could you get something from my desk?" Mycroft bounced back.

"Oh, so that's why. You're using me for something. Predictable."

"Sherlock-"

"I'm going. Do try not to have a heart attack, we both know how high your blood pressure is from all of those fatty acids you've been consuming. Putting on weight again are we?" Sherlock grinned to himself as he climbed the small staircase to Mycroft's office on the top floor, sliding his hand along the mahogany hand rest.

"Losing it," Mycroft snapped in return "Have you finished being irritating yet?"
"What do you want?"

"There's a key for my desk in my-"

"In the paper sleeve of your hardback cover of Moby Dick, third shelf on the wall by the sofa."
Sherlock provided with a smug undertone to his voice, and Mycroft pretended not to be surprised
that Sherlock knew this already.

"The folder entitled 'Correspondence'" Mycroft supplied, and Sherlock hears rustling and muffled
voices in the background of the call and goes towards the locked drawer in Mycroft's desk.

"Yes?" He prompts impatiently, finding the folder.

"What is the time and date at the top of the fourth paper from the bottom"

"How very particular of you," Sherlock commented, sifting through the pile. "10:53 3rd of August
2009"

Mycroft scrawled down the information. "Interesting."

"Is that it? Do you have what you need to blackmail some country or other now?"

"No, but I do now have the potential to sentence a corrupt political leader in Islamabad to exile.
How was school?"

"Fine."

"Did you-"

"Mycroft"

"I know, goodbye"

"Yes", Sherlock ended the call and tossed the phone onto the leather upright button-embellished
sofa in Mycroft's overcrowded office.

Sherlock found his eyes wandering to the painting of a portrait of their parents above Mycroft's
desk that he was almost always automatically drawn to. He scoffed. *Sentiment.*

He allowed himself a moment of missing his mother, trying to block out the perfunctory hand of
his father's that rests on her shoulder. It was easier to pretend that he wasn't the reason the Holmes
family was such a mess. Deceased parents and a pretentious, unrelenting older brother to deal
with, *thanks, Father.*

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Returning to school on a Monday morning and being greeted by the usual slurs of 'freak',
'psychopath' and 'weirdo ' was to Sherlock, predictable and tiresome beyond belief.

The one thing that surprised Sherlock, however, was the appearance of Dr Watson in the corridor,
and the apparent anger on his face when he'd heard them. In fact, he had immediately loudly
ordered a large rugby player to get to his lesson unless he wanted to be sent to the head's office for
'bullying'.

Pressed back against a wall of lockers, Sherlock sank deeper in his confusion of the enigma of this
short man with his protective gaze over Sherlock.
John looked up after sending a student that was taller and definitely stronger than he was scurrying away instantly. For the third time, his eyes fell upon the steady gaze of Sherlock Holmes, the heady atmosphere in the air tense and thick, making it difficult to breathe, and John cursed himself for feeling so weak around a student.

Sherlock watched him duck into a classroom at last, wishing with every bone in his body that he could follow after him and question everything under the sun in the hopes of understanding this man. Because Sherlock wanted to unravel his mind, bury himself in the synapses and nerve endings of Dr John H Watson's brain and understand.

He needed to know why seeing him made his mind blank and deductions felt like he was desperately grasping at straws or forcing his mind through a garlic press. Sherlock wanted to know if everyone had this problem with Dr Watson, did everybody become so poisoned with confusion and contempt at the increase of heart rate for no logical reason?

"Sherlock?"

Anger rose to his chest at being disturbed, nevertheless he turned to be met with the face of Lestrade. "What?"

"You missed your tutor period with me on Thursday. Are you free now?" Greg stood with his arms crossed, hoping it made him look more authoritative, the only way to manage Sherlock, he knew from experience, was to annoy him until he complied.

"Fine," he hissed, muttering under his breath about the unimportance and irrelevance of tutor sessions. He followed Lestrade up to his classroom and slumped into his usual seat opposite his tutor's.

"So," Greg began, pulling out Sherlock's folder from his desk. "How have things been?"

Sherlock narrowed his eyes at him. "You've just been dumped by your adulterous long-term girlfriend."

He watched as emotion flickered across Lestrade's face and then sat entertaining the weaknesses of sentiment.

"Sherlock," he hissed. "What have I told you about inappropriate deductions?"

Sherlock appeared to think for a moment, trying to recall the conversation. "I don't know, I must have deleted it."

Greg pulled out Sherlock's progress reports and sighed. "How are your lessons? Are you finding them challenging enough?"

A scoff in return, "Barely" Sherlock picked at the wood of the table in front of him with his fingernails and refused eye contact.

"You are way above target for all five lessons. Impressive, as always." Greg thought aloud, flicking through more documents in the plastic sleeve.

"Yes, it would be impressive, to you." Greg pointedly ignored the attack at his intelligence and chose instead to move on to Sherlock's punishments.

"You've been suspended three times already this term. Not really a good start, is it?"

"None of which were my fault, might I add. I was just pointing out the truth to those who are too
blind to see it." Sherlock protested.

"Just because you deem something to be true, doesn't mean it is, Sherlock" Greg argued.

Sherlock gave him a look in return so bewildered that it was like Greg had just told him the sky was green and the world was ruled by aliens.

"How is your biology class now that you have driven away Mrs Jacobsen?"

Sherlock's mind immediately returned to John Watson. If he was being honest, he really wasn't sure how to respond to Lestrade's question.

"You've got Dr Watson now, right? He's a nice guy, good teacher too." Lestrade nodded to himself. "Have you driven him spare yet?"

"No," Sherlock started.

Greg looked up for a second. "So...you're saying that biology is actually going okay?"

Sherlock grimaced at his shoes and actually came to terms with the truth. "It is, actually." He fiddled with his hands.

"Hmm," Greg paused, "Well, that's brilliant, keep it up."

The rest of the session was spent going over plans for university which Sherlock deemed as 'tedious and unimportant' and sat unresponsive for a few minutes before lapsing into his recent findings on the world's deadliest toxins when Lestrade had asked him about it.

With each tutor appointment, Greg felt like he was getting closer to understanding this isolated genius, rude as he may be, he was still human, and Greg felt like he had achieved something whenever he saw a glimpse of that human side leak out every once in a while.

Sherlock found himself in the chemistry lab after school again on the same day that Dr Watson had defended him from the stupidity of other students.

He was just jotting down notes from his observations of the breaking down of chemical compounds when the cleaner entered, propping the door open with her mop. The petite old woman was startled to see Sherlock, a silent and unmoving presence in the dimly lighted room, but her eyes lit up with recognition when Sherlock lifted his head.

"Oh hello, dear" she cooed, pulling in her cleaning trolley.

"Mrs Hudson," he acknowledged with a nod.

"Are you here dissecting animals again?"

"No, not this time." he squinted at the gritty particles gathering at the bottom of his test-tube.

She hobbled over with interest, and Sherlock deduced that her hip was giving her trouble again.

"Are you taking that medication I suggested?" he demanded as soon as she drew near to him.

"I was, but I seem to have lost them again, you know how I am" she chuckled to herself and went about spritzing surfaces with disinfectant, tutting at the cluster of equipment Sherlock had occupied the entire desk with.
"Sherlock," she scolded, noticing the puddle on the floor where green liquid had seeped down the side of the bench. "The mess you've made"

Sherlock rolled his eyes and ripped a paper towel off the roll on her trolley, bending and wiping it up in a single motion. "There, happy?"

"Oh, yes" she laughed again, a high tinkling sound. "Thank you, dear. You know how I can't bend down when my hip gets bad like this" she speaks to herself, tapping her hip and moving around with the cleaning solution again.

Sherlock hummed to himself in vague distraction, bringing focus instead to the results of his experiment.

"Oh Sherlock, dear?" Mrs Hudson called from the other room. "Could you give me a hand with this? I can't reach it."

Sherlock lifted himself from the chair, pushing his microscope away and entering the store room where some of the equipment was kept. He reached for the jar she wanted in one fluid movement without stretching, passed it back down to her for her to dust and then placed it back on the top shelf.

"Why do they let it get so dusty? There were cobwebs hanging off of that one... oh dear."

"Dust is eloquent, Mrs Hudson" Sherlock replied in his deep droning voice to which she chuckled at again and returned to her trolley.

Eleven minutes later, Sherlock's stomach rumbles, which annoys him. "Shut up"

"Sherlock," Mrs Hudson scolded, "Have you eaten anything today?"

"Irrelevant" he frowned, adjusting the lens on the microscope.

He watched Mrs Hudson limp back over to her trolley out the corner of his eye and produce biscuits from her bag. "As usual then," she supplied, and slid the packet down the bench to him.

Sherlock took the packet without a word and ate for Mrs Hudson's sake, until she smiled with triumph and moved on to clean the sinks.

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Sherlock crashes that night, he lies on the floor for 5 hours until his back is stiff and thinks, thinks, thinks.

He'd expected a text from Mycroft anytime soon, who probably knew Sherlock's thoughts from across the stupid wide world because Mycroft knows everything and just loves to point it out.

He considered for the fifth time that night, going out to purchase something to keep his brain from tearing him apart. Something that would slow him down, would let him rest and give him the answers he never knew he needed.

But he'd promised Mummy.

Instead, he lit five cigarettes at once and attempted smoking them together, nowhere near the same high, but enough to send his brain spinning and glue him even further to the floor as the nicotine sank into his bloodstream.
Text Message: Mycroft
Don't do anything stupid. MH

Sherlock stared even harder at the ceiling, wondering what the definition of stupid was to his brother, and who Mycroft must have paid extra to keep an eye on him while he was gone. Which one of the servants was Mycroft's messenger?

Sherlock stumped out the half finished cigarettes, rolled over and vomited in disorientation, the face of John Watson flashing tauntingly before his eyes before he passed out.

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Sherlock wasn't in John's class on Monday, and he found himself missing the sarcastic commentaries that he sometimes muttered under his breath from the front row that usually only John could hear. It was true that the class was quiet without him, not only because the students had nothing to laugh at or taunt, they sat stoically and copied notes from the board.

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Two days later, John stared blearily at the bottom of his empty cup, sliding around the remaining sugary contents of his tea.

"You okay, mate?" he vaguely registered Greg's voice bringing his mind into consciousness and shook himself out of a daydream.

"Wha- yeah, sorry, in a world of my own" John sighed at himself and stabbed a finger at the coffee machine, pushing his empty cup underneath the nozzle.

"Late night, last night?" Greg smirked at him, leaning cross-armed against the column next to the machine.

John dismissed him with a frown, laughing away speculation. "For all the wrong reasons unfortunately," he re-takes his cup "Was up marking papers until one"

Greg tutted at him, suggesting something about organisation and dawdled off to his office to make a phone call to a parent. Or at least that's what John thought he said he was going to do. If he was entirely honest, he couldn't remember where the hell he was supposed to be at that moment, let alone anybody else.

With a quick check to his timetable, he saw that he had a free period and thanked his lucky stars, scooping up his box of folders and ignoring the shoot of pain his leg sent him, a tell tale sign that it was getting worse again.

When he entered his classroom, managing to deposit his box on his desk and fall back into his chair before he collapsed from exhaustion, he eventually realised a difference.

There was someone else in the room.

In Sherlock's usual seat, there was a mop of dark curls face down in crossed arms on the desk in front of him, the boy's back rising and falling softly with a faint grumbling sound of a snore.

John frowned, why was Sherlock asleep in his classroom? Alarm bells in his head told him he should contact somebody and complain for a strike to be put on his record since he really shouldn't be sleeping in classrooms, let alone vacant ones, but the more dominant voice in his head told him not to.
Instead, he stood confused for a few minutes, watching the sleeping form of Sherlock Holmes and contemplated his sanity.

"Sherlock?" He decided to wake him, "Sherlock, wake up.", with a hesitant shake to his shoulder, Sherlock snapped awake immediately, startled at his surroundings.

"What?" he asked immediately, as if John were the one in Sherlock's classroom.

"Why are you asleep in a science classroom?" John crossed his arms.

"I don't remember" he frowned, straightening out his shirt.

John's eyes fell to the way the creases smoothed out under his fingertips, stretched over solid chest muscles. He shook his head. "You can't do that," he insisted.

Sherlock squinted at him, that look that made John feel instantly panicked, as if his mind were being read by the genius that very second.

"Where were you on Monday's lesson?" John inquired, walking back over to his desk as Sherlock stood.

"At home" He wandered to the back of the classroom.

"So you just decided not to come in? You're missing important lessons"

"I'm already ahead of the syllabus" he yawned, examining the rusting clasps of the bunsen burners shoved in the corner drawer.

John didn't even question that, "Still, your absences will go on your record" he threatened half-heartedly.

"I don't care" Sherlock said matter-of-factly.

"Of course you don't" John smiled to himself.

Sherlock is silent for the next two minutes, embracing the presence of Dr Watson and suspicious of how comfortable he feels around him.

"Don't you have a lesson?" John asked after a while, hoping Sherlock would say no.

"No," he hesitated. "Is this...okay?" Sherlock asked, hoping he would understand.

John lifted his head, registering the uncertainty splayed across the young man's face. "Of course"

Sherlock settled back, then, and John had to stop himself from grasping the opportunity of turning this into some kind of interview to find out more about the enigma of Sherlock Holmes.

Sherlock watched him.

"Interesting," he said after a while, and John lifted his head with a questioning expression. "You are nervous."

"No...I'm not" John replied, thinking Yes, I am.

Sherlock stood immediately, "Do I make you nervous?"

John swallowed, staying firmly planted to his seat. "Why would you make me nervous?"
Sherlock frowned in return, moving closer to Dr Watson's desk. "I don't know. That's the frustrating part"

John blinked at him, surprised at the comfort he felt with having Sherlock so close. Simultaneously appalled with himself for letting himself feel like this with a student. Sherlock was a student. He withdrew from the closeness.

"Sweaty palms, fidgeting, lack of eye-contact" Sherlock deduced out loud and then stopped abruptly at the look on his teacher's face. "Sorry, I... is this inappropriate?"

John cleared his throat, not looking at his student. "Yes,"

Sherlock deduced the teacher's discomfort and withdrew himself, snapping back his mask of cool indifference and stepping out of the room, walking briskly away without looking back.

As soon as the door closed behind Sherlock, John let out a huge breath. His pulse was racing with anticipation and excitement and everything else that John probably shouldn't be feeling.

He had never had such an interest in a student before, even just generally. His job gave him purpose in his previously lone life and he took the good days along with the bad, but he had never singled any student out. Then what was he doing with Sherlock?

_Breathe._

All John knew was that Sherlock was a locked door, an occasional peek through the keyhole allowed some of his brilliance to shine through, but not knowing whatever was on the other side of that door made it difficult to know if Sherlock was ever being himself, ever being truthful. He shut out John's attempt at questioning him, about himself, about his work or anything that he deemed unimportant.

John found himself wondering if it was just the mystery that attracted his interest in Sherlock Holmes...he had never felt..._romantically_ interested in a student before, and he didn't even think he was romantically interested in Sherlock, he was just generally drawn in by him.

Sherlock, John decided, was like a solitary storm, dark and grey but full of flashes of light and intensity, he drew John in with his darkness, with his potential of destruction. But John was always on the outside. However much he wanted to be let in.
John’s Wednesday morning free periods slowly but surely became infected with Sherlock Holmes’ silent presence, he entered at 9:01 and left at 9:52, right on schedule, every week like clockwork. In fact, John found himself so used to Sherlock's schedule of appearances he even began bringing two cups of coffee with him to his classroom each week. Sherlock soundlessly accepted the steaming mug from him every Wednesday with a slight incline of his head in a grateful nod and took his usual seat on the front row, pouring over books, examining slides under microscopes, or writing extra papers for John to mark for him.

When it became close to next period, Sherlock stood and hitched his satchel over his shoulder, brushing shoulders with John as he lay down his empty mug next to his and left John with the smell of aftershave and faint cigarette smoke in a temporary cloud until his next class came pouring in.

John was handing back past-papers, winding around the science benches and placing people's papers brandished with red or green pen, grades circled with marker.

He passed Sherlock at the end, sliding his paper onto his desk where his long fingers were taking his pen apart, piece by piece.

"Brilliant, as always. Well done, Sherlock" he praised him quietly and moved on to the next student, as Sherlock looked down at his A* with inexpressive eyes, sliding it into the back compartment of his satchel.

"Sherlock?"

He lifted his head.

"Do your parents know that you smoke?"

"My parents are dead" Sherlock replied, blinking back at John.

John apologised hesitantly, berating himself internally, and Sherlock responded with the tiniest of sad smiles, but John thinks that it's progress. They returned to comfortable silence.

Mycroft returns at the end of the week, and Sherlock is annoyed to have his presence lurking around the house once more. He is also trying harder than ever to keep his thoughts inaccessible, not wanting his brother to find out about Dr Watson yet. Dr Watson was Sherlock's secret.

"Sherlock, where is my shoe horn?" Mycroft called.

"How would I know?" Sherlock replied with irritation evident in his voice.

"I thought you knew everything," Mycroft taunted in response and Sherlock marched over to the
umbrella stand in the next room and pulled out said shoe horn, throwing it at his brother's head.

Mycroft frowned at his brother's rudeness, catching it mid-air and replying with a sarcastic and over-exaggerated "Thank you" to which Sherlock stomped back to his own room.

Sherlock had just left the chemistry lab at 5:52pm, supposing that reception staff had left by now, he headed for an alternative exit. Mrs Hudson had been more chipper today, Sherlock had deduced it definitely had something to do with her new lover she'd managed to secure three days ago at a bingo game in West London but not mentioned anything about it.

Sherlock fiddled with a loose thread hanging from his sleeve and focused on the direction of his feet until he heard an additional set of irregular footsteps behind him and turned.

"Hi, Sherlock" Dr Watson called out, chequered shirt tucked under thick oatmeal jumper and a sandalwood coloured satchel slung over his right shoulder, bulging with textbooks and ungraded papers.

"Dr Watson" Sherlock acknowledged, unconsciously slowing his steps to walk in tandem with his teacher.

"Why are you in school this late?" John asked, looking over to Sherlock who has his head hanging down, black curls falling forward from his pale forehead.

"I usually stay later than this," Sherlock started. "But Mycroft has insisted I come home for 5:30 at the latest today."

"Mycroft?" John asked with interest, as they approached the end of the corridor.

"My brother" Sherlock supplied, voice dripping with disdain.

"That's true," John agreed, pushing open the door to the back entrance, using his electronic key card to unlock the automatic doors and holding the door open for Sherlock. "You do realise it is past 5:30?"

Sherlock slid underneath Dr Watson's arm that held the door open and was immediately hit with bitter cold winter air. "Of course I do"

"You're being late on purpose?" Sherlock noticed a look of confusion pass Dr Watson's face.

"Yes" Sherlock supplied without explanation.

John shook his head and carried on walking, only noticing Sherlock's absence when he realised only the sound of his own footsteps now hit the ground. He turned to see him lighting a cigarette against the wall.

"You shouldn't smoke" John scolds, and Sherlock laughs.

"How endearing" Sherlock took his first drag and pushed forward off the wall, moving closer to
the projection of John's body heat.

"What is?"

"You. Trying to sound authoritative, it's entertaining." Sherlock smirked at him and exhaled in a curl of white smoke, hanging in the air and then drifting away.

John frowned to himself "I am authoritative"

Sherlock gave him a look.

"Okay, maybe not to you, but you don't find anybody intimidating. I'm authoritative to others." John insisted, and Sherlock noticed the way Dr Watson's arms come to fold close against his chest to give the illusion of height and power.

Sherlock offered out his cigarette between his fingers. John shakes his head.

"I don't smoke," he reacts. "Plus, it would be kind of inappropriate"

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Dull"

"What is?"

"Rules."

John found himself laughing a little hysterically, as Sherlock allowed his lips to stretch slowly into a smile in response.

Eventually, Sherlock stamped out his cigarette on the ground and kicked the trodden filter into a gutter, flicking his coat about until his collar came up around his neck, framing his face in a way that prompted John to look at it for a little longer than he should have.

"How are you getting home?" John asked when they reached the cars.

"Walking," Sherlock slid his hands into his pockets and pulled out his new leather gloves, slipping them onto his frozen fingers.

"In this weather? You'll freeze to death" John insisted with a chatter to his teeth, hands rubbing together to trap the warmth in.

"Highly unlikely, the statistical likelihood of death from fr-"

"Sherlock, how far away do you live?"

Sherlock stopped, narrowing his eyes momentarily "about half an hour's walk"

John thinks he is doing the responsible thing by considering giving a student a lift home, bearing in mind it was late and getting dark, and nobody is safe walking home alone in the dark, not even Sherlock. This is what he tries to convince himself as he asks Sherlock if he would like a lift home.

"Why?" Sherlock questioned suspiciously.

"Because you shouldn't be walking home on your own at this time of night. If you feel uncomfortable with being in a car alone with me then I can contact somebody who can come and pick you up, or call a taxi, if you'd like-"
"But why?"

John paused, "What do you mean, why?"

"Why do you care?" Sherlock looked genuinely confused with the concept that John cared about his wellbeing, which made the teacher internally curse whatever made Sherlock feel like he was so alone in this world.

"Why shouldn't I? It's freezing out here, stop being so damn irritating and get in." John unlocked the car with his key-fob and climbed into the driver's seat, wiping the condensation from the windscreen with a sponge tucked in the holder at his right.

Sherlock sat tentatively down on the seat next to his teacher, yanking his seatbelt across and providing his address when John asked for it.

They sat in another one of their comfortable silences until John gestured to the radio, telling Sherlock to put on what he would like. "I don't care much for the music of today" Sherlock replied quietly.

John leant over and jabbed at the buttons with his free hand, "Nonsense, there's loads on here. You're bound to find something you like." John skipped over the channels until Sherlock's hand stopped him, pressing the back button onto Classics FM at hearing the passing notes of a violin.

Both men resolutely ignore the brush of fingertips that the radio decisions had caused, John listening intently to the new genre of music that Sherlock had introduced him to.

"Just here will do," Sherlock gestured to the side road, unfastening his seat belt as John pulls up around the corner from his house. "Thank you, Dr Watson."

John winced, "You don't have to be so formal all the time, 'Dr Watson' makes me feel so old" he laughed, half serious, half joking.

Sherlock stopped, turning his head back to his teacher. "What would you rather me call you? Sir?"

John shook his head, "No," he hesitates, and then jumps straight off the diving board and into the deep end. "You can call me John"

With a pause of uncertainty, Sherlock watched Dr Watson's face for signs of regret or repulsion, but there are none, only calmness with an open and trusting expression which scared Sherlock just a little bit.

"John," he repeated back to him, and John tried to ignore the fact that he likes the sound of his name coming from Sherlock's mouth.

John nodded, and Sherlock blinked back at him, before turning his head away and pushing down the door handle, stepping back out into the cold.

Mycroft says nothing to him on his return, he'd expected Sherlock to be late and as usual, he was right to predict so.

"Are we going?" Sherlock asked, ripping off his scarf and tossing it over the chair.

"Yes, it starts in an hour" Mycroft responded absently, flicking through a stapled document of 121 pages.
Sherlock goes straight upstairs, forcing himself to keep his brain in semi-structured order instead of what was actually happening inside his head.


He slid off his suit jacket and unbuttoned his shirt in a haste, yanking at the zip of his trousers until he was stood in his boxers in front of the mirror, staring at the wide uncertain eyes in the reflection. His eyes slid down the pale expanse of his own skin, muscled in places, smooth and flat in others, smatterings of hair around scars, blemishes and marks of blush, the blush rising straight to his cheeks.

*Blush?*

Sherlock grunted, snapping himself out of it. Such a *human* reaction.

He dressed quickly afterwards, opting for a pale blue shirt and his second favourite suit.

"Sherlock- wear a tie", Mycroft called from downstairs.

"No!" He shouted back in defiance.

"I'm sure the opera won't miss you, then" the calm voice sounded closer as Mycroft walks upstairs, heading for his own room.

Sherlock cursed under his breath and reaches for his only tie, skinny black patterned silk, one his mother had bought him years ago for his birthday after he had started to dress up in suits similar to his father's and Mycroft's.

Mycroft knocked and entered. "Much better."

"Irritating", he fiddled with the knot at his throat.

"Let's go"

John sat at home on a Thursday night and drowned his sorrows with a pint of beer and the discography of Bon Jovi. He didn't realise how deeply he was hooked, until it hit him that he might be attracted to one of his own students. And however hard he tried to convince himself it was wrong, he couldn't stop seeing Sherlock's face every-time he closed his eyes to block out the blinding light.

*Shit.*

To: Greg Lestrade
*Have you ever got through to Sherlock before?*

From: Greg Lestrade
*I wish. Why do you ask?*

To: Greg Lestrade
*Just wondering. Do you think he's lonely?*

John stared at the ceiling and realised that he'd probably drank too much, and probably shouldn't
be discussing a student via text to another teacher, but he trusted Greg, and he knew he wouldn't tell anybody.

From: Greg Lestrade
**Probably. I've given up trying to understand or help him, he won't accept it.**

John takes a minute to reply, in the process receiving another text from Greg.

From: Greg Lestrade
**Are you having trouble with him? Do you need me to speak to him?**

To: Greg Lestrade
No, it will be fine. Just curious mate.

From: Greg Lestrade
**Aren't we all.**

Sherlock found himself anticipating Wednesday more than ever.

John tried not to think too hard about the strong smell of aftershave and cigarette smoke missing from his classroom.

Sherlock entered and walked straight over to John, who was slumped over his desk wearing reading glasses that slid down his nose persistently every time he straightened them.

"Morning, Sherlock"

"John," Sherlock nodded to him, and John checks the door is closed, so nobody can hear the agreed use of his first name by one of his students.

"Don't worry, I took care of it" Sherlock reassured him, and John startled at the psychic speed he had answered John's thoughts.

"I probably shouldn't have given you that permission" John reflected, worrying his lip between his teeth absently as Sherlock pulled a stool over to his desk and sits to the side reading equations from the whiteboard.

"Would you like to relinquish it?" Sherlock deadpans, not showing any signs of being phased by John's outward sense of regret.

John pulled his glasses away from his face, waiting for Sherlock to look back to him. "No...as long as you are aware of situations in not to use my first name"

"I'm not stupid, John." Sherlock informed him.

"I know that," John smiled.

"Good," Sherlock smirked to himself, pulling over the Biology textbook that John is using. "I'm glad."

"Glad?!" John repeated incredulously. "Sherlock Holmes is capable of emotion?"
Sherlock glared at him and shut the textbook with a snap, "I'm capable of hatred, too, you know” he hinted.

John settled back in his chair, stretching his arms behind his head. "You could never hate me"

"Couldn't I?" Sherlock challenged.

The tension in the air was thick as Sherlock returned to the front bench of the classroom, sliding backwards onto the table and letting his long legs dangle out in front, leaning back on his arms.

John tried so desperately hard not to let his eyes follow downwards when Sherlock's shirt lifts and exposes the tiniest show of pale skin, his hipbone jutting out from his skinny frame.

Sherlock lifted an eyebrow without saying a word, and John turned so bright red he practically shrunk in on himself, hoping to God that Sherlock wouldn't point it out.

He doesn't. In fact, when John looks back to him, his gaze is intense and involved. "I don't think I could, actually." fingers skittering across the worktop.

John heard his breath hitch before feeling it. "Couldn't what?"

"Hate you," Sherlock bounces back. "And I have no idea why."

"That's a good thing, isn't it?" John tapped his pen steadily against his leg.

Sherlock clasped his hands together, positioning them in a steeple underneath his chin. "I haven't decided yet."

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Sherlock misses another two and a half lessons in the next week, and John is concerned by the content that he is missing, no matter how much of a genius he claims to be.

This is partly the reason why he decides to corner him the upcoming Wednesday.

"You need to attend catch-up sessions" John insisted, as soon as Sherlock entered the room.

Sherlock's jaw actually dropped open. "Tell me you're joking"

John raised an eyebrow, holding out Sherlock's coffee mug regardless.

"John," he hissed, keeping his voice down due to the open door. "Those classes are for imbeciles! I refuse to be deemed as the same standard as the scum of the school."

John sighed, "Sherlock-"

"No!" he practically stomped, shouting in defiance.

"Calm down!" he raised his voice above Sherlock's, "Sit down."

Sherlock proved his point by marching over to the window instead.

"If it's this much of a problem, I can privately tutor your catch up sessions?" John suggested.

Sherlock considered this. "So I wouldn't have to deal with people?"

"Nope, just me"
"Don't sound too excited" John added sarcastically, flinging an elastic band from his desk onto Sherlock's mop of curls where he is still looming at the window. He turned with a face of disdain and flung the elastic band straight back to John.

Their first catch up session began with ten minutes spent trying to get Sherlock to actually take the whole concept seriously. John made him sit in his Biology class seat and get his refill pad out to take notes. Sherlock stated that he never makes notes, that he doesn't need to, his brain will register the important areas. John ended up explaining three times to Sherlock that some things Sherlock might deem *unimportant* areas are the bits he needs to know to pass the exam and actually get an A level in Biology.

John eventually gets him to shut up, and begins to move around the white board, drawing diagrams for mitosis and going back over the processes Sherlock had missed in his absence. The only problem was that Sherlock interrupted him every two minutes by finishing John's sentences for him, if only to prove a point, that he didn't need these catch up sessions at all.

"Have we established that I am fine without these sessions yet?" Sherlock groaned, face down on the table where he sat.

"It's better to be safe than sorry, I want to know I'm doing my job properly by making sure you understand the syllabus requirements."

"I know the syllabus like the back of my hand"

John put his hands on his hips in defeat for a moment, "You know what, I think we need a break for now anyway." He walked straight over to his bag and pulled out a litre bottle of water, uncapping the bottle and wetting his tongue that was dry from talking.

Sherlock watched him as usual, silent and furtive until disturbed by John with a question, or until he thought of a question himself to ask John.

"So, what are you doing when you get home tonight?" John asked finally, snapping the genius out of his brainstorm.

"I imagine I will irritate my brother for a while and then retire to the library and lie on the floor for a while. Who knows"

With a pitying glance towards his student, John took a leap. "That doesn't sound very fun, don't you have a girlfriend or anyone to go meet up with?"

Sherlock turned slowly as if suspicious he was being tested, staring at the man in front of him for a moment before shaking his head. "Not really my area."

John didn't quite know how to respond to this, until he realised his mistake. "Oh...do you have a boyfriend, then?"

"No," Sherlock noticed the faint embarrassment John felt. "I do not have a boyfriend."

"Unattached then," John nodded, turning in a circle and walking back to his desk, saying under his breath "Just like me" and half hoping Sherlock had heard it.

He did.
"Excuse me, Dr Watson? Could I speak to Sherlock Holmes, please?" the head-teacher entered with a paler face than usual, and John felt himself go slightly pale at the thought of what Sherlock possibly could have done now and how many times they would allow his misbehaviour before he was expelled for it.

"Sure, Sherlock?" John prompted, sending the boy on the front row a look when he looked up with heavy eyes looking as though he was about to fall asleep then and there. He heaved himself up with a loud and purposeful sigh, weaving around the lab bench and following the overweight man outside.

In order to not let his composure slip, John immediately launched back into teaching, going through the mark scheme for questions on the repercussions of kidney dialysis. Sherlock entered the room again 5 minutes later with a forceful shove to the door behind him with his foot to close it. He trudged back to his chair without looking at anyone, buried in his own head.

"What was that about?" John asked as soon as the last student filtered out, leaving Sherlock who was packing his equipment away purposefully slowly.

"There has been a complaint filed against me" he drawled, the most bored and unaffected sound John had heard come from him.

"What? From who?" He stood from his seat immediately, walking over to where Sherlock's desk was.

"A teacher, apparently."

"For doing what? Your behaviour has been so much better lately"

Sherlock's adam's apple bobbed defiantly, "Smoking."

With an exasperated look to the ceiling, John leaned his head back. "Well, I hate to say I told you so but..."

"But you told me so." Sherlock finished his sentence for him, and John picked up on a mutter of 'predictable' under his breath.

Piling everything into his hands and straight down into his bag messily, Sherlock pushed his bag on to the floor and leant forward on his elbows, focusing on John.

"What did Sir say?" John inquired, stepping sideways and away in case any passersby seemed suspicious.

"If I'm caught smoking again on school grounds I'm suspended for a week."

John paused, cup of tea half way to his mouth, and slowly lowered his mug. "Please try not to get yourself suspended, it really doesn't look good on your record, Sherlock."

"I don't care about that, I just want to do what I want without idiotic people getting in the way of everything actually fun in life" He gesticulated wildly, hoping John would understand.
"I know you don't care, but you should." John scolded, heading for the whiteboard spray to clean to board of pen.

"Why do you care anyway?" Sherlock narrowed his eyes.

"Because I don't want you to be expelled, that's why" John huffed, stretching on his tip-toes to reach the title at the top.

Sherlock sits quietly until John faces him again.

"Don't you ever get tired of constantly pushing people away?" His teacher sighed, trying and failing to figure Sherlock out.

"It's a necessity to access life's basic tools of control to circumvent unnecessary hindrances of human emotion." Sherlock stated matter-of-factly.

"Right. I probably should have expected an answer like that." His phone buzzed in his pocket as he frowned in response to Sherlock. His lock-screen lit up with a message.

From: Harry
Coming out for drinks tonight?

John sighed and pocketed the device, bringing his attention back to Sherlock who was staring intently at the phone in his pocket. "Family member, estranged although trying to gain contact, from the observation of ignorance from your side you are not as interested as the featured party. So, rivalry there, statistically less likely to be parents due to your age-"

"Hey!" John cried indignantly.

"Sibling rivalry?" Sherlock supplied at last.

"Not that dramatic, but yes, it was my sister. Impressive." He sent Sherlock a stern but helplessly amazed look by the young man's deduction skills, which earned another stroke to Sherlock's ever-growing ego as he sat there smirking in return.

With a shake of his head, John lifted his satchel over his shoulder and flicked off the lights at the front of the classroom. "Anyway, I best be off."

Sherlock stood to follow him, retrieved his own bag and jumped over the benches, ignoring the look it earned from John. "Dentist appointment?"

John paused and turned to look at him. "How did you kn-- never mind."

Sherlock held the door open for his teacher, stepping into the empty hallway, most students and teachers had, as usual, gone home by this time, so Sherlock and John were alone in the silence.

Sherlock paused at the stairwell closest to the chemistry labs, knowing that John would cut through the staff room to leave the building.

"Are you staying behind?" John asked after realising he had stopped.

He nodded in answer.

"See you tomorrow then?" John sounded hopeful, and Sherlock rocked on his heels in response, digging his hands into his coat pockets.

"Yes," he said finally, and with a twirl of fabric, he descended down the stairs to the labs, leaving
"Yes," he said finally, and with a twirl of fabric, he descended down the stairs to the labs, leaving John to go his separate ways.

Sherlock was seething.

He dug his fingers into the wooden frame of the bench in front of him, curling his nails into the soft MDF board and leaving crescent moon shapes underneath. He barely registered the half amused, half concerned glances that John was directing towards him every so often he was so overcome with rage.

"Oh, Sir, I know the answer to this one!" the shrill voice accompanied with a waving hand in the air echoed from the other end of the bench to him.

Sherlock snapped his head around, sending the deadliest glare he could muster towards the new boy who was content on spending every waking second trying to outsmart him and prove he was the most intelligent.

Anderson had been praised by John three times already that lesson, and Sherlock had hated every minute of it.

John looked around hopefully, observing the blank faces of the rest of the students who were just letting Philip do all of the work. He sighed.

"Yes, Philip?"

"The role of plasma cells and memory cells produce a secondary response-"

"Wrong." Sherlock droned from the other side of the classroom, and John sent him a desperate look begging him not to start an argument with the new kid like he so desperately wanted to.

"Excuse me?" Anderson snorted, turning his entire body around in his chair to face the accusing voice coming from his left.

"I said wrong. Phagocytises, lysosomes and lysosomal enzymes in the subsequent destruction of ingested pathogens allow a defensive function in mammalian blood." Sherlock returned in a monotonous voice.

"Well, I think you'll find that if you refer to the syllabus-" Anderson started, and Sherlock laughed loudly to interrupt him. "What is so funny?!"

"Syllabus," he scoffed. "If you refer to that as your most prominent point of reference then you're definitely even more unintelligent than I thought you were in the first place."

"Sherlock-" John started, deciding to break up the argument before it gets out of hand, and knowing Sherlock, it will. "Stop the drama, please, you are both right."

Anderson sent a triumphantly smug look over to Sherlock and sat up straighter and more primly on his stool, folding his hands over one another.

Sherlock sent John the most desperate look he could muster, mentally begging for him to remove Anderson from the class so he wouldn't have to put up with the stupidity of the boy.

Instead, John pointedly turned his back on Sherlock and returned to the whiteboard to continue teaching, and Sherlock glared intensely at the clock in the hopes it would make the minutes pass faster.
The bell eventually rang for lunchtime, and Sherlock stared Anderson out as he trotted to the front desk and handed John his paper with a flourish. Sherlock began to plan ways to get the paper from John later on, knowing how easily distracted the doctor could become.

"What the hell was that all about?" John asked the second the last student left the room.

"I hate him." Sherlock replied, leaping up from his seat at once and gesticulating wildly in front of John's desk where he sat dumfounded.

"Sherlock, he literally just joined the school two hours ago. What has made you so detestable of him?"

"He thinks he is more intelligent than me, John, did you see the way he looked at me today, and the way he looked at you? He practically hung off your every word for God sake." He stood and paced the stretch of windows to the right side wall of the room, still ranting to himself.

"He is supposed to hang off my every word if I am teaching, that is how you learn, Sherlock"

Sherlock waved his hand in John's general direction. "Stupid."

"Who is? I hope you aren't talking about me" Sherlock heard John use his 'teacher voice' and rolled his eyes.

"No. Anderson. Keep up, John!"

John sighed, leaning back in his chair with his hands behind his head, "God knows i'm trying..."

Sherlock scowled at him and pushed open the closest window, observing the people milling around on the concrete outside, as the remains of last night's bout of snow had settled in the corners and some surfaces. Sherlock supposed that they were about to do something completely mundane like start a snowball fight.

John approached from behind, settling his elbows on the window ledge next to Sherlock, their arms brushing the slightest fraction. "I have to lock up, are you coming?"

Sherlock huffed, his breath causing a circle of condensation to form on the cold window, before rapidly shrinking away, diminished by the heat of the room. He nodded.

Reaching for the lanyard around his neck that held his keys, John pulled away, trying not to pay attention to the brushing of fabric as his arm grazed Sherlock's, and his student turned to look at him far more intently than he should. John tries to find a reason to care about what he should and shouldn't be doing anymore, and finds it difficult to locate one.

__________________________________________________________________________________

Sherlock felt the burn in his lungs and sucked the smoke in deeper, feeling lightheaded and swaying backwards against the wall. He held his breath until he felt dizzy and exhaled in a thin cloud of smoke, followed by a breathy sigh of exhaustion. He closed his eyes and wished he were with John.

__________________________________________________________________________________

John rubbed at his eyes with his fists, tempted to slap himself to stay awake, and settled his mug of cold coffee down next to the intimidating stack of ungraded essays and empty lesson plans. He fell backwards onto the sofa, turning his head towards the window being pelted with rain and wind, and before he knew it he was lost in his thoughts of piercing verdigris coloured eyes that haunted
"You missed your appointment with the doctor, where were you?"

"Doing more important things" Sherlock mumbled from underneath the mass of blankets and pillows he had buried his body in. He heard a sigh from his brother and a shutting of the door.

Sherlock closed his eyes again until he heard a scuffling of dress-shoes on wooden floorboards and realised that Mycroft had not left, he had closed the door behind him. He groaned. "Go away Mycroft"

With the sound of an opening of a drawer, Sherlock threw the duvet over his head in frustration, eyes landing on his brother pulling out the chess board from where it was stuffed underneath the dresser. Sherlock watched him for a moment, calculating, and then brought the blankets with him as he dragged himself over to the table where Mycroft was setting up the pieces.

He glared at the white pieces before him as if they had personally offended him, spinning the board around in a fluid movement so the black pieces were on his side.

Mycroft raised an eyebrow "I was trying to be courteous," he reached for a pawn.

"Just because whites make the first move does not guarantee eventual success" Sherlock moved his knight forward in defiance.

"And you were so adamant on playing black why? Let me guess-

"There is no reason. I don't need courtesy from you" Sherlock spat.

"The colour black is a metaphor for your wounded tortured soul and the evolution of decay you face yourself dwelling in. How poetic." Mycroft smirked and moved his bishop.

Sherlock only glared and avoided Mycroft's threat, moving his knight forward again.

"When are you going to tell me the thing you have so desperately trying to hide these past weeks?" Mycroft waves his hand nonchalantly.

Sherlock smirked in return and made his move.

Mycroft took out Sherlock's knight and placed it on the side.

Sherlock attacked Mycroft's bishop and flung it back into the box. "Your turn"

He moved a rook. "I will find out what you are hiding from me, Sherlock. You know my methods."

Sherlock shook his head in amusement, eyes trained on Mycroft's king as he moved.

"Oh let me guess, you'll have me stalked by brainless and insolent secret service agents for the next few weeks until you have enough information to amuse you."

Mycroft took his pawn.

"Something along those lines" Mycroft squinted at him in vague amusement.

Sherlock beamed back at him. "Check"
Mycroft moved his queen, "Checkmate"

Sherlock frowned at the board in confusion and then flipped the board shut in frustration, pieces flying everywhere.

"You're getting better." Mycroft commented from where he was sat.

"Shut up." Sherlock grouched, reaching for his violin to play something horrendous until Mycroft leaves.

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Sherlock headed to Lestrade's classroom for his weekly tutor meeting, barging straight in without knocking as usual, Greg was usually inside stuffing his face with doughnuts or playing apps on his phone and cursing at the screen.

This time, however, he was hunched over his desk, listening intently to John, who sat opposite.

"I-Sherlock?" John asked, and then visibly panics, turning straight back to Lestrade as if the public services teacher could read his thoughts.

Sherlock blinked with amusement and acknowledges him with a nod. "Dr Watson."

"You need to stop barging into my classroom, Sherlock." Greg scolded, standing up behind his desk as John mimicked his actions.

Sherlock ignored him and moved over to his usual seat which he slumped into and watched as John and Lestrade talked quietly, about the rapidly deteriorating condition of a fellow alcohol-addicted teacher, Sherlock deduced.

Greg lead him to the door eventually, with a pat on the back and the promise to 'catch up at lunch', John left with a final glance to Sherlock and closed the door behind him.

"Right," Lestrade clapped once, the sound echoing around the room making Sherlock wince.

"Could you stop being so irritating for five minutes?" Sherlock complained, folding his arms.

"Hello to you too" Greg commented as he sorted through his tutor folders. "How's your personal statement coming along?"

"I haven't started it" Sherlock admitted, knowing it would infuriate his tutor to no end after he had asked Sherlock at least 20 times to at least begin writing it.

Lestrade sighed, "Why am I not surprised?"

"You have unrealistic expectations" his student replied matter-of-factly.

"Of what?" Lestrade asked with a confused look on his face.

"Everything. But mostly me."

"You can't blame me for trying" he replied, sitting down opposite Sherlock at last. "Reports have been good from your teachers lately. Just a couple of disputes with your Chemistry teacher I see?"

"I am too advanced for her." Sherlock raised his chin.
"Nevertheless, you need to be more respectful."

Sherlock rolled his eyes in true two-year-old fashion and swung back on his chair.

"Do you have lessons this afternoon?"

"Free periods," Sherlock drawled "I'll most likely be in Chemistry"

Greg nodded and looked back at Sherlock's last progress statement, written in the previous term. He yanked the paper free and pushed it towards Sherlock once more. "You need to write a new statement, about your targets for each subject."

Sherlock stared back at Lestrade as if he had just asked him to time-travel back in time and change history. Lestrade simply raised his eyebrows, pushing a pen towards his student until the boy frowned down at the paper and began to scribble one-worded statements.

Five minutes later, once Sherlock had explained to him the nature of the smoking complaint made by the member of staff through the head teacher, Lestrade packed up his folders and shoved them into a drawer close to his desk. "Okay, we're about done here. You can go for lunch. See you on Thursday."

Sherlock nodded once and rose, heading straight for the chemistry labs to purposefully avoid the student infested cafeteria.

John was halfway through explaining to a year seven student the importance of manners when a sharp ringing trilled through the air. He startled when recognising the sound as the fire alarm, not recalling a notice about a fire drill in the all staff email that morning.

His thoughts were interrupted by the heavy scent of smoke drifting into the classroom. *Shit.*

"Alright! Don't panic! Fire procedures! Line up and follow me!" He mentally checked off all the things he was supposed to do in the event of the fire, did a manically fast head-count and ushered the hysterical students into the corridor into slightly warmer air, rushing them all towards the fire exit stairs.

They curled down the stairs and then scattered once they hit the grass outside, "Tutor formation!" John called after the disappearing heads, moving as far away from the building as they could, reaching the swarms of other students gathered by the green wire fence in loose tutor lines.

John spotted Greg Lestrade almost immediately, rushing to where he was ushering his tutor group together. "Greg! Do you know what's going on?"

"Not a clue, half of my tutor is missing-" Greg counted the heads of the sixth-formers in front of him, John stood to the side helplessly, thankful he doesn't have a tutor group of his own.

Another teacher jogged past wearing the reflective vest fire marshals were to wear and Greg snagged him to ask for any information he knew, "They're saying it's on the second floor, by the chemistry department" the man shrugged, rushing off towards the other vested teachers.

A group of four students made their way over to Greg after a few seconds and Lestrade scanned back over his register again, noticing only one more absence.

"John-"
John saw the look of panic on his face and something in his stomach dropped. "What is it?"

"Have you seen Sherlock?" Greg asked, glancing back to the building, darkened smoke beginning to billow out from the windows of the second floor with the occasional crackle, causing frenzy amongst the students.

John spun around desperately trying to locate the head of curly hair, but knowing he wasn't the tallest person there made it impossible, and his heart was panicking in his chest, beating wildly and palms sweating. "I haven't seen him since lunch-time, he told me he'd be in Chemistry all afternoon" John croaked.

Breathe. He has to be here somewhere.

"Me too... Shit." Greg cursed, waving over one of the marshals frantically. "Have any of you seen Sherlock?" he asked the other students in his tutor, though they stood there with blank looks on their face as if they had never even dared to speak to Sherlock let alone know where he was.

John hyperventilates, imagining Sherlock trapped in that building, choking from smoke inhalation and crowded by flames. "Fuck. Greg- I'm... I'm going in" he called, already running towards the building, stripping his coat off and throwing it behind him onto the tarmac.

"No! John, you can't go in there!" Greg panicked, shouting over student's voices, eyes frantically looking back towards the crowds of children still piling out from the building. "John! Just wait for the fire engines!"

John turned back to Greg with a determined look in his eyes just before a roar of heat blasts glass from one of the large windows on the second floor, crackling with a hiss and a wave of heat. John ignored the screams and continued to run.

He heard Greg shouting other teachers to restrain John, to stop him, but continued running, forcing himself straight through the double doors, the heat hitting him immediately as he clambered up the stairs, hearing his name being called by the mass of voices, teachers rushing in after him and being held back for their own safety.

John barely escaped, clambering up taking the steps two at a time as the air began to get thicker and the sweat around his collar started to drip onto the fabric. John was either hallucinating from the fear or his tie was definitely trying to strangle him.

There were a few last people rushing from the building past him down the stairs, being evacuated by adults that John ignored when they screamed at him asking what the hell he was doing.

He forced the doors open, hearing another smash-explosion of glass nearby but resolutely ignoring the horror he knows he was running straight in to. "Sherlock!" he screamed, weaving madly through the empty hallways, coughing and spluttering from the smoke making its way into his lungs.

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It's about a minute later after screaming his student's name that he hears a weak croak from below him. "John?"

And there he was. Covered in black soot and hunched over on the floor. Clawing his way along the carpet. Trying desperately to open his eyes from the intensity of the smoke to see if it really was his teacher or if his idiotically hopeful mind was hallucinating his figure.

"Shit, Sherlock-" John grabbed him immediately, hauling his arm around Sherlock's back and dragging him towards the stairs. "Come on,"
They were met at the mid-point of the stairs by three firemen dressed in huge gear, masks strapped on tightly and rushing straight towards them. They were separated as one large fire-fighter practically lifted John over his shoulder and two others lifted Sherlock between them, the teen’s eyes were squeezed shut and covered in blackness of dirt and dust.

More quickly than John could remember, they were met by the light of the sky, the freshness of the wind forcing itself into their lungs, causing Sherlock to begin a violent coughing fit, both of them being moved straight over to the ambulance on site.

John vaguely noticed that most of the students that had been lined up had been evacuated to the field further away, cordoned off by tape and firemen surrounding the engines with three supporting ambulances. "Sherlock? I- Are you- Is he okay?" John questioned earnestly, craning his neck around to see Sherlock's legs dangling from the back of the other ambulance, still coughing everywhere.

The member of ambulance staff braced John on the shoulders, settling him with a firm squeeze, ushering him to sit down, pulling out meters and masks immediately. "Don't worry, he has paramedics with him too. What is your name?"

"John", he croaked, launching into another coughing fit at the persistent itching and dryness in his throat.

They were attaching a breath monitor to John's face just as he heard a retching from beside him, and leaned over to see Sherlock throwing up violently over the concrete floor. He went to pull the mask down from his face, ready to stand and help him "Sherlock-"

"No, keep seated please, we can't afford you getting disorientated and passing out." his paramedic pushed him down again, and John eyed the lines of equipment in clear trays and boxes along the wall of the ambulance, distracting himself with the sight of syringes and valves stuffed into transparent packaging.

Sherlock had quietened now, they had laid him down on the stretcher and he was being instructed to breathe deeply into the gas and air machine, tracking his pulse simultaneously. John imagined the voice in Sherlock's head about how irritating these green-coated people were being, and barely held back a chuckle.

"John!" he heard a nearby voice, and turned to register Greg running towards the vehicle. "Are you okay? You fucking idiot- why did you do that for?" he went to punch John in the shoulder and hesitated halfway from the fragile looking state of his face. Dark circles surrounded his bloodshot eyes, the hint of soot dusting his wrinkled clothes and his face, Greg stared at him with pity whilst John wrestled with his uncomfortably tight top shirt button.

"And you-" Greg turned to the ambulance opposite, spotting Sherlock with his legs dangling, just out of John's viewpoint. "Why weren't you out as soon as the fire alarm sounded?" he cried, gesticulating in frustration.

That's when John finally hears his voice, deep and barren of emotion, just on the side of croaky which no doubt irritated the unbreakable Sherlock Holmes. "Fire alarms are idiotic, I thought it was another one of those ridiculous drills. Plus, I was busy thinking."

Greg's eyes lit up with unquestionable anger, just about to lapse into a well-deserved lecture when a tall man appeared quite literally from nowhere.

He was dressed in a full piece suit, jet black and pin-striped with a crimson red tie Windsor-
knotted at the stiff wing-tip collar. With an air of familiarity and confidence, the man marched straight over to Sherlock, grasping tightly a hawk-ended umbrella and reaching straight for Sherlock's face. John felt immediately intimidated by his presence.

Sherlock scowled as Mycroft took his face in one hand, gripping him by his chin and tilting his head to check for signs of trauma with a direct look into his eyes. After a moment he let go, his fingers hovering.

"I'm fine" Sherlock insisted with irritation. "Would you tell them to stop putting this blanket on me?!" he ripped the orange object from his shoulders once more and tossed it to the floor with defiance.

"Sort out your shirt" the man ordered in an uninterested tone, wiping at the material loosely hanging from Sherlock's shoulders, and John restrained the urge to pounce forward, wondering who the hell this man was. When studying his features closely, the gingery-brunette hair and sharp blue eyes held certain similarities to Sherlock, but this man looked entirely too young to be his father, or his uncle, and besides, Sherlock had told John that his parents were deceased.

Greg interrupted before John could ask, however, stepping forward into the shadow of the ambulance. "Excuse me, I don't believe we've been introduced, I'm-

"Gregory Lestrade, I presume?" He turned to face the teacher, a slight squint to his snake-like eyes and offered a long outstretched hand.

John watched with confusion as Greg visibly swallowed, looking entirely flustered as he gripped the man's hand. "Yes, yes- And you are?"

"Mycroft Holmes" they shook hands. "Are you the teacher that retrieved my brother from the fire? I believe I ought to express my utmost gratitude-

"Oh, no, I- That wasn't me, I'm Sherlock's tutor. Dr John Watson here saved him from the fire" Greg gestured directly over to John who finally jumped down from the van, paramedics be damned.

He self-consciously straightened his spine and pushed his shoulders back, walking briskly forward to the much taller man whose intense gaze was now fixed directly on him. John finally caught sight of Sherlock as he rounded the ambulance, exchanging a glance with him and ignoring his rapidly increasing heart-rate.

"Doctor John Watson," Mycroft tested the name on his tongue for a moment, rapidly flicking his eyes over John's approaching frame, deducing the man's emotions from the expressions on his face.

"Pleased to meet you" John reached out a hand towards him, firmly shaking Mycroft's cold hand and then returning to his normal stance.

"I believe I owe you my thanks, for assisting Sherlock from the fire."

John blinked, keeping his eyes straight ahead and away from his student. "I'm just glad nobody was seriously hurt." he attempted to sound as sincere and professional as he could, feeling even more daunted by the older Holmes' looming stance and blank facial expression.

Mycroft rapidly attached the data in his head; from the lingering glances and uneasiness, Sherlock's increase of breath behind him when he shook Dr Watson's hand, from the fathomable electrical charge in the air between the two silent men, it was safe to determine that this is what Sherlock had been hiding. And with one look back to Sherlock, he knew that he was right.
Sherlock sprung up. "Can we all stop lurking around like lacklustre animals and get out of here." he snapped, reaching for his discarded coat that lay abandoned on the ambulance step, still reeking of smoke. With the final affirmation from paramedics that they were acceptably medically relieved, Sherlock stormed off ahead, wrapped in his coat, collar up and dress-shoes crunching the broken glass particles under his feet.

Whilst Mycroft had excused himself as politely as possible to approach the head-teacher, Greg and John were left in silent apprehension, "Well, that was interesting," John said at last. "I felt like he was trying to read my thoughts or something."

"Seeing that he's Sherlock's brother, he probably was" Greg frowned, not taking his eyes from the tall man with the black umbrella despite the clear skies. "Oh here's your coat, by the way."

"Ta" John took it from him, slipping it on immediately and pulling the collar closed around his face to force out the biting cold.

Greg made his excuses about speaking to the head and left, whilst John focused on the direction Sherlock was heading, crossing the small field and rounding the corner to the bricked bike sheds away from view.

Rubbing his hands together to keep the rapidly dissipating warmth in, he aimed to look casual as he walked in the same general direction Sherlock had, if only to check up on his wellbeing.

"Are you seriously smoking right now, Sherlock? Seriously?" John scolded as soon as he rounded the corner, raising his voice at the man with the lighter in his hand.

"I...Yes. Sorry-" Sherlock grimaced down at himself and retracted his thumb from the lighter pedal, stuffing the un-used cigarette back into the sodden cardboard carton crinkled in his inside coat pocket.

John slid his hands into his pockets, his exhale turning into a mist of fog from the freezing winter air. He raised his eyebrows, "Sherlock Holmes saying sorry, that's a first." He scuffed his shoe at the floor, refusing eye contact which convinced Sherlock of his previous suspicion, he was angry with him.

"Well. You did save my life, I suppose that grants some sort of an apology" Sherlock was attempting to be sincere, but still somehow managed to make John huff out a laugh, running his calloused hands over his worn-looking face.

"Jesus, Sherlock" he shook his head. "What were you thinking? There are fire alarms for a reason, you know, what if I hadn't gone in after you? What if someone had managed to stop me?"

"You know my methods, John." he grinned unexpectedly. "I am known to be indestructible."

John bit out a bitter laugh, completely done with anything Sherlock had to say. He pushed off from the wall and stormed off in the direction of the school.

"Wait! John-" Sherlock grabbed his arm, hauling him back into the secluded bricked corner, not letting go even after John was stood staring straight back at him. "I-"

John looked down at Sherlock's leather gloved hands, fiddling with the thick material of John's coat sleeve, which had been returned to him by Greg so he didn't freeze to death.
"I am thankful", his icy sharp eyes flicked upwards, meeting John's gaze for a moment, a fleeting chance of softness and invitation before the connection was lost and Sherlock dropped his sight to the ground once more.

Though the air was cold the warm breath between them mingled and warmed John's face, aware of his mouth parting slightly at a loss of what to say. He found his eyes inexplicably drawn to Sherlock's perfectly sculpted cupid-bow lips.

"Just try to be more careful, okay?" John sighed, pulling away from the close proximity they had just shared, suddenly nervous that it had been witnessed.

The silence between them stretched on persistently, the crunch of gravel under their feet scraping minutely as their feet shuffled about.

"Are you angry with me?" the young Holmes stared directly at the ground.

"I was, but in my experience- anger never seems to last long with you" John sighed, straightening his stance and flexing his hands at his sides. Sherlock looked up at him.

"Should I take that as a compliment?"

"Take it however you like, I'm so exhausted right now I have no idea what I'm even saying, let alone what I mean by the things I say."

Clearing his throat, Sherlock uncurled from his slouch against the wall. "I believe students and teachers have been excused from school until further notice. You should go home."

While John's brain was screaming at him for sleep, his body swayed unintentionally more towards Sherlock's moving figure. "You're going home too I hope? You can't stay here-"

"I'm sure Mycroft will insist on my return tonight" Sherlock rolled his eyes, his curls falling lopsided by the determined breeze.

The two began to walk back to the general gathering of vehicles and scattered people, taped off by police. Sherlock ducked underneath and lifted the dividing tape up for John to walk under.

Before they realise how long they had stood in comfortable silence, a quick glance to the left provided the view of an expressionless Mycroft, stood aside with his arm settled on the open door of a sleek black Mercedes with an unspoken demand that Sherlock say his goodbyes and follow him home.

Sherlock glared at him for a moment, and then reluctantly turned back to John, knowing that Mycroft was watching their every move. John's wide eyes flickered up to his with some hesitation, neither addressing the odd atmosphere that had changed and now hung about the air between them.

"See you then" John nodded, pursing his lips and measuring the reasonable amount of distance between their bodies.

The irritating flashes of LED blue and red lights from the sirens of police and ambulances flashed over Sherlock's pale and stoic features, the sky beginning to darken with the prelude of nightfall. He departed with a silence about him that sends a shiver down John's spine.

Surrounded by the dissipating warmth of the air, Doctor John Watson forced himself not to watch as the young man he had become so enraptured by climbed into a car sheathed in shadows.
Chapter End Notes

Please leave feedback if you feel so inclined ;)
Chapter 3

What I've done, you've done too,

The walls I hide behind, you walk through

The official report from the fire-investigator team stated that the fire at the school had been caused by an open flame, a bunsen burner left unattended and still alight in an empty classroom with an open window and stacks of papers and worksheets nearby that had not been cleared away.

As expected, there were questions asked about why Sherlock Holmes was so nearby the source of the fire, a couple of classrooms down the hall with dangerous chemicals, equipment, and an empty room all to himself. Although the attempt of scape-goating Sherlock was short-lived, as the interference of Mycroft provided unquestionable, substantial evidence that the fire was not started anywhere near Sherlock’s classroom or caused by any chemical compounds reacting together that he may have caused. So that was that.

In other words, Sherlock was in the clear, although very heavily lectured by Lestrade, and various other members of staff in weekly assemblies of the importance of the adequate execution of fire drills. Naturally, Sherlock proceeded to dismiss everything he was told by the figure that he had worked out of the un-likeness of this event to happen again. *(There is less than a 5.8% chance that an event similar to this will occur again, Lestrade, so it is not necessary to grant the irrelevant procedure of fire drills a place in my mind palace and therefore must be immediately deleted)*

 Needless to say, Lestrade was having trouble restraining himself from shaking some violent and well-justified sense into his student.

And then there was John. Just over a week had passed since the fire, and the science side of the school had been shut off and lessons cancelled until the building was deemed safe again after sufficient repairs, this meant that he had not seen Sherlock since the fire.

He had heard about him, through Lestrade, about how he was driving the tutor round the bend with his stubborn and impatient nature that only seemed to be amplified by the recent restriction he was being put under from having no access to the labs in-school.

The truth was that Sherlock had spent an entire week trying to force John Watson from his brain, though he kept reappearing with flashes of lop-sided grins, confused frowns and tired limps.

"Sherlock, what is wrong? You are moping around like a puppy who’s had his tail stepped on" Mrs Hudson tutted, pushing the sweeping brush in a circle around him as he sat refusing to move to accommodate her cleaning.

Sherlock said nothing and merely raised an eyebrow, staring up at the library ceiling and counting the stains and smudges on the tiles.

"Oh, I see, you’re lost without your chemicals aren’t you, dear? Well, some time away from explosions might do you good, what with all of this fire business lately." she hummed to herself, moving further away as she swept around the circular tables.
"These restrictions of the science labs are ridiculous" Sherlock growled to himself, jumping down from his seat and dragging his forefinger along the spines of the closest row of books.

"Rules are there for a reason, to keep you safe" Mrs Hudson chided, waving a finger in his direction to emphasise her point.

Before Sherlock got a chance to respond, he received a sharp shhh from the librarian on duty, accompanied by an impatient glare. Mrs Hudson raised an eyebrow at him and pointedly returned a book to the shelf that Sherlock had thrown to the floor in his mood.

Sherlock felt for the lighter in his pocket and resolutely ignored the twist of guilt in his stomach that came with the action. He brushed his thumb over the sturdy metal wheel of the clasp, squeezing his eyes shut in annoyance for a moment before giving in, and swung his coat over his head and onto his shoulders.

Barely 30 seconds had passed since he'd lit up when he heard the footsteps behind him. "John?"

He turned to meet the suspicions of his mind and was faced with the sheepish looking teacher, hands stuffed in his pockets, tie askew and loosened at the knot with a night's worth of stubble making a light appearance on his jaw and chin, curving around the softness of his open lips.

"Long time no see," John laughed with uncertainty, taking measured steps forward, wishing so intensely that they were alone so he could shake Sherlock and scream how consuming his feelings were becoming, and how dare he exist to be such a temptation, and why did his lips always look so alluring and kissable?

Sherlock narrowed his eyes slightly, something in the back of his mind registering that such a characteristic had recently been inherited from Mycroft, which irritated Sherlock to no end. He deduced what he could from the way John was standing, apprehensively with his fingers grasping the material on the inside of his pockets, the state of his un-buttoned cuffs rolled to the elbow and his dress shoes covered in a slight sheen from walking across the wet grass to the block where he knew Sherlock usually went to smoke.

Lost: 3.5 lbs, stress-related. Recently had an argument with his mother. Won a poker game against Lestrade at lunch-

"Indeed," Sherlock hallowed his cheeks on the inhale, swaying his weight to the other foot and sliding his hand into his suit trouser pocket, canting his hips slightly forward and saying nothing in return.

"How have you been?" The doctor asked, Sherlock repressed his smirk at typical caring John and let his arm push against the brick wall, his long fingers tracing the indents of dried cement, picking at the sharp corners of brick.

"Bored, as usual." He grimaced, wincing as he sliced his thumb on a sharp crack of cement and dark red liquid dropped onto the stark grey pavement at his feet. John tutted slightly but rushed forward to help and examine the cut.

He took Sherlock's hand into his own without any hesitation.

Sherlock was struck between wanting to watch Dr Watson's calloused fingers brushing rhythmically against his, and watching John's face contort with the effort of concentration, the dent between his eyes defining, the laugh lines around his eyes squinting together, his blue eyes flickering back and forth over Sherlock's pale skin. Sherlock found himself feeling quite breathless
when John's lips parted unconsciously.

"Idiot," John muttered softly, voice full of affection, snapping Sherlock out of his daydream to realise Dr Watson was still examining the cut on his thumb. "I can't leave you for one second without you injuring yourself."

"How?"

"Damaging your lungs by smoking, burning yourself with chemicals, getting trapped in fires, cutting yourself on bricks." John smirked, "You're a whole new definition of danger."

Sherlock's brow furrowed for a second, realising that he had dropped his cigarette to the ground a while ago, and his free hand he had been holding it with had the slightest tremor, to which perplexed him to no end. "John-"

"Don't." He starts, sliding his hand out of Sherlock's. "Just...Don't. I don't know what this is between us but-"

Sherlock sighed. "I don't do sentiment, John. I don't do this."

John's jaw clenched for a moment. "Then don't."

"I can't" he growled in return, turning with a swish of thick fabric as he slid his lighter back into his pocket and rubbed his hands together.

John paused, watching his student cover his face with his hand, sliding his palm upwards into his hair and gripping. "You can't wh-"

"I can't stop thinking" Sherlock shouted, and John frowns at him in warning to lower his voice, and watched as Sherlock slid his back down the wall to slump on the floor, arms resting limply atop his knees.

John watched him for a while, until he too dropped to the floor next to him, slightly slower and less agile because of his leg, but hitching himself upwards, hands sifting the gravel from the ground in fistfuls.

"About you" Sherlock added with the toss of a sharp stone skittering against the gravel, the words ripping open the silence and knocking John's breath from his chest in the process.

"Fuck," John groaned, "Sherlock, we can't. We really can't." he swore, running his hands over his face with a muffled voice.

Sherlock nodded back to him in agreement. Until, softly; "I know."

"I mean- I would lose my job, and...you would be in so much trouble, probably expelled, because of your reputation. And the things people would think about me, probably about you too, I just- I don't want to ruin any chance you've got at a successful and happy life."

Sherlock scowled at the last part, keeping his mouth shut and contemplating whether his thoughts had ever encompassed the potential of a successful and happy life to begin with, before he'd even met John. He knew that they hadn't.

"Plus I would probably be skinned alive by your brother, and he would have me ejected from the country for high treason or something equally ridiculous and terrifying-"

"Psh, please. Mycroft is an idiot, he'd never get away with it. I wouldn't let him."
John smiled sadly for a moment, pulling against the magnetic field that was pushing his outstretched hand towards Sherlock’s.

Sherlock hauled himself up from the ground, brushing off his suit trousers and flicking out his coat, the collar flinging up. He stooped to help John up with his un-injured hand, making sure not to linger too long on the up-take.

"Is it weird that I miss our Wednesdays?" John said tentatively after a moment, more light-heartedly.

"Our Wednesdays?" Sherlock smirked, sinking his hands in his pockets and leading the way from the bricked house-shed.

"You know what I mean" John mumbled, cheeks turning pink.

"We can still have our Wednesdays" Sherlock insisted.

John looked over to him. "My classroom is one of the ones that has been restricted from the fire." He frowned, his eyes flickering to the right quickly as if he had no choice but to remember that day.

"We are not restricted to the four walls of this dreadful school, John."

"We are if we want to remain appropriate, Sherlock." John reprimanded him.

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Fine,"

John was silent as they approached the double doors of the school, "One day", he smiled with something like a promise, and slapped his hand on Sherlock’s back to create the illusion of simple friendly discussion to any onlookers.

Sherlock forced his lips to lift to a hollow smile, holding the door open for his teacher and disregarding the sickliness settling in his stomach.

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John didn’t like the way Greg was looking at him.

After parting with Sherlock he had retired to the staff room, found Greg Lestrade sitting in one of the small chairs by the open windows, a box full of folders at his feet. John had nodded towards him and made a bee-line to the coffee machine before returning to the chair opposite Greg.

It wasn’t until John had been sat reading the newspaper he had grabbed from the side for a couple of minutes that he had noticed something was different.

"What?" he asked finally, folding the newspaper and dropping it onto his lap.

Greg didn’t look startled at being addressed, as if he had wanted John to ask him, which made the doctor feel slightly uneasy. "Have you seen Sherlock today?"

John paused. "Yes, briefly. Why?"

Greg remained in silence for a couple of beats before turning his head towards the window, looking out across the back fields of the school, John’s gaze followed. And landed on the line of bricked storage shed-houses in the distance, currently being pelted by rain. "Nothing, I just...I saw you two talking"
Shit. John wished he were a better actor as he felt his face drop. "Oh?"

"You two are rather close, aren't you?" Greg asked, sounding genuinely curious.

John cleared his throat and uncrossed his legs in his chair. "I suppose. Not really, why?"

Lestrade laughed suddenly, a legitimate smile spreading across his face.

"Don't look so serious, John. I'm only asking. It just seems to be that you're one of the only people who can get through to him most of the time." he settled back in his seat, scratching at the tightness of the watch around his wrist. "God knows I can't."

John felt the weight lift from his shoulders but the tension remained, his foot tapping nervously. "I don't think anyone ever truly gets through to Sherlock, or ever will" John joked, and the moment is gone. That doesn't stop John becoming increasingly paranoid as soon as any other teacher walks through the door, his irrational brain insisting to him that everyone knew.

\textit{Everyone knows, and there isn't even anything to know.}

Doctor Watson checked his own pulse for signs of an approaching anxiety attack and excused himself to the bathroom.

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It wasn't the first time Sherlock had followed John, but it was definitely the longest time he had attempted it for.

The intense messages from his brain demanding him for more data on John made Sherlock leap at any chance he got to observe the man. John was just about to pull out of the car park when he ran his hands over his face and kept them there for a couple of minutes as his frame began to shake ever so slightly.

Something clicked in Sherlock and his stomach twisted uncomfortably, heart rate increasing for reasons he didn't know. His legs began moving of their own accord before he could change his mind, re-evaluate the situation and decide on a plan of action.

But no, Sherlock apparently had little control over his emotions lately, which made him livid with himself. But in this moment he just didn't care.

John heard the softest tap on the glass to his right, and pulled away from his bubble of self-pity to be met with the concerned face of Sherlock Holmes, his knuckles hovering against the window. He'd heard a clear "John?" before he had made probably one of the most risky and possibly stupid decisions of the day.

John looked around, knowing that his own regular parking space was quite secluded towards the back of the car-park, shadowed under the darkness of a large willow tree, creating flickering shadows in the dim light of the evening. Such a split-second decision made alarm bells ring in his head as he gestured for Sherlock to go around the car and come sit in the passenger seat next to him.

It appeared he didn't need to be told twice, as he took three long strides to wrench open the door and sit like a silent inquisitive owl inside, watching John with hooded eyes and wringing his hands together. "Are you-"

The genius' eyebrows furrowed with caution, and John watched as one of Sherlock's hands reached halfway out towards him and was immediately pulled back towards his chest. "Okay? I
mean...Are you alright?” he frowned to himself, clearly unfamiliar if uncomfortable with expressing emotional concern outwardly.

John mustered a sad smile and turned back to the wheel. "Shall we go on a drive?” he cleared his throat at the nod of consent from Sherlock and pulled out from the parking space. Sherlock gets his phone out to scroll through so he can keep his head down and concealed from prying eyes.

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They end up in a re-furbished 1950s cafe on the outskirts of London, they warmed themselves with travel cups of coffee until John led them back out to the car.

Sherlock itched for a cigarette but remembered how John disapproved the last time he smoked, and tightened his hands around his cup instead as they leaned against the bonnet of the car.

"John, I- I wish I were better at this. I'm...sorry"

He watched Sherlock fumble over his words and became even more awestruck by his student, perplexed at how somebody so incredibly intelligent could be so incapable of handling something as instinctive as emotions.

"You're fine” he smiled, tempted to reach out to trace the knuckles of Sherlock's gloved hand. "I'm sorry, I'm just finding all of this difficult to cope with, I know that's no excuse but-"

"What exactly are you finding difficult?” Sherlock turned to face John, needing to understand.

With the electricity of eye-contact threatening to break John's self-restraint of desire, he looked away. "This, Sherlock. Whatever this is. I can't take the suspense anymore, or the paranoia that everyone knows about us-"

"Us?"

"Yes, us." John insisted.

Sherlock’s hand edged closer to John's across the glossed metal hood. "I wasn't aware there was an us, John."

John breathed out, the cold air making it appear as a tunnel of smoke. "That's the problem." He looked down to their hands, their little fingers overlapping.

Sherlock stood suddenly and pulled his coat around himself, walking straight out of the car park, leaving John with no choice but to follow, panicking that he had said the wrong thing, yet again.

"Sherlock-"

"Shh-" He hushed, holding a hand out. John crossed his arms for a moment, leaning back against the gate of somebody's house, watching Sherlock standing alone.

Sherlock bounded off a second later, his head whipping round as if he were a dog being called by his owner. John downed back the rest of his drink and sprinted after him, racing around the corner to find Sherlock half-way up a nearby tree.

"What the hell are you doing?” John exclaimed, standing underneath Sherlock in preparation to catch him.

"One second-" Sherlock called, reaching straight over to a branch sheathed in hanging leaves to
where the quietest of strangled meowing could be heard.

"Sherlock-" John called again, only to notice that the student was cradling something in his arms, dropping down from the tree immediately to lay it out against the pavement. A tiny baby bird, entangled in a muddy plastic bag.

John watched in awe as Sherlock untangled the plastic as best as he could, soothing the bird with a low hum in the base of his throat, and checking over his feathers before swinging back up to replace the chick in its home of twigs and sticks.

"How did you even-" John began as Sherlock turned back to him in silence.

"Couldn't you hear her?" he asked with confusion, clearing his throat and putting his hands in his pockets with the decency of being embarrassed by John's awestruck expression.

"No, I- How did you learn to do that? It was completely calm with you"

"Bird calls," Sherlock shrugged. "My father and I used to bird watch when I was a child." he admitted reluctantly, stalking off with his tall figure casting a shadow against the cracked pavement.

"Sherlock," John called.

He stopped without turning his head. "What?" John's eyes fell upon the dark silhouette of wide shoulders encased in the length of Sherlock's textured collared coat, the distinguished figure that John had come to know so well.

"Come here," John pleaded with a mixture of affection and fear appearing in his voice. Sherlock stood stock still, his dress shoes scuffing against the floor and his hair blowing persistently in the breeze as he returned cautiously to John.

Wishing for the 100th time that he was taller, John took a deep breath and pushed himself up onto his tiptoes to press his forehead to Sherlock's, his own gloved hand resting against the nape of his neck.

Sherlock froze, then immediately moved closer to the warmth, his mouth falling open as he crowded John back against the bricked wall of the alley way behind them. With a great deal of uncertainty, he placed his hand on the wall to the side of John's head, his eyes burning with the same question John's brain was screaming.

"We shouldn't-" John started, contradicting himself by curling his hands in the folds of Sherlock's thick coat and urging Sherlock's body closer to his own.

"Do you really care?" Sherlock asked eventually, sharp eyes scanning for any clues he could get from John's expression on whether he should make the move to push them both over the edge.

"No-" John swore, his eyes starting to water from the intensity of which they were boring into Sherlock's. "I don't."

Sherlock calculated the angle of John's stubby nose from this close up, measured the likelihood that the scar high on his left cheekbone had been caused by stray shrapnel whizzing through Afghanistan-warzone air. Feels the calluses of John's fingertips against the gooseflesh of his bare neck, wonders if John resents the tremble in his left forefinger from the damaged nerve he'd gained from being too near an exploding bomb in his first year in the field.

Sherlock wonders if John sees himself as wounded, wondered if he sees Sherlock that way too.
He wonders how much Lestrade has told him about the drugs, the suspensions, the (minor, in his opinion) crimes.

Sherlock wonders if he would ever find the strength to tell John himself.

"Neither do I," He said at last, but let his hand fall from the surface of bricked wall behind John's head.

They walked back to John's car in silence, neither of them acknowledging what could have potentially just happened. So close.

"Sherlock-" John started, looking over to where Sherlock was staring out of the car window on his own side.

"No, I don't think you are a sinister paedophile, John. Seriously? I am eighteen. A thirteen year age-gap is hardly the biggest difference I have heard of in situations such as these." Sherlock insisted without turning his head.

"I- how do you do that?" John's cheeks began to fill with colour, his head shaking with confusion at how his student could seemingly read his thoughts with little difficulty.

"You are an extremely loud thinker" Sherlock drawled in response, the illusion of him sounding insulted by John's very existence being shattered by the tiniest of smiles lifting the corner of his lips, illuminated by the passing flashes of street-lamp light.

"There is no point in insulting Mycroft's intelligence by dropping me off around the corner from my house, John. He has known all this time where I've been and with whom." Sherlock sighed, flapping his hand at John until he pulled away from the kerb and continued to drive further down the road in pursuit of Sherlock's house.

"Shit- What? He knows? How can he know?"

Sherlock canted his hips upward in order to squash his phone down into the pocket of his trousers. "Probably some predictable magic trick of his including the security cameras of the entirety of London that he likes to show off with every so often"

John visibly tensed, his knuckles becoming increasingly white on the steering wheel. "We shouldn't have-"

"No. Probably not, but we did." Sherlock stated curtly. "Mycroft is Mycroft. He won't do anything, he knows that if he did I would run again-" Sherlock babbled before he can stop himself.

John's brow furrowed as he turned to Sherlock, releasing his foot down on the brake slowly.

Sherlock closed his eyes as they came to a stop, knowing the predictable questions that were coming, the ones everybody asked. Why would you do that, Sherlock? What is wrong with you? Why are you so freakishly different that you'd rather be homeless than let your brother do what is best for you? You should listen to your brother, he is older and has legal guardianship. Why do you never listen, Sherlock?
Instead, John was silent, his breathing controlled. He spoke quietly. "I'll run with you," John turned his body towards him. "If you ever have to, ever again, Sherlock. Run to me."

And with that, Sherlock's walls came crashing down, those polluted waters burst free from the dams he had built and rebuilt himself, and rushed outwards, rushed towards John. And he knew he would never doubt John Watson again. Would never doubt his intentions, his focus, his overwhelmingly virtuous and willing heart. He would never doubt the security he found in John's eyes. Would never doubt the strength of the soldier, the graciousness of the doctor, the irrevocable pull of John Watson.

*Never again, John.*
A week later, John’s classroom is returned to him, and lessons resume as normal. Even though there had been little-to-no fire damage to John’s room, all science classrooms had been decked out with the newest high-standard equipment, which meant inevitably that Sherlock spent his entirety of his free time dwelling there.

"Sherlock, really?" John sighed upon entering his classroom on a Wednesday morning. "Have some respect and tidy up after yourself please."

Sherlock paused momentarily and surveyed his surroundings, noticing that the entirety of the bench to his right side had been decorated with the remainders of the first phases of his experiment on the saliva sample of his neighbour’s dog he had collected that morning.

John looked up to the clock, only having just gotten into school himself, an hour before school even began. "Are you just letting yourself in now?" He challenged, sinking back into his chair and wincing at the twinge of pain coming from his leg.

Sherlock pursed his lips, glancing up to John and doing a double-take, noticing the expression on his teacher’s face.

"John?" he stood, checking on the closed door in his peripheral vision before pulling off his latex gloves.

Sherlock could feel the stress radiating off of him in waves, his face buried in his hands, the twitch of his bad leg every so often, the laboured breathing. "John" he repeated, and moved around the bench towards him.

John inhaled sharply. "I'm- no I'm fine, really- just- " He waved a hand in Sherlock's direction when he sensed him approaching.

"Harriet, I assume?" the deep voice returned, standing to the side of John's desk by now, hands hovering, unsure what to do with them. "That and the fact that your car broke down on the way to work, your leg is causing you pain again, and your nightmares of the war have returned."

John’s immediate thought was the question of how Sherlock’s deductions didn't offend him sometimes. Instead he found himself often wondering at the genius of the young man before him, wondering what his technical mental age and capability was, knowing it far exceeded his own and most of the people he knew. "I- yes, correct." John pulled his hands away from his face and startled to feel Sherlock's fingertips coming into contact with the material of his shirt, tracing along the seam uncertainly, clearly uncomfortable with the raw emotion in the room.

"I'm sorry, John. I never know what to do in these situations." John saw the thoughts racing behind Sherlock's eyes and a smile stretched across his face.

"You're doing better than you think you are." He blinked, staring up at Sherlock with something
akin to adoration across his features.

Something close to a blush coloured Sherlock’s cheeks for a moment. Confused at the reaction, he immediately tried to control it, which of course made him blush even harder. John smiled so hard at this he felt as though his face was about to split in two and okay, maybe this is a bit creepy, he should probably stop but, God, he’s so gorgeous.

Sherlock grunted at the idiocy of emotional bodily responses and immediately stormed back to his station, resolutely ignoring John who was now having a hard time controlling his laughter.

"John!" Sherlock snapped in anger.

Right on cue, John burst into spontaneous giggles. "I’m sorry- you just looked like such a confused puppy."

Sherlock merely offered an empty glare at him in return, secretly just glad that he had managed to make John feel even the tiniest better than he was feeling beforehand. Sherlock Holmes saw that as a win.

"Where is your car now?" Sherlock asked after a moment’s silence, staring at John’s exposed throat and the bob of his adam’s apple as his head hung back over the edge of his chair, feet up on his desk.

"I managed to make it to the car park, just." John laughed without humour. "I half-thought I’d have to get out and push it to school. It practically started coughing up bolts as soon as I pulled out of my drive."

Sherlock frowned to himself, reaching for his phone deposited at the bottom of his suit-trouser pocket, thumbing the screen to open and compose a text whilst still focused on John.

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"You’ve reached the voicemail of Sherlock Holmes. You have less than 8 seconds to think of something void of idiocy and predictability to say, if this is too much of a challenge for you, please press 'end' now."

BEEP

"Sherlock, if you miss one more doctor’s appointment I will personally send a squad of secret service agents to break into that ridiculous school and set fire to the entirely new refurbished science labs, in the hopes you will accept some of your actual responsibilities instead of spending the entirety of your time in the company of hydrochloric acid and that entirely unimportant retired soldier you have become so enamoured by and have been attempting to hide from me for weeks now. You have been warned."

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Sherlock slammed his phone down in anger, chipping the corner of the metal casing in the process.

"What?" Lestrade asked, speaking around mouth full of food, reclined back in his chair.

"Mycroft." Sherlock grunted in return, pulling at the fraying thread of the button at his shirt cuff.

"Mycroft..." Greg paused. "That’s your brother, right?"
Sherlock squinted at him suspiciously.

"What? I was just making conversation!" Greg spluttered, cheeks reddening as he pulled his feet down from his desk and dusted doughnut crumbs from his lap.

"Well don't, it's annoying."

Greg rolled his eyes in return and stood, moving over to the window with his hands on his hips, looking out at the tarmac that was darkened with puddles of rain. "Any closer to deciding university plans?"

Sherlock was quiet for a moment, tapping away on his phone until Greg calls his name again.

"I haven't had time to think about it" Sherlock excuses absently, steeping his fingers underneath his chin.

"You know the deadline is approaching for your statement." Greg squinted to make out the faces of the teachers on duty outside.

"Yes." he replied with a sigh, his eyes sliding closed.

"A school trip?" Sherlock repeated, voice dripping with disdain.

John sighed, "Yes, Sherlock. A school trip. You have to attend, no skipping out, it contributes towards your statistics for the exam." He continued laying the named folders along the bench in places of his students who were in his next class.

"There is no version of this trip that exists with me attending."

"You're going." John doesn't bother gritting his teeth, he sing-songs his replies, knowing full well that Sherlock would eventually cave in and attend after sulking about it for a couple of days anyway.

"John, I am not-"

"Hey boys" Greg swung around the door to John's classroom, looking suspiciously cheerful in Sherlock’s eyes. Before Sherlock could voice his complaints to his tutor about the form of torture John was attempting to enforce on him by compelling him to attend the biology trip, Lestrade began to speak.

"Hey Johnny- boy," Sherlock internally winced at the nickname. "I was just wondering if you knew what time we have to be there at the coaches for on Friday?"

Something in Sherlock clicked. "Wha- Lestrade! Please don't tell me you've been roped into this waste of time trip too?"

"Excited, then?" Lestrade mocked, turning his gaze to John who’s shoulders were shaking with laughter, whilst he stretched to wipe the whiteboard clean.

"What are you doing on a Biology trip?"

"Oh, I volunteered." Lestrade smiled, taking a bite out an apple he’d been shining on his thigh.

"You're a public services teacher!" Sherlock complained, not keen on having his un-official guardian trailing around after him berating him every chance he gets.
"Exactly, and every Friday morning, I have three different periods of hormonal year eights. A.K.A my personal hell which I would like to avoid if given the chance." John chuckled in agreement, pulling a stool from behind the door and settling on it, his feet barely reaching the floor. "Jumped at the first offer I got to chaperone." Lestrade continued.

"Don't blame you, mate" John raised his eyebrows.

"Well, Have fun without me." Sherlock raised his nose slightly, turning from the conversation back to a thick textbook he had lugged into John's classroom at the start of lunch, his head buried in the pages so intently that he'd nearly knocked John's coffee out of his hands from their collision.

"You're coming, Sherlock." John called from the other end of the classroom where he had gone to ram shut a faulty cupboard which persistently swung back open with a squeak. John frowned.

"No."

"You're coming," Lestrade forced. "It's compulsory for A2 Biology students, otherwise you won't even get an A-level."

"Fine by me" Sherlock drawled without looking up, his long fingers tracing over the letters of a bolded paragraph in the textbook.

"Not fine by me-" John demanded, his voice pushing more authority. "No one in my class is going to fail Biology. I won't allow for it. So yes, you are coming, Sherlock. If I have to drag you there myself."

Sherlock's eyes snapped to his teacher behind him, his attention focused on Sherlock now, having abandoned the faulty storage. With John determined not to look away, and Sherlock determined to deduce everything about John in that particular moment, the atmosphere was electric.

Not that Lestrade noticed. He practically skipped away happily, "Good, now that's sorted. I'd better return to I.T. See you later, John. Sherlock- don't forget to email me your statement tonight."

With the hint of a grin gracing John's stubbled face, he shook his head as if not quite believing himself the intense situation they'd just found themselves in with another teacher in the room. They'd bickered like an old married couple.

Sherlock just began to plot for possible ways to convince John to make an exception, though knowing deep down there was no way in hell he would be able to deter John Watson from getting what he wanted.

John knew he was being too optimistic by convincing himself that Sherlock would actually attend the biology trip. He shook his head at Greg who was mouthing at him from across the car park, the bustle of students' chatter muting communication.

He reached around in his back pocket for his teacher's badge, staring down at the slow ticking of his watch. He looked back over to Greg, who was in discussion with a younger looking woman that John assumed was a new teaching assistant, just the same height as the students with mousy brown hair and sporting a knitted jumper.

John was about to go over to introduce himself when he spotted a familiar shadow on the ground behind him.
"John," Sherlock acknowledged quietly, stepping into the light of the sun.

John turned to face him, and then immediately regretted doing so.

Sherlock was dressed in a slim-fitting navy suit with thin lapels and a fresh white shirt with the collar open at the throat, exposing a freckle to the left of Sherlock’s adam's apple, the one John was having a very hard time looking away from.

The stretch of fitted material over the muscles of his chest was tenting the shirt somewhat, buttons straining slightly; and John was having a difficult time remembering that Sherlock was his student, since he looked like he had just stepped off a model runway, his dark curls tousled by the wind, cheekbones sharp as ever, but his eyes soft and focused.

"Hi" John squeaked, blinking and clearing his throat, trying to drag his eyes away from the tightness of the crotch area of his dress-trousers. Sherlock's lips thinned for a moment, his hand tightening on the strap of his brown and battered leather satchel which was slung high over his shoulder. "You decided to show up then?"

"I could hardly disobey direct orders from my tutor and my teacher. Besides, Mycroft threatened to confiscate my taxidermy collection if I didn't come."

John nodded dizzily, desperately looking anywhere but directly into Sherlock's pale eyes, in literal fear of falling into them.

"I see Lestrade still has no qualms about abandoning his I.T. class." Sherlock nodded his head to his tutor's direction, his hands in his pockets, hips slightly pushed forwards, stood at a right-angle to John who mirrored his pose.

John hummed in response as Sherlock swung his satchel underneath his arm, pushed towards his back. "Who's the new girl?" John asked, referring to the lady who was gesticulating wildly to a confused Lestrade.

"I would have thought you'd know, considering she's a teacher." Sherlock's baritone voice replied.

"Oh, so she is a teacher?" John wondered aloud, noticing how they were both standing apart from the general gaggle of students who were gathered by the coaches. "What else can you deduce?"

Sherlock squinted slightly, focusing on the figure. "She's young, just out of university studying forensic science. Only child, recent break-up and enjoys dissections. She joined two days ago, reduced timetable, she's on a teacher training course, acting as a TA for the next 3 months until returning to Milton Keynes in April."

John looked back over to the girl, seeing that she was now staring back...straight at Sherlock. "Right...interesting."

Sherlock squinted back at the young woman who was smoothing her hair down with a small smile.

John turned suddenly, turning his back to the woman and shoving his shoulder slightly into Sherlock's, "I think somebody is interested" he says, close to Sherlock's ear, his head tilting in Molly's direction.

Sherlock made a noncommittal hum, turning his attention back to John, their eyes meeting. John tried not to stare for too long, but the paleness and pure blue of Sherlock's eyes were pulling him in, so much that he found his own appreciatively drifting downwards.
"So how come I haven't seen you around the staff room or anything?" Lestrade continued, glancing over to a bickering group of boys, wondering whether their jostling looked serious enough for him to intervene.

"Oh, I only started here a couple of days ago. I haven't really seen much of anyone yet, I only know Cerys, I've been assisting in her class."

"Cerys Farren? The physics teacher?"

"Yeah, key stage 4" she smiles in return, brushing a strand of hair out of her eyes.

Lestrade nods in return, his eyes drifting over to John and Sherlock, standing apart at the bricked steps leading up to the car park.

"Oh- Are there more teachers chaperoning? The tall one, over there...in the suit? Who is he?" her voice raised slightly, her hand coming up to her neck.

Lestrade snorted indelicately, a smile filling his face. "Oh, he wishes he had that much power, no, he's not a teacher, that's Sherlock Holmes, one of my students."

"Oh..." The young woman replied, her voice shrill. "He really does look much older..."

Lestrade noticed John glancing over to them, standing shorter than Sherlock, he really did not look like a teacher compared to the young Holmes. "That one there next to him is John, he teaches Biology. He's a doctor, actually."

The young teacher makes a high-pitched hum in response, her eyes not leaving the tall darkened figure of Sherlock. Lestrade rolled his eyes, realising that Sherlock and her probably didn't have many years between them at all.

Eventually, Lestrade managed to pull her attention back to the register lists, where they began to herd the students onto the separate coaches. He noticed an absence of a couple of the lists, remembering he'd split them with John that morning.

He turned to find his colleague, noticing he and Sherlock still stood in the same area, only turned towards each other, seemingly talking intensely about something. Considering calling John over, he raised his hand, only to stop mid-way.

They were...staring at each-other. Greg frowned.

Desperately trying not to dwell too much on the weight he felt at the bottom of his stomach at catching the two of them in such an inappropriate proximity, he raised his voice to summon John.

Sherlock's hands were itching to touch him, to grab John's in his own, but he bit his tongue, shoved his hands deeper into his pockets.

"John!"

Damn, Lestrade. Sherlock gritted his teeth, his head snapping out of John's gaze, sending an annoyed grimace over to his tutor.

John panicked, almost falling over with the speed in which he pulled himself away from Sherlock,
envious at Sherlock's constant cool and collected exterior.

He flexed his hands at his sides, heading straight over to Greg. "Alright?" he called.

"Yeah," Greg replied, head down, watching Sherlock in his peripheral vision as he wandered over to the rear end of the bus. "Just checking the registers."

John nods jerkily, mentally berating himself for being so suspicious.

"This is Molly, by the way. Molly, this is John." Lestrade gestured over to the young teacher who appeared to be daydreaming.

"Oh- Hello! Molly Hooper, lovely to meet you, I'm here on placement."

"John Watson," John held out a hand to shake, "Likewise, I've heard you're assisting in Physics? We might be brushing shoulders, we've got new labs all down the first floor."

"Oh, yes, I've heard! The facilities look fantastic." She nodded enthusiastically, dropping John's hand.

Lestrade had moved to the crowds, reading lists out of which students were to mount which coach, John's eyes were inevitably drawn to the isolated figure moving the gravel around on the floor with the toe of his dress shoe.

Sherlock looked up, blinked at John, and moved further into the crowds where John lost him.

Due to the excess of biology students in the year, they had all been piled on to separate coaches with allocated teachers. Sherlock had been forced on to the first coach and shoved his way onto a lone seat, purposefully storing his bag on the seat next to him so nobody could sit and annoy him for the 40 minute journey.

Greg had stepped onto the other coach, leaving John to deal with Molly. He waited for his class to pile onto the coach before taking the teachers seats at the front.

"Ready to go, mate" he nodded to the driver and stepped into the aisle as the vehicle pulled away from the kerb.

"Right- you know the deal, no funny business, we'll be there in about 40 minutes. Don't chuck your rubbish on the floor or you'll be staying behind to clean the entire coach after school." John's eyes were inevitably drawn to the group of troublemakers huddled at the back of the bus, shooting them a meaningful warning look before taking his seat back next to Molly. "Oh, and make sure your seatbelts are on!" he called over his shoulder before fastening his own.

"So-" Molly started after John had got settled. "How long have you been teaching here for?"

John let out a puff of air, "Wow, feels like centuries," he laughed. "Not long actually, I came here after being relieved from military duty so- a couple of years ago I trained to teach."

Molly was startled by a shout from behind them, John rolling his eyes at the usual antics of the students. "Oh, Greg mentioned you were a soldier?" she squeaked with interest.

"Military doctor." John nodded. "Where are you coming from then? University of..."

"Roehampton," she supplied.
"Ah, couple of mates of mine came from there. I've heard good things."

Molly nodded enthusiastically, as John seemed to notice she responded to most things with eagerness. "I love it there"

John turned for a moment at hearing noise coming from the back, letting his eyes fall on Sherlock who was sitting with his headphones in staring down at his phone, his curly hair falling over his forehead and onto his face.

"This is your class then?" Molly continued, happily jabbering on to herself, staring out the window at the passing traffic. "I have to say, some of them look so much older than eighteen. That one- Sherlock, was it? Strange name. Greg told me about him, I could hardly believe he wasn't a teacher when he told me, he looks-"

"Yes," John interrupted, something like jealousy rising to his chest. "He often comes across older than he is."

"He looks about early 20s, same as me- " She shook her head. "Gosh, when I was eighteen I still looked thirteen."

John suddenly realised that there couldn't be less than 4 years between the two of them, knowing that there was at least 10 between Sherlock and himself. "Hmm, didn't we all." He muttered in reply, desperately trying to mask his bitterness at Molly's clear interest in Sherlock.

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"What the hell is he doing?" Greg muttered to himself.

"Huh?" John shook himself out of his daze, the teachers and assistants were leaning against a farmer's fence, surrounded by students' neglected bags thrown haphazardly onto the long grass.

After reaching the nature reserve site they had booked into, they were lead straight into an over-run field bordering smatterings of forest containing ridiculously tall trees.

"Sherlock," Greg replied, spotting the figure in the distance, trudging about in the uneven grass.

Instead of merging with other equally bored biology students throwing around their quadrats onto patches of grass and scribbling statistics onto clipboards, Sherlock had ventured close to a running stream, and was attempting to cross it, balancing on his tip-toes.

"I specifically said not to go past that sign post!" Greg huffed, marching off towards the suited figure.

John smirked and followed. "Since when does Sherlock let anybody tell him what to do?"

Greg grunted in return, the wind sending his fringe flying upwards, the lapels of his coat flapping. "I'm going to kill him if he goes near that forest. I'm not tracking him down, he can sleep here tonight for all I care!"

"Sir! Can you come here please?" John was distracted by three girls from his biology class, who were stood looking extremely confused. He nodded and walked towards them, his hands in his pockets, looking wistfully back to Lestrade's retreating figure towards Sherlock.

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"Sherlock!" Greg shouted, the wind carrying most of the sound away from his student's ears.
"What the hell are you doing?"

Sherlock glared at the tutor over his shoulder, seeing his figure trudging towards him. He turned back to where he was crouched at the edge of the stream, calculating the speed of river flow in his head at-

"Sherlock!"

"What?!" He snapped, noticing the teacher was stood directly above him now, hands on hips, hair flying everywhere.

"What part of don't go past the sign post did you not understand?" He wheezed slightly from the exertion of speed-walking across the grass, and pushed himself further into Sherlock's personal space, intent on seeing what he was crouched over. "I- Sherlock! Put that down! My god-

"Why? It's still alive, I can save it." Sherlock rises to his feet, exposing the bottom of his suit trousers which were now splashed with mud. He cupped a small bluish-black bird in both of his hands, one of its wings broken in an array of dishevelled feathers sticking out at all angles, its small beak opening and closing weakly.

"It could be infected or something!" Lestrade gesticulates, slapping Sherlock on the back, "Put it down!"

"No-" He glared back stubbornly, marching away back in the direction of which they came. Greg followed, hopping over the sludge of soft mud surrounding the bank of the river.

"It's going to die anyway," He ran after his student, noticing John in the distance turning away from the students that had gained his attention, "Sherlock!"

Sherlock was determinedly walking over to John and away from Lestrade, heading towards where he had left his bag when they'd entered the field.

John frowned at the pair in the distance, seeing Sherlock cradling something fluffy to his chest with both hands cupped, long legs carrying him quickly away from Greg, who looked red in the face stumbling after him and waving his hands in the air.

"Sherlock, what-

"Lestrade is being an idiot." He stated, walking swiftly past John and towards the pile of bags, to which he dug out his satchel that sat primly against the fence near Miss Hooper's tiny feet.

"Oh!" She gasped with surprise as Sherlock dove towards his bag, pulling out a scarf that had been rolled up inside. "I- sorry, erm, Sherlock"

"Sherlock-" John's disapproving voice sounded from behind him, getting closer, while Greg stayed behind attempting to convince other students who were gathering round to see what all the fuss was about to return to their sampling.

"Is that a bird?" Molly hopped down from the fence, squinting at the animal in Sherlock's large hands.

John resisted placing a hand on Sherlock's moving shoulder as he crouched at his feet carefully wrapping the injured bird in his soft scarf and returned it to the safety of his chest.

Sherlock stood again, facing John. "I need a thin cotton bandage, some spring water and an elastic band." he deadpanned.
"Wha- wait a minute. What is it- it looks dead to me?" John pushed at the material of Sherlock’s scarf covering the bird’s head.

Sherlock grunted and pulled away, pushing at John’s intrusive hands. "It’s not dead, I can save it. It's wing is broken. If you would just get me the resources I need-"

"Maybe the lodge at reception would have something for it?" Molly interrupted, her voice small.

Sherlock whirled around, his long coat whipping at John's shins. "Finally, somebody who speaks some sense." He bit out, shoving past a blushing Molly Hooper who was shifting on her feet and mumbling, and stormed up the cobbled path leading to the lodge.

John sighs in frustration and tears after him, walking a couple of paces behind his student, long legs be damned. "Where did you even find it anyway?"

"I heard it crying when I was in the field, I had to jump over the river to reach it, it was wedged underneath a fallen branch at the foot of a tree. It would have drowned." Sherlock explained, words flowing out at the speed of light.

"Okay- well, here's the lodge- We can leave it with them, I'm sure they can help it" "I can help it, John." He hissed. "If people would stop getting in my way as usual-

"Hey-" John snapped, tugging at Sherlock's coat at arm's length. "Watch who you think you're talking to."

Sherlock rolled his eyes, remembering the situation they were in. "Yes. I'm sorry. Now can we go!?"

"Yes. I've already said yes"

John holds the door of the wooden lodge open for Sherlock, who storms in guns blazing demanding all numbers of equipment from the staff on hand. John trails immediately after, apologising for the rudeness of his student and asking politely if they have any vets or medical resources on site.

It was decided after Greg reached the hut that Sherlock was to leave the bird in the capable hands of the vet who had been called into the lodge and was working on stabilising the bird. Sherlock had already criticised the man's technique when wrapping the bird's wing and attempted to butt in and re-wrap it himself.

That is until John intervened- again. ("Sherlock, out of all of us here, who is a qualified vet? Not you. So get moving, leave it to the professionals.")

It was an angered Holmes that stormed off ahead to the coach an hour later when all students and teachers had re-assembled after lunch-time, he had spent his own lunch waiting outside the wood-cabin waiting for word from the vets and neglecting to eat anything at all, even when John had bought his satchel back to him.

"-Don't know what he was thinking, the silly prick"

"I don't know," John sighs, looking over to where Sherlock was staring out across the field solemnly.
"I mean- one minute he's ripping the shit out of you, telling you this and that about everyone you've ever known and-" Greg paused, taking a swig of his water and gesticulating in wonder "-how both your brother's neighbours are drug addicts and your girlfriend has cheated on you twice this month, and the next he's running off like Indiana Jones on an adventure and saving the life of a fucking dying animal!"

John let his gaze pass the silhouette of Sherlock's slim form, watching the slices of soft reds and oranges melt into the blue hue of the sky in the background, the dark dishevelled outline of Sherlock's curls just meeting the line of the horizon. John felt his hooded eyes water slightly at the jolt in his chest, sending his heartbeat wracking wildly when he caught sight of Sherlock's face turned looking back at him.

"Let's not mention this to any senior staff anyway, can't be arsed to explain the specifics of spending an hour trying to convince a student to leave a half-dead animal alone." Greg continued talking to himself. "Just going to sign us all out in reception, get Sherlock on the bus will ya? Other students are on already." He slapped John on the back, retiring to the log cabin and ducking his head to fit underneath the lopsided doorway.

John barely heard the voice speaking to him as he walked towards Sherlock, just nodded in Greg's general direction and tried to catch his breath. His eyes fell to Sherlock's hands, previously in his pockets or skittering along the splintered wood of the gate in front of him, now hanging loosely at his sides, fingers blocking the light of the setting sun.

How easy would it be to take those hands into his own? To thread his fingers through the suited man's and tug him away from all of this. Take him somewhere new, anywhere, anywhere he wanted.

"Should we be going?" Sherlock's surprisingly softened voice broke through John's internal monologue. His face turned back to the sunset, as the sky faded slowly towards darkness.

John cleared his throat, watery eyes skittering away from the young man's face, looking at anything but Sherlock. "Um, yeah-" He clenched his hands at his sides. "Lestrade's gone to check out, so-"

Sherlock nodded, his eyebrows raised slightly, eyes still unfocused and hazy, until he blinked and set his full attention on John.

John felt as though someone had filled his shoes with lead, stood unmoving as if Sherlock had pinned him straight to the spot with just one look. "I'm sorry," John said quietly, knowing the world wasn't there to listen. "About the bird"

Sherlock stared at him. "Animals die every day, John."

"Well, yes. I know that, I just-"

Sherlock nods and moves towards him, allowing the back of his knuckles to brush against John's momentarily before asking where the coaches were parked.

They trudged back together in silence, putting a significant distance between themselves when the vehicles came into sight, clambering onto separate coaches and settling into cold uncomfortable seats.
John picked absently at a thread on the sleeve of his navy jumper, already having loosened the tie around his throat and unbuttoned his collar. He spotted his car parked in his usual spot and headed over towards it, shoes crunching loudly on the gravel.

It'd been only just a week since his car's decision to break down, and had then been mysteriously repaired as if upon a miracle by the end of the day, standing proudly in the same spot that he'd left it, looking if anything as though it had had an entire new paint-job and new mirrors alongside (upon inspection) an entire new engine compartment that now ran as smooth as anything.

Completely confused, wondering if he had been observing someone else's car instead of his own, he'd spun in circles to check for nearby pranksters, then, thought rationally, who would prank somebody by improving their battered and broken car?

There was only one solution then. Sherlock Holmes.

*It took less than two minutes to find him, as John marched straight back through the double doors, and then did a double-take, noticing his student leaning against the outdoor smoking area sign, smoke flowing from his pursed lips.*

"What?" Sherlock asked, his face feigning innocence, whilst his eyes glinted mischievously.

*John could have kissed him then and there. "Sherlock! What did you do?!"

"I've got a... friend, who's a mechanic. He owed me a favour."

John spluttered, still not connecting the dots. "What kind of favour!? I've got a completely new car over there!"

"Well- you had a couple deep scratches, as well as the faulty engine, so I told him to refurbish the coat too. Plus your left wing-mirror obviously had been mangled in a disagreement with another angry driver about a year ago, probably an early red land rover model going by the size of the de-"

"Sherlock- I..." John had silenced him with a look, and the student had never recalled seeing John's eyes so shockingly blue in that moment, he was lost in the specks of green and grey dancing in the doctor's irises. "I can't accept this. I have to pay you for all this trouble you've gone to-"

"No. I will not accept payment." Sherlock snapped at once.

"I can't not pay you! There has to be at least a couple of grand's work there!"

"No," Sherlock stuck his nose in the air, turning away from John with folded arms.

"No?" John questioned.

"I told you, it was an IOU."

"So, what- your 'mechanic friend' just happened to do all of that work for free?" John asked
incredulously, folding his arms and mirroring Sherlock.

"Yes, I already told you this, John." Sherlock flung his arms in the air, his voice raising.

"Shh!" John hissed, grabbing Sherlock's arm and pulling him away from the building. "I, God-what did you do for him? That's a pretty extravagant IOU."

Sherlock scowled back at him in return, snatching his arm away. "Nothing like that."

"No- I, Sherlock. I didn't mean it like that. God- I didn't mean that at all, and it's none of my business anyway, I just- thank you. I am thankful, I'm just finding hard to believe you would do something like that for me." John babbled, realising how that might have sounded, noticing Sherlock shrinking in on himself as the walls snapped back up.

Sherlock quietened for a moment, staring down at his own fingers that he was playing with.

"I'm sorry" John shuffled closer, after checking that they were concealed behind the school coach.

"It's okay, you wouldn't be the first to assume-"

"I'm not assuming, Sherlock. You understood me wrong. And I don't care about that-" John hesitated, before placing his hand at the back of Sherlock's head, his fingers resting amongst the shorter curls at the nape of his neck. "Thank you, really. It's very sweet of you"

Sherlock allowed the corner of his lips to lift ever so slightly, only just resisting experimentally resting his forehead against John's to trace the differences in pulse and heart-rate the action would produce.

"Anything to stop you from complaining" he winked in return and danced away from the swipe of John's hand.

John had lost himself in the memory so deeply that he'd become aware that he was standing stock still in front of his car smiling to himself like a happy idiot. He blinked himself awake, feeling flush rise up his neck, cursing when his keys fell from his fumbling fingers.

Before he could bend to retrieve them, a different hand snatched them up from the ground.

"Good afternoon, Doctor Watson." the slick voice of Mycroft Holmes spoke across from him.

"Oh, uh, good afternoon. Mycroft, isn't it?"

Mycroft quirked a smile. "Quite."

John's attention was drawn to the hawk-ended cane once again in Mycroft's ringed hand, his knuckles white with the tightness of his grip.

"Anything I can help you with? Are you here for a parental meeting?" John enquired politely.

"I am here to speak to you, Doctor Watson." Mycroft raised an eyebrow, as if questioning how John didn't know this already.

"Me?" John felt panic and adrenaline rising in his chest but remained fearless in the face of Sherlock's intimidating elder brother.

"Please follow me." Mycroft gestured with his cane toward a sleek black car glistening in the
afternoon sunlight, John noticed a suited man holding open one of the back doors.

"Oh- I'm sorry, but I have an appointment with-"

"Your dentist appointment has been rescheduled for Wednesday morning."

John shook his head, "Oh, but-"

"You have a free period from teaching every Wednesday morning from 8.40am to 9.50am, during this time you enjoy the company of my younger brother until he is required in Chemistry. I am sure I do not need to state the obvious that you will not be seeing Sherlock this Wednesday for your usual jovial...meetings."

John felt sick to his stomach, his jaw felt fused shut, his feet unsteady.

"Come now- Doctor Watson." Mycroft entered the black car, sliding over the panel seat to make room for John, who numbly managed to follow, closing the door behind him.

John felt as though he'd been abducted again, like the time he was held captive once for 42 hours in Afghanistan. For some reason, Dr Watson felt significantly more intimidated sitting across from a gingery haired man wearing a full three piece suit, thin chain hanging from the pocket of his waist coat, and clutching onto a hefty black and metal cane than he'd felt with a masked Arabian man standing across from him pointing an AK47 at his head.

The ride was silent, and John squinted through the tinted windows to see if he could recognise any buildings they were speeding past, barely catching the tourist signposts indicating that they were just on the outskirts of Westminster.

The drive was cut short by Mycroft leaning forward to the dividing glass and knocking sharply once on the window, to which the driver stopped immediately, pulling onto the pavement.

John was immediately escorted to the open floor plan of an abandoned car-park, with grey concrete walls and piles of rubble surrounding faded yellow parallel lines.

"Take a seat, John." Mycroft insisted, and the doctor noticed a lone foldout chair perched upon the asphalt.

"Why? Is this an interview?" He replied sharply in return, noticing that there was no seat for Mycroft who stood smirking. "I'm sorry, Mr Holmes, but I don't quite see why I'm here."

"I think you do" Mr Holmes returned, his eyes zeroing in on John's. "How familiar are you with my brother, Doctor Watson?"

John felt instinctive adrenaline pulsing through him at the threatening tone to Mycroft's voice, his body readying itself for battle. "He comes to do his work in my classroom every Wednesday morning, which I have consented to, as otherwise he would simply perform chemical experiments in the corridor."

"So, you deny any romantic affiliation between my brother and yourself?" the elder Holmes asked directly.

"Of course. I - God, what do you think is going on? We're not about to run off to France together, he's my student-"
"In that case-" Mycroft pulled a document out of the pocket of his suit jacket. "The man in this photograph must be your twin?"

John felt his hair stand on end as his view came into contact with the image before him.

It showed Sherlock and himself, stood extremely close together, but not touching. John's hand cupped the back of Sherlock's neck, and Sherlock's head was tilted downwards, his forehead almost touching John's, the smallest private little smile on his lips.

John recognised the setting, the background of the coach's A-line logo, and recalled the moment perfectly, it was the very one he'd been reminiscing on just moments ago before he'd come into contact with the elder Holmes brother. He tamed down the rising panic in his chest and stood forward.

"However, I think we both know that's not true."

"I think that it's none of your business" John snarled, his mind flashing back to the first time he had seen Mycroft Holmes, the cold demeaning manner he'd had with Sherlock, the condescending tone of his voice.

"You don't seem very afraid." His head tilted to the side, questioning.

"You don't seem very frightening." John straightened his pose, refusing to be handled.

Mycroft's laugh echoed around the dripping emptiness of the underground space. "Ah yes, the bravery of the soldier-"

"Are we done?" John snapped.

"Bravery is by far the kindest word for stupidity, don't you think?" The suited man continued, his head tilted back, eyes rapidly scanning the ceiling.

John clenched his jaw shut, a confident glare settling between his eyes.

"I'm sure I don't need to assure you that if you plan to continue your relationship with Sherlock Holmes, you will find yourself suffering under degrees of extreme difficulty by the end of the week."

"Well, I guess I'm chuffed then, since it isn't a relationship." John insisted.

Mycroft squinted, humour dancing in his eyes. "Oh don't tell me- you're friends" John sniffed at the torturous way Mycroft forced the word through his teeth.

"Why is that so difficult to accept?"

"You've met him. How many friends do you imagine he has?" The way the man before him spoke reminded John of the taunting tone of a bully.

"I'm guessing you're not friends." John barked out a laugh, turning on the ball of his foot.

"We have what you might call-" He examined the end of his cane. "A difficult relationship."

"Can't imagine why." John squared his shoulders, reaching into his pocket and feeling the shape of his phone protruding.

"Well-" Mycroft broke off, checking his pocket watch. "I would make some sort of threat, but I'm sure your situation is quite clear to you, goodbye Doctor Watson. See you very soon."
Before John could reply, Mycroft had turned the corner and left, the click-clack of his shoes fading away from the room, his presence replaced with that of a young woman wearing a sharp pencil skirt, tapping away on her phone.

"I'm to take you home."

Sherlock hadn't even gotten both feet through the door before deducing where his brother had been.

"MYCROFT!" Sherlock shouted, slamming the door shut behind him with his foot.

"Don't be so tedious as to raise your voice, Sherlock. You are not three years old anymore." Mycroft droned from his office.

The younger Holmes stormed into the room, a whirlwind of papers going flying from the force of Sherlock's entrance. Mycroft stood, moving around his desk with a calm demeanour, prepared to address the matter Sherlock was clearly so enraged about.

"Really, Sherlock, what did you expect, that I'd just sit by and let you embarrass-"

The elder Holmes stumbled backwards from the force of Sherlock's aggressive push, colliding with the desk behind him, which skidded on its legs until reaching a raised floorboard.

"Sherlock!" He scolded. "What on earth are yo-"

"What have you done?!" Sherlock growled in return, pushing harshly at Mycroft's chest again, until Mycroft retaliated, gripping Sherlock's arm in a sudden twist, putting pressure on his elbow. Sherlock yelped, bringing his knee up to knock Mycroft's arm away.

Hearing the commotion coming from Mycroft's work room, some of his security staff came rushing in, some holding handguns. "At ease!" Mycroft called immediately, waving an arm in their general direction, as they stared back in confusion at recognising Mr Holmes' younger brother as the threat to be removed.

"Oh no, please, go ahead. I'd like to see you try-" Sherlock threatened, gesticulating towards them.

"Sherlock- Behave yourself. Sit down." Mycroft nodded absently to his staff, who began to filter out of the room, closing the door behind them.

"I don't want to sit down, Mycroft" He gritted his teeth. "What have you said to John?"

"John?" Mycroft raised his eyebrows, looking genuinely taken aback by Sherlock's use of the Doctor's first name.

"Doctor Watson-" Sherlock fumbled, berating himself at the blush reaching his cheeks. "What did you do? If you've threatened him, I swear I will-"

"So the photographs portrayed the truth, then" Mycroft spoke to himself, frowning.

"Which photographs?!" Sherlock exclaimed loudly.

Mycroft retrieved the file from his drawer, sliding the same photos he had shown John over to his baby brother, watching Sherlock's face go pale and taut when he laid eyes on them.
Sherlock eventually grimaced, ripping the photos into halves and quarters, sitting down and saying nothing.

"You had no right." he said after minutes of silence.

"I had every right, Sherlock. What you're doing fooling around with some- soldier! Is beyond me"

"He's a doctor" Sherlock interjected stubbornly. "And we're not fooling around."

"How do you define the nature of these then?" Mycroft gestured to the mound of ripped photographic paper segments splayed across the table.

Sherlock took a breath and spoke through gritted teeth. "I am not defining anything! There is nothing to define."

Mycroft watched his younger brother for a second, observing the stiffness of his lower lip, the folded arms, completely closed off. Yet, Mycroft could see. "But you want there to be." he concluded.

"Oh, Sherlock" he sighed, his voice softer than usual. Sherlock visibly flinched at the comforting tone coming from his older brother, he knew that the Holmeses had never indulged in emotional bonding, the closest member of the family to be openly emotional would've been his mother, who was no longer with them.

In fact, the closest to his mother that Sherlock could be now, was by sitting in Mycroft's office, staring into the beady eyes of the portrait above his brother's desk, silently seething that the artist hadn't captured the warmth in the flecks of amber that had once faintly encircled his mother's icy blue irises.

"Ah, unrequited love-" Mycroft spoke again, settling into his desk chair and sorting his papers into a pile.

"Don't you dare." Sherlock hissed.

"I'm warning you, Sherlock, don't get involved." the elder Holmes lamented.

"Involved? I'm not involved!" Sherlock stood. Mycroft observed his form, recalling a time when his younger brother stood at half the height he was now.

"No" Mycroft mocked, laughing. "I believe you, really, I do"

Sherlock glared at him, mentally mapping out the 26 items that could be utilised for murder in the room.

"Well then, I can see from our conversation that I have nothing worry about at all. Isn't that a shame? It seems I won't need to threaten Dr Watson any further after all."

"Oh, please, you wouldn't be able to threaten a fly-" Sherlock retaliated childishlly.

"I'm sorry for your...predicament, Sherlock. Sentiment is a dangerous disadvantage;" Mycroft frowns to himself, ignoring Sherlock's interruptions and denials. "The fact remains that you are young and available."

"John isn't like that" Sherlock insisted, not caring about the name slip any longer. "It's not like that at all-"
"Hmm," Mycroft raised his eyebrows distractedly, the conversation fading as his eyes returned to his desk. "Don't expect a happy ending, Sherlock. Real life is rarely so neat."

"Heeey! Johnny- I miss you. I - God, piss off Trev, anyway, John, Johnny. Where are you!? I don't see you anymore. I- hic- promise I - hic- haven't touched the booze in -hic- weeks! I mean, well- apart from-"

End of message one. Next message, received at 12:02 am.

"Damn phone fucking up again- I, hey! Could I have my old one back? I'll just scratch off the engraving. I don't have -hic- any money for a new -hic- one. Damn hiccups! Plus I don't hate Clara as much -hic- as I did before. Yeah, I'm coming, Trevor! Just wait a minute would ya? I'm callin' my brother!"

End of message two. Next message, received at 12:11 am.

"Johnny- I'm sorry. I really -hic- am. I miss you Johnny and life is so fucking hard, I- I just want my big brother back...John?"

End of messages. To listen to these messages again, press 1, to save these messages, press-

"Alright, mate, Greg here. Just wondering if you wanted to hit the pubs tonight? Had an awkward run in with an ex, left me high and dry- haha. Could do with a bit of moral support while I drown my sorrows and try not to remember the look on her face when she saw how much older I've gotten since we last saw each other. Give us a call anyway, cheers."

End of message.

"You should've seen it, mate. Never felt so old in my life, she had some strapping 20 year old builder in a vest top on her arm. Tattoo sleeves, tight jeans, I tell ya, I feel like a ancient relic." Greg shook his head, downing the last of his beer.

The two men were sat on the stools at the bar, conversing quietly at the end, just in proximity with a gaggle of university students to their left who were downing no-handed shots of Jäger.

"We've all been there," John shook his head. "I had a similar situation back in the army actually" John grimaced into the ring of the bottom of his pint glass, feeling his forearm pinned to the sticky residue of the bar's surface and cringing.

"Hold that thought-" Greg held out his finger, manoeuvring his way down from the bar stool. "Just nipping to the gents, back in two ticks."

John lifted his glass to Greg and then watched him disappear behind people's heads. He flexed his fingers atop the bar, crunching his hand into a fist when it began to shake. He'd been trying not to dwell on the threat of Sherlock's brother, knowing that if he was as intelligent as Sherlock himself, he would figure out that John hadn't actually done anything illegal, and that technically those photos could merely display a moment of comfort in a time of distress.

What this meant, though, was that John would have to sever contact with Sherlock outside of lesson time, if only to protect himself, and Sherlock, from the interference of his brother. John
wasn't quite sure what occupation Mycroft Holmes held, but he came across as extremely powerful and intimidating to the face of the common stranger. Doctor Watson had attempted to hold his nerve, however, and succeeded in his own mind by doing so, however, there was one small problem with this plan of separation he had devised. Sherlock Holmes.

*How the hell did I get in so deep?* He found himself wondering as his heart began to race wildly at the thought of the young man. Sherlock was enigmatic, secretly (and perhaps surprisingly, considering his outward demeanour) benign and gentle, and above all else in the eyes of John Hamish Watson, he was staggeringly beautiful.

"-Jheez, there's a hell of a queue in there." Greg's voice filtered back to John's senses.

"Is there?" John responded absently, sipping at the dregs of his lager.

"Another round?" the bartender appeared as if from nowhere, his eyes focused solely on John, a flush highlighting his cheeks.

Greg raised his eyebrows, a teasing smile meeting his lips at the obvious attempt at flirting coming from the 20-something bartender, he was tall, wearing a tight waistcoat with blonde hair that flopped sideways over his green eyes. Eyes that were now looking up and down appreciatively at John's figure.

John smiled politely back, but it didn't meet his eyes. "Sure, same again thanks. Greg?" he looked to his side and blatantly ignored the looks his friend was giving him.

"Same, ta" Greg nodded, speaking to the bartender who hadn't looked his way once.

The blonde man who's name-tag indicated he was called Matthew, practically dragged himself away from the pair, flirty smile not gone from his face as he turned his back and bent over to reach the pint glasses.

Greg barely contained his loud guwaff of laughter, hand covering his face.

"Shut it-" John jabbed from the side, trying to make it obvious to Matthew that he wasn't interested by turning his back on the young man's suggestive looks.

"You're in there, mate" Greg laughed again, pushing his empty glass to the inside edge of the bar. "Feel free to catch up with me tomorrow if you wanna cut this short for any reason" he teased.

John hummed and shook his head, a small smile pinched at his lips. He looked back over to the slim young bartender, and was able to admire the fit of material at his waist, the attractive curve of his behind in suit trousers, and admitted to himself that, yeah, this guy was eye-catching.

But he didn't have the same brightness in his eyes as Sherlock did, nor the excitement, the thoughtfulness of his features, the faintest of freckles smattered across his nose and cheeks, or the sharp yet soft curve of Sherlock's upper bowed lip. And sure, Matthew could fill a suit well, but it was nothing compared to how John had felt the first time he saw Sherlock approaching in a tailored shirt and jacket, with those icy blue eyes seeming darker against the contrast of material colour.

John remained silent and waited for their drinks to appear in Matthew’s hands. And if John felt the brush of the young man's suggestive fingers against his own, he didn't say anything. Because he wasn't interested in hands that weren't calloused from the strings of the violin, or hands without a scar on the knuckle of the left forefinger from where chemicals had been spilled without the care-taking that John had insisted upon. Wasn't even interested in the smile sent his way that John deemed as hollow because it wasn't full of the enigma that Sherlock's lips held.
The bartender cleared his throat. "They're on the house."

"I- Oh, thanks a lot" John nodded towards him, raising his glass in thanks.

"And, uh- I mean, I don't know what your plans are but, I get my break in an hour or so, so if you fancied hanging around? I could buy you another drink?"

John smiled politely back at him, "You are a good looking guy, don't get me wrong, but I'm afraid I'll have to politely decline." He smiled one of his most charming smiles at the man who was obviously disappointed, lingering for a moment in embarrassment and then excusing himself.

Greg let out a quiet whistle, shaking his head.

John frowned at him, "What?

"You were in there, mate. Why'd you shoot him down? Was it the age?"

The doctor flexed his wrist, fiddling with the metal clasp of his watch that was trying to strangle his pulse. "No- I mean- uh,"

"Just saying, the age gap probably isn't so severe, plus you look younger than you are so you wouldn't look like some kind of predator or-", Greg shrugged, wiping the froth from his upper lip.

John barely resists cringing, shaking his head. "It's not that, but uh, thanks- I think?"

Noticing the silence to his left, Greg paused. "Oh, is there someone special?"

"That's a very difficult question to answer" John laughed, scratching at the back of his neck, his eyes scanning the labels of the spirits mounted against the wall taps.

"So there is," Greg laughed. "Come on then, out with it. Who's the lucky lady?- Or lad- I mean, which is fine too, obviously."

John laughed at Greg's mumblings. "Don't worry," he smiled, clapping a hand on Greg's forearm.

Before he could stop himself, John's consciousness was suddenly infused with facets of Sherlock Holmes. Flashes of dark curls and pale skin, long fingers and strong cheekbones.

"Uh, well, there kind of is someone actually. But nothing has happened between us yet." John spoke cautiously.

"But you want it to?" Greg supplied.

"Of course. It's just...not a realistic situation." John shook his head, scratching his fingernails against the grain of the polished wooden surface of the bar.

Greg circled the liquid in his glass around momentarily, watching the froth move around. "How come?"

The doctor sighed. "Well, I guess you could say that it's not an obvious match. Plus, his family despise me."

Greg raised his brows. "Oh," he stared at the beer taps for a moment. "I'm sure they don't despise you?"

"Close enough" John laughed to himself. "His brother has already threatened me, and nothing's
even happened between us yet."

"Threatened you how?" Greg straightened his back.

"With the implication of bodily harm, I think." John chuckled.

"Shit," Greg swallowed another mouthful. "Sure you could take him on though, you're a soldier!"

"Ex-soldier" John corrected, "And somehow I don't think that would be my wisest decision."

Greg shook his head. "Why isn't it an obvious match then?"

John shifted uncomfortably, reminding himself not to say too much. "Oh, uh, just- We'd be a bit of an odd couple, I think."

"Why would you let that stop you? If you're into him."

John almost giggled at the situation he was in, he had a fellow teacher pretty much encouraging him to go for a student they both taught. If only he knew.

"It's complicated." John sighed, feeling ten years older than he actually was.

"Always is." Greg pressed his lips together.

"Where is Doctor Watson?" Sherlock stormed in to Lestrade's classroom.

After spending the entire night awake and buzzing, Sherlock was up and out of the door before the school even opened, standing outside the gate staring in until the caretakers came to unlock it. He'd headed straight to John's classroom, finding the door unlocked, clearly from the cleaners patrolling the halls.

He waited 42 minutes inside the biology lab, expecting John to appear, laden with his usual morning coffee, newspaper and satchel.

Finally deciding that John clearly wasn't going to appear for their usual Wednesday morning slot, he closed the door behind him and sought Lestrade's classroom, barging in without knocking.

"Sherlock, I'm teaching-" Lestrade stood, mid gesture at the front of a class full of uniformed pupils looking half asleep, Sherlock immediately deduced they were year nines.

"Clearly." Sherlock stared at him. "Doctor Watson?"

"He called in sick, now if you don't mind-" Lestrade moved towards him, shooing him out of the door with a disapproving look on his face.

Sherlock stood in the corridor for a moment, just as the bell went, signalling his next class, he headed straight for reception, out the door, onto the main street, and into a taxi.

John in fact was not sick, but had called in that morning with the fabricated excuse of a nasty stomach bug; and was now sitting alone in his silent living room, wondering what he should do.

The truth was, that he couldn't face going in, seeing Sherlock's face and forcing himself not to let his usual smile fill his own face, because he couldn't anymore. He couldn't put himself and
possibly Sherlock in danger.

Eventually having settled wasting the day away indoors, he switched on the TV to a repeat of some crime drama from Thursday night and wandered over to the kitchen to make himself a cup of tea.

The kettle had just boiled by the time the doorbell rang. John shook himself out of his daze, biting at the skin around his thumbnail as he reached absently for his keys to unlock the front door.

"Can I help y- what the- Sherlock!"

With a blur of dark clothes and curls, Sherlock barged in without introduction.

He pressed a hand to the centre of the young man's chest, forcing him further from the threshold.

"Sherlock! What are you doing here?! You can't just waltz in!" John panicked, his hand moving to Sherlock's shoulder which was still moving forward.

"Nonsense, John." Sherlock shook his head in frustration.

"What about your brother?!!" John asked, his eyes darting about the street from his still open door. "The photos, he's watching us-"

Sherlock let out what could only be described as a growl, as he stepped back out of the door, onto John's doorstep, reaching for a heavy stone from the assortment in John's neighbour's garden. He spun in a second, focused in on a CCTV camera turned towards them from the corner shop across the road from John's house, and launched the stone straight into the lens until sparks began to erupt and glass fell onto the pavement from the shattered lens.

"Sherlock! You could get arrested for that!"

"My brother isn't watching us anymore," Sherlock stated impatiently, forcing himself back through the doorway and past a gobsmacked John. "Do shut the door, John, it's freezing out there."

John closed the door and immediately rounded on Sherlock. "Why are you here?! You should be at sixth form, how the hell did you- and how do you know where I live! What made you think it was a good decision for you to just show up?!"

"Lestrade said you were ill, which I deduced was an obviously false excuse, no indication of initiation to first stages of illness in days previous, body temperature normal, pallor of skin usual, no further indications of weakness, fatigue, or dizziness-"

"Okay, yes- I'm not ill- but what-

"I've had your address stored in my mind palace for weeks now, John, do stop being so melodramatic."

Sherlock droned, moving into the living room where the T.V. was still on. "Ugh-dull. John, why do you fill your head with this rubbish?"

John stood, his hands over his face, trying to take deep breaths and figure out how he could get his student out of his house before Sherlock's brother came knocking.

"Sherlock, while I appreciate your concern, this really is inappropriate-"

"Is it?" Sherlock asked, his eyes narrowed. He stood with his hands in his coat pockets, knuckles moving under the fabric, his legs spread a shoulders width apart. "According to Mycroft, we have
gone way past inappropriate already."

John knew Sherlock well enough to detect the undertones of hurt in his voice, but cringed nevertheless, sighing again and turning around as if not knowing where to put himself in his own home.

"So you've spoken to him?"

"Yes." Sherlock supplied, his lips pressed together.

"So you understand- I...we can't do this anymore, Sherlock" John scratched at his chin, avoiding eye contact.

For once, Sherlock was silent. He scanned John's bookshelves, his walls, even the ceiling, his eyes taking in the intricacies of John's home. "I wasn't under the assumption that there was anything going on in the first place."

"Don't be ridiculous! You know-"

"What do I know, John?" Sherlock stared at him.

"You can't call me that anymore-"

"What do I know?"

"You know that this- this thing between us, has been far more than the usual platonic and appropriate teacher-student relationship."

Sherlock traced the lines of stress appearing on John's face with his eyes, the minuscule quiver in his voice that only Sherlock would be able to notice.

"And God, Sherlock, I- I want you, I want you all the time-"

And that was it, Sherlock watched as John broke down before him, his frame shook with the pressure of bottling it all in, and Sherlock felt his knees weaken beneath him as he dropped to the floor in front of John's seat. "John-"

Sherlock pried John's fists away from his eyes, set aback by the soldier's physical strength which fought against him to remain curled in a ball upon his worn leather sofa. He felt his chest ache unexpectedly at the sight before him, the collar of John's shirt unbuttoned and crumpled underneath his jumper, the shaking of John's hands, his fingers grasping desperately at his own face to hide himself away, his eyes shining with unshed tears, and he was beautiful. He was beautiful.

"John, please-" he pleaded, aware of the vulnerability in his own voice. "Please-

"I can't, Sherlock- I can't." he shook his head, still not looking at his student.

"Please." Sherlock swallowed the lump in his throat and resolutely ignored the logical voice in his head demanding him to shut himself off to this vulnerability, to straighten up and walk out, to not get involved. He realised soon after that the voice remarkably resembled his brother's. Caring is not an advantage, Sherlock.

His hands reached for John's again, managing to pull them apart this time, taking the initiative to thread his fingers through and wait for the shaking to steady.
Eventually, John awoke to the calloused skin of Sherlock's hands tracing his own, and revelled in the opportunity to feel those long and delicate fingers dancing across his own scars.

John shook his head. "How can this be wrong?"

Sherlock hesitated, not certain on what he should say in such an emotionally raw situation.

"It's not" he gazed up into the deepness of John's ocean-blue eyes. "It's not, John."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for your kind feedback and support so far, it really motivates me to keep on with this story!
"Aren't you going to give me a tour?" Sherlock asked from where he was sprawled out along John's huge fabric sofa.

After John's unexpected outburst, and Sherlock's inexperienced attempt at comforting him, the pair of them had slowly migrated to opposing sofas in John's living room, with the usual intense and electric atmosphere returned between them.

John had settled on watching Sherlock stretch out against the settee, having deposited his coat over the banister of John's stairs and toed his dress shoes off at the door. His body resembled something feline-like as he twisted and turned to find comfort, curving around John's square cushions.

John sat back in his own seat, legs spread and fingers curled over the edge of the arm-rest. He licked his lips subconsciously, shifting slightly as Sherlock's eyes met his own. "What do you want to see?"

Sherlock held his gaze for a moment, before curling back up into a cross-legged position on the sofa, his fingers idle. "It's your house, John, you decide." he said at last, his voice coming across deeper than before.

John nodded, moving his hands to his thighs and pushing himself up. "Come on then,"

For the first time that week, John felt the hollowness in his chest drain away as he watched Sherlock move fluidly around his home as if he were the world's most talented ballet dancer. And for the third time since Sherlock had entered his home, he found himself wondering how anyone could possibly end up so unfairly attractive.

"This-" Sherlock's voice woke John from his thoughts, and the doctor noticed him examining a small wooden shape that had been resting on one of John's shelves in the spare room, it was carved to the shape of a rose. "A hand-me-down." Sherlock deduced immediately, and John nodded at him, smiling from his side, his hands in his pockets waiting for Sherlock to continue.

"I'd estimate- about 25-30 years old, African Mahogany, going by the rich grain and colour, and-" Sherlock moved over to the nearest natural light source, examining the wood closely. "Yes. Definitely, it has a slight shimmer in certain light. Amateur craftsmanship, so- kept for sentimental purposes then. I'd say the carver had 2-3 years experience, but the wood is worn, it has scratches, dents over time- so, it's been kept for a long time, handed about. Here I would normally estimate a man in his late 60s to be the original owner, but infuriatingly, since I don't yet have enough data on male figures of your family, I cannot decisively say who. I would guess, however, that this was originally owned by your father or grandfather, and carved for a woman of interest, both of whom are now deceased, which must be why you now have ownership."

Sherlock turned his head back to John with a stagnant look on his face, before taking in John's dumbfounded expression.

"I- yes, you're right. Wow- I didn't expect for you to get all that from just a dusty old piece of wood. " John took the carving back, running his fingers in the direction of the grain. "It was my grandfather's, he hand-crafted it for my grandmother when he was away at war. I'd always taken interest in it as a boy, hence, when they both died, it was handed to me. " 
Sherlock nodded once, his eyes scanning John's face, his emotions apparent in the curve of his lower lip and the deepness of his frown. "You were very close, but your father intervened." He deduced aloud.

John nodded. "He was never close with Pops as a boy, couldn't say he approved of his father being besotted with me from the moment I was born."

"He was jealous," Sherlock said, still watching John. "One of the reasons you had such a difficult relationship with your father as a child and adolescent."

John placed the carving carefully back on the shelf, turning back to Sherlock's bright eyes, seeing the cogs turning in that incredible brain of his.

"You joined the army to follow in your grandfather's footsteps, and perhaps to spite your father. Any semblance of a relationship you might have had with him was arguably destroyed by this action, but you didn't care."

"He was suffocating, not just to me- Harry as well, and my mum was a pushover, plus she feared him, so she never helped. I joined the army to get my independence, to get my doctorate and do my grandparents proud. They both died in a car-accident two days after I'd returned home from military service for being shot."

"I'm...sorry" Sherlock frowned. "That sounds-"

"It's fine" John smiled, his knuckles brushing against Sherlock's absently. "It's all fine, it is now anyway."

Sherlock nodded, absorbing everything that was John Watson and trying to catch his breath.

"I fear to ask about your parents-" John joked, breaking the ice. "If they were anything like your brother, I'm not sure I want to know." He teased, watching as Sherlock smiled at the sound of his laughter.

"Actually, I'm not sure you do." He replied, a mixture of good-natured joking and a hint of sorrow. John lead him to the next room with a hand on his shoulder, and decided to file the parents question away for another time.

"It's getting late." Sherlock heard John's voice behind him.

The youngest Holmes was stood at one of John's upstairs bay windows, staring out onto the street-light lit road, staying silent as the darkness swept over the day. They'd wandered aimlessly for a while, leant against the walls of John's hallway and chatted, weaved their way through the rooms upstairs.

Sherlock hummed in return, not turning around. He sensed John getting closer.

So close. John thought, and Sherlock felt John's breath on the back of his neck as the man moved closer.

"Sherlock-"

Sherlock closed his eyes.

A war was going on in the doctor's mind, as his body fought against sliding his arms around
Sherlock's narrow waist, pressing his hand to his stomach and pulling him flush against John's own body. His skin tingled at the prospect of pressing his nose against the line of Sherlock pale neck, his stubble burning the column of undisturbed marble skin, his lips pressing softly with urgency against the gap behind Sherlock's ear and along his jagged hairline. He stopped himself from taking Sherlock and swaying him, to the music in his head, stopped himself from turning him and begging with his eyes for Sherlock to just kiss him. Please, just once.

"I should get you home." He sighed, and Sherlock turned at last, his eyes dark.

"John-" he stared at his feet,"please come to school tomorrow."

The doctor sighed. "I'm going to try,"

"You know I'll just come looking for you if you don't" Sherlock promised in the dark room.

John chuckled. "To be honest I think I like the sound of that better," he joked, shaking his head.

Sherlock was quiet, the only noise being the occasional passing of a car, or somebody's shoes crunching on the gravel, sounds trailing in from John's open box window.

"Don't make me beg, John" his voice sounded like a whisper, and John felt hands touching his own.

His eyes fluttered closed at the feeling of fire and ice flitting across his skin, Sherlock's fingers felt better than he ever could've imagined, as they traced uncertainly around the curve of his wrist.

"Sherlock-" John warned, his voice lower than before. "Are you sure we-"

"John, for a remarkable man, you really do have difficulty with understanding when to shut up."

John laughed instead, and felt the warmth in his own chest spreading as he finally looked up to Sherlock's face.

"Have I ever told you how stunning you are?" John whispered, taking in the softness of Sherlock's steady gaze, the beat of his pulse underneath John's fingers.

Sherlock broke his gaze with a frustrated noise, and John immediately missed the tenderness he'd caught in Sherlock's icy blue eyes. "What?" he chuckled, finally bringing his hand up to Sherlock's face, settling the backs of his fingers against Sherlock's cheek.

"Do I embarrass you?" He asked, moving his hand to the back of Sherlock's neck, his thumb stroking the shapes of Sherlock's ear.

Sherlock shook his head, his gaze on the ground. John tilted his own head backwards, his eyes ducking underneath Sherlock's hanging curls to spot the pinkness rising to his cheeks and smiled.

"Sorry," John smiles at him, "I won't talk-"

Sherlock looked up again, bringing his spare hand to John's chest, the weight of it pressing securely against John's rapid heartbeat. He watched his own fingers stroke across the wool of John's jumper, felt the stiffness of toned muscle underneath the fabric, took a deep breath as John's hand moved to the side of his neck.

Just as Sherlock pressed his forehead to John's, a loud ringing filled the room, breaking the two men apart.
Sherlock cursed underneath his breath, retrieving his phone from his pocket and glaring at the screen that flashed with the name Mycroft.

John looked over his shoulder, swallowing the lump in his throat. "Answer it, Sherlock."

He looked into John's eyes with a question, to which John nodded in reply, his hands now safely in his jean pockets.

"What?" Sherlock sighed into the device.

"You know vandalism against CCTV cameras is a crime. Are you deliberately trying to irritate me? Or did you just smash the lens in order to conceal evidence of you entering Dr Watson's home?"

Sherlock checked his watch. "96 minutes. You're getting slow."

Mycroft's sigh on the other end sounded stressed, which made Sherlock considerably smug. "Come home now, Sherlock. I won't ask you again."

Sherlock smiled as the line went dead, pocketing his phone and looking back out the window to the dark night.

He turned finally, facing John who was sat on the edge of his bed, his hands clasped, staring at his socked feet. Sherlock came to stand before him.

John cleared his throat, "What did he say?" he croaked with a frown.

"Just some nonsense threat, the usual." Sherlock shrugged. The longer he watched John, the more apparent the doctor's stress became. "He can't do anything."

"Of course he can," John looked up at him. "I could go to jail, if any of this goes any further."

Sherlock glared hard at the wall, wishing not for the first time that his brother didn't exist to drive John away from him.

"Which is why...why I couldn't face coming in today-I..I don't want this, Sherlock"

Sherlock turned away from his teacher. "Yes, you're making that quite clear."

John's head snapped up. "Not you- Sherlock, I didn't mean- shit. Look- I- find it difficult...this sort of stuff."

Sherlock's silence followed.

"It's not that I don't want you. That's the problem, I do-"

"Well, I'm sorry i'm such a problem for you."

"Sherlock-" He snapped. "If you're going to behave like a child, then I won't even attemp-"

"Too childish for you. I understand." Sherlock scowled, slinking his coat on in a swift movement, shaking out his collar.

"No- Sherlock, for god sake-"

"I'll see you at school, Dr Watson." Sherlock replied shortly, and John panicked as he passed him through the doorway.
"Don't you dare-" John yanked him back by his sleeve with slightly too much force. "We're not done. Now shut up, sit down and listen." He ordered, and Sherlock was surprised to hear John's authoritative 'teacher' voice ordering him.

"I don't understand that brain of yours. I'm sure you understand much more of mine, but...I like you, Sherlock. It's illogical and impractical and illegal but I won't hide it. Not from you."

Sherlock remained seated on the very edge of John's king-sized bed, his hands palms down on the textured cotton duvet that John had bought months ago and never really looked at twice. It startled him to realise that the patterned fabric only became interesting to him when Sherlock's fingers were pulling at it.

"And I don't know what I should do, I don't have the first idea, Sherlock. It's killing me, can't you see that? I don't understand any of it, I'm not even gay-"

Sherlock's lips immediately pulled into a smirk.

"I'm not! I mean...I've had experiences...maybe that makes me bisexual. But there's only ever been two serious relationships, they were both women and I-" John panicked, realising just what he was getting himself into by proclaiming these things to his student. "There's never been anyone like you," he swallowed the lump in his throat.

Sherlock's eyebrows pulled together momentarily, deducing the amount of stress John seemed to be putting himself under just to try and explain himself.

"There's never been anyone with your brain, your voice, your eyes, or your ridiculous upturned collar, or your stupid smoking habit, or your outrageously tempting lips-"

Sherlock's head tilted, watching colour seep into John's cheeks, who had abruptly quietened, staring hard at the wall behind Sherlock's head.

"I'd never thought of you as a romantic, John." Sherlock's amused voice filtered into the doctor's consciousness.

"Me either" he laughed, rubbing his eyes and falling onto the bed next to him. "I just thought...you know."

"Do I?" he encouraged.

John sighed. "I just thought you should know."

"And now I do." Sherlock supplied, twisting his hands together, his expression blank.

Both men were silent for a moment, staring at the same white ceiling with peeling paint. "It's not illegal, you know." Sherlock offered into the quiet.

"Well, technically it is. If it weren't, your brother wouldn't be so keen on threatening my life."

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "No. Mycroft would still be keen on doing that regardless."

"Still," John shrugged, hauling himself up to face Sherlock who was still sat in the same position, his long legs dangling over the edge of the raised bed, fingers clasped together, eyes wandering from wall to wall.

"I'm eighteen. In my last year of sixth form, soon I'll be gone anyway-"
"I'm still your teacher now, the circumstances work against us." He reached his hand across the void of the duvet, towards Sherlock.

Sherlock scowled. "What is the point of laws? They make everything so pointless." He eyed John’s fingers.

"You wouldn't want the chaos that exists without them" the doctor drawled.

"I wouldn't mind certain degrees of chaos." Sherlock replied after a moment, touching his index finger to the knuckles of John's outstretched hand.

John hummed in response, closing his eyes.

Sherlock jolted all of a sudden, "So the solution is simple- I drop biology."

"No, Sherlock-" John sat up, a frown on his face. "You can't just drop an entire subject after a year and a half of work! Exams are in three weeks!"

"I would still have three others, so technically-"

"I know you'd be allowed to, but I'm not allowing you to." John reasoned with Sherlock's grimace. "I won't allow you to waste any of your talent. You're the top of the class-"

"I'm the top of all of my classes-" Sherlock frowned. "I don't see what the problem is."

"I said no. That's final." John stood from the bed, moving in front of Sherlock to ensure he wasn't ignored.

Sherlock sighed, folding his arms. "For goodness sakes, John. I-"

"I know you don't like the word no, Sherlock. But if you go against my word then I won't hesitate to-"

Sherlock stood immediately, crowding the doctor across the room and against the wall, ignoring the current buzzing of his phone on John's bed. "What?" he challenged. "You won't hesitate to what?"

Feeling the coldness of the wall seep through his shirt and onto his back, John realised how trapped he actually was by the cage of Sherlock's arms either side of his head, pinned in place by the determined look in his student's eyes.

"Your phone-" He protested weakly, his gaze flickering to the closeness of Sherlock's damp lips.

"I don't care" Sherlock growled in return. "I don't care, John. I don't care about Mycroft, or the school, or the law, or your self-restraint, or logic, practicality, or whatever the hell else is holding you back from-"

"Sherlock, I really don't think we sh-mmph!"

John felt the world around him fusing into multicolour blur as Sherlock's lips finally collided with his own. Felt the warmth of Sherlock's chest, closing him in against the coarse material of his tall coat. He grasped desperately at Sherlock's collar as he breathed hotly through the gaps of their mouths, pulling Sherlock towards him and not letting go, never letting go again.

The doctor vaguely registered the muted gasp of John as a vibration against his own lips before he grasped Sherlock's biceps, feeling his body burst into flames at the press of Sherlock's cool
fingertips against the small of his back registered through the thin material of his shirt.

He barely heard his conscience in the back of his head being drowned out by the delicious noises pouring from Sherlock's lips. In fact, John was sure he could sense Sherlock pushing his hips against the wall with his own, but barely had a chance to register the movement before those icy hands were working hastily at the buttons of his now wrinkled white shirt.

John surprised himself at slipping his tongue into the velvet warmth of Sherlock's mouth, his own hands gripping the flesh of Sherlock's hips, pulling his shirt from the tightly belted trousers and pressing his warm palms against Sherlock's pale and untouched skin. Sherlock let out an embarrassing whine, allowing John's insistent lips move to his neck, his nose shoving Sherlock's jaw upwards so he could circle his tone around Sherlock's adam's apple.

John's brain short-circuited, his hands feeling numb, the air barely hitting his exposed chest, his breath laboured and hot against the wet stretched skin covering Sherlock's jutting adam's apple. He blinked, shaking his head for a moment at Sherlock's surprising and quiet gasps. "Shit, I- Sherlock- we shouldn't."

Sherlock growled again, his hands moving to John's chest, pinning him back again when he tried to move forward and out of his grasp.

"No, Sherlock." He gasped, having lost his breath. "Come on-"

Sherlock stumbled backwards slightly on his own feet, his chest rising and falling rapidly. "John?" he rasped.

John squeezed his eyes shut from the sight of his dishevelled student stood before him, tamed down the wild arousal thrumming and buzzing underneath his skin and tried not to focus on the husky tone of Sherlock's deep voice.

He was bewildered to see the tranquillity in Sherlock's eyes when he opened his own again. He was leant back on his palms, his legs hanging over the edge of John's bed, stray curls sticking out of the tamed mop of hair. John traced the calmness in his posture, the smoothness of pale skin peeking out from the neck of his shirt, the potential for a smile dancing on his lips.

"You can't expect me to stay away now-" he insisted with a confidence suggesting he knew just how to play John Watson.

John emerged from his daydream, buttoning up the top few shirt buttons that Sherlock must have fumbled open in passionate haste. He caught his student watching him lazily as he tucked his wrinkled shirt back into his trousers, and immediately rounded on Sherlock, raising a finger to point at him.

"You're still not dropping Biology."

Sherlock simply smiled.

____________________________________

At John's insistence, Sherlock took a taxi home, finding the time useful to reflect upon the past few hours, marvelling at the magnificence of London that flew by in a whirlwind of lights and people.

In moments of rare consciousness, he continued to startle at the soft touch of his own fingers to his lips, tracing the lines where John had kissed him and taken everything Sherlock had wanted him to take.
Fighting an overwhelming urge to pull out a cigarette from the depths of his coat pockets, he found himself swaying on his feet, stuck to the pavement where the cabbie had left him. How could he face Mycroft now? He needed to protect John at all costs, which meant not allowing his brother to know anything that could potentially put John's job in danger. Which is why 10 minutes later he was jimmying up the drain-pipe attached to the back wall of the mansion-like-house, picking the simple lock of his bedroom window and sliding in without much effort at all.

He pretended not to hear the presence of footsteps on the other side of his locked door half an hour later, resolutely ignoring Mycroft's muted voice by playing his violin loudly next to the doorjamb until he gave up and Sherlock seen the shadow of footsteps pass the line of light under his door, and heard the closing of an office door.

Gregory Lestrade had had his fair share of run ins with Sherlock Holmes.

Some of the most memorable being simple competitions of who could talk over each other the loudest to get their opinion across, or literally trying to lock Sherlock in his classroom so he would be forced to endure their tutor sessions without a way of escape. Greg thought himself quite clever after that one, that was until Sherlock pointed out there were 5 different escape routes he could have utilised during the entire meeting before strolling out the door, the tail of his coat disappearing round the corner.

The point being, was that Greg had found over the years that he had known the enigma of the young man, that Sherlock Holmes was a machine capable of inflicting any deduction of his to get his own way, and 90% of the time, he did.

Which is why Greg was more than a little surprised to find an over-emotional Sherlock sitting curled up on his usual chair in their next tutor meeting, tears threatening to fall.

"Sherlock- I, what the-"

"I can't do it anymore." Sherlock gasped simply.

"Do what?" Greg asked, uncomfortably perching himself on the edge of his desk, a hesitant hand hovering over his student's shoulder before clasping it encouragingly.

"The stress of five subjects, Lestrade. It's completely overwhelming." he broke off into a quiet sob, his face angled away from his tutor.

I must be dreaming. I'm definitely about to be woken from the most surreal and bizarre dream I've probably ever experienced-

"What are you talking about, Sherlock? You're on track for all five! You're working at A* level-"

"It's Biology." Sherlock stated, the upset still lingering in his features. "I want to drop it, I was told I had to discuss it with my tutor and get permission beforehand-"

"Wait- hold on a minute-" Greg shook his head, bringing his palm to his face. "This has come from nowhere! John-I mean, Dr Watson was telling me just the other day how you're excelling in lesson, starting to involve yourself more, getting 100% on all past-papers-"

"It is causing me emotional upheaval." Sherlock stated, "I don't know what else I need to say to prove to you, Lestrade-"

"Let me talk to Dr Watson-" Greg insisted, rising from his seat.
"No! I mean- I wouldn't want to... hurt his feelings?"

Greg squinted at him, folding his arms. "What are you up to, Sherlock?"

Before he could answer, John appeared in the doorway, a polite and apologetic smile on his face for interrupting. When his eyes landed on Sherlock, however, the worry appeared instantaneously. "Hi Greg, erm, Sherlock- are you okay?"

Sherlock scowled immediately, all emotion draining from his face, wiping a stray tear from his cheek, as all emotion magically disappeared from his face, the hard and analytical expression of typical Sherlock Holmes returning.

"I see I couldn't convince you with a display of emotion, which is unfortunately the most predictably successful method of gaining answers or consent from people in today's idiotic society. That is fine. I will simply be forced to forge your signature on the permission form." Sherlock glared at Lestrade, rising from his seat and moving to the doorway.

"Now- hold on a second! What the hell was that?! Are you telling me that was all an act?" Greg looked between John and his student with intense confusion, his eyes wide. "I thought you were seriously upset, Sherlock- and you are not doing anything with my signature, thank you very much. Get back here-"

Sherlock flounced out the door, disappearing quickly, leaving the two teachers wholly confused.

"You know what, I don't even know how to react to him anymore." Greg ran a hand over his face, as John stayed quiet to the side of him.

Only a couple of hours had passed since Sherlock had last seen John, and he was sensing that in order to avoid him longer, he should probably evade the science department. However, it was imperative that he checked his mould experiments sitting in Petri dishes on the windowsill of Chemistry lab number 3 before he left for home, which is where he found himself when John came storming in.

"Ah, John, I was expecting you." Sherlock spoke to his pipette just as the sound of familiar footsteps entered the room.

"What the hell are you playing at?" John hissed in response, arms flailing about.

Sherlock eyed the window next to the door, knowing there was barely a miniscule chance anyone was still around so late after school.

"And don't say you don't know what I'm talking about, because you know, Sherlock!" Sherlock rolled his eyes to himself as he heard John's voice getting louder, and turned finally to face him.

His tie was loosened slightly around his still buttoned collar, the navy blue fabric of it peeking out from underneath his grey jumper. He surveyed John's posture, stood with his hands on his hips, face open and anxious, bottom lip slightly reddened from where he'd been clearly been biting at it apprehensively.

"Lestrade is not a problem, John. I have had his signature memorised since year eleven, it's really not that complex." he said simply, sliding out of his suit jacket and tucking in his shirt at the back, the deep purple fabric feeling cool to the touch.

John's eyes slid over the open throated neckline of Sherlock's shirt, lingered on a button and then
fell back to his face, which was staring back at him with calmness.

"How can you joke about this?" John shook his head, his voice quiet.

Sherlock frowned, returning his Petri dish to the side and weaving around the lab benches to reach John on the other side of the classroom.

"I'm not joking. I thought I'd made that pretty clear by expressing my wishes to terminate my Biology studies in order for our affair to continue-"

"Don't call it that-" John grimaced, feeling slightly sick.

"Then what? John-"

"Not an affair! Not anything." he sighed, and then winced realising how that must have sounded. But Sherlock was quiet again, staring hard at his own hands, expressionless.

"It was the only logical solution." He said after a moment's silence.

John tampered down the frustration rising to his chest, "You and your logic, for God's sakes, Sherlock- did you even stop to think about what I want? I don't want us to happen this way."

Sherlock remained still as John moved towards him, his hand settling on Sherlock's knee, where he was sat on one of the stools.

"Then which way?" he asked impatiently, confusing seeped into the irises that were trained solely on John's.

"You deserve more than this," John sighed as if he were praying. "More than this secrecy, and scandal. More than what people will think and say when they find ou-

"I don't care what people think-" Sherlock replied, his voice turning harder with the childish petulance John had come to recognise as the young man's sense of pride and stubbornness.

John snapped instantly, zeroing in on his student. "Sherlock, I don't want the world believing you're-"

He paused, meeting Sherlock's intense gaze. "That I am what?" he blinked, his voice deep in response to John's.

John slid his palm across his face in a familiar action, as Sherlock rose to his feet, closing the distance between them and taking in the emotion from John's face up-close. Here he could see the quiver in his eyebrow; the moisture of his eyes, the shine on his lips.

"That I am what, John?" He whispered, his breath hitting John's face.

The doctor avoided his eyes, staring down at Sherlock's empty hands, remembering the feel of that cool skin against his own. Before he could doubt himself, he tilted his head upwards, slanting his lips firmly against Sherlock's.

It was softer than their first kiss, gentler, filled with promise and tenderness, and Sherlock remained stiller, his hands ghosting over John's as he tilted his head to avoid bumping noses with the doctor.

They revelled in the quietness of the world at that precise moment, the sensation of feeling at home in such a rare moment of paused time. John felt immediately overwhelmed at the emotion
brimming in his chest, only exaggerated by the gentleness of Sherlock's touches, the innocence of his slow and explorative hands.

However lost the couple seemed to each other, they both subconsciously knew that their sanctuary would be painfully temporary, the moment shattering with a reverberating crash of a mop hitting the floor.

"Oh!" a high pitched female voice exclaimed as the two men sprung apart, "Sherlock, dear, is that you?"

"Yes. Mrs Hudson-" The chemist sighed with relief, "I- don't believe you've met..."

He looked to John who was sporting a horrified expression on his face, quickly righting himself to face the cleaner who had just entered the room.

"Mrs Hudson, Doctor John Watson. John, Mrs Hudson." Sherlock gestured between the pair, and John hurriedly moved forward to take her hand.

"Hello, Sir" Mrs Hudson replied politely, shaking his hand. "My apologies, I didn't realise Sherlock was in here with anybody. I should have knocked-"

"No, no, it's quite alright, nothing was- err-"

"John-" Sherlock interrupted, sending him a firm look saying stop talking now. "How is your hip, Mrs Hudson?"

"My hip? Oh- it's fine, dear."

"And the new tablets I gave you? Are they working?" he asked impatiently, moving out of the way when she waved her hands at him, pushing at his feet with her broom.

"Yes, yes, much better than those last ones Dr Chase gave me, I even said to Mrs Turner last week- you know how she gets with her gossip, though she can't talk really, she's got all sorts- anyway, she was put on the same ones I was, and then-"

"Biscuits!" Sherlock interrupted her, running to her trolley that was stationary in the hallway, as John shot the woman an exasperated look to which she clucked amusedly at.

"His mother has a lot to answer for." she chuckled to John, who nodded dumbly in return, eyes darting back to Sherlock when he re-entered the classroom with his mouth and hands full of ginger-nut biscuits.

"John?" he offered the packet to the shell-shocked man before him, attempting to send him a look that said snap out of it, we're fine.

"Wha-Oh, no thank you. I'm fine." he touched his stomach absently, fiddling with one of the shirt buttons that was poking through his jumper. "Actually, I- think I'd better be going, Sherlock. Lovely to meet you, Mrs Hudson- sorry I couldn't stay, I have piles of exam papers to file through." he smiled sheepishly.

"Oh, don't worry about it, dear! I'm sure Sherlock will keep me company for a little while. Nice to meet you, Doctor Watson." John was struck momentarily by the warmth of her hazel-brown eyes, and the genuineness of her smile. He blinked back at the elderly woman, who was stood with her hands clasped around her broom, the standard navy-blue tunic cleaners uniform drowning her petite shoulders.
Sherlock watched John signal to him with his eyes to follow him to the corridor, and deposited his biscuits on the counter next to Mrs Hudson, sending a wink her way and rushing out with his long legs, hearing her soft chuckle behind him.

John waited anxiously in the hallway, pacing about and poking his head around windows to check if any other surprise cleaners were working in the classrooms nearby.

Just as the teacher was raking his hair back with his fingers, Sherlock appeared, moving closer than socially appropriate into John's personal space, eyes darting everywhere.

"You're upset—no...conflicted. Increased heart-rate and breathing, restlessness—"

"Sherlock, please—" he shook his head.

"You can rely on Mrs Hudson for full discretion, she would never tell—"

"I can't do this—" John blurted, "I can't keep jumping out of my skin every time I realise we're standing too close, or within ear-shot of some other teacher—"

"Then don't," Sherlock insisted immediately, reaching for the fabric of John's jumper, his fingers landing on the strip of buttons down the centre. "Leave with me, John—"

"What—Sherlock. I can't just leave, neither can you! You have exams, your lessons, your whole future,"

"I have two exams left, can you wait?" He asked with urgency, John seemingly sensing the seriousness of his words from the manic expression on his face. "We can get away, somewhere Mycroft won't find us—"

"But he will, he will find us" John shook his head, taking Sherlock's wandering fingers in his own.

"I have my ways of keeping Mycroft distracted. Come on, John."

John sighed. "I don't know, Sherlock. I'd lose my job." he said quietly, his eyes on Sherlock's shoes.

"Believe me, nothing will jeopardise your career, I'll take care of everything— as long as you trust me." Sherlock turned his questioning gaze up towards his teacher's downcast eyes.

"Of course I trust you, I just..." he hesitated, checking his surroundings and pulling them backwards behind a pillar before stroking his hand down the side of Sherlock's face.

"Think about it?" Sherlock sighs finally, a hint of annoyance in his typical impatient manner, the brightness of the genius' eyes lighting the shadows that cast upon them behind the pillar. John's own eyes took in every inch of Sherlock's face before nodding slowly, letting his hand come to the back of Sherlock's neck and pressing his head forward with three strong spaced fingers.

Sherlock kissed him firmly, still trying to learn as much as he could from just their third kiss, recognising the temperature of John's velvet lips, the quickness of his pulse, the surprising softness of his warmed skin.

John pulled away from the kiss with a soft smack of lips, not wanting to be interrupted for the second time that day; attentively smoothing down the collar of Sherlock's open-throated shirt and hoping desperately to whoever was up there that everything would turn out okay.
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

I wanna take you somewhere, so you know I care.

But it's so cold, and I don't know where.

"Where are you going this time?" Sherlock examined his fingernails, feigning disinterest in Mycroft's conversation. He had just been summoned into his brother's office with a firm and urgent sounding voice, only to find Mycroft hurriedly shoving things into drawers and pulling open his briefcase; piling brimming plastic wallets inside.

"Rome-" Mycroft answered distractedly. "I need you to stay here for the next three days, no staying behind at sixth form, come straight home."

Sherlock traced the outline of embellished lettering protruding from a discarded plaque, the one that had always rested on the corner table of Mycroft's office. He scratched his fingernail against the groove of the G, following the curve of the S, and skimming across the surname of "G. S. Holmes".

"And when will you return?"

Mycroft frowned with clear impatience. "I just told yo-"

"No. You will be visiting another location after your three days in Italy are concluded." Sherlock replied with a defiant raised eyebrow.

Mycroft hid his smile behind a familiar squint, "Good."

Sherlock ignored the small swell of pride that rose in his chest, following the rare praise from his elder brother. "I would suggest somewhere in France, most likely somewhere on the outskirts of Paris, or possibly in Orleans..."

Mycroft didn't give his brother an answer, simply stopped his movements, watching Sherlock closely.

"How is Doctor Watson?"

Sherlock froze, the movement barely noticeable, but surely his brother would have seen his momentary panic.

Mycroft grimaced at his brother's silence. "I warned you, Sherlock."

"And I'm warning you-" Sherlock snapped, any semblance of civil conversation slowly dissolving between the two men, stood mirroring each other in the open and aged room. "If you threaten John again, if you have him harmed in any way, I'm gone."

Mycroft was careful to keep his face still, staring at his sibling.

"I'll be gone, and you won't see me again, Mycroft. And you remember last time- you remember
"That's quite enough." Mycroft snapped finally, towering over his brother, instantly worried at the familiar flames of daringness he could see in Sherlock's eyes.

Sherlock knew it was a low blow, but seeing the panic rising in his brother's otherwise calm demeanour almost made up for it. He felt the weight settle in his feet again, clamped down on the unsettling nerves that he always kept such a tight grip on around his brother, felt himself gaining control.

"Don't push me, Sherlock."

Sherlock glared back at him. To the common outsider, they simply looked like two men in a heated argument, two brothers facing a battle between them, dressed in formal clothing and not enough experience even between them to configure any sort of stalemate.

Sherlock's final raised eyebrow was the end of the conversation, just as if he had been holding a gun pointed towards Mycroft, putting pressure on the trigger, Mycroft knew the danger that Sherlock was suggesting by threatening to run again.

Mycroft clicked both clasps of his briefcase, taking his cane from the umbrella stand and staring down his brother as he moved to the door.

"Unwise, brother mine."

Sherlock waited until the elder Holmes had left the room before letting his gaze settle on his mother's dead eyes above the desk. *So sorry, Mummy. So very sorry.*

---

"Doctor Watson? Could I have a quick word?"

John's brain panicked as soon as he recognised the voice of the head-teacher, a podgy middle-aged man with deep forehead wrinkles and abnormally large ears; knowing that there had to be a serious reason he was being called on in the middle of teaching.

"Sure-erm, just turn to the next page, guys, start on questions two and three, and we'll go over them when I get back."

John nodded to his class, searching the gazes of his blank-eyed students to attempt to gain some sort of reassurance that they knew what they were doing.

"Is there a problem, sir?" he asked as soon as the door was closed behind them.

"Not at all, John. I just wanted to ask you a few questions, if that's okay? It will only take a moment."

"Uh, yes, go ahead." John furrowed his brow, emitting a borderline nervous chuckle.

"We received a call this morning, from the guardian of one of our upper sixth students." Mr Frays began, scratching at his thinning hair.

John nodded earnestly, his eyes searching for any clues in the tone of his boss' voice.

"Sherlock Holmes? A2 Biology, I believe, you teach him? Correct?"

"Yes, I do. Is there a problem?" John asked innocently enough.
"His older brother contacted us, raising his concern over him being distracted in lessons. He said that his brother had become less focused on his examinations lately. Mr Mycroft Holmes believes he is distracted by a male member of the class."

John shook his head in bewilderment, barely hearing the head-teacher's words past the ringing in his ears. Oh God, I'm dead. I'm so dead. "Oh?" he squeaked.

Mr Frays nodded, stuffing his hands in his suit pockets uncomfortably just as John noticed a browned stain on his tie. "Only, he didn't mention a name, just expressed a desire for this to be addressed, so, I guess what I'm asking here John is..."

John closed his eyes, waiting for the fatal blow.

"Have you noticed Sherlock becoming distracted by any other students? Perhaps, any other boys he sits near? Or his lab partner, maybe?"

"I, uh..." John attempted to form a sentence.

"Just, as a heads up, I don't know your seating plan, but maybe this is the time for a re-shuffle? His brother seemed quite apprehensive over the matter. As he is one of our more...esteemed guardians, I assured him it would be resolved immediately."

"Right. Yes, of course. I, erm, think I know who he means. I'll move some of the girls to the front row." John nodded decisively, wondering if his momentary breakdown was obvious to anyone apart from himself experiencing it.

"Excellent." The other man grinned toothily, clearly relieved and shaking a stunned John's hand quickly; excusing himself to attend his second period meeting. "Thanks, John-"

"Colin." Dr Watson tipped his head to the teacher, watching in amazement as he waddled away from John down the corridor.

"And then, you should've seen the look on her face, she almost- John?" Greg poked his colleague's leg.

John was in a world of his own, sat back in the comfiest chair of the staff room, nursing a fresh cup of tea loosely in his grasp, looking so out of it that Greg was worried he was about to spill it all over his light grey trousers.

"Huh, what? Oh- sorry, mate- I'm just...not with it today." He blinked at the wall, shaking his head slowly.

"Clearly," Greg sipped his coffee, frowning at his friend. "You okay?"

"Yeah...yeah, fine"

Greg hesitated before pushing, turning to face John more directly. "Come on, you don't have to put on a brave face with me, what's on your mind?"

Wearing the expression of a deeply conflicted, helpless and repressed man, the doctor placed his mug on the floor, hauling his torso back up to a sitting position. "There's this...person. The one I was telling you about..."
"Oh," Greg immediately shifted to a more comfortable sitting position, his voice comically low in a way that made them look like two gossiping teenage girls. "The someone special guy?"

"Yeah-

"Has something bad happe-

"No, no, nothing like that." John sighed. "Things between us are actually going stupidly well considering the situation we're in."

"Then what's the problem?" Greg frowned, noticing a gaggle of teachers filing into the staff room through the door to John's right.

John was hushed, his eyes downcast still, his fingernails bitten back to stubs and reddened around the edges. "We can't really...be together, like we want to be."

"Don't tell me this is some Romeo and Juliet shit where your families are sworn enemies and you are doomed to an existence without one another?"

"Close enough." John laughed dryly, tapping his thumb against the rim of his mug.

"Is his brother still messing you around?" Greg asked casually, concern lacing his gaze. "Because if it gets serious, you know I used to be a copper-" he placed his own mug on the coffee table in front of them.

"It's nothing I can't handle," John rushed to reassure him, "We just won't ever get to spend any time alone with him lurking, I guess he's.. protective?"

Greg harrumphed, falling back into his chair and folding his arms. "This is ridiculous, you're a grown man! He can't control you, or your guy- you're all adults, I don't understand what all the fuss is about."

John felt heat rising up the back of his neck and rushed to scratch at it, keeping his face tilted downwards. "Yeah, I -uh...I don't know either. Bizarre."

Thankfully, most of the time, Greg was captain oblivious, so John had no problem avoiding giving any further more risqué details that could expose the fact that it was Sherlock Holmes he was talking about; Greg's rather opinionated, loud and insanely intelligent student, the one Greg had the smallest soft spot for, but would never admit to his face to spare the boy the ego-boost.

"Well, why don't you pull a Romeo and Juliet? Didn't they elope or something?" Greg teased, "If that's the situation you're in" he broke off laughing, taking another sip from his mug, not realising the contemplation on John's face.

"Believe me, I think that might be our only option left" John attempted to sound nonchalant, his eyes darted to the window as a burst of heavy rainfall began to slide against the roof-light-window of the staffroom, he tried to push the memory of Sherlock's words out of his head.

_Leave with me, John._

The doctor shivered involuntarily.

"Shit, I've got the washing on the line at home-I thought it was supposed to be sunny today!?” Greg cursed, tutting at the grey skies above them, brushing a hand through his short and slightly greying hair. "I suppose that's England for ya" he grumbled.
John raised his eyebrows at the floor and hummed in agreement, dragging his gaze to the water sliding like sheets of lead down the angled panel of glass, forcing down his melancholy and making conversation with Greg about the meeting they were expected to attend that afternoon.

You have (1) message. Start of message, arrived at 1.03pm, Tuesday 23rd of May.

"Sherlock, I am reinforcing the house with extra security for the next week after events that are unfolding over here, please ask new officers for the usual password when they arrive to you. Also, please ensure you are following the procedures I requested. No staying behind, I mean it. Get back to the house as soon as your lessons are finished. Don't try to be smart, or we will be having words when I get home."

Mycroft's voice was insistent yet calm, almost droning, and try as he might, Sherlock couldn't detect any significant background noise indicating clues to his location, or the situation of supposed danger that his brother had found himself in. He deleted the message, as was the agreed protocol for any messages between them, considering Mycroft's government position, which sometimes put him in an ironic position of threat from angered officials of the EU or distant criminals of war, sometimes even assassin level attackers.

Sherlock pressed his mobile phone to the sealed line of his lips, his eyes flitting over the surroundings of the spines of books in the library. He detected a familiar voice faintly drifting into his consciousness from the other side of the racks, immediately cringing when he realised that the voice belonged to Anderson.

He passed him in a huff when he rounded the corner towards the exit, resolutely ignoring Anderson's sly comment about the freak infecting public libraries with his psychopathic presence.

He didn't have the time or patience to deal with imbeciles.

Considering that exam season was well and truly underway, sixth form staff were having a great time hounding students into attending revision sessions for exams. In fact, Sherlock was beginning to get increasingly more irritated every time he came face to face with the bright yellow headache-worthy notices that were plastered on every wall, door, and entrance, stating available classes for students to access in free periods.

This, predictably meant that Sherlock was forced to endure increased amount of human contact with his fellow students, who began to infiltrate his safe haven of chemistry lab 3 which was usually empty save for Sherlock and his experiments.

This also meant that Mrs Hudson had acquired the presence of the familiar gangly teenage form, who had been spending much more of his time in her company. She didn't seem to mind, considering she'd had no children, Sherlock felt like a son to her, or perhaps a grandson, considering the age between the two.

Sherlock made a point of expressing his distaste in her choice of strong-smelling detergents, cursing every-time the scent made him sneeze and sniffle like a messy two-year old with a winter cold.

"Shouldn't you be revising, Sherlock?" she asked one Thursday afternoon, catching sight of a crumpled neon yellow page atop the pile in the rubbish bin. Sherlock had been ripping them from the walls whenever she was near and either hiding or discarding them, in the hopes that she
wouldn't scold him for not studying.

"I don't need to revise." He stated with confidence, and Mrs Hudson raised her eyebrows, still smoothing out the wrinkles of the revision timetable.

"It says here you do, don't you do Biology and Forensics? There's after-school revision classes here- Mrs Kemp for Forensics, and for Biology, Doctor-- Oh-" she broke off with a fluster, blinking at the sheet. "Dr Watson, for Biology"

"Who teaches the classes is irrelevant, I don't need to attend a class melting-pot of brainless spotted adolescents who barely understand the difference between a kettle and a toaster." He snapped.

She chuckled in return, "Oh Sherlock," she sighed. "You're going to have to learn to get along with people one day," she pulled a sheet of blue-tac from her cleaning trolley, pulling a blob off from the corner and pointedly sticking the poster back on the wall.

Sherlock grunted noncommittally, fiddling with the peeling border of an English display board on Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

"Why are you wasting your time with a boring old biddy like me anyway? I doubt you've been in this area of the school for a good few years, too busy slaving away in that science department of yours."

"You took my skull" he pouted at her, staring wistfully at the head resting atop her box of bin-bags.

"Because it was scaring the year sevens with you shouting abuse at it," she clucked, shuffling back over to her trolley and retrieving said skull, placing it back into Sherlock's outstretched hands.

He immediately curled his long fingers around the parietal bone, skimming across the dips of the temporal bones. "It's not as if I have anywhere else to go," he finally answered seriously. "These revision classes are intruding on the labs, and I'm not allowed to perform any experiments in the hallways thanks to the new enforced fire-safety rules." he rolled his eyes, poking his thumbs against the teeth of the skull's bottom jaw.

"Good," she announced, "We could do without any more fires"

Sherlock remained quiet for a moment, watching her tucking the wire of the hoover up and away, and hooking it onto a compartment of her trolley which stood obediently to the side.

"Right then," she smiled, "I'm done in here, I need to empty the bins in the sixth form common room, are you staying?"

Sherlock stood with a sigh, his coat feeling heavier on his shoulders today for some reason, and relished at the protruding shape of his lighter in his trouser pocket. He thumbed over the smooth plastic curve, deliberating on killing a bit more time until the end of the day or going home early to an empty and lonely house.

His mind wandered to John as it often did these days, which left Sherlock buried in a stubborn bubble of silence that he only realised he was in 45 minutes later when he shook himself out of it. Mrs Hudson was gone, Sherlock realised she must have attempted to speak to him and realised that he'd sunk into his mind palace again. *Sometimes I don't talk for days on end.*

His feet carried him to the centre stairwell, which he quickly bound down, his coat billowing out
behind him. It was approaching the end of the school day, and an irritating voice in the back of Sherlock's head warned him that he should arrive home soon to avoid being kidnapped, tortured, or worse as leverage by whomever was threatening Mycroft at that particular moment in time.

He'd half expected to be stalked by a couple of 'secret' agents, keeping a watchful eye over him in case he decided to disobey his darling brother's explicit orders. Either they hadn't gotten the memo to watch over him this time, or Mycroft had selected agents actually capable of remaining secret instead of previous observers whom Sherlock had noticed immediately, accusing them of having as much stealth as elephants in a library.

He found himself nearing John's classroom, hovering outside by the window, he caught sight of the teacher. But he was not alone.

Sherlock pressed his ear to the gap of the slightly ajar door, recognising the voice of a year twelve student named - Sebastian, was it?

"I'm just really worried, Doctor..." Sherlock gritted his teeth at the sound of the flirtatious tone laced in Sebastian's voice.

"You have no reason to be, you're doing great so far, you even got an A in your mock-"

"I can feel myself slipping though..." Sebastian's voice curled with an air of seduction, and Sherlock glanced at the figure moving closer to John's back where the teacher was cleaning his whiteboard. "I was wondering if you could give me a hand?"

Sherlock felt anger bubbling higher in his chest as Sebastian's lithe form slinked closer to John's oblivious body.

Sherlock was just about the push the door open when John turned, blinking rapidly with confusion as soon as he noticed the proximity of his student, stumbling backwards and knocking over his chair in a rush to put distance between them.

Sherlock hadn't been particularly observant of Sebastian prior to realising that John taught him for AS Biology, but immediately realised that Sebastian was what one would call a predatory gay. Sherlock's eyes traced the styled quiff raised straight up from Sebastian's forehead, the tightness of his skinny jeans, riding low on his hips to reveal a neon-banded underwear brand, collar up on his fitted polo shirt.

"Sebastian-" John raised his hands to keep a distance between himself and his student, who had an alarmingly confident look in his eyes, and who was stepping over John's fallen chair with hooded eyes that were sliding appreciatively up and down John's form.

"I really do need your help, Doctor Watson-" Sebastian winked at him daringly, and Sherlock actually let out a growl, his hand moving to the door-handle.

"I can help you with your Biology studies, Sebastian, but anything more than that would be inappropriate." John said firmly from his corner, folding his arms across his chest, which only allowed Sebastian to appreciate the delicious stretch of muscle in John's biceps and chest.

"You don't seem to have any problems helping Sherlock Holmes out-" Sebastian challenged, a perfectly plucked eyebrow raised, and John's face noticeably sobered. "No wonder he always gets top marks, no one could be that clever...unless they had help."

"You better watch what you are making assumptions about- those are serious allegations to make." The fire in John's voice was evident, and Sherlock's body shivered involuntarily, still concealing himself behind the wood of the door.
"They're hardly allegations, are they? It's pretty obvious there's something going on-"

John only just restrained himself from leaping at the boy, settling for curling his fists at his sides, his expression livid. "You watch your tone, boy." he snapped, and Sebastian laughed harshly, stepping around a lab bench and moving along the length towards the teacher.

"Am I not your type, is that it? Not psychopathic enough for you?"

"I'm not a psychopath, Moran, I'm a highly functioning sociopath- do your research." Sherlock’s voice suddenly sounded from the doorway, hard and deep and vicious, his frame suddenly looking much larger and more intimidating than usual as he closed the door behind him.

"Oh no, have I interrupted a romantic rendezvous?" Sebastian's green eyes stared back at Sherlock with unwavering icy threat.

"Sherlock-" John pleaded, his eyes trying to meet Sherlock's gaze, the one which was trained murderously on the other student in the room.

"Trying to find someone who's desperate enough to fuck you, Sebastian? You've worked your way through most of the student body, gay and straight, so naturally now you're moving on to teachers, is that it?" Sherlock questioned, knowing he was right.

"Just following in your footsteps," Sebastian smirked, turning just in time to see John's fierce expression waver. "Oh, didn't you know? Sherlock here's sixth form's resident rent boy-"

"Get out." John growled, his anger coming off him in waves, and Sebastian had the decency of being startled by the shout from the undersized Biology teacher.

Sebastian recovered quickly, however, sashaying past Sherlock who was stood in front of the closed door, who was careful to keep his expression as unaffected as he could manage, only the twitch of muscle in his clenched jaw giving away his anger.

"Someone needed to tell you the truth, Doctor Watson," he replied in his most innocent voice, which only came across as fake and desperate to John. "You know where to find me, if you change your mind-" he looked over his shoulder to the teacher with a sway of his hips as he exited the room, closing the door behind him with a salacious wink.

The silence was loud enough to fill the void of conversation in the room between John and Sherlock as soon as the click of the door sounded.

Sherlock was watching John, his gaze fixed on his troubled expression as he sank back against the edge of his desk, rubbing his palms over his face, his back hunched forward.

"You're worried he's right." Sherlock said into the quiet, his voice accusatory.

"What?" John looked at him.

"You're worried he's right about me-"

"No" He shook his head, looking back to his hands on his knees.

"That's why you're so upset. You can't even entertain the possibility that he might be right, you're afraid that you've been taken in by me as well-"
"No I'm not-" John turned back to him, his voice more insistent against Sherlock's baritone.

"He's playing with your mind, can't you see what's going on?!" Sherlock shouted, his voice laced with aggression and defensiveness, his hand smacked against the marble of the lab-bench surface.

"No, Sherlock-" John sighed, planting his feet on the floor and moving past Sherlock to pull the blind across on his rectangular window next to the door, shoving the door wedge underneath the jamb. He moved cautiously back over to the taller man, gripping the edges of his coat, moving his head into Sherlock's line of view where he was staring stubbornly at the floor.

"I know you for real," he said softly, his eyebrows furrowing with the intensity of his gaze into Sherlock's hesitant eyes. He pushed Sherlock's curly hair out of his eyes, moving his hand to grasp one of Sherlock's that were hanging uselessly at his side.

He frowned, pulling away from John's embrace.

"Sherlock-" he pleaded, emotion evident in his voice as he stood off to the side, his hands and soul feeling empty with the lack of Sherlock's presence.

"I came to pick up my textbook." the monotone greeted him, and the height of the young man wound around the bench to the side tables, lifted a large book from the surface and paused.

"I have a revision class in fifteen minutes, why don't you stay?" John pleaded softly, moving towards him and placing his hand on the desk to block Sherlock from shoving past.

"You know I don't do those idiotic classes, John" he grunted, looking directly out of the window and avoiding John's eyes.

"After, then? Will you wait for me? We can go somewhere, just us, please?"

Sherlock brought his gaze back to the man before him, seeing the vulnerability in his eyes and feeling the anxiousness and anticipation coming off him in waves. He felt an increase of heartbeat, his pulse thrumming against his skin, and looked down at his own body with a frown as if it were betraying him personally. He suddenly heard Mycroft's warning in his head, knowing he should head straight home, not linger in the same place for too long, but John was asking him directly. John was asking him to stay. John.

He nodded with a slight exhale of breath, staring down at John's feet directly opposite his.

"You'll stay?" John almost kicked himself at how pathetically hopeful he sounded.

"Yes"

"Thank you," he breathed, his hand reaching for Sherlock's face and then hesitating mid-air. "I uh, I'll only be an hour."

Before he had a chance to say anything, a knock sounded at the door, and John rushed to open it, revealing a Physics teacher that Sherlock wasn't familiar with. He slid out the door behind them while John was in conversation, and headed towards the stretch of Astroturf adjoined to the sports field to smoke.

He knew he'd probably be caught in an instant, he'd been caught in the same area before, which had been the time the head-teacher got involved and threatened to suspend him again.
He sat down on the sodden wood that was damp with rain from the mid-May showers, noticing a flock of red in the form of the year eight rugby team running across the pitch towards the curved fence, dropping down water bottles of various sizes and colours and jogging on the spot in their black shorts in order to keep warm.

He picked absently at the edge of the wood, revelling at the soothing motion of his calloused fingertips against the grain. However much he needed one right now, he didn't smoke, still trying to test his strength for John. He'd began to notice the increasing positive correlation of John's scrunched up expressions after kissing post-cigarette Sherlock and how it made him pull away more quickly than times when his mouth was fresh.

The pressure pulsed against his skull as a rapid-fire stampede of information and stimuli raced around the forefront of his mind, and Sherlock felt the heavy weight of his eyelids even more now, his body craving the sleep that bought it all to a halt, if only for a couple of hours.

To keep himself awake, he deduced what he could of the chubby sweaty boys in the distance, finding three closeted homosexuals, two who owned large family dogs, six with divorced parents, and one with a cross-dressing father. With a raised eyebrow, he zeroed in on their coach, an ironically fat man with neon orange sweat-bands on each wrist.

"Mr Sherlock Holmes?"

Sherlock turned to find a man dressed from head to toe in black, smart material, on the verge of casual dress, with a nude ear-piece concealed in his left inner ear.

Sherlock squinted back at him.

"I've had express orders from your brother to retrieve you from sixth form and transport you home."

Sherlock didn't even blink, "Password?"

"Adagio, Sir."

Sherlock sighed. "Fine."

Sherlock followed the man, at least two steps behind him, into a silver Mercedes. He clambered into the back and watched with amusement out of the window as Mycroft's man scanned their surroundings momentarily for any threats, before sinking into the right-hand driver's side and pulling away from the school.

__________________________________________________________________________________

John wasn't a particularly worrisome human being, but Sherlock Holmes had always had a habit of just appearing as soon as you were thinking about him. In this case however, John couldn't lay eyes on him anywhere.

He'd waited behind in the classroom for at least fifteen minutes, knowing even that was a push for Mr. punctual Holmes, to be more than 4 minutes behind schedule. Suspiciously locking the door behind him, he made for the exit, checking all smoking locations which Sherlock had absently mentioned to him before, including the corner they often 'ran into each other' on most days of the week.

He trudged along the corridor of Chemistry classrooms, even made his way down to the Philosophy department and the library before despondently and rather anxiously making his way to the car park. His heart finally sank at the image of his vehicle standing alone without a familiar
lanky figure looming around with an air of mystery and barely concealed grace.

John nodded to a loud group of students who were filing out of reception from the Biology session he’d just taught, heading home with their backpacks and mobiles, with scattered smiles towards him.

He’d just released the handbrake when his phone buzzed against his trouser pocket, which began the daily struggle of wiggling it out of the position between his bum and the seat without strangling himself with his seatbelt.

He pushed the handbrake back into place with a sigh, and came face to face with an un-read text message from an unfamiliar number on his phone screen. He frowned and slid his thumb across the screen, picking at a loose thread on the material of his trousers as his phone slowly co-operated with loading the message.

From: Unknown number

I had to leave, some ridiculous scheme of Mycroft's for me to be home ASAP every night whilst he's away on business. Had an agent come to pick me up so I had no chance of escaping. - SH

John’s heart leapt unexpectedly at the two letters at the end, signalling Sherlock's initials.

To: Unknown number

Should I even ask how you got my number? p.s. How do I know this is really you?

John bit at the skin around his thumbnail, digging his teeth into the edge with the unexpected appearance of nervousness.

From: Unknown number

I have my ways. Do you want me to answer a cryptic question that only I would know the answer to? I'll spare you the effort. Our first kiss was against the wall of your bedroom. SH

With a flush rising to his cheeks and a vivid memory playing before his now closed eyes, John let out a slightly shaky breath, grinning absurdly and typing back a response.

To: Unknown number

Okay. Yes. It's you. I was hoping we'd get a chance to talk after school.

After another moment of staring into the distance, John's phone buzzed in his lap.

I am sorry. Mycroft tends to enjoy being an interference on my life so much he even has the ability to do it from another country. There's always tomorrow. SH

It's not your fault. I'm sorry too though, for today. I hope you know I didn't believe what he said. I was just--shocked. I was not expecting anything like that from him.

You should learn to expect the worst from most people, John. SH

I really hope we are still talking about Sebastian.

After saving Sherlock's contact details, John decided to actually leave the car park, placing his
phone on the passenger seat beside him and strapping on his seatbelt. He made it to a second set of traffic lights before checking his phone again.

I am just giving you some valuable advice. SH.

John frowned at Sherlock's text, eyes flickering back to the lights, still on red. Then replying.

Should I expect the worst from you?

He didn't check his phone again until reaching home, having read some statistic in the papers that morning about the amount of road accidents caused by mobile phones, he decided it would be much safer to wait until he was in the security of his own house before reading the rest of his messages.

I am probably not who you want or expect me to be. I would hate to raise your expectations unnecessarily. SH.

Confused at the tone of Sherlock's writing, John debated on a reply, typing out the start and then quickly deleting it, deciding to bite the bullet and call him.

Ring ring. Ring ring.

Ring ring. Ring ring.

Ring ri-

"Sherlock Holmes"

"It's me," John said quietly.

"Oh- John..."

"What are you talking about, Sherlock? Where has all of this come from? Was it what Sebastian said?" the teacher's voice rose with the impression of anxiousness.

"To what are you referring?" the baritone voice replied, and John swore he could detect a touch of innocence.

"You know what. What's all this malarkey about expectations? Since when have I ever made you feel like I had expectations of you?" John asked softly, the quietest Sherlock had probably ever heard him.

He shuffled on the other side of the call. "I didn't say you had, I was merely stating a fact-"

"Don't give me that-"

"It's something that I have come to believe, from my experiences- that it is easier to expect the worst from people, so when they inevitably let you down, I find it to be less of a tedious drama."

John was quiet, tracing the leather of his arm-chair. "You shouldn't have to feel that way. I hope you don't expect the worst from me, Sherlock."

The student's answering silence was deafening.

"Do you think I'm going to break your heart? Is that it?" John's voice was sudden, tinged with emotion.
"I've been reliably informed that I don't have one-" he mumbled in return.

"Sherlock- I'm being serious here."

Sherlock paused, "How realistic is it for us to continue this affair?"

And there it was, the punch to the gut that John was dreading. He felt his throat close unexpectedly, a metal ball settle in the pit of his stomach. "So it is us? You don't want me anymore?"

"That's not what I said, John. Why don't people listen." he muttered to himself,

"Then explain it to me."

"Then explain it to me."

"Then explain it to me." John asked him. "Please, I know your head races round a mile a minute sometimes but--help me understand it, Sherlock."

It was with a heavy heartJohn waited on the other side of the line, his fingernails curled into the edge of the leather seam on his armrest.

Finally- "I can't please you, John."

The teacher would have been tricked by Sherlock's usual monotonic voice if it hadn't cracked on the last syllable of his name, wavering and fading out to a thin silence in which John finally realised the heartbreaking insecurities of the young man he was falling head over heels for.

"Sherlock," he whispered, his voice private, reminiscent of the whispers of lovers on the run from a world who didn't understand them, and didn't try to, either. "You already do please me."

"You can't be seen anywhere with me, my very existence and presence near you threatens your career. You lie to your friends about me- to Lestrade, to Stamford, you don't answer calls from family in the worry they'll ask you if you have a new girlfriend yet-"

"But I chose this, Sherlock, you can't dictate my suffering as a fault of your own when it is all mine. It's not even a fault! I enjoy...being with you...if that's what this is. I know we haven't defined what this is yet, but-"

"Mycroft will have you deported." Sherlock deadpanned in return.

John would have scolded him for interrupting his romantic declaration if he wasn't so amused by Sherlock's words, even if they were true (which they probably were, knowing Mycroft), the bluntness of Sherlock's defence had him giggling through the receiver, unaware at the smile that tugged at the young man's lips as soon as he heard it.

"And you know what? He probably will-" John huffed out a laugh after his outburst. "But it would be worth it."

Sherlock hummed, raising an eyebrow that went unseen by his lover.

"Plus, you'd probably follow me to wherever I ended up, anyway." he teased.

Sherlock was quiet again, his eyes landing on the shined reflection of his shoes. "I would."

"Maybe that is the best way...to get away from here. From everyone, just us." John mused momentarily.

"Is that an answer to my previous suggestion?"
"Maybe," John sighed. "Who knows anymore. But I can't take much more of this, being apart from you all the time. A few scattered minutes at school isn't enough."

"Any place in particular you'd like to go?" Sherlock asked casually, his eyes flicking to an A-Z map of Britain which was tucked against the side of his wardrobe in the corner of his room. He shifted to the side of the bed, planting his feet on the floor and listened to John's muted yawn in the background.

"Anywhere would be better than here right now," John picked at his nails. "The further away, the better."

"Outside of England?" Sherlock asked, his voice still suspiciously casual to John's ears.

"God no- haven't you seen the movies? We'd be caught at the airport, probably shot down by SWAT teams sent by your brother."

Sherlock closed his eyes for a moment. "Ireland?"

"Same problem, we'd never get past the border." John replied, amused at how their conversation had progressed into jokes about eloping from London. He felt as though he were one half of a Shakespearean lovers pair, desperately arranging plans to flee the court from a restrictive Duke Mycroft. He laughed aloud at his own thoughts.

"What's so funny?"

"Nothing," he giggled, which quickly dissolved into another yawn. "God, I'm bloody knackered."

"I'll let you sleep."

John wasn't sure if it was his tiredness convincing him that Sherlock's voice sounded so fond, nevertheless, he didn't have a chance to determine where the emotional haze had come from, as he drifted into sleep. Sherlock remained on the other side of the line until John's breathing slowed, eventually hanging up after the sound of what could only be described as a snuffle.

Chapter End Notes

IMPORTANT:

Please review and let me know your thoughts, I'm considering discontinuing this if not many people are interested in me continuing, so keep me updated :) Thanks for reading!
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Give me your hand, and take what you will tonight,

I'll give it as fast and high as the flame will rise, cinder and smoke.

Sherlock walked out of the exam hall with a feeling of exhaustion, he'd finished his penultimate exam within the first 20 minutes, and spent the rest of the 70 remaining minutes attempting to make himself sleep. He'd been just approaching the threshold of hypnagogic sleep when he was shaken by a stern envidulator who was convinced he was cheating somehow by hiding his face in his arms on the table. He had simply glared at the woman with the short unkempt hair and hauled his upper body to sitting position, frowning at the sluggishly ticking clock.

Doctor Watson was waiting outside the hall when his biology students began to file out, chatting amongst themselves about questions and answers. He zeroed in on a few worried looking faces, mostly all the ones he had expected to do less than brilliantly from recent mock results, and attempted to comfort them down from verging panic attacks with the assurance that it was all over now and all they could do was wait until results day.

He lingered in the lobby of the concourse for a moment, some of his brighter students coming over to him to consolidate their answers with him. His eyes were only momentarily distracted by Sherlock's figure appearing in the double-doorway, he appeared to have his usual air of confidence surrounding him, but John wasn't fooled by his steeled expression, his eyes worriedly traced the shape of Sherlock's hooded and blood-shot eyes, and lingered on the slouch of his shoulders which usually stood ram-rod straight and broad.

Once he felt satisfied with having spoken to the majority of his students, John began to break away from the retreating shapes, who were returning to their lessons or in the direction of the common room. He knew that Sherlock would probably have gone in search of caffeine, and headed to the canteen, which was just on the verge of opening up for lunch-time. Sure enough, he spotted the figure lounged in one of the chairs of an empty table, his curly hair appearing more mop-like than usual with the smallest of curls wound around the shape of his ears and smattered jaggedly along the nape of his neck. John was hit with a wall of desire to kiss along said hairline, and distracted himself with heading through to the coffee machine.

He filled a cup with black coffee, watching the steaming liquid pour from the nozzle, setting another cup up next to it and filling it with tea. He moved to greet the ladies at the checkouts with a charming smile, grabbing sugar, milk, and spoons and paying with a swipe of his card, carrying both cups over to Sherlock.

He set the coffee cup in front of the barely awake student, startling Sherlock to consciousness which was followed by a furrowed eyebrow and a glare to the canteen staff to his left. "They said they weren't open yet."

John shrugged, "Teacher privileges".

Sherlock raised his eyebrows in response and popped off the plastic lid to his drink. John looked
around to see a few other students sat at tables in the empty canteen, and decided to pull up a chair and sit opposite him. "So, how was it?"

Sherlock took a tentative sip from the hot drink, his lip curving over the edge of the cup. He wet his lips with a darting pink tongue after pulling away, and his eyes flicked immediately up to John's open blues. "Child's play." he smiled.

John smiled warmly at him in return, knowing that most would interpret Sherlock's attitude towards the exam as arrogance, whereas after coming to know Sherlock as well as he did now, he knew of the truth the young man spoke, knowing that he was more than likely one of the smartest people John would ever have the pleasure to encounter in his life.

"Good, I knew you'd have no problems with the questions." he nodded, emptying a miniature carton of milk into his own drink, and reaching for a plastic spoon to stir. "So- that's it, you're nearly all done?" he looked up at Sherlock under his eyelashes.

Sherlock paused for a moment, his eyes darkening in a squint, staring intensely into John's. "Yes"

John hummed with an air of innocence in return, his eyes returning to the whirlpool he was creating in his tea. Sherlock was thankful for the tablecloth concealing the table's edges as he hooked his ankle around John's, and pulled his foot possessively forward.

John wished that he could reach out and stroke his thumb across Sherlock's knuckles, but kept his hands firmly glued to his cup instead. "Will you be doing anything to celebrate?"

"Hopefully," Sherlock nodded, his eyes trained on John's thick hands. "I have something planned for tomorrow morning. In which case, you'd better pack a suitcase."

"What?" John frowned immediately. "What are you talking about?"

"We're leaving." he grinned with a hint of daringness in his expression that John probably would have found terrifying if it were on somebody else's face.

"What do you mean?" he hissed. "Sherlock- I can't just up and leave, I need to give at least a week's notice-"

"Of course you can," Sherlock said simply. "I have it all planned out and under control."

"Plus you still have a forensics exam left to do- there is no way I'm letting you skip an entir-"

"I will still be taking my exam." He replied, looking calm as ever, and taking another sip from his cup.

"Sherlock-" the teacher interrupted firmly, trying to keep his voice down as more people filed into the canteen for the beginning of lunch. "This is all very- romantic- really, and spontaneous and thoughtful but-"

"No buts," Sherlock stood, draining the last of his coffee and setting his hollow cup on the table. "We're leaving, John. We agreed before-"

"When did we agree?!" John asks with exasperation. "Sherlock!" he hissed, barely resisting grabbing at his retreating figure as he sauntered off towards the exit, leaving John with a cup of lukewarm tea and an oncoming headache of confusion.
Greg Lestrade's frustration was at boiling point after being asked to go on duty at lunch-time, after a loud complaint to whomever of his colleagues were listening in the staff room that period, he had stomped off to his post to stand and watch over bratty children for an hour, the voice at the back of his head reminding him how much shit he was going to be in for being so behind on marking.

He stood with his arms crossed, letting out the occasional grunt, seen to be grumbling and cursing under his breath at the polished floor.

He glared at Stamford who passed him with a deliberate laugh, carrying as much food as his chubby hands could manage from the canteen and towards his own classroom. Greg had already broken up three fights, shouted at 6 separate lads to pick up their rubbish and scolded an intimidating and large group of teenage girls when they began doodling hearts and names against the doors of lockers and walls with permanent marker.

"Lestrade" he heard behind him, turning to see Sherlock Holmes nodding in acknowledgement to him.

"Sherlock" he replied, "Didn't you have an exam today?"

"Congratulations on remembering."

"I won't ask you how it went, you obviously passed it with flying colours." Greg replied with a voice full of sarcasm.

"Naturally." Sherlock replied, his eyes tracing the movements of a lone boy with dark hair crossing the space in front of them and trailing dejectedly to the library.

"So have you come to say goodbye to your favourite teacher, is that it? A week and a half left." He leaned over with suggestively raised eyebrows and nudged his shoulder into Sherlock's bony one.

Sherlock harrumphed, "Don't be ridiculous-"

"Oh don't pretend you won't miss our tutor sessions- me screaming at you... You sitting not listening to a word I'm saying- ahh, the good old days..."

Sherlock rolled his eyes like a true teenager, resisting the smile that threatened to tug at his lips.

"Will you still be in over the following weeks? Using the labs and that?" the teacher asked, simultaneously tapping the shoulder of a passing year eight boy who had his shirt un-tucked and tie in his pocket.

Sherlock hesitated, which went un-noticed by Lestrade who was still insisting to the student to correct his unkempt uniform. "Perhaps."

"Well, it will be weird not having you around, that's for sure. You've made quite an impression on a lot of teachers at this school." Greg slid his hands into his pockets and stared at the scuff-marks on the toe of his shoes.

The young man snorted indelicately in return. "Please- the majority of them loathe me."

"Well...yes...maybe- but, not all of them." he scratched at the back of his head. "Dr Watson will be sad to see you go, I'm sure. We talked about you quite a bit when he first took over your class."
Sherlock squinted at him. "What did you talk about?"

"Just about that gigantic ego of yours," he teased, clapping a hand on Sherlock's shoulder.

"Oh do shut up." Sherlock folded his arms. "You both mistake my disregard for the importance of other human beings as a portrayal of self-love, I just can't stand to be within half a metre of any of those living breathing morons."

"I'll take that as a complement then," Greg grinned suddenly, gesturing to the lack of space between them with a nod of his head, his arms crossed over his chest.

"Oh no, you're still an idiot." Sherlock reassured him.

"This farewell conversation isn't going how I'd pictured it." Greg frowned, a sparkle of humour in his eyes that Sherlock was all too familiar with by now.

"Anyway, I need to go." Sherlock brushed his palms against the material of his trousers.

"Have you said goodbye to John yet? It was your last Biology exam, after all. I'm sure he'd appreciate a visit from you, Sherlock." Greg suggested innocently enough, his eyes trained on the groups of students around them.

"Uh- no. I haven't. I'll get on that."

"Best to." Greg nodded, sniffing suddenly and then flexed one of his nostrils. "Well, I guess this is it then." he turned to his pupil, meeting his eyes.

"This won't be the last time you'll see me, Lestrade." Sherlock said with confidence, an expressionless face making the sentence seem slightly strange.

"I'm not sure if that coming from you reassures me or scares me even more." he laughed, and patted Sherlock's shoulder again regardless, squeezing quickly and then withdrawing, knowing that Sherlock wasn't particularly partial to others touching him. "Congratulations, anyway."

"Thank you," he nodded. "I'll see you around, Lestrade. I appreciate all of your hard work."

Greg was pleasantly surprised to hear the last of Sherlock's sentence, not expecting the expression of gratitude. He went to return the sentiment, but Sherlock had already retreated, the shape of his fitted suit flitting up the main staircase.

"Lestrade sent me up here to say goodbye to you." he said as soon as he entered the room, only just noticing that John had another student in his classroom with him. John looked towards Sherlock as he closed the door behind him and stood quietly in front of it.

"Yeah- hi, Sherlock, give me a second- Just helping Danielle out here." John trailed off distractedly, and turned back to the uniformed pupil who had traces of tear-marks down her streaked make-up face, Sherlock noticed, and was scrawling fast sentences in a refill pad as John pointed to various diagrams in her textbook.

After a few minutes, their conversation came to a gradual halt, and the young girl began packing her things back into a purple shoulder bag.
"Has that helped in any way?" John asked softly, rubbing his hands together and leaning back against his desk.

"Yeah it has, thank you so much Doctor Watson, sorry for intruding on your free time." the student mumbled in reply, smiling shyly and stepping around Sherlock's tall form towards the door.

"It's no problem at all, happy to help." John smiled reassuringly at her, and lifted a hand to wave her goodbye as she turned the handle and left.

Sherlock watched John turn to him in a gesture of familiarity, suddenly picturing their usual routine of 'hello' glances that spoke with so much hidden desire unable to be physically expressed.

"Hello, you." John blinked, his smile lopsided and fond as he pushed himself up against his desk, sitting on the ledge. Sherlock's eyes drifted to the colourful socks peeking out of John's hitched trousers, the material bunching around his crotch and pulling tight against his thighs as he dangled his spread legs over the edge of the desk.

Sherlock gave him a small smile, his eyes crinkling slightly at the edges, and John was hit with the realisation of how long it had been since he had kissed the young man. Suddenly his lips tingled.

"So, what was it you said you came up for?" he shifted in his seat, clenching his buttocks so his behind wouldn't begin to turn numb.

"Lestrade." He remained standing at a considerable distance. "Said that you'd appreciate a goodbye from me."

"A goodbye?" the doctor frowned, his forehead wrinkling.

"As today is technically my last day of studying Biology." Sherlock clarified.

"Oh..." He looked towards Sherlock's clasped hands. "I guess it is." he mused.

"Of course, I won't be saying goodbye to you." Sherlock cleared his throat.

John dropped down from his seat upon his desk with a sigh, his eyes nervously glancing towards the window by the door. "Can we please discuss this?"

Sherlock was about to feign ignorance before John gave him a look. "You know what I'm talking about. Both of us pulling a disappearing act in the middle of a school week isn't the best plan you've had, Sherlock."

Sherlock raised his chin. "I refute that statement."

"In your eyes, maybe. But there will be consequences attached to those sorts of plans- you must have seen the news and all the gossip, when things like this have happened before. You'll be deemed abducted, regardless of your age, because of the circumstances in which we met."

"I am eighteen, legal to make my own decisions." Sherlock frowned at his former teacher, crossing his arms stubbornly across his chest.

John moved forward instinctively, wanting to unravel Sherlock's automatic self-detachment processes. He held out his hands almost defensively towards the boy, not noticing the open crack of the door.

"I don't disregard that, but you know how these things go." Their eyes were glued to each other,
the raw element of delicate and dangerous conversation inside the last place they should be having said conversation seemed to ignite an electrical charge between the two men. "What would your brother do? He'll kill us- no, he'd kill me- you'd probably be fine, but... we just wouldn't get away with it, Sherlock-"

"Erm...Doctor Watson?" A voice sounded from the doorway.

*Shit. Shit shit shit.*

"Yes?" he squeaked, turning quickly to the voice of his co-worker who had just entered the room with his hand still on the door's edge, suspicious eyes darting between Sherlock and himself.

Sherlock had the decency to step away, acting nonchalant as best as he could, and turning to tidy a stack of test-tubes which had been stacked haphazardly into their holding containers by a previous class.

"Can I help you, Kevin?" John moved closer to the Physics teacher, attempting to block Sherlock from view to hopefully move all potential suspicious thoughts from the intruding teacher's mind.

"I just thought I'd let you know," The look on his face was a combination of thinly veiled disgust and suspicion. "This afternoon's meeting has been cancelled. I told Colin I'd let you know since I'd see you before he would."

"Oh- yes, of course. Thanks, mate, I appreciate it." John nodded to him, having masked most of his crippling anxiety by now. "I'll, erm, catch you later, then?"

Kevin Lynch hummed in answer, fixing John with a look that said he would be seeking him out later, and turned to leave.

John closed his eyes as soon as the door closed behind the man, his expression holding the weariness of someone who was barely holding himself together. Sherlock watched him with the same level of scrutiny as he always did, and was met with a still unexpected wave of sadness, recognising the effect and strain their relationship was putting on the usually strong, resilient and untouchable man.

"Jesus," He groaned, covering his face with his hands. "I'm such an idiot."

Sherlock didn't dare to move over to him, suddenly hyperaware of the amount of distance usually deemed acceptable between students and teachers. He counted the fake tiles of the floor, telling himself to stay at least a length of 5 between them.

"It's my fault. I shouldn't have come."

"No, no-" John insisted, his eyes searching for Sherlock's as the younger man began to turn towards the exit. "You should have- don't leave, please."

Sherlock stood with his back towards him, his hand on the door-handle. He checked from his position in front of the window that there were no on-lookers in the corridor.

"Listen," John sighed, turning his gaze to his lover. "My meeting's been cancelled, so I'm leaving early. I have the whole afternoon free, will you come with me?" John's eyes looked red, his face tired.

Sherlock straightened his lips into a line. "Where to?"

"My house? Is that okay?" He said carefully.
Sherlock was vaguely aware of the time, his conscience reminding him of Mycroft's inane rules regarding his new enforced curfew. Realising that technically the school-day hadn't ended yet, as neither he or John had any lessons in the afternoon, he nodded to the teacher and put his hands in his pockets.

They made their way to John's home separately, and Sherlock found himself waiting at least 10 minutes after arriving before he allowed himself to knock on John's front door, his experienced eyes still scanning the surroundings of John's street just in-case. He found nothing out of the ordinary, and was suddenly distracted by the prospect of being alone with John as soon as the man opened his door for him.

As soon as the door closed, he peeled off his coat and watched John's small but sturdy frame standing off to the side looking back at him with hooded eyes.

"God, I missed you." He said, reaching straight for Sherlock's hand.

Sherlock stooped to John's height, pressing his lips against the other man's. He felt a hand at the back of his head straight away, fingers threading through his curls and another curving around the slant of his neck, thumb resting underneath his adam's apple. He felt his feet moving his body even closer to John's on their own accord.

John released a breath. Even with Sherlock leaning down, he still had to move on to his tip-toes, and eventually felt the phantom presence of one of Sherlock's large hands at the small of his back, hesitantly hovering before settling against the moving muscles aside John's spine.

A small smack of lips filled the silence as Sherlock pulled away, his eyes large and inquisitive, head tilted and reminding John immediately of some sort of curious woodland creature un-acustomed to its environment. John smiled, kissing the corner of Sherlock's stunned mouth, stealing one more kiss accompanied with the presence of his hand on Sherlock's angled face before moving away.

"Would you like something to drink?" he asked over his shoulder, padding barefoot to the kitchen with a lightness in his chest he hadn't felt in an extremely long time.

"No, thank you." Sherlock said from where he stood, his voice another tone deeper, the gravel in his throat reminiscent of the times he would speak straight after a cigarette. John couldn't resist smirking.

John turned his head to the man before entering the other room, noticing Sherlock was still planted in the doorway, next to the coat-stand. "You don't have to stay there, you know." John's eyes relished the look of child-like wonder on his face. "Make yourself at home."

Not having the awkwardness of Sherlock being in John's house for the first time helped both men to relax in each other's presence, so used to being wired 24/7. It was the memory of their first kiss upon Sherlock's last visit to John's home that had the shorter man continually having to stop himself from breaking into a gigantic grin every time it graced his thoughts.

"Kevin Lynch," Sherlock spoke when they were sat across from each other on John's bed. "What's his story?"
John gave him a teasing look, taking a bite from one of the biscuits he'd laid out on a plate. "What, you mean you can't just deduce it?"

Sherlock flashed an empty glare at him. "I was trying to give you the opportunity to share your opinions on the man."

"My opinions?" John sighed, crossing his legs. "Well, they aren't particularly high ones, I'll say that. He's a known homophobe, for one."

Sherlock winced, still nibbling on his first biscuit as John started on his third.

"Yeah," John noticed his expression, raising his own eyebrows. "I know, he wasn't exactly popular with one of our openly gay trainee staff members when he started, Darrel Jacobs. Not sure if you'd remember him, he was quite dishy actually." John mused. "Though on reflection, not really my type."

"Stay on topic, John."

"Right. Kevin. Anyway, he's an A grade tosser. Pretty sure he's had a sexual harassment complaint filed against him by one of the female Art teachers too. Always seemed like a pig to me."

"So, not exactly the best person that could have overheard our conversation from earlier." Sherlock stated with a raised eyebrow.

"No, not really." John sighed again, noticing a couple of crumbs resting on Sherlock's chin and giving them a swipe with his thumb. "Haven't you come across him before? You do Physics."

Sherlock cleared his throat. "You are under the assumption that I remember the name of my own teachers, let alone others in the departments of my subjects."

"Well, I'd hope you'd remember my name, at least."

Sherlock scowled at John's grin, letting his fingers trail the edge of the small plate sitting on the bed-sheets. "You know you're the exception."

"Still don't know what you see in me if I'm being honest." John stretched back against the headboard, his arms behind his head. "What would a fit young genius like you be doing faffing around with an old stumpy bloke like me?"

"You have an irritating habit of underestimating yourself, John." Sherlock replied simply, taking the final bite of his biscuit.

"Sorry?"

"I 'see' a lot in you, regarding your previous statement."

"Go on then," he grinned, hinting.

"I'll tell you someday." Sherlock lay down flat on the bed, rolling his eyes upwards to see John, who was propped up against his pillows.

He couldn't resist leaning over and pressing an up-side down kiss to Sherlock's open lips, lasting only a moment before he returning to his previous position. "Sorry-" he shrugged. "Couldn't resist the Spiderman kiss."
"Spider-man?" Sherlock frowned.

"Don't tell me you don't know Spiderman," John's mouth dropped open, and Sherlock felt the discomfort of embarrassment flushing through his system, and reached for his phone, searching the name into Google. "I thought you knew everything?"

As the results flashed over Sherlock's eyes, he snorted. "A superhero? Really, John? No wonder I didn't recognise it, I don't concern myself with such trivia."

"Of course you don't," John looked back at him fondly.

After John had fulfilled his amount of enjoyment of quizzing Sherlock on famous characters from film and television for the day, to which he knew very few, conversation turned to the more serious topic on John's mind.

"Will you explain this elaborate plan of yours to me?" he threaded his fingers through Sherlock's curls. His body had migrated itself gradually up towards John's on the pillows, and the genius lay with his eyes closed, his broad chest rising and falling with the human matter of breathing.

"I believe we discussed it partially on our first phone-call." The deep voice replied from below him.

John frowned, trying to recall their full conversation from a couple of weeks ago. "I was under the impression we were speaking hypothetically, Sherlock. Not planning our imminent and daring escape."

"Yes, but I can see what the secrecy of our relationship has been doing to you, John." Sherlock spoke with a voice filled with such wisdom John found himself completely awestruck by the reminder of the actual age-gap between them.

"I thought I'd been hiding it quite well, actually" he brushed back Sherlock's thick fringe.

Sherlock hummed. "You must realise it is difficult to hide many things from me."

"I'm beginning to realise that, Sherlock, but-" he sighed. "I just don't think it's really the right time to be waltzing off into the sunset."

"There couldn't be a better time." Sherlock insisted from where he lay on the bed. "Don't think I can't see how the strain of secrecy attached to our relationship has affected your health."

"My health?" John raised his eyebrows.

"You have lost almost half a stone with stress since our whole secret ordeal began, you are more than often tired, irritable and on edge. Jumpy whenever anybody comes around a corner. Afraid of Mycroft's inconsistent and unexpected appearances in which he continues to threaten you. Far from the John Watson I met at the beginning of our relationship."

John let Sherlock's words in, shocked to find that they were infused with truth that he hadn't even noticed before. He had become so obsessed with trying to remain as normal as possible, that he'd convinced himself his act was impenetrable. As usual, he had obviously underestimated Sherlock Holmes.

A vibration under his thigh startled the doctor out of his thoughts, the metal of his phone felt warm
to his touch when he slid his thumb across the screen.

Mike Stamford:
U heard the news?

John frowned, aware of Sherlock's eyes still boring into his face from the other side of the bed.

John Watson:
News?

"What does Stamford want?" the dark haired young man lay back on the bed, his long form stretched over the length of the headboard. John was just about to ask how Sherlock knew it was Mike from all the way over there when his phone chimed again.

Mike Stamford:
School scandal. Rumour goin round staff room there's a gay teacher n student fling been found out.

John felt his stomach drop immediately, and Sherlock was sitting up quickly, moving towards John with a hand on his shoulder and taking the phone from his hand. He blinked rapidly as Sherlock frowned down at the message, trying to dampen down a potential panic attack.

Sherlock gritted his teeth, typing out a response, fingers moving quickly across the keys.

John Watson:
Year group? Define 'found out'.

John glimpsed at the message as it was sending and realised that Sherlock's message sounded way too blunt and not like John's usual conversational manner at all but he couldn't find himself caring too much in his anxiety. He stood quickly, moving away from the bed with Sherlock still sat on it, lingering by the window.

Mike Stamford:
Sixth form. Fletch told me Kev Lynch down in science walked in on the 2 of them talking about stuff, came into the staff room earlier shouting about it for all to hear, said he was marching straight up 2 Colin's office to report them. Dunno who it is though, bloody wrong ain't it?

Sherlock read the response aloud to John, a frown evident on his features, before sighing and locking the device. "John-"

"This is a nightmare" the teacher's muffled voice returned, his face buried in his hands.

Sherlock moved to stand behind John's figure, feeling responsible for John's reaction. "We can leave." he said immediately. "This is perfect timing."

"No- Sherlock," he sighed, turning to face the man. "Nothing about this is perfect, I'm going to lose my job, there's no way I can sit there and deny everything knowing how often we've been spotted together lately. Mrs Hudson knows- now Kevin, who probably whipped out a tape recorder too while he was at it- Jesus-" John shook his head, pausing his rambling. "Sherlock, what are we going to do?"

"I told you that Mrs Hudson can be trusted," he sat back on the edge of John's bed. "You are letting emotion cloud your rational thinking, we- well more likely I would have noticed any potential recording devices as protruding shapes, he will have little evidence against us aside from..."
his word."

John scowled back at the young man, "Rational thinking? What do you expect me to do? Sit back and hope that this is all just coincidental?"

"The universe is rarely so lazy," Sherlock sighed, "No- the rumours are about us. You will be called into the head's office first thing tomorrow morning, probably me too."

"Would they wait that long to question us after such a serious allegation has been made?"

"Without hard evidence, most likely" he replied, his fingers steepled underneath his chin.

"So what do we do?" The exhaustion was evident in the doctor's voice as he turned away from the window finally, hands on his hips, facing Sherlock.

Sherlock was quiet for a moment, his eyes focused on John's. "Escape."

John sighed. "We aren't in some fantasy fiction novel, Sherlock."

"Don't be ridiculous. I know that." John looked at his own tired eyes in the mirror across the room.

"Where would we go?"

"I told you, I already have an acceptable escape route planned." Sherlock blinked at him.

John raised his eyebrows. "Yes, but where to?"

"It's a secret." Sherlock smiled lopsidedly, and John's heart leaped in his chest.

"Fine. Be all suspicious- but- what do we take with us? How much money will we need? Do I need to-?"

"Just follow my lead, John." The young man stood quickly, grasping the doctor's forearms. "I promise you everything will go to plan."

_________________________________________

Mycroft's agents were on red alert. After searching the premises of the Holmes' estate four times over and finding little evidence to suggest that Mr Holmes' brother had returned home had begun to make the panic set in.

The two guards on school-duty who were to survey Sherlock Holmes' movements had been distracted when a 'ridiculously attractive' teacher in a crimson red dress and legs longer than anything had crossed their path on the way to her car, stopping for a 30 second chat and officially, yet unbeknownst to her, concealing Sherlock's speedy movements past their checkpoint (later indicated by the CCTV footage).

Agents Harding, Jackson, and Smith of the CCTV team on-duty that day had only been able to follow the young man to the edge of a shadowed flat where the boy slipped into the darkness in a swift feline-like movement, effectively finding a security-camera blind-spot.

The official decision had been made that evening by Chief Superintendent Martins to send out double the force of agents that night to the younger Holmes' typically favoured hiding places,
turning them upside down in the hopes they would find him amongst one of them.

None of the trained killers needed to be told twice when reminded of the threat of the consequences otherwise, one by one, agents stepped down from considerations of who should be the one to phone the iceman first thing in the morning if his younger brother was not found.

"Shhh!" Sherlock hissed into the darkness. "Stop clobbering everything together."

John looked up at his almost-lover with a powerful glare, his head ducked under the doorway of the rear-passenger seats. "Do I look like I'm doing it intentionally? You could at least give me a hand-"

"On second thoughts..." Sherlock turned quickly, jogging back around the shape of John's car which shone dully in the dim light of the street-lamp.

John huffed. "Where are you going?" He slammed the door shut and went around to the open passenger door to peer inside at Sherlock.

"Are you finished?" he looked back at John and asked impatiently, fingers curled tightly around the steering wheel.

John blinked back at him, "You're driving?"

"Obvious, John. I'm the only one who knows where we're going." Sherlock frowned at him, questioning the idiocy of the average human brain.

John slid into the other seat with a sigh, "I was going to offer to drive, since I'm assuming it will be long-haul, and I doubt you've driven out of London before."

Sherlock raised an eyebrow, looking down at the pedals at his feet. "You would assume that."

"What- You have?"

The car jolted unexpectedly before Sherlock managed to reverse out of a box-space John had parked in earlier that afternoon. He put his arm around the back of John's seat as he looked out of the rear-view mirror at the car behind him. The sky was at its darkest point and littered with stars mostly concealed by the foggy London-polluted air.

"As always, John, you underestimate me." Sherlock smiled crookedly at the confusion on the doctor's face, finally driving off down the road and turning onto the main road, putting his foot down.

The silhouette flickered manically against the walls of the weakly lit hallway, hands quickly and mechanically cracking at the lock of the door, tools wedged solidly against the pegs inside. A final click sounded and the man pressed hurriedly down on the stiff handle, forcing himself through the door and reaching for the night goggles hooked to his bullet-proof vest.

The room was silent save for the irritating buzzing of a trapped fly repeatedly smashing itself
against a closed window. With surprisingly quiet footsteps considering the weight and size of the chunky black boots, he moved forward, eyes scanning the shapes of the lab tables, sweeping over the open door to a separate adjoined room at the back before moving towards it quickly, gun in hand.

He nudged the door open with the steel-cap of his toe, turning quickly around the corner, gun raised to fire, and came face-to-face with shelves full of beakers and pipettes.

They'd just made it on to the M6 and picked up speed when John turned to see Sherlock's face half illuminated by the moonlight, his angled cheek, chin and nose divided by various shadows, the curls of his fringe flitting in the breeze coming in from the driver-side window cracked down a little.

Unable to speak, he looked down at his own hand and moved it to Sherlock's muscled thigh. He felt a slight flinch at the unexpected touch, and looked up to Sherlock's eyes which immediately softened when they met John's, then eventually returned to the road. Finding the urge to stroke his thumb continually against the fabric of the younger man's suit trousers, John looked back out at the blur of movement in the view of his own window and tapped his left hand against his own knee to imaginary music in his head.

He sat on the front of the teacher's desk and reached for his flask, taking a swig of water and sighing with exhaustion. He'd raided half of the locations on the list in two hours with no luck whatsoever. He pushed up his black mask over his face, wiping at the sweat gathered on his forehead before reaching for the phone strapped to his belt.

He stabbed at the speed-dial number and took another drink waiting for the ringing to cut out. Finally, it did. "Well?"

"He's not here." He grunted back, only to be met with silence.

He was just about to terminate the call when the other voice sounded again. "Move on to the next one."

The line went dead and he rose to his feet, pulling the mask back down over his face and holstering his gun, heading for the door.

"John?" a muted voice filtered into his consciousness.

He felt a hand at the back of his neck, strong but not forceful; caressing, almost. "John..."
"Huh?" He blinked slowly, aware of an unattractive line of drool beginning to slide out of his mouth. He swiped at it quickly, eyes refocusing on the iciness of the blue irises across from him. His eyes fell to the defined bow of an upper-lip not too far away from his own lips.

He realised his hand had slid from Sherlock's thigh to the centre-console, just on the edge of his own seat, and lay limp. "What time is it?" He rubbed at his eyes, only just realising that Sherlock had pulled his hand away from his neck and that the car had stopped moving. "Where are we?"

Sherlock smiled fondly at the sleepy state of the man opposite him. "We should stop for the night, we're both tired."

Only then did John's eyes trace the faint circles underneath Sherlock's, the hooded lids and slouched shoulders. "You should have woke me." John reached forward with concern to caress his fingers along the edge of Sherlock's hair line, which only succeeded in making the young man sleepier.

Sherlock didn't reply, but nodded his head towards the building situated across the car-park that John hadn't noticed. The neon letters that had probably once worked flickered in the distance, and John was only able to make out three of them.

"Mtl?"

"Motel." Sherlock corrected.

John looked at him and deadpanned "How romantic of you."

"Shush, it's only for tonight," Sherlock checked the handbrake and lifted his hips to feel his back pocket for his phone, pulling it out alongside his wallet. "Come on." he climbed out of his side, closing the door and waiting for a sleepless John to follow.

They checked in as a Mr Turner and a Mr Brugière, the latter apparently looked like Sherlock but had a heavy French accent which John barely contained his laughter at until it burst out of him the moment they entered the lift. It really was such a shame that the only way Sherlock could manage to shut him up was by kissing him senseless against the mirrored walls of the lift until they reached floor 3 and Sherlock was striding out of the opened doors with their room key dangling from his fingers and a shell-shocked teacher still glued to the wall.

After fiddling with the cheap and probably broken lock, Sherlock let them both into an unimpressive room which neither of them cared enough about to notice. Sherlock was thrown off guard by the domesticity of the roles they immediately fell into, taking turns in the small bathroom whilst the other got changed for bed and moved their bags into the bedroom.

John was sitting on the side of the bed in his navy boxers and a white t-shirt staring at his own hands when Sherlock exited the en-suite and turned off the light. He stared at the older man looking back at him with uncertainty, thankful for the calming aura John was clearly attempting to emanate. The bed-side lamp emitted a dimmed glow, bathing John's warm features with a pale yellow tinge, highlighting the softness of his features and contrasting the gunmetal blue of his eyes.

"Come here," he said quietly, his legs apart, arms outstretched, and Sherlock moved cautiously towards him, stood with his unsure hands at his sides until John wrapped his arms around his flat
stomach and buried his face into the soft cotton of Sherlock's grey t-shirt. "You okay?" he mumbled.

Sherlock nodded, and then foolishly realised that John couldn't see his face, "Yes, fine."

Pulling back slightly, he looked up to the student's face, suddenly aware of the implications that came along with the two of them sharing a bed. "Hey-" he started, his hands stroking rhythmically up and down Sherlock's sides. "I'm not expecting anything from you here, just sleeping, no funny business."

Not meeting his eyes, Sherlock glanced nervously to the side and let out a breath, startling John with the sudden prominent appearance of his youth in one simple action. "Promise?" he asked, apprehensively.

"Promise." John smiled, his arms fully wrapped around Sherlock's waist. "Now come on, I don't bite."

John shifted back on the bed to the far side, watching Sherlock climb on and crawl towards him atop the covers. He fell on his side next to John and obliged when John pulled him closer with an arm around his waist, placing his own hand on John's unbelievably muscled chest and gazing in wonderment at the situation he'd found himself in.

"So," John started, trying to take both of their minds off everything that was going on. "Any clues to where we're heading?"

"I've already answered this question." Sherlock squinted at him.

"Yes, but," John smoothed his own hand up Sherlock's chest, his fingers resting on his shoulder. "I was hoping that you'd give in and tell me if I asked you enough."

Sherlock hummed with false suspicion in reply to John's innocent smile and on instinct moved forward to nuzzle his face into the side of John's exposed neck.

"Hey," John said, moving his hand to stroke up Sherlock's back. "What's all this? You're not shy, are you?"

Sherlock shook his head against John's shoulder, almost clinging to him as John manoeuvred himself to lay on his back, allowing Sherlock to rest on his chest.

"Sherlock-" he said softly, placing his hands either side of the student's head and managing to tilt his face back up. "It's just me."

Seeming to find something in John's words, Sherlock sprung forward to capture John's lips against his own. Surprised by the reaction of his partner, John eagerly pressed back, attempting to match Sherlock's erratic pace.

Both of John's hands were pressed to Sherlock's face and neck, and Sherlock found himself migrating onto his stomach, one of his legs between John's, until he sat up and forced Sherlock backwards. Their kiss deepened once again as Sherlock moved onto John's lap, feeling the heat of the room surrounding them and stubbornly ignoring the desire to lift John's shirt over his head and just touch.

"Sherlock-" He gasped, hands at the younger man's hips now, feeling the roughness of barely-there stubble brushing against his own lips and chin, revelling in the dizziness of emotion and pleasure that plagued his senses, something he hadn't experienced in a long time just from kissing.
He was immediately distracted by an almost inaudible gasp from Sherlock when John moved his tongue into his mouth, meeting the softness of Sherlock's velvet tongue, caressing expertly and pulling away to meet Sherlock's bowed lips. Surprised to hear a soft moan escape his own throat, John gripped Sherlock's body in his hands, turning it over quickly and skilfully, falling to his elbows over him and feeling the fire that consumed his every nerve ending at the feeling of Sherlock's body pressed tightly and solidly against his own.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for the support lately, I really appreciate all of your kind comments. I have decided to carry on with the fic as long as people are still interested in it, please feel free to leave me any reviews, thoughts or suggestions in the comment box :)

I remember us alone, waiting for the light to go,

Don't you feel that hunger? I've got so many secrets to show.

If there was a window in their room, it would have been drenched with steam from the heat emanating from the two bodies. A voice in the back of John's head was screaming at him, *too much, too fast!* But his body thought otherwise, and apparently, so did Sherlock's.

"John-" he gasped, his head falling backwards onto the pillow, as John's lips made their way up the column of his pale throat, making Sherlock question if he was even in the room anymore, his body felt so alight he wasn't sure he was even still connected to it.

"Like that?" John asked, breathy and deep, feeling Sherlock's fingers tightening in his hair.

Overwhelmed by the permission to touch each other which they had been deprived of for so long, the pressure of touch felt like some sort of sacred addiction between the two men, caught up in a moment of passion.

John hummed against Sherlock's prominent adam's apple, spurred on by the fleeting touches of Sherlock's long and delicate fingers at the base of his skull.

Consumed by the familiar warmth of a body underneath him, John acted on instinct, pressing his lips against Sherlock's into a deep kiss, his hand fell to the space of mattress at Sherlock's side, before moving to the hem of his t-shirt. He rubbed his thumb at the younger man's hipbone before sliding his hand up and underneath the material, against soft-untouched skin. John's hands kept moving, his fingertips grasped his young lover's waistband instinctively.

And suddenly, Sherlock was gone. Having pushed John away with surprising strength and wriggled off the bed, around to the other side and pressed his back to the door, breathing heavily, wide eyes like a startled animal.

*Shit.* John pulled himself up, scrambling off the bed and towards Sherlock who looked as though he were being approached by a mass murderer. He held his hands out to request distance, and John paused, his chest rising and falling with short of breath.

"I'm- God- Sherlock. I'm so sorry- I...fuck. I promised I wouldn't- and I..." He rubbed his eyes with his fists and tried to figure out a way to prise Sherlock from the door and convince him that he wasn't about to force him into anything he didn't want to do. Which was going to be difficult considering his previous actions from just a moment ago.

"I'm so sorry. Please forgive me, God I don't know what came over me-" he shook his head, panic rising in his chest. "Well. You did. I just...We haven't been together in so long, and I thought...Shit, I don't know what I thought."

Sherlock stared at him, looking confused, eyes slightly unfocussed and dazed.
"John-" his voice finally cracked, quiet and distant, watching John who looked like he was afraid to be within even a metre of him.

John remained silent, his lips pressed together as if he were worried as soon as they opened all manner of things would come tumbling out with little control. Instead, he watched Sherlock carefully, watched his eyes which were unfocused but were attempting to land on Sherlock.

Sherlock shook his head, looking slightly ill in John's opinion, and stepped away from the door, wiping his palms on his t-shirt. "I apologise, I don't know what came over me."

"You apologise? You have nothing to apologise for, Sherlock." John gave him a look of bewilderment.

Instead of making eye contact, Sherlock moved slowly back towards the bed, sitting tentatively down the edge of it and waiting for John to do the same before he spoke. John sat next to him on the bed, noticing the difference in the size of his own muscled thighs compared to Sherlock's slightly thinner ones.

"It's not you- really- it's..." John watched as the young man looked at the ground with what could only be described as a look of deep shame. "It's me."

"Hey-" he started, cautiously moving a hand towards Sherlock's, grasping it tightly when he saw no flinches or protests. "Nothing is your fault, it was me being an idiot, as usual, and not thinking with my brain."

"No- I don't..." Sherlock sighed. "I don't mean that, John. I mean--" his lips pressed tight together.

"What is it?" John asked, his hand going to its favourite place, the curls at the nape of Sherlock's neck.

"Just- what you did. It reminded me..."

Struggling to see his partner in such distress, John winced visibly, not wanting Sherlock to continue from the clear discomfort it was causing him, but simultaneously not wanting to interrupt. He made a quick decision whilst Sherlock sat looking slightly green and deep in thought. "Come on, let's lay down."

Sherlock frowned with confusion back at him, watching the doctor lay on his back on his own side of the bed, turning onto his side and putting his hand under the pillow his head lay on. He looked up at Sherlock expectantly, and Sherlock joined him on top of the covers, lying on his back for a moment until he felt comfortable to face John on his own side.

"So when I was...it reminded you of what exactly?" He asked softly, not wanting to force Sherlock into admitting anything he might have changed his mind about revealing.

"I've been in a similar situation before." He admitted with some element of coldness or detachment in his voice. When John met his eyes, he wished so intensely he could enter the mind of the brilliant Sherlock Holmes. Wished he could climb in and walk around in it, know what it was like to live as the extraordinary man, someone so capable of so many things, though completely incapable of others, wished he could understand, wished he could know of his clearly troubled past.

"Right, okay," John nodded somewhat over-enthusiastically. "I take it that it wasn't...a good experience?"

Sherlock raised an eyebrow. "Putting it lightly." he sighed, finally finding the confidence to meet
John’s intense gaze from across their pillows. "It was against my will."

John’s stomach turned. "God, Sherlock." he whispered, placing his hand at the back of the genius' neck. "How old were you?"

"Twelve? Thirteen? I don't remember exactly." Sherlock sniffed, looking at the stained motel ceiling from their lumpy double-bed.

The doctor closed his eyes, "How old was he? Or she?"

He hesitated. "Seventeen."

"Truthfully?"

Sherlock sighed. "Nineteen."

"Fuck-- Sherlock...that- that counts as abuse! How...far did it go?"

The genius squirmed uncomfortably. While he was revealing this to John, John of all people, the only person he had let in for years, his throat still felt caught, restricted, thick with dastardly emotion. He recalled the first time he laid eyes upon the trademark smirk he'd become so accustomed to over the month that he was involved with the boy.

Sherlock met him at a summer camp his parents dragged him along to while Mycroft was off on some fox-hunting trip with his boarding school. It was clearly somewhere for the refined, the 52 acre stretch of land hosted golf clubs, spas and royal baths, cricket and tennis courts; anything you could possibly imagine in an upper-class lodge. Sherlock hated it.

He'd pulled himself up on the edge of the swimming pool and introduced himself as James.

Sherlock had originally been awestruck by him, entranced. Immediately deducing James' age, he often found himself laying awake each night at the resort, staring at the ceiling and recounting James' gradual advancing actions towards him, recalling his elevated breathing rate and dilated pupils. Sherlock remained indifferent, himself.

He hounded Sherlock for weeks before he managed to force himself into Sherlock's bedroom. He claimed he was frustrated with Sherlock's unresponsiveness towards him, and it was the most logical solution for them to work out their 'problem' physically. Having found the most opportune time, Sherlock's temporary apartment was vacant whilst his parents were out for a club meeting, and James would touch him, always being stronger than the gangly young boy.

He never screamed, he thrashed, scratched, shoved, and bit as hard as he could. Nothing seemed to deter the figure of heavy black eyes and gelled hair. James' glowing white teeth held the familiar cunning grin of a wolf sizing up its prey, and his hands wandered. They never stopped. Sherlock grew tired.

He told John with as much nonchalance that he could muster that it had happened no less than 5 times, and resolutely told himself not to look at John's expression. He worried of the reaction of his new lover, not knowing what John would think of him, considering Sherlock had a false reputation of being promiscuous amongst the student body, though he was never quite sure of the origin of those rumours. Just as he was beginning the familiar process of trying to eliminate possible instigators from his list of suspects, he felt John's hand touch his face, it was shaking slightly.

He sighed, his eyes like muted sapphire shot through with amber-gold and whitish grey undertones moved to Sherlock's face, lingered and then closed. Sherlock reached out and felt for
John’s elevated pulse in his thick wrist.

"Did you ever tell anybody?" He asked after a long while of silence, shifting closer to Sherlock's body on top of the rustling covers.

The garish purple curtains seemed to hurt Sherlock’s eyes even in the darkness, he frowned and tucked his head under his own arm, burying deeper into his pillow as John watched him.

"Father knew." He admitted. "I'm sure of it, he deduced it the second he saw us after the first time."

John grimaced, "And he never said anything? Didn't try to stop it?" Sherlock shook his head.

He remained silent, wondered at Sherlock's childhood, thought of the masses of locked doors he always faced whenever he stood opposite Sherlock Holmes, wondered if he'd ever be shown a key.

"I had no idea." John mused to himself, his voice laced with shock.

"How were you to know? You don't have my deductive or intellective capabilities."

"No, but I am a doctor, Sherlock."

Sherlock frowned at him. "An army doctor."

"I did some locum work for 6 months before meeting Mike who put me on to teaching." John admitted, moving his hand to Sherlock's waist and resting it there gently whilst the genius tried to look unaffected by the touch. "Sometimes you come across...emotional or mental issues with patients feeling depressed, often after extensive forms of...sexual, emotional, physical abuse"

"It wasn't like that." he sniffed in response, rolling his eyes up indignantly. John knew that it was, even if Sherlock wasn't willing to admit it, or hadn't realised the extent of it himself yet.

"Okay," he sighed, pulling Sherlock's body flush to his own. John decided to drop the matter, it clearly wasn't helping Sherlock to revisit his memories, and John himself was beginning to get more furious by the second that he couldn't find this guy and beat the living crap out of him. Someday, he thought, squeezing Sherlock's body closer to his chest.

The morning came unrealistically quickly, so soon that when John opened his eyes he felt as though he'd only fallen asleep with Sherlock 30 minutes ago. Looking down to his own body above the covers, across from Sherlock's, jogged his memory, and he immediately sought the embrace of his partner. As reassurance if anything else. Reassurance that Sherlock was okay. Or would be for now, at least, until they could get away from everything that was happening to them.

Sherlock groaned. "Stop moving." he was face down in his own pillow, his voice muffled.

"I'm trying to keep us warm." John grouched back. He'd begun moving the covers from underneath their legs in an attempt to pull them over the two bodies, feeling the chill of the air on their naked legs.

"Ridiculous, John." he stropped, immediately reaching for the doctor's arm, which had moved from its place around Sherlock's waist, and pulled it back to its original position. John tried to conceal his shock, but went along with the younger man's continued pulling until they were fully
facing each other, hugged into each-other as if they were outside in the snow in the dead of winter.

Sherlock only seemed to realise what he had done when he blinked his eyes open to find John's sleepy lashes millimetres away, wide eyed and soft, scanning over Sherlock's face with a look of fascination and bewilderment. A quick scan of the other man's face had him concluding John felt as little rested as he himself did. He'd just noticed the curve of a vague sleep-wrinkle on John's cheek before it had moved out of view and he felt the soft and slow pressure of lips against his own, brushed with a hint of stubble Sherlock still wasn't used to.

John sighed into the kiss. "Mmm-" Relishing in the privacy of the room, he allowed his hands to wander across Sherlock's distinctive face, his thumbs falling victim to the sharp curve of cheekbones underneath the sensitive temple of Sherlock's skull. He marvelled at the fact that he had a sanctuary between his hands, a supernova.

"You think very loudly" Sherlock spoke between their closed lips, his hand moving to John's shoulder.

"Stop pretending you're psychic."

"I am." Sherlock frowned, pushing at John's chest until he rolled onto his back and pushed himself up onto his elbows to hover over him. "Are you hungry? Isn't that something that you do...breakfast?"

"Stop pretending you're some sort of alien species." he giggled in return, moving and tugging his fingers through the hair at the nape of Sherlock's neck. "You have to eat too."

"When did we agree that?"

"Just now." John said and kissed him. "Come on, E.T." John hauled himself out of bed, patting Sherlock's hip and moving towards the bathroom. He closed the door with the sound of a muffled groan, as Sherlock buried his head underneath the pillow.

Having stuffed themselves with packaged pastries and fresh coffee from a nearby petrol station, Sherlock had returned to the reception and handed in their keys with a flourish; thanking the irritated receptionist loudly in a broken French accent, effectively waking her from her peaceful daydream.

After denying John's offer to drive once again, the younger man had taken the wheel, a comfortable silence filling their private bubble of the car, partly helped by the rather emotional revelation they'd both lived through the night before. It wasn't long, though, before the silence became punctured with a feeling opposed to comfort.

"John-" Sherlock frowned, glancing over to the man for the fifth time in the last two minutes. "What is the matter with you?"

Surprised to be addressed, the teacher looked up to Sherlock, exposing the suppressed panic in his eyes. Sherlock had been driving for two hours before he noticed the sudden increase of shiftiness, John had been checking his phone, biting his nails, tapping his foot, glancing out of the window often, and a slight sheen of sweat had begun to form around his hairline.

"Nothing! I'm fine-" he replied overenthusiastically.
"You are not fine." Sherlock stated, glancing in his rear view mirror automatically, scanning his view for the appearance of any over-friendly or familiar cars that could be following them.

"I just...Friends...from work, are texting me. Asking where I am and - Greg has sent me a message defending me against the accusations- and I just-"

"Okay." Sherlock pulled over abruptly, switching lanes until he was able to access the hard-shoulder.

"What are you doing?" John screeched as they almost collided with an upcoming Jeep.

Sherlock killed the engine and pulled at the handbrake. "Give me your phone", he held out his hand towards John with an expectant eyebrow raised.

**Missed call (x2) Mike Stamford**

**Text message: Mike Stamford**

John, don't know where you are but everyone lookin for you. Think you should come in and tell them they're wrong from what they sayin about you.

Missed call (x3) Work
Missed call (x6) Greg Lestrade

**Text message: Greg Lestrade**

Hi mate, don't know what you've heard but there's a couple nasty rumours going round about you, I've told them all where to go. Just need you to come in so I can prove my point, where are you anyway?

**Text message: Greg Lestrade**

Some of the stuff they were sayin about you and Sherlock ridiculous, don't worry I can back you up, I can vouch for you two just being good mates or whatever. I know you were another mentor to him.

He looked over to John, who was staring solemnly at his own hands, portraying signs of anxiousness

and avoiding Sherlock's gaze.

"If I can't be there to deny the allegations, they will be perceived as true." John muttered.

"You knew that when we agreed to leave together." Sherlock said cautiously.

"I know...I just, didn't expect it to affect me like this."

"Your career is important to you." He stated.

"Yes." John nodded, his forehead scrunched up in a frown. "But I know now-"

Sherlock turned to him, sensing that John was attempting to draw his attention.

"I know that nothing is more important than this. Me and you."
The sound of passing cars filtered through his consciousness as Sherlock remained silent, mirroring the position John had held moments ago, looking down at his hands. His own mobile buzzed in his pocket.

John watched him as he slowly thumbed open the lock screen to be met with notifications of his own. "4 Missed calls, Sixth form." he read aloud in his baritone voice. "Text. From...Lestrade?" he frowned in confusion, until the lines quickly disappeared from his face in realisation. "Must have accessed my file from the school database."

"What does it say?" John crowded closer to his shoulder to see the screen and began reading the text aloud.

"Sherlock, it's Lestrade. I don't know what stunt you are pulling this time by not coming in but I'm asking you personally to quit it for a second and come prove to these idiots that you aren't being groomed or molested by Dr Watson. Thanks."

John physically winced at the word. "Molested" he shook his head. "This is serious, Sherlock."

"It's been serious all along, you've just been neglecting to accept that."

"You think I haven't accepted it? Of course it's bloody serious-- I'm risking my job here!" He turned fully to face Sherlock.

John was sat looking like a man in turmoil, which he supposed that's what he was.

It scared the wits out of him that the young man opposite was already the most important person in his life after only becoming acquainted with him a few months prior to that feeling. John had once been called a romantic, and though he wasn't sure he lived up to the title, he definitely questioned his sanity whenever he felt the way he did looking at Sherlock Holmes.

He often felt quite positive he was about to develop heart-shaped pupils, or that he would begin burping actual butterflies from the swarm in his stomach, whenever he thought about the world's most intelligent and captivating human who was waiting for him at the end of each day.

"You told me once that relationships were about sacrifice." Sherlock's voice broke through, and John found himself spinning back into his memories of the second time Sherlock had entered his home, they'd laid together on John's bed which was partly riddled with biscuit crumbs and Sherlock had tried to convince him to leave with him.

"I did." John nodded. "They are."

Sherlock looked at him. "So...?"

"So, let's leave," John said decidedly. "I've already determined that there's nothing more important to me right now than this." He let his hand fall atop Sherlock's folded ones and squeezed. "I just had a bit of a panic and forgot, that's all."

Sherlock sighed. "So much sentimentality. It's nauseating."

John smiled, his eyes falling to Sherlock's still lips. "You love it really."

Sherlock raised an eyebrow, pulled his hand from John's with a small smile and turned the key in the ignition.
The lack of expression in the cold voice on the other end of the line only terrified the superintendent more.

"So, what you are telling me," the haughty voice began, tension crushing like a vice over the inferior soldier. "Is that the highest capable soldiers and guards under my company, hand selected agents-have been outsmarted by a single eighteen year old?"

"Yes, Sir." he mumbled with embarrassment. "Sir- may I have permission to explai-

"No." The word sliced through the pleas, cold and unforgiving, relentless. "I will be returning tonight, ahead of schedule. You better have this mess sorted out before I arrive home, or I can reassure you on behalf of the British government that you will never work again."

The line buzzed a dead tone, mocking and continuous.

John stretched with a small squeak, mid-yawn, blinking himself awake from his nap. Sherlock had the radio on its quietest setting, emitting slow classical music.

"Hello" he smiled sideways at John, reaching to change the station before John stopped him.

"You don't have to change it for me- I'm getting used to classical actually. Makes me feel like I'm in a Spielberg movie."

"A what?" Sherlock stared over at him with a look close to horror.

"Stephen Spielberg?" John paused for a moment, seeing the clueless look on Sherlock's face, and giggled. "Never-mind. Where are we?"

"Just on the outskirts of Manchester." Sherlock shifted in his seat, which prompted an impressive yawn from the driver.

John immediately moved his hand to Sherlock's thigh. "Are you tired? Let's swap over, I'll drive."

"I'm fine" Sherlock blinked, still focused on the warmth of John's palm that was seeping through the material of his trousers.

"Sherlock, I'd rather swap with you than have an accident," he stroked his hand rhythmically along the in-seam of Sherlock's trousers. "It's not a problem, come on."

Distracted by John's ministrations, he nodded absently.

"Pull over there, then." John pointed over to the hard shoulder with his free hand.

Sherlock sighed but obeyed, unbuckling his seatbelt as soon as they parked, just about ready to climb out before John stopped him with a hand on his chest. He turned back to him questioningly, only to be met with the liquid fire of John's eyes.

John was leaning over with hooded eyes and soft lips before he even realised himself. He managed to get the start of a snog in before Sherlock was pulling away quite quickly, looking away from him and out the window.

"What's wrong?" he moved a hand to the back of the younger man's neck.
"I'm just checking..." his eyes scanned the surroundings of the spaced trees around them, glaring at the shadows until he felt satisfied, and turned back to John, diving in to kiss his lips.

"What was that?" John said around the kiss, his hands reaching for Sherlock who was suddenly passionate, lips claiming John's with what seemed like the power and experience of someone at least 15 years his senior.

"Mycroft," he said, impatiently, moving to John's neck, seeking the location of the sensitive skin of his pressure point.

"Mycroft?" John frowned, his eyes rolling back in his head on the verge of a moan at the feeling of Sherlock's insistent lips against his skin. He cupped the back of his head, his other hand returning to its place on Sherlock's thigh, which stuttered under his touch.

Sherlock's resolve crumbled bit by bit as the heat rose inside the vehicle. Each time he felt John's sure grip on him he felt as though he might tip over the edge into primal animalistic sexual nature, worried he might hurt John in the haste he felt to get to him. He was sure he'd never felt such an intense physiological reaction from his body before, he was sure his biology was never set up to feel this way with anyone. No one before had even come close to making him feel how he felt with John. Even just standing in the same room as him convinced him that John was sending subconscious electrical signals, shocks, straight through his body and brain.

"I just can't keep my hands off you," John said, amazed. He pulled back to look at Sherlock's face, angles and shapes envious of a supermodel's facial features, wondering how the hell he ended up with someone so unfairly gorgeous.

Sherlock kissed him, his tongue pressing against John's lower lip. "Please don't try to" he smiled, pressing his nose against John's cheek. John smiled, the tip of Sherlock's nose falling against his dimpled cheek, his fingers moving against the smooth material of Sherlock's pressed shirt collar.

"I can't believe we're being punished for this. Good things are too often tainted with bad." John sighed.

"Good things are too often destroyed." Sherlock spoke in his baritone voice, his eyes speaking of sadness.

John pulled back and looked at him. "That won't happen to us."

Sherlock looked sceptical, his unsure eyes roaming over the lines of John's face. "There are quite a few variables working against us, John."

"Yes. But we know how we feel about each other, don't we?" John spoke with the sureness of his feelings towards the young man across from him. Even if he didn't know the extent of Sherlock's range of emotions or feeling towards anything let alone him, he knew he was regarded higher than most in Sherlock's eyes.

Sherlock nodded, allowing John to touch him for a moment longer before pulling away. "We should get going. We can't stay too long in the same place," He gestured to the steering wheel. "Mycroft."

"We're going to get caught straight away, aren't we?" John winced, looking over to Sherlock from the side.

He paused. "No. I told you, I have a plan." he grinned, pulling up the handbrake.

"Wait, wait-" John put his hand on Sherlock's. "I'm driving, get out."
Sherlock groaned, pushed down the hand-brake and pulled himself out of the car.

"Look, Greg. I understand your situation, I really do. You and John have always been good mates, it's only natural you'd want to defend him. But surely you can understand how serious this is?"

"With all due respect, Colin, surely you can understand how much of a lying tosser Kevin is? You know what he's like! All the trouble he's caused since he's been here speaks for itself. How can you tell this isn't just another one of his lies?"

Greg was exhausted. He'd been phoning, texting, emailing, God knows bloody everyone who had ever had any contact with John or Sherlock, desperately trying to reach them. He'd been at odds with everyone in the staff room who had questioned John's credibility as a teacher or human being. It was safe to say he was angry. He'd also managed to cause an argument with just about all of his colleagues whom he was previously pretty close with.

He'd crowded himself into the head's office first thing in the morning each day to try and weasel more information out of the fat bastard. Greg didn't understand how he and so many others were so quick to judge the person that they'd all worshipped at some point or another. John was a people pleaser, a true gent, everyone had always admired those qualities in him.

"I can tell because somebody else has come forward and offered a statement." The chubby man sat himself down in the sagged chair behind his desk and folded his hands atop his beer-belly.


"Will you calm yourself down?" The man raised his eyebrows at him. Greg paused and tried to reason with himself that the fat bastard was still his boss, and he'd rather not get fired. "Take a seat."

He sat in the uncomfortable chair opposite, leaning forward on his elbows and running a hand through his hair as the head-teacher began to speak.

"A year 12 student came to my office after-school yesterday. Sebastian Moran. Said he'd also had a similar run in with both parties involved. He'd interrupted a...meeting, of theirs. Said Dr. Watson got angry and threatened him when he claimed that he knew what was going on between him and Mr Holmes."

"Well he was bound to be angry! I would be angry if someone accused me of something like that when it isn't true!" Greg reasoned, frowning hard at the wood of the table in front of him.

"He also said that Dr. Watson propositioned him with a similar offer when Mr Holmes was not in the room."

Greg felt sick to his stomach. He didn't know Sebastian, but he'd heard of the sly little rat. Skinny little thing in the lower sixth, clearly a trust fund baby chucked into public school by stuck up parents who didn't care for a trouble-making homosexual son tarnishing their reputation. Or at least that's what he'd been told by Stamford when he'd first asked about him.

The only other time he'd became acquainted with Sebastian Moran was in the hallway outside his classroom, he'd given him a harsh word when he'd caught him crowding Sherlock into a corner calling him a 'psychopathic freak'. Unfortunately, finding Sherlock being teased wasn't such a rare
occasion. But however hard the hit, Sherlock always merely straightened his spine, pulled his satchel back over his shoulder and marched away with his usual expressionless face. Not a crack in that wall.

Greg sighed, running another hand through his hair.

"Well, is there evidence? How trustworthy is Moran as a source?" He questioned immediately.

"Greg," Colin began cautiously, his lips pressed together as he looked at the clearly distressed man. "You're not on the force anymore, this is none of your concern."

"It's nothing to do with-"

"No-" The head-teacher stopped him, holding a fat hand up to him. "I know you are worried for your friend. And I know you were close to Sherlock, too. But this is as far as it goes now. I appreciate your efforts in trying to contact John, but please let us handle it from now on."

Greg bit his tongue, feeling tired again. He knew the bags under his eyes were prominent and grey.

"Everything will turn out the way it should." Colin smiled at him which was obviously an attempt to reassure him, but just made Greg want to punch him in the face even more than he already did. "No need to concern yourself with this anymore. You should return to your usual schedule of teaching without wasting your time in here every morning."

Greg understood the message he was getting. _Shut the fuck up, back the fuck off, and get back to work._ He smiled politely to his boss. _No thanks, mate._

"Thank you, Sir." he replied dutifully, rising from his chair and leaving without another word.

He felt his phone vibrate in his pocket as soon as he left the stuffy office-room, he answered without checking the ID, heading outside to the staff smoking area.

He made it a point to not look anybody in the eye as he descended the steps of the plane, sniffing rudely even at the air hostesses who were their usual irritating and jolly selves stood at the exits wishing him a safe journey home.

He had a missed call from the prime minister’s secretary, and a thousand and one other things higher on his list of priorities and things to do.

"Mr Holmes?" a vaguely familiar voice sounded from behind him. He turned to face his newly appointed assistant. She'd only worked for him for about a week prior to his departure, but he found himself not hating her as profusely as he had all his previous assistants.

He greeted her in silence as she handed him a travel-cup of tea and gestured for him to follow her to the car parked on the tarmac. "As usual, passport control will not be necessary. Would you like to go to Downing Street first? Or would you prefer to return home before your meeting?"

"Take me home, I have some people to fire." he said with a grimace, buckling himself in and settling back in the leather seats, wishing they would swallow him whole.
"Which exit?" John asked as they approached the roundabout.

"Third. Actually, pull up just down the road after the roundabout." Sherlock's eyes seemed to be transfixed by something in the distance.

"Where am I going, Sherlock?" John asked impatiently, peering repeatedly in his side-view mirrors.

"Turn left here and try and find a parking spot."

Before John had even pulled into a space, Sherlock was opening the door and bounding out, jumping the wooden gate in front of them and landing in the outskirts of a large field of tall grass. "Sherlock!"

"Come on, John!" He shouted back to the man who was hurriedly trying to park and exit the car. Sherlock headed towards a prominent oak tree that was bent off to the side, running against the wind.

"I wish you'd tell me where you're headed before disappearing all the time!" He shouted after him, coming to an abrupt stop behind Sherlock who was examining the tree.

"This is an extremely rare tree, John." Sherlock told him, his hand touching the trunk as gently as John imagined one to hold a newborn. "A Cork oak." he nodded.

"How do you know?" John frowned, still breathing slightly irregularly from the running.

"Distinctive markings, prominent bark patterns in comparison to more ordinary oaks."

John nodded seriously, "Right. Yes."

"I've only ever seen them in books. I saw it from over there." Sherlock informed him, and John watched the setting sun filter through Sherlock's mused curls as he traced his fingers along a lowered branch that was on the verge of snapping.

He was so busy watching Sherlock, he hadn't noticed him turning to speak to him. "Unique." he said, watching John stare back at him with a pensive look on his face.

"Very," John agreed, watching the colours change in Sherlock's strange ethereal eyes.

"Come on," he propositioned to the teacher. "It's getting darker." He hesitated for a moment before holding out his hand, an almost timid look on his young face.

John smiled, the corners of his eyes crinkling only slightly, revealing his age in contrast to Sherlock's flawless pale skin; and let his hand be trapped between Sherlock's fingers.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for the slow update, its been the UK equivalent of finals at university for me over the past few months so I've had no time to continue the story. But now I'm free to write!
PLEASE REVIEW and let me know what you want to see the escapee couple get up to away from the supervision of London!
"Please, come in, come in." the chubby man cajoled, a smile plastered on his face. "Take a seat, Mr Holmes. Thank you ever so much for stopping by."

Mycroft took one pointed look at the head-teacher who was settling down in his own leather chair, one which had clearly dimpled from his weight, and remained standing.

The teacher's smile faded slightly as he wriggled around in his seat, the uncomfortable silence getting the better of him.

"I trust you have no further news after your futile attempts to contact your employee Doctor John Watson?" Mycroft's voice sliced through the quiet.

"Unfortunately not, Mr Holmes."

"That is unfortunate." Mycroft glared at him. He knew how useless the teacher had been in attempting to get in touch with John Watson, he'd had all phones and points of contact tapped to monitor progress. In fact it felt like he had had every phone in the entirety of London tapped and checked for news of his brother.

"I'm terribly sorry, we take full responsibility for our employee. Whilst Dr Watson has not technically been unlawful due to Mr Holmes' age, this kind of behaviour is obviously unacceptable. We will be having strong, strong words with John when he returns." The man sat back in his chair with his hands folded, seemingly satisfied with his defence.

Mycroft glanced upon the teacher's attempt at a comforting smile and looked away again, turning his body to the door.

"Thank you, sir, for you prove once again to be completely useless to me. Good day."

The head teacher watched the suited young man stroll out of the door in which he entered, his mouth agape, a deep frown creasing his face. He didn't even have a chance to formulate a response, before Mycroft disappeared around the corner.

"Gregory Lestrade?"

"Fucking hel- oh-" he hissed, almost falling backwards off his wheeled chair in surprise at the interruption of the quiet. His eyes swung back to the figure in the doorway, partially blocking out the light from the corridor with its height. The man's head fell just below the top of the door-way.

Greg stood in his bleary haze, focusing on the familiar figure, and immediately felt the adrenaline wash through him, his brain recognising a familiar pair of cerulean eyes, albeit shaped differently, and placed closer together. "That's me."

"I am aware you previously had a career at Scotland yard. Am I correct in believing you were respectfully released after a long period of depression, causing largely un-authorised absences from work, and triggered by the suicide of your younger sister?"
Greg felt the words like the sting of a cold razor against his face, like nails on a chalkboard, scratching slowly and painfully ringing in his ears. "Mr Holmes." he gritted his teeth. "With all due respect, I know you're a man of a certain level of power, but if you think you can just walk in here an-"

"Please, take a seat." Mycroft gestured to Greg's own discarded chair sat a small distance from his desk.

The teacher clenched his fists at his sides, flexing and releasing in a rhythm that almost began to feel therapeutic until he realised where he was, who he was with, and what was likely to happen next.

"Look-" Greg sighed, falling back into his chair. "I know you're here about Sherlock, and while it's understandable for you to be questioning any other members of staff who were remotely close to your brother after what's happened, I can assure you that my intentions were completely pur-"

"Where are they?" Mycroft leant forward, his gaze threatening and almost predatory, his voice sharp. Greg's eyes were drawn to the broadness of his shoulders, the shifting of muscle underneath the fabric. The man was incredibly lean, but Greg had noticed a slightly beefier body shape to the last time he'd saw the Holmes brother. Maybe he'd got a slimmer fitting suit?

"Who?" His eyebrows drew together in confusion.

"Don't give me an opportunity to insult your intellect," the suited man leant back. "Despite your disposition, you are an intelligent man. What do you think I am asking you?"

Greg stared at him for a moment, his mouth agape. "Surely you don't think I know where your brother is." he asked.

The suited man leant back in his chair, looking suddenly like most exhausted person in the world. Greg's face softened, he moved his elbows to his desk and leant forward on them, looking directly at Mycroft.

"Look- I can't imagine how you feel, they disappeared without a trace. But- If I can be of any assistance I will try my hardest to help you." He watched the tired man lift his head, "Besides, from how Sherlock goes on about you, I think he's more likely to get in contact with me first. John too for that matter."

Mycroft squinted at him, almost as if he were deliberating punching the teacher, rebuffing his offer to help. Greg held eye contact until he began to feel uncomfortable with the intensity, shifting in his seat.

Just as he was considering taking back his offer and apologising for overstepping, Mycroft Holmes stood. Greg rushed to mirror him, tucking his chair underneath his desk, slipping his hands into his pockets as Mycroft pulled out his pocket watch that hung on the end of a delicate gold chain at his waistcoat. "I have somewhere to be."

Greg nodded enthusiastically, almost knocking over a discarded mug in the process of moving closer to his door. Mycroft raised an eyebrow as Greg caught the mug, splashing his shirt with small speckles of cold coffee.

"Do you want my number?" Greg blurted out, settling the mug back down on his desk, and almost slapping himself straight away, "I mean- uh- you know, to call me- if you decide to use me. Not use me like that, I mean, utilise me."
Mycroft simply blinked at the man before him, feeling an absent thrill run through him for reasons undetermined. "I will contact you if I deem it necessary." he nodded. "Good day."

In an instant he was gone, and Greg was left alone in the small room, feeling his damp shirt stick to his stomach and an itchiness at his collar.

"Scotland?" John asked, bewildered.

They'd just exited Northumberland, before Scottish flags came into view, motorway signs indicating they were approaching the border between England and Scotland.

Sherlock tightened his grip on the steering wheel, saying nothing and glancing over to John, his mouth pressed in a line. "Not good?" he asked, after a moment of unsuccessfully trying to gauge John's reaction to his chosen destination.

"No! No- Sherlock," He blurted, smoothing a hand down the back of Sherlock's neck, resting it there as they pulled up to a lull in traffic. "Good- very good." he pressed a kiss to the corner of Sherlock's mouth, thrilling at the way his head turned to the left as if a magnetic force drew their lips together.

"I've just never been, is all." he said, sliding his hand down to Sherlock's thigh. "I've heard that it's beautiful."

"It is," he smiled, releasing some of his previous tension in the process. He felt secure under John's grip, grounded. "I used to come here as a child, my father's family is Scottish."

John raised his eyebrows, momentarily becoming distracted by the vast rolling green hills that came gradually into view. "A Scotsman, ey?" he grinned. "How come I've never seen you in your kilt?"

Sherlock smirked, tightening his grip on the steering wheel with a glance to his partner. "Some things are better left to the imagination, John."

Greg stared blankly at the wall of confectionary, squinting at the small stickers indicating the price of each box of chocolates. It was his mother's birthday coming up, and, same as every year, he hadn't got a clue what to get her. Women liked chocolates, right?

Greg sighed.

"You gonna buy anything then?" A voice broke through his daydream, a voice belonging to a teenage girl sat at the counter chewing gum loudly and filing her pink nails, one ear pressed to a mobile phone on her shoulder. Greg sighed again, shook his head and went straight for the exit.

He was just about to text his brother, when his phone lit up in his hand. Unknown number.

He frowned, picking up the call. "Hello?"

"Get in the car." the voice said, sounding way too familiar to be coincidental.

Greg raised his eyebrows, "Mycroft?" he was just about to start walking again when he noticed a
lustrous black car to the left of him, a chauffeur stepped out abruptly and held open the door with an expectant look.

"Yes. Get in." Mycroft said, hanging up.

Greg didn't even hesitate, climbing into the dimly lit car with tinted windows. Foolishly, for some reason he'd expected Mycroft to be in one of the back seats, but they were empty. He didn't try to reason with the driver, just submitted silently and watched the buildings pass by with a gnawing touch of anxiety.

The car twisted and turned around unfamiliar streets, until they ended up in a quieter and significantly grander area of central London. Greg frowned at the towering pallid terraced houses, recognising the location instantly from a sign showing Eaton Square. "Of course he lives in fucking Belgravia."

"We have arrived, sir." A voice called from the front of the vehicle. "Number 48."

Greg thanked the driver as he climbed out of the car, who nodded back to him and started off down the way they'd came. Greg stood on the pavement outside the mass of a building, eyes flickering over the wrought iron gates either side of the closed front door. He wiped his palms on his trousers, smoothed the creases out of his shirt, and reached forward to press the doorbell.

The door opened before he'd even made contact with the button, and Greg was faced with yet another smartly dressed stranger who looked him up and down once, and stepped aside with an arm gesturing further into the house.

"I presume I'm in the right place?" Greg asked unsurely, looking around at the high ceilings and large pristine mirrors framed with vases.

The servant opened his mouth to speak, but was interrupted by a new voice coming from behind Greg. "Of course."

The teacher turned, facing an elegantly dressed younger man, minus the usual umbrella or cane. His tie-pin glistened in the centre of his attire, light reflecting from the luxurious chandeliers. "Mycroft."

Mycroft Holmes nodded, his eyes scanning Greg's body, recognising a new pair of jeans, rolled at the ankle to reveal navy socks obviously given to him by his worrisome and sentimental mother who was currently going through a particularly bad bout of arthritis. He halted his deductions, blinking at the ex-inspector and clearing his throat. "This way."

Greg followed, his attention at Mycroft's slim waist and full shoulders, the cut of his suit falling just above his behind--

"I do apologise for the interruption. Did you find anything for your Mother's 63rd birthday?"

Greg's mouth went dry. "I- No. I didn't- how did you-"

"Any progress?"

"Progress?" Greg struggled to keep up with those long legs.

"On learning the whereabouts of my brother and Doctor Watson. I know you haven't had any
cellular contact with either of them since the last time I saw you.”

Greg bit his lips together, chewing on the inside absently as he took in Mycroft's meaning. "I doubt they would contact me."

"More likely you than me." Mycroft squinted with a curl of a smile, it was humourless, and Greg wondered for the hundredth time at the nature of Sherlock and his brother's strange relationship.

Without realising his feet were taking him into a new room, Greg nearly tripped at a raised doorstep, only being able to stop as Mycroft threw an arm across to prevent him from falling. Only then did he realise where they were.

It seemed that a once white minimalistic room had been transformed and divided into hubs of technology, large screens stacked next to each other on the wall, framed by smaller ones blinking fuzzy CCTV footage for 3 seconds each before changing to a different location. Greg's mouth hung open, he felt useless in the busy room, there were men and women typing away rapidly, some rushing around holding iPads, folders, or sheets with different passport stills printed on them. They all seemed to concentrate even harder when Mycroft entered the room.

He sighed, checking his pocket watch which sat snugly in the pocket of his waistcoat. "Hourly report, Michael?" He called, stood to the side of Greg offering no explanation.

Suddenly a shorter man appeared at his side, glasses slightly askew, hair messy and arms full of clipboards. "Yes, sir. We have some more character profiles from latest utilised passports matching your brother's description. I have organised them into piles of relevance and statistical likeliness to be valid."

Mycroft raised his eyebrows at the man, his hand twitching as he cleared the closest desk and gestured for the clerk to place the clipboards down on the surface.

Greg moved closer to Mycroft, peering over his shoulder as the cold grey eyes scanned mechanically over 30 or so passport photographs, all of them looking startlingly similar to Sherlock's day to day appearance. A few workers jumped in their seats at the sound of the first crash, as Mycroft pushed insignificant boards onto the floor, his arms moving quickly until they paused mid-air, hovering over one on the top line.

At first glance, Greg didn't see Sherlock at all, he saw a spotty, chubbier faced teenager, with longer hair, wearing a black t-shirt emblazoned with the lettering 'My Chemical Romance', clearly a teen-punk-rock band that Sherlock would undoubtedly despise. "You can't be serious-" he started, "It looks nothing like him!"

"Precisely." Mycroft hummed, ripping the sheet from the metal clip. "This one, enlarge it." he thrust the sheet towards Michael, who stood with an empty clipboard hugged to his chest. He became alive all of a sudden, taking the sheet and running to the closest computer, clicking rapidly, and slamming the photo face down into an adjacent high-tech scanner.

Mycroft crowded over him, a hand on the back of his chair. Greg certainly didn't envy the poor kid, having the pressure of such a man as Mycroft Holmes breathing down his neck.

"Finished, sir." Greg whistled appreciatively, it had only taken him 10 seconds. Greg knew if it were him, it would've taken him longer than that just to figure out how to work the confusing looking keyboard. He wondered what Mycroft could want with him here.

The surrounding workers were silent, waiting with bated breath as Mycroft moved closer to the screen, irises flickering quickly across the enlarged photo of the boy. Greg's eyes were drawn to
the collar of the boy's shirt, noticing the lack of thin and prominent collar bones from Sherlock's gaunt form.

The other things, like the hair, the t-shirt, even the fullness of his cheeks, Sherlock could fake, but putting that much weight on in the space of a week? Greg knew it was impossible. Mycroft had come to the same conclusion, seconds before.

He sighed, waving a hand in the direction of the screen and stalking off towards a darker corner of the room, concealed by the shadows of the towers of stacked and blinking computer modems. Greg followed him, noticing the tail end of his suit rounding a corner through a door concealed at the back.

They'd entered another room, it was small and more homely, decorated with armchairs, lamps, sofas, small statuettes, and paintings on the wall.

"Are you okay?" Greg asked, watching Mycroft's stiff back as he faced out of the window.

"Fine." he said abruptly, not turning around.

The older man put his hands in his pockets, staring tiredly at the glass teacups placed in the corner of the room on a small vintage coffee table until Mycroft spoke again.

"He hasn't left the country." he said, sounding sure. "He won't have risked being caught in a location populated with such high security."

"Like an airport" Greg concluded. Mycroft nodded. "I just don't see why John would have gone along with this. Sherlock has some hair-brained ideas sometimes, John knows that, why would he have risked his job by not offering any explanation of the truth? He was clearly just worried about Sherlock, as he usually is, and wanted to make sure he wasn't hurting himself...I don't understand why he would let people accuse him of being something he isn't."

Mycroft turned, his eyes boring straight into Greg's. "You have no idea, do you?"

Greg's eyebrows pulled together in confusion. "What?"

"The nature of their relationship. Sherlock's convinced they're an item." He said with disgust.

"An item? But...nothing ever happened--" he trailed off, thinking back to their behaviour around each other. He'd only managed to catch a few furtive glances that immediately sprung to the forefront of his memory, but apart from that, his brain was struggling to force the concept of the rumours actually being true to his list of possibilities.

"The reason you're here, is because I was hoping to take you up on the offer of your help into the investigation regarding the location of my brother and Doctor Watson. You're the only one who knew them both well. I feel your...insight, will be useful to us." Mycroft said quickly, his eyes on the ground.

"Okay..." Greg said, uncertain, as if questioning himself. He looked back towards the man opposite him, taking in Mycroft's cool exterior, the one that must be internally harvesting so much pain.

He sighed, running a hand through his hair. "Okay." he agreed, wondering what it was he was even getting himself involved in, as Mycroft imperceptibly nodded back to him.

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"The ETA of our destined location is within three hours minus expected traffic, therefore I am suggesting we stop at Edinburgh before it gets dark to eat."

John looked over to Sherlock, "You're hungry?" he asked, surprised.

"Well, I suppose I'll have to be, seeing as you're enjoying pushing me into the habit of eating." He rolled his eyes.

"I shouldn't have to push you into it, Sherlock. You're an expert Biology student, you know how poorly the body functions without any food source." John lectured.

"Yes, Sir." The deep voice returned, tinged with humour and something akin to flirtation. John shifted in his seat and kept his eyes resolutely on the road.

John knew not to question how Sherlock had gotten reservations at one of the most popular restaurants in Edinburgh at peak time, he knew he would only receive a mysterious raised eyebrow in response. If anything, John thought it was incredibly romantic for someone of Sherlock's disposition, and found himself being surprised over and over again by the younger man's spontaneity.

Instead, John was quiet as the waiter ushered them to possibly the best table in the restaurant, over-looking the setting sun over the city of Edinburgh; the spires and rooftops casting harsh silhouettes against the cherry coloured sky.

"Sherlock-" he gasped, dragging his eyes away from the stunning sight back to Sherlock's contented face, tinged slightly with the gorgeous sunlight. He had his hands folded together, a leather-strapped watch peeking out from under the cuff of his sleeve, staring at him with eyes that promised him anything, everything. John wanted to put his hands on Sherlock's chest, dance in slow motion on the edge of the world, or at least on the edge of this balcony. "It's gorgeous."

"Let's eat." he said, his eyes soft. One of his fingers brushed John's knuckles as he reached for the menu.

"Sherlock..." he began, hesitant, watching Sherlock's eyes roaming the list of dishes.

Piercing blue eyes snapped up to meet his immediately.

"Thank you." John smiled, feeling overwhelmed with emotion all of a sudden. "For everything. Somehow you knew exactly what I needed, even when I didn't."

"Don't be stupid, John." he replied, watching a flicker of hurt cross John's face. "I'm the one who should be thanking you."

John's worried face stretched into a warm smile as Sherlock quickly returned his gaze to his menu, a slight tinge to his usually pale cheeks.

They left Edinburgh's Tower restaurant stuffed from a three-course meal, John still moaning in utter delight over the Scottish strawberry and pistachio Eton mess they'd shared for dessert, his arm hooked through Sherlock's as he lead him back to the car.
As soon as they arrived at their parking space on a small side-road, lit with a yellow dimming street-lamp, John took Sherlock's hand, spinning him around and backing him against the passenger side-door.

"How long do we have?" he asked, his eyes full of something Sherlock couldn't quite place. The street was dark and practically empty, save for a few drunken women singing at the top of the road as they clambered into a taxi.

"Until we arrive?" he asked, feeling an electric energy buzzing from John's skin, the rolled up sleeves of his jumper had exposed his toned forearms, which were covered in goose-bumps. "A couple more hours, yet."

"Okay." John smiled, leaning forward slowly and pressing a kiss to Sherlock's pliant lips, their entire bodies flush against each other. He slid his tongue in almost immediately, letting it rub against Sherlock's in a way it never had before, pulling a gasp from the younger man. John hummed, his hand gripping Sherlock's hip, Sherlock's hands on his chest.

"You taste like strawberries." Sherlock pulled back with a curious voice, his eyes tracing the reddened outline of John's lips, his hands still gripping at the collar of his tucked in shirt.

John's chuckle was deep and throaty. "So do you."

Sherlock felt the coldness of the metal seep through to the skin of his back as John pressed him against the car one more time, hands strong and sure, yet managing to be careful, caressing. Sherlock never thought he would get so much enjoyment from running his fingers through the layers of John's thick hair, but couldn't seem to stop himself.

He broke away from John's lips with a gasp, his head moving to the left, leaving John's lips at the space underneath Sherlock's ear, breathing heavily. "We should probably leave." he said.

John pressed a final kiss to Sherlock's cheek. "Let's."

"Settling in alright then?" Stamford asked. He sat in his usual dipped chair that had held his weight for several years, in the almost empty staffroom.

"Yes, thank you...I mean, I think so." Molly replied, her nervous temperament still hadn't dissolved regardless of the longer time she had spent in the her new temp position. She hadn't spoken to Mike properly before, only a few passing hello's, but he often came across to her as keen, almost pushy.

"I'm sure you're doing fine. What years you with now?" he bit savagely into a sugared jam doughnut, his permanently rosy-red cheeks chomped away.

"Sevens and Eights mostly." she responded meekly, offering a small smile and sitting straighter in her uncomfortable chair. She pulled off the lid of her plastic lunchbox, taking out a small, crustless cucumber sandwich, cut into a neat and precise triangle, taking a small bite from the corner.

"Ah, bloody terrors, they are. Aren't they, Greg?" He reached over to slap Lestrade's shoulder, who was sat loosely within their circle, staring into the distance as he stirred sugar into his tea.

The force of Stamford's clap shook Greg's arm, almost spilling the hot liquid all into his lap, he steadied it, shooting a small glare to Mike's shoes, and then plastered on his usual fake smile. "Hmm? Yeah. Nightmare."
Molly smiled at him, still chewing on her first bite of her sandwich, "How are you doing, Greg?"

Greg pushed away his distraction at hearing his name again, facing the young substitute teacher and nodding around a sip of his tea. "I'm good. Yeah. Rushed off my feet, but no change there." he smiled back politely.

Molly nodded sincerely, her eyes glancing back to Mike who had started in on his second doughnut. "Any word from John, at all?"

Mike stopped mid-chew, looking over to Molly and then to Greg in surprise.

"Oh- I'm sorry, should I not have sai-" Molly panicked.

"No, no-" Greg insisted, his tired eyes trained on the floor. "It's fine, I...No. Haven't heard anything," he smiled weakly, knowing that the majority of the staff room were clearly trying to subtly listen in on the conversation. He still could hardly face sitting in the staff room with these people, couldn't stand seeing Kevin Lynch's smug little face grin at him every time they passed each other in the corridor. The last Greg had heard, they'd given him John's classroom to teach in, since the Biology teacher hadn't been in contact.

"'Scuse me." he mumbled in apology, pushing up from his chair with his free hand, having a sudden desire to eat alone in his own classroom instead.

There was an eerie quality to the scenery surrounded by the dark night on the other side of their car windows. John was silent as they slowed to a more tumultuous path, through the centre of vast hills and valleys, which broke up the indigo sky with their peaks, resting among the thin layers of clouds.

Sherlock had since leaving the restaurant, unbuttoned his shirt to chest level, rolled up his sleeves and cracked the window open on the driver's side to let in some air-flow. He looked out from under his dishevelled curls, falling long and dark over his forehead, rustled by the wind. "We're almost there."

"How can you see anything in this dark?" John asked, bewildered. He rolled his own sleeves up to the elbow, and then decided against it, yanking his jumper over his head to reveal a pale shirt underneath similar to one that Sherlock owned. He tugged at his own buttons which were beginning to attack his neck, pausing in his ministrations when he looked over to Sherlock.

Despite the darkness, the light of the moon was luminescent, casting a backlit glow over Sherlock's features. The buzz of the radio faded from his consciousness as his eyes traced the tendons in Sherlock's outstretched forearm, the knuckles of his large hand taut against the wheel. The car slowed to a momentary halt as Sherlock squinted at poorly lit road signs, biting at his bottom lip in concentration, and John stared at the shine of his raven black hair, the straight line of his nose, the extraordinary length of his dark lashes.

Sherlock fiddled with the indicator sticks, changing to different light settings until the headlights shone brighter on the words in front. "A-ha!"

John felt as if he were in another world as he laid his head back against the seat as they sped off down the road, the fresh air blowing persistently in, tousling Sherlock's hair and carrying the intoxicating scent of his cologne straight to John.
Ten minutes later, they pulled up to a side road boasting a large sign proclaiming their location as 'East Cottage'. The crackle of gravel under the car tires shook the two men slightly as they approached a small gaggle of trees, giving way to a small white old-style cottage decorated with thick wooden beams, barely lit with a few glowing lamps in the small windows.

"Wow-" John gasped, leaning forward and reaching for his seatbelt. "Where are we?"

Sherlock remained seated, turning the ignition off and reaching for the handbrake, his eyes trained solely on John. "Glencoe. Scottish Highlands."

They stepped out of the car, the gravel crunching under their boots, as Sherlock grabbed John's suitcase from the back seat, positioning it next to the car before looking back up to his partner.

John stood in front of the car, gazing up at the thatched roof of the cottage, the ornate swirls on the surface of the glass, framed by heavy wooden shutters as if from Victorian ages. He was surprised by the quiet, the only interrupting sound was the flow of water, clearly from a nearby river, and the crunch of Sherlock's shoes moving around behind him. A hand appeared on his hip.

"Do you want to do the honours?" Sherlock's deep voice rang in his ear, his body almost flush to John's. His large hand splayed just above the waistband of John's jeans, the other holding a set of keys retrieved from his backpack.

"Hmm?" John settled back against Sherlock's height, letting his head fall back onto his shoulder, feeling his large hand move to his stomach, hearing his feet shuffle closer. Sherlock pressed the key into his hand.

Sherlock dragged most of their luggage in behind John, who stood in the surprisingly large hallway, staring up at the curved wooden staircase which led to a balcony landing above their heads. The doors to the kitchen were open, and Sherlock encouraged him with a nod of his head to go and explore, whilst he went to lock the car.

The ceilings in the rest of the rooms were quite low compared to the hallway, as to be expected of a traditional old British cottage. The beams were thick oak, looming above their heads and framing some of the walls. Inside, the decor was quaint, subtle, old-fashioned and warm. John had never imagined Sherlock to choose something like this for their getaway home.

"Sherlock?" he called, his eyes fixed on the old-fashioned wood fire, framed by gorgeous red bricks and cream walls. The student appeared silently, focused on John's figure lit in the low lamp light, he gave in to the urge to kiss the vacant warm skin above his collar. John's intake of breath felt like a firework going off in Sherlock's brain, like a crashing crescendo.

"Sherlock-" he gasped, feeling possessive hands at his waist.

"John-" he sighed, between kisses, feeling John's body warm and pliant under his hands. He spun the shorter man around with ease, meeting the fire in John's eyes with the intense iciness of his own.

"We're alone." he said, his voice barely above a whisper, and John realised the truth behind his lover's words. They were alone. Actually alone, not merely alone for the moment, for five minutes until Lestrade or Mrs Hudson came barging in, but alone.

This realisation came with a smash as Sherlock's lips collided with his own, his hands falling everywhere on John's body, clenching and pulling at John's shirt, stretching it so tight he was pretty sure it would rip. He heard his own breaths turning into a carnal panting, barely holding on with his arms wrapped around Sherlock's shoulders as the young man attacked his throat with
passionate kisses and playful bites.

John heard himself moan, barely registering the sound came from him as Sherlock sucked deliciously at his adam's apple, teasing the rough skin of his throat with his tongue, holding John in place against him with the strength of his two hands. "Sherlock--let's...ohh, my god-"

He worked at the buttons of the doctor's shirt with long cold fingers, as John's hands fell to his throat, worked their way up to his hair where he tugged sharply at the thick mass of curls, guiding Sherlock's mouth to the space under his jaw. He'd just managed to undo the last button, pulling the shirt out of the belted jeans, when John spoke, desperately and quickly. "Let's go upstairs."

"Yes," Sherlock gasped, his voice barely above a growl, deep with arousal. John took his hand, pulling him towards the closest door and hoping it lead back to the hallway, desperately trying to ignore the visible bulge in his trousers in favour of focusing on any kind of rational thought with such little blood going to his brain.

"Are you sure?" John gasped, as soon as Sherlock had him on his back in the large king-size bed. "Sherlock- I need you to tell m-aah-" The younger man sucked a mark at the doctor's collarbone. "I need to know you're okay with--"

Sherlock silenced him with a forceful kiss, his eyes heavy and hooded, blown black and icy blue. "I...

John reached a hand to the mop of dark-auburn curls, cradling the genius' skull in his hand. He made sure to get direct eye contact with the boy before Sherlock could distract him any further with his pretty mouth and dirty tricks. John hummed in question, encouraging him to speak.

"I trust you." he said, almost hesitantly, as if it put him under great discomfort to expose his mind and his feelings to another person. John supposed that it probably did, knowing how reclusive Sherlock usually was.

"Okay--" he sighed, "Good, that's...

Sherlock's nimble fingers worked their way slowly down the strip of buttons on John's creased shirt, loosening the fabric and revealing the soldier's muscled chest underneath, with a smattering of blonde hair at his sternum. Sherlock was fascinated.

He stared at the skin before him, so unused to seeing anything but cold, pale flesh reminiscent of Greek marble. He noticed the freckles and moles, the scratches and scars, the warmth of John's golden-amber skin. Sherlock frowned, needing to get a closer look, and moving himself onto John's lap.

"Ohh- fuck-" the doctor's head fell back onto the pillows, feeling the hardness contained in his jeans fall in perfect line with Sherlock's clad crack. Trying to get his breathing under control in fear of coming right then and there, his hands shot to Sherlock's hips, stilling his shuffling above him. The student seemed distracted, staring intensely down at John's bare chest.

Long tentative fingers fell onto his skin as if by magic, and John couldn't remember ever feeling so intensely captured in bed with any other lover before. Sherlock ground him. He stared up at the face above him, clearly enthralled, eyes piercing and curious as a newborn baby, and John couldn't find it in him to feel self conscious under his gaze, if anything it calmed him.
"Okay?" he asked, stroking his thumbs over Sherlock's hipbones, his pelvis shifting slightly.

Sherlock's eyes were drawn to the ring of puckered scar tissue in the doctor's left shoulder, slightly raised and tinged in a soft pink colour. His fingers fell just underneath it, circling gently, unaware of John's fond and watchful gaze on him.

John had never been particularly unconfident with his body, he'd been in good shape since he was a teenager, knowing that he had to be if he were to be accepted into the army at 18. He knew he wasn't anywhere near Adonis or David level, but he was vaguely proud of how he'd managed to maintain his fitness over the years as he aged. Nothing, though, had prepared him for this.

Anyone who knew Sherlock Holmes, knew his analytical and processing disposition, his scientifically driven brain, his attention to detail that mattered, though John had never seen the look in his eyes up close when he was utterly struck by something. It was the look of genuine curiosity and struggle. Struggle to take everything in, to catalogue, preserve and invest himself so devotedly into something. John felt like he was some sort of alien species, being examined through sight, touch, smell- something to be marvelled at, something unknown.

Suddenly, Sherlock exhaled, loudly, through his nose, his eyes dancing quickly over the expanse of John's naked torso, trailing up his neck to seek out John's eyes, soft and inviting and warm. Always warm.

"You are a marvel, John Watson."

He fell forward onto his elbows either side of John's face, their noses bumping, Sherlock's eyelashes fanning out over John's cheeks. John pushed at the gathering of Sherlock's hair that had fallen forward over his eyebrows, attempting to tuck the stubborn curls behind his ear. "You clearly haven't seen yourself then, love."

Sherlock hummed, his eyes on John's lips, breathing heavy. He watched as John craned his neck forward, nosing at Sherlock's collar, pressing kisses at the flesh of his shoulder. The hand that was holding Sherlock's hair moved to the nape of his neck, his other hand working slowly at the buttons of the fitted dark purple shirt. "This okay?" he asked again, between kisses that were managing to fall on different pieces of skin as the fabric gradually moved away.

Sherlock's eyes watched him still, fond and awestruck at the sensations flowing through his body. He could feel both his own and John's arousal pressed together still from the waist down, the feeling blinding and potentially dizzying, however it was nothing compared to the tingling in his chest, his rapid heartbeat thumping as if alight as he watched John's face so close to his own.

His breath caught in his throat as John flipped him onto his back, now able to unbutton the rest of his shirt and put his mouth to the trail of hair at Sherlock's toned navel. "Jesus- Sherlock..." he said with surprise, pulling back to gaze at his young lover's naked navel. "You're even more gorgeous without your clothes on. Not that I'm surprised..." he raised his eyebrows, moving his mouth back to the rise and fall of Sherlock's chest, dipping his tongue into the dent of his sternum, fingers trailing delicately down Sherlock's sides which probably should have tickled if it weren't for the tension in the room.

Sherlock was panting, in awe of how worked up he could get from just a few fleeting touches of John's skin against his own. "John-" he wriggled his hips, urging John's slow fingers to move faster, lower.

"Mmm?" John breathed out against the chiselled lines of Sherlock's angled torso, trailing his nose along the line of his pectoral muscle, teasing his lips around a nipple.
"More..." he said impatiently, lifting his hips at John.

"Yeah?" he breathed, moving until he was no longer chest height with Sherlock but face to face, seizing him with a fierce and controlling kiss, his tongue pressing insistently against Sherlock's. He placed his hands either side of Sherlock's head, swinging a leg over so he was positioned in the younger man's lap.

Tilting his hips until he found the perfect angle, he took Sherlock's breath away with one particularly well aimed thrust, bringing their arousals together in the heat of the room. Sherlock's hands flew to John's hips, forcing him to grind back down against him again.

He groaned, attaching his teeth to John's ear lobe with a primal and possessive growl. John put his hands back on Sherlock's thighs to steady himself, feeling material and pausing. "Sherlock-

He moaned in response. "What?"

"You're going to ruin your nice trousers if you come in them," he frowned, his hand paused at the fastened button just in front of his own crotch.

Sherlock paused, his breath heavy against John's ear. "You shouldn't be thinking about trousers."

John snorted, turning his head until their lips met, shuffling back onto Sherlock's thighs so he could undo his dress trousers properly. He paused in his ministrations and pulled away from Sherlock's lips, ignoring the unhappy growl it provoked.

"What? Why did you stop?" he complained, dilated pupils focused on John's thoughtful face. "Wha-ohh... John." he thrusted upwards as soon as John's hand fell to the bulge in his trousers, rubbing tentatively at the head of Sherlock's cock and feeling for the curved outline with his fingers.

"Shit," John breathed, hooking his thumb around the head, "You're big...Sherlock."

Taking no notice of John's words, Sherlock grabbed his face again, needing to be closer to his lover. John was slowly but surely discovering Sherlock's love of kissing, feeling the burn of his stubble against his chin as he worked his hand inside the unzipped trousers to the dampness of Sherlock's boxers.

"I- John-" he whined, finding security in his eyes just as he felt the hand curl around his leaking cock.

"Okay?" John paused, looking back into Sherlock's eyes, searching his facial expression for any of the uncertainty or panic he had found before, the first time they'd shared a bed together.

Sherlock nodded, his hands falling back to John's strong hips, moving to the small of his muscled back, shirtless and golden. He worked his way under the waistband of his jeans and boxers, hands resting fully on full and glorious cheeks. John groaned, feeling his way back to Sherlock's exposed cock, still slightly perturbed by the above average size

"Closer, John." he gasped, pulling at the doctor's buttocks, edging his jeans and boxers down in the process, until the head of his cock was visible through the grey boxer briefs. The pressure in the room was unbelievable, both men sweating from exertion, pulling their bodies against each other, as John lined up his semi- clothed cock with Sherlock's, rutting hard against the hard and pliant body beneath him, spurred on by Sherlock's tense grip on his arse.

He held himself up above Sherlock, rotating his hips in delicious circles, crotch to crotch, the head of his cock jutting out from the confines of his boxers to meet the leaking head of Sherlock's own
"Yeah?" he growled into John's neck, nipping at his bottom lip, shameless and ridiculously turned on, his hands still gripping onto John's burning skin as they neared their respective climaxes.

John was the one who came first, grunting with exertion, one hand gripping the headboard above Sherlock, muscles straining as he held himself above his lover's flushed body, his other hand pressed solidly to Sherlock's chest as he worked his cock against sticky skin. Sherlock found himself coming just at the image of John above him, muscles glorious and tanned, face contorted in utter ecstasy as he worked Sherlock's cock against his own.

"Oh my..." John slowed to a halt above a panting Sherlock, his head falling forward onto his forearm as they caught their breath. Sherlock's hands never left John's hips as he let his head fall back against the pillows, throat exposed with adam's apple prominent and bobbing in the air.

"John?"

"Mmm?"

"I can't feel my legs."

"Oh."

It took a second, but the elder man moved, rolling onto his side next to Sherlock, still trying to catch his breath. "Well. That was intense."

"Slight understatement, John." Sherlock offered from his side of the bed, eyes closed as he tried to wet his dry lips with his tongue.

"Do you want a drink? I'm going to get some water." John suggested after a moment, leaning over to press a chaste kiss to Sherlock's still lips. He hummed against the kiss, which John thought meant yes, and pulled himself up to fetch a couple of glasses.

"You're not falling asleep, are you?" John asked, watching Sherlock's silent form, side profile glowing in the lamp-light, steepled hands under his chin as he lay still naked in the bed. John had returned with two tall glasses of water and a wet face-cloth, which landed on Sherlock's stomach with a slap and a hiss at the cold fabric. They'd managed to clean up quite quickly, cracking open a window to release some heat from the room and immediately returning to each other under the duvet.

John trailed his fingers through the light hair on Sherlock's chest, feeling his heartbeat under his palms was refreshing and grounding, knowing that however hard Sherlock tried to convince himself, he was no robot.

"I'm not asleep."

"You sure?" John teased, hearing the drowsiness in his lover's voice, stroking his hands up Sherlock's biceps soothingly. "We can sleep for a little bit?"

"Mm, John. Not tired." His eyebrow furrowed, eyes still closed, and John pressed his thumb to the persistent dent between his eyes, immediately smoothing it out. He trailed his hand down Sherlock's cheek, his fingers falling naturally back to his hair.
"You love my hair." he said suddenly, as if discovering a new deduction.

"I do." John smiled, holding back a laugh at the disorientated Sherlock Holmes before him. "I've never seen you like this." he giggles, feeling Sherlock's arm go around him in his trance.

"Hmm?"

"I'm used to seeing you as the quick minded, fast-paced, brilliant Sherlock Holmes. You're considerably...slower, right now. It's nice to have you on my level."

Sherlock frowned, his words sounding slurred and far away. "I'm still brilliant."

"You're always brilliant." John smiled as Sherlock's arm went limp against him, his head falling to the side slightly, into John's shoulder. "My brilliant, beautiful, Sherlock Holmes."

Chapter End Notes

As always please feel free to leave your thoughts and comments, I really appreciate them. Apologies for the slow reply, right now I'm in the countryside without wifi--it's killing me!
Chapter 11

Greg awoke to the sound of a car alarm insistently blaring from his open window.

"Bloody car-" he muttered to himself as soon as he managed to haul himself up and over to the window, slamming it shut. He paused mid-yawn, stretching out his spine and wincing at the cracks, looking towards his forgotten phone on the bed-side table.

He thumbed over a text from his personal trainer, heading for the reply button as the phone screen lit up in his hands: Unknown Caller. He hesitated, sitting down on the side of the bed as he pressed accept on the call.

"Greg Lestrade speaking."

"Good morning, Greg. I trust you slept well."

The smoothness of Mycroft's familiar voice seeped into Greg's skin, ran through his veins like the sharp tingle of alcohol in the bloodstream. "Mycroft." he said.

"Yes. I'm calling to tell you that your gym appointment has been set back to 2.20pm. There's work to be done, I'd like you to assist."

Greg frowned down at his bare feet, his fingers clenching tightly around the device in his hand. "What work?"

"Official interviews, this morning. Then, lunch." Mycroft sounded cautious.

"Lunch?" Greg raised his eyebrows.

"Yes."

Lestrade was quiet on the other end of the phone. "Interviews?"

Mycroft cleared his throat, "I will explain within the hour. You have 30 minutes until Lance arrives."

"Who's Lance?" The teacher questioned incredulously, rubbing a hand over his forehead. What the hell had he gotten himself into by becoming involved with the Holmes brothers?

"The chauffer from your previous visit."

"Oh--" Greg paused dumbly. "Right..."

"Goodbye, Gregory."

"What abou-"

Greg frowned as the line went dead, pressing the lock button down on his phone. Mycroft always seemed so cold, so distant. It didn't take much to see how he'd influenced his younger brother, Sherlock had clearly learnt a lot from his intelligent older sibling, even if he wouldn't dare to admit it. Lestrade was always shocked to realise how soft and pliable Sherlock seemed in comparison to Mycroft Holmes. The younger Holmes had always been a challenge, it was always eventful to be
in his presence, even when he was buried in the depths of his 'embryonic evolving mind palace'.
But, yes, Mycroft was different. Mycroft was carefully composed, completely, down to a tee.
Greg couldn't seem to fault his demeanour, as hard as he had tried.

Greg knew he was inexplicably drawn to the man, he became flustered like an old woman
whenever Mycroft so much as looked at him, for God's sake. Being unsure of where his attraction
stemmed from made it more difficult for him to stop himself from reacting the way he did. Truth
be told, he was impressed, he hadn't felt an attraction to a man since that fleeting phase in
university, since then it had been women all the way. Who knew what it was that made Mycroft
Holmes so appealing to him, with a glance back down to his phone as a reminder of their
discussion, Greg knew he was soon to find out.

John awoke to the soft snores of the young man beside him, who was still shirtless, wild hair
ruffled deliciously from sleep. He rubbed sleep away from his eyes, rolling over to throw an arm
around his young lover, pulling the pale body closer to his chest.
Sherlock grunted in his sleep, his hands twitching, and John smiled down at the unconscious
whine he emitted. "So you're a vocal sleeper," he whispered to himself, leaning forward to trace
his nose along the line of Sherlock's collarbone, sweeping up to his throat. The younger man was
up against John's chest, his limp arms pressed in against the teacher's muscled pecs.
John pressed a kiss to Sherlock's shoulder before falling backwards onto the bed, Sherlock
moving with him onto his chest once more. John's eyes cast over the decoration of the room, lit
with slices of light that peeked through the heavy curtains. He still couldn't believe that Sherlock
had sorted out this entire place, including journey start to finish, so quickly and on his own.

He noticed Sherlock's breathing becoming lighter, and stroked his hand over the ridiculously
smooth warmth of his skin, marvelling at the infallible stretch of white, barely broken in pattern by
a stray mole or occasional scar. He felt his pulse in the crease of his elbow, slow and at resting
rate, and overall proving Sherlock's vulnerability, his human-ness. So many others, including
Sherlock himself, appeared to believe he was something robotic, void of most hindrances such as
human emotion.

John had seen far too much of the real Sherlock Holmes to believe such things to be true.
"Mhmm..."
"Hmm?" John asked in amusement, looking down to Sherlock's sleeping face, which looked very
confused, wrinkling in a frown.
"Mmm..." he lolled his head against John's shoulder, pulling a snigger from the older man.
"Sherlock?" he mumbled against the skin of Sherlock's cheek, his palm skittering along the young
man's chest.
Sherlock stretched out against his lover like a cat, toes curling against John's calves, before
retracting inwards and tucking his head underneath John's chin with a satisfied little grunt.
"Morning, love." he smiled, feeling Sherlock's cheek against his heart.

Slowly bringing himself back into consciousness, Sherlock blinked sleepily against John's skin,
his long eyelashes feeling ticklish. He pressed his ear against John's chest, content to hear and feel
the continuous thudding against his flesh, enabling himself to do what he'd been wanting to for so
long, what they'd been holding back from.

"Good morning." he said after a short while, pulling back to survey John's equally tired looking face.

"Did you sleep well?" John said, pressing a kiss to the corner of Sherlock's mouth, smiling at the soft pull of Sherlock's hand in his hair which guided him back towards his lips in a proper kiss.

"I did." Sherlock said against John's lips. He hooked a leg over John's hip, their groins slotting against each other.

John kissed him back with fervour for a minute, his hands framing Sherlock's face, his neck, his shoulders, before rolling onto his back. Sherlock whined, following and sitting upright against the hardness in John's trousers pressing right against his clothed entrance.

The doctor's skilled hands moved to the young boy's hips, gripping and forcing, Sherlock's hands pressing down on his chest.

"John..." Sherlock called quietly.

John kissed him, slowing his movements immediately. "We should slow down..." he said against Sherlock's lips. "We have lots of time for that." he hinted with a final squeeze to Sherlock's hips.

He nodded hesitantly at John's words, lifting himself off of the teacher's lap. "What would you like to do today?" he asked, pulling on a fresh pair of boxer-briefs and walking towards their en-suite.

"Did you have anything in mind?" John asked, watching the delicious pull of muscles in Sherlock's bare back as he walked away from him. He put his arms behind his head, leant back against the headboard and stared at his toes moving under the sheet.

"I believe you would enjoy perusing the sights." the baritone voice came from the small room opposite.

"Sounds great. We could have our own little adventure." John smiled to himself, looking up as soon as Sherlock walked back in.

"John Watson, the adventurous type?" Sherlock's eyebrow twitched with a hint of veiled humour. "Who'd have thought it?"

"Oi, there's a lot of things you don't know about me, I'll have you know." he grabbed at Sherlock's hand as he swayed past him towards the wardrobe, pulling him onto the bed next to him.

"Soon I will know everything there is to know." Sherlock looked up at him, his eyes dancing like blue pools of excitement.

"Likewise, I hope." John pressed his lips together. "You are an enigma, Sherlock Holmes."

"I don't aim to be." he said quietly, looking down his own hand trapped in John's. "Nobody has ever wanted to know for the sake of knowing, most only want information to exploit."

The doctor frowned, "I hope you know that's not my intention."

"I know that you're not like anybody else." Sherlock said cautiously, tapping his finger against John's thumb. "That's all I need to know."
After a rushed coffee and burnt mouth on John's part, Sherlock eventually hauls the doctor from his comfortable new favourite place upon one of the worn armchairs which sat in the living room.

"John, you can't wear loafers on a hike." Sherlock stated, staring at the teacher's feet with disdain.

"I didn't know we were going to Scotland!" John pleaded his defence, throwing shoes over his shoulder from his suitcase about the room left, right and centre. Sherlock only just managed to dodge one, catching another mid-flight. "None of these bloody shoes are hike-appropriate."

Ten minutes later, John emerged from the bedroom dressed more appropriately, and in search of his lover, who had seemingly disappeared. "Sherlock?" he called down the stairs of the cottage.

The young man appeared in the doorway of the kitchen, dressed in a polo shirt, dark wash jeans, and sporting a navy fedora which seemed to be taming down the wildness of his curls which were sticking manically to his forehead.

"Oh," John said, surprised. "What's with the clothes?" he made his way to where Sherlock stood, his eyes drifting up and down his form.

"Need to keep a low profile." Sherlock stated quietly, his hands in his pockets.

John was silent, his eyes seeking Sherlock's under the lip of the hat which covered his face.

"You're experienced at this, aren't you?" John reached for the one side of Sherlock's up-turned collar, smoothing it down against his collarbone. "Running. Hiding."

He didn't say anything in return, but John knew from the way he looked at him, lifting his head to make eye contact with John, those cool and calculating eyes turned slightly glassy.

"We should get going." Sherlock said after a moment, his voice thick.

"Okay." John returned, pausing for a second to press a chaste kiss to the student's lips, his hand bracing his face.

They hiked through the woodland, Sherlock stopping continuously in fascination at the wild plants growing, scribbling down notes in a small notebook he had tucked into his pocket.

John merely accepted the sheer beauty of the place, watching as the filtered sunlight fell through the canopy of the trees onto Sherlock's hair, now free of the fedora.

They passed alongside a vast stretch of bluebells, realising how many butterflies were attracted to them, as pairs of them danced around each other and weaved in and out of the flowers. John was struck by how at home he felt in a place he had never visited before. He felt the mix of ground, gravel and wood crunch under his boots as he followed along contentedly after Sherlock; deciding that he'd be content to do so for the rest of his life.
"How often did you visit Scotland as a child?" John asked, as Sherlock returned to his side from inspecting an odd-looking plant.

"Intermittently..." he said, gazing off into the distance. "Father always encouraged us to come along with him whenever he took trips up to see relatives."

"I can imagine you here," John admitted, looking up at the man next to him. "Running around with a tiny microscope, conducting your mould experiments and measuring the consistency of snail trails."

"I spent a lot of time in the forest." Sherlock's knuckles brushed against John's where their hands dangled side by side. "There's never anybody around, it was perfect for me as a child."

"Did you ever try to make friends, Sherlock?" John asked quietly, genuinely interested in the answer.

Sherlock looked at him with the hint of a frown surrounding his features. "I didn't know how."

"Surely children tried to make friends with you?"

"I was different. They sensed immediately." He confessed. "Like a pack of blood-hounds, picking out a scent." He picked viciously at his own nails, avoiding the weight of John's stare.

John reached out without a word, taking Sherlock's hand in his own as they carried on the rough path to Signal Rock.

Sherlock appreciated the silence, if anything. Appreciated the weight of John's calloused palm against his own, the hush of the forest save for the occasional flutter or chirp of the birds hidden somewhere in the trees. It still felt unfathomable to him that they were there, free from the confines of those four walls of John’s lab, the entire building felt like a faded nightmare that was beginning to drift from memory upon awakening.

Sherlock found himself wondering how long he could run for this time around.

"Mycroft, have you had one wink of sleep in the last 48 hours?" Greg stood with his arms folded in the doorway of Mycroft Holmes' study, watching the tired man pulling together piles of paper and sliding them into files. They'd began that morning with interviewing useless 'witnesses' who had claimed to see the escaped pair in a variety of places all over the UK. Mycroft had deemed all sources useless after the final candidate, and retired to his study leaving Greg with the rest of the crew.

"Hello, Gregory. I trust you are getting along famously with my assistants assigned to you?"

Greg stared at the back of Mycroft’s head, he hadn't turned when he spoke, hadn't even acknowledged him entering the room.

"He's definitely not hiding out in London." Greg replied, seeing Mycroft pause for a second, before reaching for another paper.

"Yes, I have already reached that conclusion for myself. All of Sherlock's safehouses are abandoned, there is no CCTV footage to cover his tracks, whereabouts, or movements. Which is
also the case with Dr Watson, your esteemed friend."

Even without seeing the elder Holmes' face, Greg knew it hadn't faltered. Mycroft was holding his composure inexplicably considering his younger brother had all but disappeared off the bloody ends of the earth. He could tell, though. Maybe it was his experience with said younger Holmes brother, but Greg knew the signs of a Holmes beginning to crack under the pressure. And Mycroft was still so young, Greg had estimated that Mycroft was at least 5 years his junior, despite the fact that he almost had the entirety of the British continent at his feet.

He only just caught the slight tremble of Mycroft's hand before the genius had violently shook it straight, clamping down and gritting his teeth in the face of any exposed emotions that dared to try and sneak their way in.

"Come on then," Greg said, decisively, emphasising his statement with a clap of his hands which actually made Mycroft turn for the first time since he had entered the room.

"I'm sorry?" He fixed the teacher with a deep frown.

"You promised me lunch, and I'm starved, so." Greg sucked his bottom lip between his teeth, waiting for the man to move from his chair.

"I will summon the maid in a moment, just give me a-"

"No-" Greg started, cutting Mycroft's rebuttal off with a simple word. "You are not spending another second in this place. You'll drive yourself barmy."

Mycroft turned his entire body round on the swivel chair with a faint look of amusement on his face. "Are you attempting to interfere with my schedule for today, Mr Lestrade?"

"Well, considering I didn't know the schedule, let alone that I would even be here with you this morning when I was planning on heading to the gym; yes. Yes, I am. And you'll shut up and like it, because I've already had enough of these four walls, and I've only been inside them twice before."

Greg's eyes fell upon an umbrella stand in the corner, where quite an arrangement of fancy looking canes and elaborately decorated umbrellas stood proudly, waiting for Mycroft to commandeer. He picked one up at once, offering it out to the seated man.

"I'm pretty sure you've seen a hell of a lot more of them than I have, and I already feel claustrophobic." he sent him one last tiny smile in the hopes it might sway the intelligent and rigid man from his steadfast opinions.

Mycroft held his gaze for a long moment, his eyes falling to the hawk ended umbrella that the teacher was holding out to him in earnest. The confidence in his stance reassured Mycroft, made him wonder.

He took the umbrella silently, the only sound in the room still the ticking of an old grandfather clock which sat in the light of the elongated French windows. Mycroft was startled to see Greg's smile increase to the size of a genuine one as he took the umbrella from him.

"Right, good. Yes." Greg nodded to himself, "So."

Greg stood decisively, his feet heading towards the door automatically, he stopped himself, clearing his throat audibly and addressing Mycroft, "Where are we going?"
"It's strange seeing you with stubble." John mused, his hand scratching over Sherlock's face openly, brave in the face of the public, unknown amongst the passing crowd.

Sherlock hummed to him, his eyes flickering over a collection of taxidermy butterflies which contained rarer specimen than those he had in his case at home in London.

They'd ventured into a small strip of old-fashioned shops, apparently just around the corner from the main square of Glencoe village. Exhausted after climbing, hiking, and sightseeing but a few of the vast and breathtaking hills of Scotland, and seeking rest, John had convinced Sherlock to walk the extra quarter-mile to the centre.

John himself had his eye on a vintage globe, brushed with a coppery-golden stand, which shone under the natural day-light from the window. He stroked a finger gently over the cracked deep blue tinge of the Indian ocean, his eyes glancing quickly at Afghanistan and skimming over the surge of anxiety which rose in his chest at seeing the name written down after such a long time.

John cleared his throat, tipping his head to Sherlock as he came to face himself in an ornate silver hand-mirror, propped against a doll. "To be honest, I could do with a shave myself." He stroked a hand against the hair appearing on his chin and throat, frowning at the pull he felt against his fingertips.

Sherlock looked at him. "Don't."

"What?" John asked absent-mindedly, distracted by the wrinkles around his eyes which appeared in his reflection.

"Don't shave," Sherlock replied. "We should be employing every possible tactic that we can access to widen the gap between our normal appearances and our new appearances."

John frowned at the wooden floor, knowing that Sherlock wasn't watching him anyway. He still wasn't thrilled at the reminder of what they had done, and what they possibly faced as a consequence if or when they were found, but he nodded anyway, plastering on a fake smile and taking Sherlock's hand in his.

"This is nice." Greg nodded, his eyes looking around the place. "Lovely wait-staff."

"It's the first cafe we saw." Mycroft deadpanned, "Hardly the Ritz."

"I'm trying to lighten the mood, if you hadn't noticed." Greg glared at him.

"I had." Mycroft tilted his head. "I was hoping you would have stopped trying by now." he sighed, scrunching up a clean napkin in front of him on the table.

"I'm not going to stop trying, Mycroft. Because you need to think about something other than finding Sherlock, looking for Sherlock, worrying about Sherlock. I can see what this is doing to you, and it's only been a few days since I got involved."

Greg paused, lowering his head after his outburst to the older Holmes brother. He stared at
Mycroft's unmoving hands, noticing how elegant and soft they appeared, definitely not scarred and calloused, like the workman's hands Greg had.

"The ravioli, please." Mycroft said, after a while, only when the waitress appeared at their side, confused at the pair's obviously awkward silence. She nodded to him, jotting down the order before turning to Greg. "And yourself?"

"I'll have scampi, cheers." Greg replied, handing over the menu to the small woman, who slid Mycroft's into her free hand also and disappeared to the kitchen.

The silence continued for two long minutes, before Greg stopped fiddling with the thread of his sleeve and lifted his head to look at the gentleman across from him.

"He's run before, hasn't he?" he asked softly, when realisation dawned.

Mycroft's glassy gaze held Greg's own for a moment.

"Yes, he has."

"Who found him?" Greg wondered aloud.

"Our mother." Mycroft looked away, out through the window onto the busy hustle and bustle of the streets of London.

"Sherlock, you can't be serious."

"Of course I'm serious, John."

"You do realise I was joking about the kilt, right?" John folded his arms, staring at his lover incredulously.

"We need to blend in," Sherlock mock-hissed at him, looking at him from under his eyelashes as he fingered through the racks of various coloured tartan kilts. "Look, John, this one is your size." he said, pulling out a worn orange and pink crossed kilt.

"Put it back," John raised his eyebrows at him, moving towards a collection of traditional leather bomber jackets, with badges sewn into the arms and breast pocket.

"Try one," Sherlock said after a moment of watching John sift through a few on the rack, kilts suddenly forgotten.

"These? No way. The days when I could have pulled off a leather jacket are long gone." he stroked a fingertip down the sleeve of cool browned leather belonging to the nearest jacket, wandering away towards shelves of Scottish memorabilia and second-hand novels.

Sherlock paused before following, concealing himself behind a store model and pulling out one of the jackets John had lingered on before heading to the checkout.
Greg stared at the ring of undissolved sugar plastered to the bottom of his mug, swirling around the dregs of liquid. Their conversation had slowed to a halt after Greg's failed attempt to get Mycroft to open up. As predicted, the man sat across from him with a familiar frown adorning his face, staring hard at Greg as if he were attempting to solve the world's longest maths equation.

"Do you trust Doctor Watson?" Mycroft Holmes asked suddenly, folding his knife over his fork and pushing them to the side of his empty plate.

"Of course," Greg supplied, folding his arms atop the table. "John is a good man."

Mycroft's answering expression appeared to insist otherwise.

"I assume you don't share the same view as me." Greg asked him.

"He is an idiot to be caught up in Sherlock's ridiculous need for rebellion and childish escapades." Mycroft shook his head, his eyes falling to a pair of buskers across the street who had just begun playing.

"Why does Sherlock have this...need, then? Surely you should know, if he's ran off before?" Greg felt himself leaning in, suddenly curious in a way he hadn't been since he was on the force, and felt the old habits of D.I. Lestrade sinking into his skin again.

"I really don't find it necessary to discuss Sherlock's idiotic getaways."

"It might help you to gain more perspective, who knows?" Greg shrugged.

"Perspective?" Mycroft scoffed, folding his napkin into an even triangle. "I don't need perspective, I need him to stop being such a child."

Greg sighed, realising that his attempts were probably futile, and threw his napkin on his plate, leaning back in his chair and gazing out of the window.

The silence continued for a while, which seemed to be customary for the two men these days, Greg was beginning to feel more on edge when there was actual conversation, the reverse of how awkward he felt before when Mycroft wouldn't speak a word to him.

"Sherlock left when he was sixteen, we found him three weeks later, practically up to his elbows in cocaine."

Greg sat speechless, shocked at Mycroft's sudden revelation. He stared at the suited man, who was staring hard at the floor.

"He was depressed from a young age, introverted, sociopathic..." Mycroft began, "Insisted that nobody understood, father tried to shake some sense into him, I was away at university during most of the ordeal."

"What happened to him?" Greg shook his head, a confused look on his face. "That doesn't sound like the typical age old teenage hormones kicking in, I mean, even if it were, Sherlock is hardly the typical teenager is he?"

"Clearly." Mycroft grimaced.

"Do you know what happened to him?" Greg questioned further, his interest piqued.

"No," Mycroft lied. "I am unaware."
"What are you doing?" Sherlock demanded, as he caught John pulling the razor against the shaving foam on his jaw. They had eventually decided to start the rest of the walk home, worn out from the day, heading straight for the bedroom to relax, as John retreated to the bathroom.

"What?" John turned to him, "I can't keep an entire beard, Sherlock, I'll look like a caveman." he sighed, adding a muttered sentence as an afterthought "A 600 year old caveman."

Sherlock frowned at him. "You do not look old, John."

"I do for my age-"

"You look spectacular for your age, now shut up will you." Sherlock said with irritation.

"Can't tell if that was a compliment or not." he pressed his lips together in attempt to get to the trickier hairs under his bottom lip.

Sherlock merely watched the muscles of John's back as he faced the mirror, twitching and moving as he shaved. He had a towel tucked around his waist, having just exited the shower, and Sherlock was having a difficult time keeping his eyes away from the rough trail of hair that trailed down from his belly-button to underneath the material.

He heard the sound of running water, followed by the zip of John's toiletry bag; and the doctor appeared in the doorway.

"Satisfied?" he asked, his arms out either side of him.

Sherlock drew his eyes to his lover's face, noticing the smoothness of his jaw and chin, surprisingly accompanied by the lengthier stubble on his upper lip.

He sat up on the bed, his legs spread, watching John's eyes fall to his exposed throat from his open collar. "A moustache, John?"

"Just following orders." John smirked, reaching forward to touch a finger to Sherlock's collar bone, caressing along to his shoulder, pushing the material of the polo shirt aside.

"Old habits die hard?" Sherlock asked, licking his lips unconsciously, dark eyes burning into John's. "Soldier."

John chuckled to himself, his biceps flexing as he tucked the loose towel in further against his hips. "Maybe..."

Sherlock stood, threading his fingers through the older man's damp hair at the back of his head. "Let's have dinner." he said, his voice surprisingly sultry.

"Dinner?" John smiled, licking his lips, his hand moving to Sherlock's chest. He noticed the hunger in his younger lover's eyes, knowing straight away his hunger was not for food.

He nodded, his lips coming up to the teacher's earlobe. "Are you hungry?"

John shivered, wondering how the hell a young virgin could be so confident and successful in turning him on every single time, with such little effort.
"Yes," the doctor replied, his hands sliding down to grip Sherlock's behind firmly. "Definitely."

Mycroft spent the rest of the afternoon in his study, pouring over spliced final cut videos of CCTV recordings. It had become clear to him that Sherlock had replaced the number plate on John's car before departing from London, probably covered distinctive features of it too, just to make it more difficult for Mycroft to track.

He squinted at the screen of his computer, feeling progressively more tired of scrolling his finger along the zoom controls. He was startled by a sharp knock at the door.

"Hi," Greg said, hovering in the doorway.

"Hello, again."

He moved further into the room, pulling up a chair and turning it around backwards to throw a leg over and sit on it, just next to Mycroft. "Think I'm gonna head off soon."

Mycroft nodded, his gaze returning to his computer.

"Are you gonna be at this the whole night?" he asked cautiously, watching the slow blinks of Mycroft's eyelashes, like weights pounding against his tired eyes.

"Most likely." Mycroft sighed, stretching out his fingers.

"Can't you get one of your... operatives, to do it for you?" Greg waved his hand absently towards the door leading to the collection of workers in the next room.

Mycroft simply gave him a look that said As if I would trust anyone apart from myself to review the final pieces of footage.

Greg held up his hands, "Okay," he laughed. "Okay, forget I said anything." He stared at the 6 o'clock shadow starting to form on Mycroft's jaw, admiring the way it made his still youthful face look that tinier bit more mature.

"You shouldn't feel guilty, you know." Greg said, watching the exhaustion in the other man's features, the miniscule slouch of his spine, the single crease in his shirt, somehow knowing by now that even these tiny discrepancies were hugely out of place for Mycroft Holmes.

Mycroft simply looked at him, his gaze lingering on the hazel of Greg's eyes. "I am his legal guardian," he said, as if that explained everything.

Greg blinked back at him.

"It is my responsibility alone to supervise Sherlock, even at his age."

"That doesn't mean it's your fault." Greg insisted.

The suited man regarded him for a moment before facing the computer screen once again.

"It's not your fault he ran, Mycroft." He said softly, leaning his head in ever so slightly to the other man's space.
The silence between them stretched on as it normally did, this time absent of Mycroft’s intermittent clicks of the mouse and clacks of the keys on the keyboard. Greg was just about to excuse himself again, when the Holmes brother opened his mouth, turning quietly to the ex-inspector. "How do you know?"

Greg saw it immediately, however much Mycroft must have been attempting to conceal the emotion in his face, the sadness seeped through. To anyone else it must have looked like he was slightly perturbed, but Greg saw, and he knew. He was wrecked.

He cares. Thought Greg. He cares so much it's killing him.

Before either man could speak again, a sharp knock shook them out of whatever strange state they’d managed to settle themselves into, and an assistant appeared immediately in the doorway.

"Sir, we have news of a sighting at a hotel on the edge of Birmingham matching your brother's description."

Mycroft breathed, "Right."

Greg watched as the man before him stood, concealing any scrap of emotion or chink of armour on his person that might have previously been exposed in Greg's presence.

"Show me." he demanded, following the young assistant out of the office, leaving Greg seated by his desk, inexplicably frozen.

Chapter End Notes

What are we thinking about Greg and Mycroft? ;)

Thanks for reading! Please leave your thoughts.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Mention and brief description of sexual abuse.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I never meant to fall for you, but I
Was buried underneath
And all I that I could see was my,
My salvation.

Mycroft tried extremely hard not to snap at the dim-witted woman, who was clearly more interested in her nails than her conversation with Mycroft, a man she clearly didn't realise the importance of.

His displeasure was clear through the video feed, "So, Miss Riley, tell me again," he sighed, staring at the woman who was popping gum-bubbles in the face of her laptop camera. "What was the name of the two gentlemen you encountered at the reception desk?"

"I told you, I dunno how you pronounce that French-sounding one. Sounded like Brujeuur to me."

"Interesting." Said Mycroft, his expression not changing in the slightest. He took all the information he needed about the receptionist's character from one look, and had to struggle through conversation for the rest. "So, a Mr Brugiére, and a Mr...?"

The woman sighed heavily. "Turner, the log book says."

"And what was the appearance of these gentlemen?"

"One was tall, that was the annoying French one. Hair like a mop."

Mycroft hummed, "And the other?"

"Short...blond..."

"Distinguishing features?"

"Come again?" She looked confused.

"Anything that made them stand out?" Mycroft explained impatiently.

"Apart from that bloody loud French accent, and the other one's annoying laugh, no. I wasn't really paying attention."

"And did they seem intimate towards each other?" Mycroft internally cringed whilst asking.
"Intimate?" she looked confused. "Well, no... I don't know. Like I said, I wasn't really paying attention, I was hungover."

"Did the room they booked into have a double bed?"

"Why do you want to know something weird like that?" she said, clearly judging the suited man on the other end of the line.

"Please, answer the question, Miss Riley. I assure you all information you give is useful to us."

She hesitated, and then continued to study her nails. "The beds are divans, so they can be split, but they're proper old, so the hinge is pretty much rusted. Don't reckon you'd be able to separate them now."

Mycroft nodded thoughtfully. "Thank you for your help, Miss Riley, one of my associates will be in touch."

She sighed in relief at the end of the interrogation, "Yeah, bye."

Mycroft sat back in his chair as the line went dead, turning his swivel chair to the large map of Britain beside him. He pushed a red pin into the title of Birmingham, and wondered at the vast possibilities with which he was suddenly faced with.

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Time passed by quicker than they had expected, the minutes of the hours of the days ticked by, without so much as a pestering neighbour interrupting their safe haven, tucked away into the corner of a rural forest, hundreds of miles away from the loudness and business of London. London, where everything seemed more stressful, more constricted, more lawful.

Instead, Sherlock now got to watch as the man he treasured blinked himself awake, sleepy and naked, in the bed next to him. He got to kiss the morning smile off his face, got to thread his fingers through the short hair at the back of his neck, the ones he would stare at as John turned to write equations on the whiteboard once upon a time.

And God, he loved John.

It was the only explanation. It must've been the only reason he would allow John to style his hair for him, the only reason he sat through idiotic cultural musicals like West Side Story, which John secretly loved, and always tried hide his tears at the end by dropping his head onto Sherlock’s shoulder. It explained why he loved when John did that. It explained why he got up every morning to make John's tea and toast, it explained why he wanted John to have everything, anything he wanted.

Sherlock had never felt so possessive over something before. Never felt so vulnerable. Never felt like such a man. Never felt like he had the world at his feet. John Watson was the missing piece, the crucial part that Sherlock didn't even realise was absent.

So foolish... I've been an idiot, a blind idiot!!

He snapped straight out of his mind palace to hear the impatient call of his name from the upstairs bathroom, and rushed to John.
"What were you doing down there?" John asked, rubbing at his damp hair with a towel. Sherlock watched the water drip down the doctor's muscled chest, struck with desire but hesitancy to touch.

"I was in my mind palace." Sherlock admitted, making eye contact with John and ignoring the jolt in his chest that happened when he did.

"Okay," John smiled, kissing him on the cheek, which prickled against his lips. "Ouch- that's a sensation I'm not used to with you." he laughed, placing the towel over his shoulders and reaching for the length of hair on Sherlock's face.

"I'm still trying to determine the right disguise-" Sherlock began to explain before John cut him off with a kiss.

"I know," John smiled, "I'll just have to get used to it, that's all."

"Besides, I'm likely to get more bother from your facial hair." Sherlock scratched at his upper lip in false annoyance.

"I don't know," John turned back to the mirror to admire his new moustache. "I kind of like it, it's growing on me I think."

"Of course it's growing on you, that is usually how facial hair works, John." Sherlock teased, turning to exit the en-suite, being met with the sharp snap of John's towel on his behind and a following yelp of surprise.

"Smart-arse." John grinned.

Greg's phone was unusually quiet.

After all the interference over the past few days, Greg had thought ahead of time to cancel any plans he had made for that Thursday morning and afternoon, knowing that Mycroft would only cancel them for him anyway.

Which is why he was sat at his kitchen table in silence, staring at the blank phone in his hand, with no plans whatsoever, waiting for it to light up with Unknown.

He huffed, taking another sip of his now cold tea. He glanced at the clock, which read 1.10pm, and decided to give the man until 2pm to call him before he sought out Mycroft's number and called him for a change.

The ex-detective was unsure of why this change in behaviour had such an apparent effect on him, why was he sat moping with nothing to do simply because Mycroft had stopped calling on him every five minutes? His life didn't revolve around the man.

In fact, as hard as he tried to convince himself that Mycroft might be the tiniest bit interested in him, Greg was harshly reminded that he was but the smallest of cogs in Mycroft's enormous working machine, and was merely there as a tool to help him on his way. Not that he was surprised, all of his relationships had left him feeling insignificant. And lonely. And pathetic. And God he needed to get laid.

Greg sighed, shaking his head at the pity-party that was going on in his head. Whilst lunch
yesterday had felt like a breakthrough to Greg, getting Mycroft to open up to him slightly about Sherlock, he knew that the stubborn suited man would try his absolute hardest not to let his composure slip again. And once again Greg would be shut out in the cold.

Greg wondered if this is what Sherlock's childhood was like, if Mycroft's childhood was like this too, the latter only echoing his father's behaviour with no idea how to function after being suddenly orphaned and left with the responsibility of another human at such a young age himself. Greg's heart suddenly ached for the pair of irritating sods. Who knows what made Sherlock Holmes, Sherlock Holmes. In actual fact, Greg was still holding onto the theory that Sherlock may have been created in a factory somewhere, and given the knowledge of a 50 year old at the moment of birth just as an experiment...

Suddenly, his phone buzzed; and he scrambled to get hold of it again.

Battery at 10%, please plug into power source.

He stared incredulously at the small screen, dropping it back onto the table, cursing himself for being so ridiculous.

"Let's go on an adventure." John's entire body was a-light, his face that of a 12 year old boy scout being faced with the prospect of new discoveries with fellow friends and freedom away from overbearing parents.

"An adventure?" Sherlock drawled, his head pointedly turning to the drizzle of rain lingering in a mist outside their window. They'd been cuddled up on the sofa reading separate books for the last hour or two. "I'm not used to this adventurous side of yours. What happened to the John Watson who would find most of his excitement in Thursday nights' BBC dramas and miniseries?"

"Ah come on, the British embrace the crap weather, it's one of our only talents as a nation." John patted Sherlock's thigh where it rested alongside his.

"I wouldn't call it a talent, moreover a lack of alternative options." Sherlock smiled to him anyway, entertaining John's childish notions of fun.

"Come on, hermit. Live a little." John winked at him before hauling himself up from the tangled heap of limbs on the sofa and heading straight for the coat rack. He shrugged on his own hoodless number before reaching for Sherlock's Belstaff, holding it out as an invitation for Sherlock to step into it.

The man relented, standing from the sofa and allowing John to slide the coat onto his shoulders, smiling at the height he had to stretch to do so.

Within ten minutes they were in the middle of nowhere, buried in the forest under canopies of trees, whose leaves were only just holding in the majority of harsh rainfall from the ground underneath.

"I'm sure as soon as we stepped out of the door, it began to rain harder." Sherlock complained half-heartedly from beside John, their hands locked between them.

"Stop complaining about the weather!" John laughed.
"I'm British, it's what we do." Sherlock insisted with a small smile, which grew considerably at the answering giggle that escaped John's lips.

"Hey- look! There's a cave!" John loosened his grip on Sherlock's hand, pointing to an approaching structure of boulders which lay haphazardly against each other.

"That is not a cave, John." Sherlock called out from behind him, he watched John's figure running towards the structure in fascination, the soggy leaves sticking to the sole of his boots.

"It could be," John answered petulantly, "We could make a cave?"

"How old are you?" Sherlock snickered, finally catching up to where John had stopped at the entrance. He scrunched up his face in protest as a raindrop struggled through the leaves and landed straight on his forehead.

"Older and wiser than you." John insisted with lift of his chin.

Sherlock responded with a raised eyebrow.

"Okay, well, at least the former is true." He winked at the younger man, before turning his attention back to the stacked slabs of stone covered in slimy moss, he immediately began to climb, using low tree branches as leverage to haul himself higher.

"John- it's wet, you're going to slip." Sherlock frowned at him.

"I'll be fine! Follow me!"

"I'd rather not injure myself today, thank you." Sherlock smirked up at him, his face looking so different from the one John was first acquainted with.


"What are you planning on doing when you're stuck up there with fear of coming down?" Sherlock teased.

"Me? I have no fears," John stuck out his tongue. "Come on, Sherlock, trust me." he said seriously, holding out a hand to the man.

Something registered in the genius' mind, a recollection of those same words echoing through his consciousness like the reverberations of a bell.

All of a sudden his world was spinning. He felt dizzy as the sickening image came back into view.

"Come on, Sherlock." Jim's smooth voice insisted from above him. He felt the surprising weight pinning him down, the pain flared in his wrists from the boy's forceful grip. "Trust me." he said as he struggled to hold Sherlock into place, his thin lips lingering at the younger boy's neck.

"Please don't-" he tried, one of the only times he'd granted his attacker with the privilege of hearing his voice protest. Sherlock knew it only encouraged him. "My parents- they'll be back soon."

"Your parents are at dinner with my parents, they won't be back for hours."

Sherlock screwed his eyes shut at the final sight of James' unbuttoning his trousers, fighting back the rising bile in his throat.
"Sherlock!" John's voice drifted back in, Sherlock opened his eyes to register that the doctor was now stood right in front of him, the assortment of boulders blurred in the background. "Sherlock-are you okay? What just happened?"

He blinked furiously in response, as if it would bleach the memories from his mind. "I thought I deleted it..." he mumbled to himself, looking everywhere but at John, who had his hands either side of Sherlock's face.

"Deleted what?" he shook his head in confusion, "Speak to me, you're worrying me..."

"John?" he gripped at the older man's coat, doubting he was even real.

"Yes, I'm here." he felt the weak pulse at his lover's neck. "God, Sherlock, you scared me half to death."

Sherlock let his head drop forward onto John's shoulder, not caring that the material was damp and uncomfortable. "I'm sorry," his muffled voice replied. "I'm sorry, I just--"

"It's okay," John comforted him, his hand going straight to the back of Sherlock's head. "It's okay. Let's go."

Sherlock frowned, feeling John slide his arm around his waist and lead him back towards the way they came. He took a step and hissed, falling into Sherlock's side, pain flaring in his ankle.

"John?" He stopped, sliding his own arm around his lover.

"It's nothing-" he insisted, ignoring the glare from Sherlock. "I hurt my leg jumping down from the rocks, is all."

"You idiot." Sherlock sighed, "I told you you'd hurt yourself."

"I needed to get to you! I just... I guess I'm not as young as I used to be." the doctor chuckled nervously.

There was a fragile silence that spread between the two men, the fading sound of rainfall becoming a faint background noise. Silently, Sherlock walked John backwards a few steps to a large chopped tree trunk big enough for two, and sat down next to him on it.

"I thought I was doing better." he admitted quietly after a moment.

"You're doing amazing, Sherlock." John insisted, resting his chin on the young man's bony shoulder.

John watched Sherlock blink down at his feet, the length of scratchy stubble decorating his jaw, creeping up towards the definition of his cheekbones. Already he felt like they'd changed. Not only on the outside, but the inside too, John knew they were more of a team now than they ever were. He knew he could lean on Sherlock as soon as he felt himself falling, and was desperate to be there to hold Sherlock up when he needed him.

"Some days will be better than others, but you're making progress. You need to try not to bury it." He advised, twirling some of Sherlock's curly hair around his forefinger.

Sherlock turned his head away, "Emotion has always been my greatest challenger."

"That's because you make it out to be an enemy, just let yourself feel, Sherlock."
John pressed his palm against Sherlock's chest, as if to emphasise the beating heart in his chest.

Sherlock shuddered despite the warmth of John's body holding him to the ground, feeling his throat close up, as if his body was naturally trying to stop emotion and pain from pouring out from him.
"I do feel."

"I know you do," John nodded, his eyes brimming with tears unexpectedly. He moved his hand to the back of Sherlock's neck, pressing their foreheads together to allow the young man to regain his composure.

The truth was, Sherlock couldn't handle the way he knew he felt for John. In certain parts of his brain, it felt wrong. Not because of the situation they'd found themselves in, but because of how he had always dealt with emotions threatening to creep in over the horizon. The Holmes household had been a difficult one to grow up in, and Sherlock had never truly been or felt like a child. Being emotional was discouraged and frequently seen as a weakness, especially to his father, it was drilled into him so often that when anything other than logic and reason threatened to seep in, Sherlock immediately panicked until he learnt how to block it out.

John's presence unravelled him, physically and emotionally, he was more relaxed, more open than he'd ever been. In fact, whenever he thought about it, Sherlock didn't recall ever doing more than just existing before John came along.

"Let's go home." Sherlock said, his voice deep and quiet, introverted, despite the emotionless expression on his face once more.

"You may have to carry me..." John admitted with an embarrassed chuckle. He watched as the genius pulled himself to his feet, holding out his hand for John to take.

They trudged slowly through the uneven ground of the forest, comforted by the silence only penetrated by the persistent rainfall. Sherlock was pleased to see that there still wasn't a soul in sight, whilst he was accustomed to the beating heart of London, he found that he appreciated the loneliness of the countryside much more when he had someone to share it with.

They arrived home drenched through to their skins. The slowness of their pace as Sherlock helped John stumble home, combined with the sudden opening of the heavens once they reached the lip of the forest, made for an extremely soggy walk back to the cottage.

Sherlock crowded John in under the porch as soon as they reached it, allowing himself to bare the weather whilst John stayed dry, fumbling for the key in his pockets.

"Sorry, love-" John had apologised, "Can't find the bloody key."

Sherlock ignored the jolt in his chest at the endearment, reaching immediately into the breast pocket of John's quilted coat and producing the small silver key to him.

John frowned down at the key, patting his now empty pocket.

"John, haven't got all day." Sherlock prompted, water running down his face in streams, hair plastered to his forehead in dark wet curls, droplets falling from his long eyelashes.
"Oh- right, shit, sorry."

They fell into the house, shaking off the water like dogs and peeling sodden layers of clothing off with a grimace. John hobbled over to the closest sofa, hearing Sherlock flick the kettle on followed by a loud whistling as it boiled in the kitchen.

"Oh marvellous idea," he sighed, "kill for a cuppa."

The doctor wriggled off his boot carefully, feeling a sharp twist in his calf muscle, and noticing the swelling on his ankle. He frowned down at it as if it had personally offended him.

Sherlock appeared with two mugs, settling one down on the coffee table next to John. "Oh dear, shall I call a doctor?" he asked innocently.

"Har-har, very funny." John responded with a half-hearted glare. "What's that?" he asked after a brief pause, noticing a bulge of fabric underneath Sherlock's arm, positioned more towards his back, hidden from view.

"I was going to give it to you before, but I must have got distracted." A strange look was on Sherlock's face, one that didn't belong there, something akin to the anxiousness of a young boy on his first day of school. He pulled out the bundle further, and John realised it was folded leather, chocolate brown and faded, with equally faded badges sewn expertly into it. It took him a moment to realise before Sherlock unfolded it that it was one of the leather jackets he had been admiring in the shop the week beforehand.

"Sherlock- you didn't?" He asked with disbelief, taking the jacket from his lover's hands, smoothing his fingertips over the cool leather. He looked up from admiring the surprise gift, and back up to Sherlock's nervous face. "It's gorgeous...thank you."

"You are welcome." A small smile appeared as the tenseness drained ever so slightly from his posture, nerves melting away. "Now you can stop calling yourself ancient, I will not hear any more incorrect assumptions."

"Yes, Sir," John joked, "I'd put it on, but I'm soaked through. Can I try it later?"

"Of course," Sherlock responded quietly, content to let his eyes roam John's face, full of happy surprise and something like adoration whenever he looked up to meet Sherlock's gaze.

"C'mere.." John motioned towards himself, not content on Sherlock being sat so far away. The genius lifted himself from his seat, settling in next to John with a familiar ease as if they'd been doing it for decades. "You're so thoughtful." John kissed his temple, consenting when Sherlock tilted his head backwards in search of his lips. The doctor wondered how anyone could have ever seen Sherlock as cold, distant and uncaring, if only they had taken the time to stop and learn and know him.

"It seems that love makes man do strange things indeed." Sherlock uttered against John's damp lips, not realising what he was saying until he felt the older man freeze against him.

"Uh- I mean.." Sherlock panicked, his heart beating into overdrive as his body tried to claw back the words that had escaped the prison inside him.

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Greg was extremely annoyed with himself, he'd decided.
Not only had he not got anything done for the entire first half of his day, but he had thought of nothing else but that damn controlling man, wondering why he was suddenly deciding to not get in contact at all, and wondering who he had offended up there to be handed such a nightmare on a plate. Helping one stubborn Holmes brother to find the other stubborn Holmes brother. Somebody should make a sitcom about his life, he thought.

After no texts or calls, or strange methods of communication such as ridiculously posh cars pulling up outside his house, or notes suddenly appearing on his fridge signed with the letter 'M', Greg had decided to take matters into his own hands, calling a cab and sitting cross-armed in the back in some sort of petulant sulk until the car pulled up to the white pillared apartment. He tried not to raise his eyebrows at the fee as he handed the money over to the cabbie, accepting his change, and stepping foot onto the pavement outside the lofty black front door.

He must have looked comical to John, eyes blown wide with shock from his own words, damp hair drying into a frizzy and manic cloud, mouth making shapes of words without any sound escaping.

But all of those details were melting into one, John gained tunnel vision as he sat fixated on Sherlock, struck by the sudden overwhelming amount of warmth that was building in his body, settling into his veins, engulfing his heart with a painful squeeze until there was just a rapid beating left in his chest, and butterflies swarming in his stomach.

"You love me?" He asked with a newfound shyness to his voice, as if he were a five year old boy again, nervously crowding little Sally Jenkins into the corner of the playground to ask her if she would be his girlfriend.

Sherlock swallowed the lump in his throat, feeling it slide painfully away as he tried as hard as he could not to explode. "I do."

John fell backwards against the sofa with a huff, completely overcome with such an unfamiliar feeling.

"I'm sorry John, I shouldn't hav-"

"Sherlock-

"You know I never usually let my em-

"Sherlock-

"And I promise if I've horribly misjudged the situation, I won't bring it up agai-

"Sherlock!

"Yes...?"

John leant forward with a smile so proud and pure, Sherlock was sure that not even the smile of an angel herself could envy the beauty of John Watson's face staring back at him, and saying those words so unquestionably. "I love you too, you daft git."
He headed straight up the stairs after a familiar nod to the usual bodyguard who stood in the entrance to the foyer. It was strange to think that he’d been there enough times now for them to stop checking him for identification whenever he walked through the door. Greg wondered if Mycroft had said something to his staff to let them know he was not a threat to him.

Once again he was struck by the grandeur of the building as he climbed the winding staircase, it really was breathtaking, no matter how many times you happened to step foot in the place. The thought of growing up in mansions like these made Greg want to question why on earth he was even allowed to be in the Holmes' presence. He knew that he himself, having grown up on a small shabby terraced estate full of poor working-class families, wouldn't have been given a second glance by either of the brothers if they hadn't of been introduced in other ways determined by the universe...

He tried to steady himself, feeling like his head was spinning and crashing into unknown locations. Before he knew it, he was being pulled against John's solid chest, the wetness of sopping cloth not deterring Sherlock from pressing his face into his lover's shoulder.

"Do you really?" he asked after a second, pulling back to get another glimpse of John Watson's teary eyes.

"Of course I do." John frowned in bewilderment, wondering how the boy could even doubt it. "In fact, I can't remember a time when I didn't feel so frustratingly and wonderfully head over heels for you, Sherlock Holmes."

"I understand that, Madam, however there really aren't any other solutions I can-" The quiet voice drifted into hearing distance, as Greg hovered unsurely near the door to Mycroft Holmes' office.

"As I have explained previously, particularly in my meeting with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on Thursday morning, my services are unfortunately limited at the moment."

Greg recognised the voice as an exhausted Mycroft Holmes, and wondered whether to enter the office uninvited to make his presence known, or to risk being caught eavesdropping on a seemingly important conversation which he probably shouldn't be listening to.

"Of course. I will offer all assistance possible-"

The teacher frowned to himself in the hallway; if he didn't know any better, it sounded like Mycroft Holmes was being told off.

"Yes, Madam..." Greg checked the time on his phone quickly, sliding it back into his pocket and getting ready to turn the handle and enter "Have a pleasant evening, Madam."

Greg wrenched open the solid door as soon as he heard Mycroft slam down the phone to its holder. "Impertinent woman." he growled under his breath to himself, before he turned to notice Greg in the doorway.
"Gregory." the young man acknowledged him, dark grey circles sagging under his eyelids. "Thank you for knocking." he said sarcastically, turning back to his desk.

"Taking a leaf out of your book," he sassed in return, stepping in and onto the bear-skin rug sprawled out on the dark hardwood floor. He shut the door with a click.

"I didn't expect you today." The back of Mycroft's head didn't move, focused solely on his computer screen, flipping between word documents and websites, and back onto small squares of CCTV footage.

"I want to help." Lestrade shrugged. "Have you slept?" he inquired innocently, moving onto the worn leather love-seat.

"Sleep is the last thing on my mind." he insisted, focused and still.

"Now you sound like your brother." Greg snorted, earning a half-hearted glare from the elder Holmes brother. "Any progress?"

"Scotland." The surprisingly deep voice returned.

"Scotland?" Lestrade frowned in confusion.

"If my calculations are correct, yes."

"What calculations? What evidence do you have?" Greg insisted.

"None other than my own deductions," Mycroft sighed, finally turning in his chair after the relentless questions from the man across from him. "Sherlock would have wanted to get as far away as possible without leaving the country as they would definitely have been caught at borders upon doing so if they were to escape abroad, thus, the furthest place possible? Scotland."

"But surely that's exactly what he'd want you to think? Sherlock is clever- he's."

"He's left false trails of breadcrumbs leading to Brighton, Devon, and Manchester. It's taken weeks for my operatives to work out, many of the leads we had were false."

"What about the hotel sighting?"

"I believe that one to be true."

Greg was quiet, D.I. Lestrade was sinking back into his bloodstream, the adrenaline of details falling together in his mind, the aching frustration of slowly piecing things together. "But why Scotland? He could've gone anywhere to get away, any tiny little city."

Mycroft physically sagged in his seat, a deep sigh deflating his chest as he brought a perfectly manicured hand to his forehead. Greg felt a sudden twang of pity for the man. The youth of his features suddenly betrayed his spectacular level of intelligence.

"We spent a great deal of time in Scotland as children, there's no other place than there he knows like the back of his hand, apart from London."

"So, what? You're just waiting for something to appear? Scotland is bloody massive!" Greg stood from his seat.

"You think I don't know that?" Mycroft demanded icily.

"Everything you're doing clearly isn't working, so why don't you take the next step? If you think
he's in Scotland, get up there!" A voice somewhere in the back of Greg's head told him that he was probably being a bit too pushy, but his conscience wanted to scream and shout at Mycroft Holmes for just sitting there.

"And do what? Wander street to street knocking doors and asking if they've seen a curly haired teenager?" Mycroft scowled up at the man looming over him, feeling the irritation scratching at his insides.

"Don't be ridiculous-" Greg shook his head, moving over to the open windows across from Mycroft's desk. "You should get over there and join up with the force, put out a search-"

Mycroft stood, his slim form casting a shadow on the wall. "Believe it or not, Gregory, I do have other pre-occupations than spending my life running after my juvenile little brother."

Greg turned, surprised at the raised voice which responded to him, "You know what, you're exactly what Sherlock always said you were." he spoke to the ground, shaking his head and turning away from Mycroft.

The suited man was silent, and Greg sighed as he realised he may have gone too far. Just as he was about to turn to apologise, Mycroft spoke up, his voice weak, and full of an emotion Greg wasn't used to associating with the man. "All I have ever done has been for him."

"What?" He asked, so hushed for his fear of breaking the tension in the room.

The sound of the traffic and the clock ticking in the background became an absent buzzing in the back of his mind as Mycroft Holmes sighed, feeling the weight of the world on his shoulders. "If I am stable, I am in a better position to help Sherlock remain stable. Did he tell you that he spent the majority of his pre-teen years with an addiction to cocaine?"

Greg's face distorted into one of displeasure and shock at the reminder, "I know he spent time on the streets, but he never elaborated. I never knew the extent until you said before."

"Our mother was the only one who ever managed to bring him home whenever he went flying off the handle." said Mycroft. "I was never in a high enough position to have the resources to find him... I'm still not."

"Mycroft." Greg's voice broke slightly, as he held out his hand. "What you're doing is brilliant. The people here work like a well oiled machine- you're bound to find him."

The man eyed the outstretched hand with uncertainty, his own fingers twitching at his side.

"I know you have limitations, we all do, but I told you I'd help you find your brother. That's what I'm going to do."

Mycroft Holmes was silent in his demeanour as he seated himself once again, the carefully constructed mask that Greg recognised greatly from Sherlock was intact, not a hair out of place.

"I want to help you, Mycroft." Greg stepped towards him cautiously, his voice soft. "Let me help you."

The ex-detective inspector breathed into the silence, his hand moving slowly to the back of Mycroft's chair, made from old remarkable stretched leather and secured with bronze studs along the seam, millimetres from the nape of Mycroft's neck.

Mr Holmes resisted the urge to wince at the statement proffered, his hackles raising at the suggestion that he probably couldn't do this by himself. Prepared for a rebuttal, he raised his
glance to Greg's and got caught unexpectedly in the trap of the blues staring back at him, hesitating in the quiet room.

He exhaled suddenly, something that sounded close to a sigh of defeat, and turned towards his desk, retrieving a blank white CD contained within a clear plastic wallet casing.

Greg held his breath as Mycroft outstretched his arm towards him, CD in hand, offering it out to Greg's absent hands that hovered by his stomach. Upon closer inspection, Greg could see Mycroft's refined scrawl in black marker, that the CD was titled "Edinburgh CCTV splices"

Greg accepted the disc with grateful hands, sliding his thumb over the protective wallet, "Thank you." His eyes met Mycroft's in the dim light of the room, following the imperceptible nod that Mycroft responded with, with curious eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for being patient with updates guys. As always I hope you enjoyed this chapter. I apologise for the delay, life has been hellish and hectic. Besides that, what did you all think of The Six Thatchers? Can't believe we finally have new content!

Feel free to leave any comments with your thoughts and feelings about this new chapter (as long as they're good ones!) I love getting all of your feedback.
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

We're back! I've missed you lot. Be sure to leave feedback and most of all enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Greg ran his hands over his face, the coarseness of his palms felt refreshing against his tired skin. "What time is it?" he said around a yawn, leaning back in his chair and sloting his hands together behind his head.

He was met with a delayed response from the man sat at the opposite desk to him, his eyes darting up to the familiar concentrated frown of Mycroft Holmes, who was sat primly despite being in the same position for hours, glaring down at his computer screen. "Just past midnight."

"Fuck," he replied eloquently.

"Yes." Mycroft replied, rotating his head slightly until an audible crack sounded from his protesting spine and neck.

"Anything?" Greg asked, knowing the answer.

Mycroft met his gaze over his screen. "Not yet."

Greg grimaced with understanding, his hands falling to his knees as he pushed himself away from his recently designated desk and moved over to the window to stretch his sore legs. "I don't know whether to start in on another disc or call a cab." he said, mostly to himself, scratching his forehead in thought and looking towards his abandoned laptop.

In all honesty, Greg couldn't say why he was so devoted to helping Mycroft Holmes. Overall he was a strange, antiscial, occasionally rude, but scarily sharp man; and Greg had never thought those personality traits had equalled a perfect equation. But there was something about him.

His tired eyes focused on the movement of Mycroft's long thin fingers dancing over the keys of his computer, as he slid his own hands into the pockets of his jeans. They'd spent the entire day going through footage separately, and Greg hadn't said as much, but he felt a touch of pride at the fact that Mycroft trusted him enough to handle the footage on his own.

They'd eaten dinner absently, picking at their plates that a member of Mycroft's staff had brought in on a trolley. Greg had expected silver dishes with lids, ridiculously fragile crockery, and five different types and sizes of spoons; but was surprised to see a simple chicken dish with vegetables and chips, the latter of which he'd happily wolfed down.

"Maybe we should call it a day," Greg suggested. "Besides, these chairs are bloody uncomfortable." he said, picking at his fingernails absently, and waiting for Mycroft to regard him.

The still three-piece suited man settled back in his chair after a click of his mouse, and turned his head to the side nearest to the teacher. "I do admit, my home office is a much more pleasant
working environment."

Greg watched him rub at the underside of his wrists which had rested on the edge of the tabletop all day. "Wait, home office? I thought you lived here?"

He pushed back from his chair, rising and stepping away from his desk for the first time in several hours, turning to face Greg with an incredulous look on his face. "Really?"

"I just assumed, you're here all the time. Don't think I've ever seen you leave, actually." His eyebrows pulled together.

"No, myself and Sherlock live in the same house we always have, even preceding our parents' death." He looked down and buttoned his suit, the material slightly creased from being in the same cramped conditions all day.

Greg nodded, unsure what to say. He knew about Sherlock's parents, of course, their death was only recent, and he remembered feeling floored at how well Sherlock had hidden the fact for so long after it happened. He'd only found out when the status of his guardianship changed on Sherlock's electronic file, and Lestrade had been notified that he was henceforth to report any issues to the boy's older brother.

He patted his back pocket to find the shape of his phone, thumbing it open and beginning to dial in a local taxi number, when the other man spoke up.

"There's no need to summon a taxi, I have a car," he said, closing the lid of his laptop and motioning towards the door.

"Oh?" Greg said, sliding his phone back into his pocket and gathering up his coat. "I don't think I've ever seen you drive anywhere yourself."

"We have not known each other that long, Gregory," he said, "I would be surprised if you knew everything about me."

Greg narrowed his eyes at him for a moment. "You know everything about me."

"Yes. Well. That goes without saying, now, doesn't it?" he saw the corner of Mycroft's mouth pulling up briefly in what looked like a smile, before it disappeared again, and he was gesturing for Greg to hurry up.

He chuckled under his breath, shrugging his coat on and reaching for the last custard cream on the trolley, shoving it carelessly into his mouth. "Alright, clever clogs." he said around crumbs, moving towards Mycroft and the door.

"John, you killed me. I am dead."

"You are not dead, you drama queen. Shush." the teacher replied, brushing a kiss over the younger man's forehead as he passed his sprawled out form on the armchair.

"I never want to eat again." Sherlock groaned, holding his stomach and curling further into himself as John moved around him, gathering plates from the small table.
"You said you liked it!" John cried, indignant.

"I did! Too much..."

"Well, it was about time I cooked for you, we've been splashing out on too many takeaways since being here and it's not doing much good for my ever-growing gut." he said with a pointed pat to his stomach, and disappeared into the next room.

"Now who's being a drama queen?"

"What!" John called from the kitchen.

"You are still in fighting shape, John. Beyond fighting shape." Sherlock argued, evidence of which flashing tauntingly behind his eyes, the memory of John's toned stomach and chest as he exited the shower that same morning.

"Well, either way, I'm glad you enjoyed it. You're filling out a bit too, in a good way." He emerged from the kitchen, walking around to the sofa adjacent to Sherlock's chair and throwing himself onto it with an 'oof'.

Sherlock hummed with disapproval. "I seem to have acquired a feeder."

John gasped, throwing a cushion at his lover's head, which was accurately dodged. "You take that back!"

Sherlock grinned at him instead, stretching out and planting his feet on the coffee table.

"I meant as in muscle, too, you've definitely gained more of that. It must be those morning runs you've started doing." John crossed his own legs perpendicular to Sherlock's, their feet almost touching on the table. "And your newly obtained lumberjack skills." he grinned, his teeth white in the dim light.

The younger man narrowed his eyes at him, "Someone had to chop the firewood."

"I did offer." John raised his eyebrows, still smiling fondly at him, and traced his fingers along the seam of the sofa arm.

"And then promptly fell asleep." Sherlock snorted, the light of humour in his expression making him even more attractive to John, who was staring at him as though cartoon hearts were about to form in his eyes.

"Some of us need more than 3 hours sleep to function." he folded his arms across his own bloated stomach.

Sherlock hummed, smoothing a hand across his stubbly chin in annoyance.

"If you hate it that much, why don't you go and have a shave?" John asked, watching him from his own seat.

"It's a necessary evil." He muttered, letting his hand fall to the side as he looked back up to John.

His eyes softened with Sherlock's gaze upon him, and he gestured for him to join him on the sofa. The lanky teen hauled himself up and deposited himself at John's side, pleased at how the teacher's arm automatically fell across his shoulders, pulling him closer to his body.

John let out a sigh of contentment, feeling Sherlock tuck his knees up against him, his body
melting into John's instinctively as his face pressed into the warmth of John's collar. "I love you, you know." he said softly, relishing in the fact that he could say it aloud now.

"I know." Sherlock's baritone replied, and his face came into view briefly before he was leaning in to kiss the corner of John's mouth.

John turned his head to catch Sherlock's lips as they pulled away, his hand coming just under his defined jaw, thumb stroking rhythmically against the hollow under the young man's cheekbone.

He heard Sherlock exhale through his nose as their lips moved against each other, pulling a sharp intake of breath from John himself as the heady atmosphere settled in, and John was suddenly aware of Sherlock's intoxicating scent.

His free hand fell to the Sherlock's waist, he was wearing a tailored white shirt that John hadn't seen before, and was continuously baffled at the amount of different clothes Sherlock seemed to be pulling from thin air each morning.

John tugged at Sherlock's hip, encouraging him onto his lap, shuffling sideways so he could slot his knees either side of John's legs. He barely had time to catch his breath before Sherlock was grabbing handfuls of his shirt, feeling safe in the cocoon of John's hands and arms around his body.

"John-" he gasped, breaking off as John attached his mouth to his neck.

"Okay?" He asked breathily, pressing a kiss underneath Sherlock's ear, his lengthy curls tickling John's nose where they curled around his ear and stuck out haphazardly from the nape of his neck.

"Yes," He nodded frantically, encouraging John's hands to grip his hips, feeling the heat between their bodies. He pushed a hand experimentally up John's chest, brushing a nipple and earning a surprised little gasp from the older man, who was rapidly hardening in his jeans.

"Sherlock..." he managed before Sherlock was kissing him again, unconfident but firm, his hands soft against John's skin, fingers brushing tantalisingly. "Let me take you to bed." John said with a pointed squeeze to his waist.

Sherlock whined in protest at the thought of disengaging as John attempted to stand up with Sherlock still wrapped around him, allowing himself to be pushed aside to the sofa as John stood and adjusted himself with an awkward wince. He looked back down to Sherlock and his stomach lurched.

His lips were slightly swollen from John's attention, dusty pink much like the attractive blush that now coloured his skin, resting high on his cheeks in two spots. John's eyes were drawn to the obvious bulge at Sherlock's crotch, his tight suit trousers slightly impractical for straddling one's lover on a small sofa. His eyes were dark and heavy, pupils blown wide and hair sticking out in every which way, his chest rising and falling quicker than usual as his eyes appreciated John's body.

He held out his hand, waggling his fingers until Sherlock huffed and stretched his own out to meet them, allowing the shorter man to pull him from his seat and lead him upstairs.

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Watching Mycroft Holmes drive was less strange than he'd expected it to be.
Greg felt very safe with him at the wheel, and although the man obviously rarely drove himself anywhere anymore considering his growing status in the government, he seemed pretty confident and relaxed. In fact, Greg wasn't sure he'd ever seen him so quiet.

He'd rolled down the window as soon as they got in, and let his arm rest atop it, the cool air flowing in, and the light from the streetlamps glinting off the gold of his signet ring as his fingers tapped against the outer body of the car.

They were almost nearing the turn-off for Greg's neighbourhood when Mycroft heard a gasp from his left. "Shit!"

Mycroft looked at him from the side, surprised from the outburst, watching Lestrade pat his pockets down thoroughly and then turn his gaze guiltily back to him. "I left my keys on the desk." he admitted, ashamed.

The suited man blinked, refocusing on the road and slowing at an approaching red light.

"Shit, Mycroft- I'm so sorry. Just drop me home and I'll get a taxi back to Belgravia."

Mycroft's lips pulled into a thin line, clearly contemplating something, as he set off again at the sight of green. Greg gnawed at his lip, feeling guilty and idiotic and knowing that this must've just been confirming the thoughts Mycroft had already about him being worthless and stupid like he deemed the rest of the human race.

He was just about to apologise again when Mycroft headed for the roundabout, getting off at the third exit, the complete opposite direction to his neighbourhood. "Mycroft, it's too late to be driving all the way back into Belgravia, and you must be knackered. Just drop me home, I don't mind-"

"We are not going back to Belgravia." the elder Holmes said quickly, his hands tightening on the steering wheel.

Greg frowned back at him in the small car, his mouth agape with confusion, "But where-"

"My house is closer. You may use the guest bedroom." he said, clearly uncomfortable with the surprising kindness of his gesture, and hoping silently that Lestrade wouldn't make a big fuss of it.

His mouth snapped shut, and the light of amusement came into his eyes as he faced forward again, his mind steering towards thoughts that it was going to be an interesting end to the night indeed.

Sherlock's brain short-circuited as John stripped his shirt off over his head and moved towards him where he was sprawled across their king-size bed. He was treated once again to the sight of all tanned, golden skin, small scars and freckles, dips of muscle that Sherlock ran his fingers over in the brief second that he could before John was crowding in against him and kissing him over and over.

He worked at his own shirt buttons, only to be slapped away and replaced by John's fumbling fingers, groaning as their clothed crotches met between them.

John managed to undo the last button, and was desperate to push the shirt from Sherlock's
shoulders to see the gorgeous stretch of marble skin underneath, attaching his mouth to the expanse of freckles across his shoulders and chest. "John, my god..."

"You don't believe in God." John chuckled, smiling against his skin before Sherlock managed to flip them over, rolling the teacher onto his back. There was a brief pause as Sherlock sat back on his knees above his teacher, eyes roaming over John's torso, following the trail of hair that lead tantalisingly underneath the waistband of John's boxers and jeans.

The older man's mouth pulled into a slow contented smile, lifting his hands above his head to grasp the headboard behind him, noticing Sherlock's eyes following the stretch of muscle in his bicep with a hooded gaze.

"How do you so consistently manage to make me feel like the luckiest man in the world?" John uttered, breaking the quiet of their combined breathing patterns and reaching a palm out to Sherlock's sternum, letting his forefinger draw a line down the centre of his torso until it fell to the pronounced V of his hips.

Sherlock blinked back at him, the look of lust fighting with an expression of love and devotion as he gazed at John's handsome face, his heart thudding painfully in his chest. "Come here," John gasped, placing his hands either side of Sherlock's neck and tugging him to meet his lips.

They wound around each other, warming each other's skin with their hands and mouths, John flicking his tongue directly against one of Sherlock's nipples, which was obviously becoming a pressure point as Sherlock began to squirm underneath him.

"Please, John-"

"What do you want?" he asked, voice deeper with arousal than Sherlock had ever heard it, as he nipped at the younger man's earlobe.

"You, just you-" Sherlock gripped John's bicep as it wound around his waist.

"You're gonna have to be more specific than that, love." John chuckled, rubbing his nose against Sherlock's.

His heart skipped slightly at the term of endearment he was still unused to, quickly racing again as he pressed his hips more forcefully against John's, his ears being treated to a guttural moan from his teacher.

"I don't know, I just- I want..."

John watched him trail off uncertainly, and lifted one of his hands to card through his hair comfortingly "Okay," he said, kissing his temple. "Let's just take it slow."

"I'm sorry, I'm not..." Sherlock frowned to himself "Better at this."

"I'm not expecting anything from you here, Sherlock. Just relax," he pushed Sherlock onto his back, going on his hands and knees over him. "Let me take care of you," he said, eyes darker than usual from where Sherlock could see him, mouth hovering above his sternum.

His erection strained against his trousers as John trailed hot open-mouthed kisses down his torso, calloused hands tracing his ribs and pinning him effectively to the bed.

Sherlock bit his lip to hold in an embarrassing moan when John's hot and heavy hand fell to the bulge at his crotch, rubbing through the material and moving quickly to the fastenings of his trousers.
He felt John's experienced tongue at the trail of hair leading from his navel to his groin, hidden underneath his boxers. The teacher sucked a mark into Sherlock's hipbone as he worked his boxers and bottoms down his legs until Sherlock could kick them off the bed.

John moved back up his body to kiss him, taking his face into his hands to ensure the comfort of his younger lover. "Promise me something?" he asked, pulling back and looking into Sherlock's transcendent blue eyes. "The second you feel uncomfortable, tell me."

"I'm fine, John." Sherlock replied calmly, feeling his lover's thumb stroking at his temple. "Thank you." he said, a touch emotional at the extra care John was taking to ensure his happiness. *God, I love you.*

John grinned, "Good," and kissed him again. Sherlock's fingers flying to the button-zip of his jeans, tugging them down over the globes of his ass. John kicked his jeans off and returned eagerly to his lover's stomach, tongue circling patterns as his hand made its way to Sherlock's neglected cock.

He gasped at the feeling of John's hand pulling deliciously at his erection, distracted by the combination of hands and tongue, until John was looking up at him with a hint of mischief in his eyes, and some hesitation.

"What?" Sherlock breathed, feeling himself getting even harder at the image of John's hand wrapped around his flushed cock.

Suddenly, John was sinking down on Sherlock's body, his cock being enveloped in the overwhelming wet velvet heat of John's mouth, his head bumping the back of John's throat with little effort.

"Fuck!" He swore, his hands flying to John's hair and gripping, pulling a particularly gorgeous moan from the older man. Sherlock grunted at the vibrations against his cock, the two men setting a steady rhythm as John's head bobbed up and down, Sherlock's hand atop it guiding him up and down the length of his erection.

"John, my- Ohh... Yes," Sherlock's head dropped back onto the pillows as John sucked harder, lips stretching and encouraging more of Sherlock's cock into his mouth. The teacher pushed insistently at his own boxer-briefs, working his cock with his hand, unable to resist the gorgeous sight of Sherlock Holmes in utter ecstasy.

He pulled off with a wet pop on the upstroke, gaining Sherlock's attention as their eyes met, "That good?" he smirked, his voice wrecked and deep.

"Do you need to ask?" Sherlock gasped in return, somehow having lost his breath as his chest heaved up and down. John moved back to his lover's cock, and pressed the point of his tongue against the underside of the head, pleased at the delicious sounds Sherlock was making as he licked a wide stripe down to his testicles and sucked one gently into his mouth.

"John, I'm going to- Oh... John." Sherlock took his cock in hand and stroked quickly, pulling himself towards orgasm as John's mouth moved over his balls.

He lifted Sherlock's hips under his hands as he approached climax, his hot tongue sliding down the short stretch of flesh to place a final deft lick to Sherlock's puckered entrance, the final straw before the younger man was crying out, shooting stripes of come against his stomach, hand fisted tightly around his cock.

John turned his attention to his own cock, one hand on Sherlock's thigh, only to be slapped away
and replaced with Sherlock's tight grasp. The young man pumped him firmly until John gasped and grunted, his release dripping down over Sherlock's long pale fingers.

Lestrade wiped the grit from his boots on the coarse welcome mat and stepped inside the house. It had been too dark from the outside to sense its enormity, but Greg suspected that it was at least a 6 bedroom house as he followed Mycroft into the large hallway.

He watched the man shuck off his suit jacket, revealing the matching waistcoat underneath that was still buttoned fully, the navy tie at his neck looking more like a strangling device. Greg had no idea how he survived in those suits all day, he counted his lucky stars that the dress code for teachers at work was smart-casual.

"Allow me." Mycroft said and turned, his eyes on the ground, but hands outstretched to receive Lestrade's jacket.

Greg passed it over, blinking up at him as he deposited it on a concealed coat rack, hidden behind a rather tall house plant. "Thanks." He nodded, and suddenly felt awkward as the two men stood alone in the hallway.

Mycroft cleared his throat, going for one of his cufflinks and popping it out, "Would you care for a nightcap?" he questioned the ex-inspector, rolling the first sleeve to his elbow, probably the most casually dressed Greg had ever seen him as he tugged at the knot of his tie.

The teacher watched him thoughtfully, "I wouldn't say no."

Mycroft nodded, and gestured for the other man to follow him through to the sitting room, which seemed surprisingly cosy and lived in. He sat down in the nearest seat and watched Mycroft trail to an out-of-place bar cart shoved into the corner of the room.

He approached the decanter silently, his exposed forearms brushing against the cool metal of the tray as he reached for two empty glasses. It had been a long time since he'd had company for a drink, in fact, when he cast his mind back, Mycroft was sure that the last time he'd shared a nightcap with another person, it had been with his father.

He resisted a shudder at the memory.

"Father, I really don't think I shou-"

"Nonsense, if you want to be recognised as a man you must drink like one." he snapped, forcing the whiskey glass into his son's hand. "No more of that pinot noir shit your mother likes to harp on about." the man muttered gruffly to himself, settling into his armchair.

Mycroft's gaze landed on the very same armchair which hadn't moved in years, currently occupied by a bright-eyed, ash-haired ex-inspector with laugh lines framed by long lashes as opposed to the tall but plump balding man who had once frequented the chair. His eyes fell to the worn fabric at the armrest, fraying seams and thread where his father had constantly dug his fingernails in, an anxious habit of his. He passed over the glass.

"Thanks," Lestrade took the glass quickly, surprised out of his own daydream, fingers colliding with Mycroft's in the process.
Greg watched as the other man tipped his glass to him, and they took their first simultaneous sips, the expensive whiskey burning the back of his throat as it slid down, ice clinking rhythmically in the amber liquid.

"So," Greg began, looking around, "this is home?"

Mycroft looked at him with an expression that said he was trying to figure him out, and then nodded, taking another silent sip.

"It's nice," Lestrade nodded to himself, "Sherlock live here with you, then?"

He settled his glass down on the fireplace before responding, tugging his top button open which was threatening to strangle him completely. "Yes. It was easier for us to stay here after our parents' death."

"You got full guardianship?" Lestrade pursed his lips, his thick eyebrows drawing together as he circled the whiskey around his glass.

"Yes. I was twenty-one at the time."

"Wow," Greg said, his eyebrows raising, unable to contemplate what the two young men must have gone through together, especially knowing the nature of their difficult relationship. "Sherlock said it was a crash."

Mycroft sighed, picking his glass back up and moving to the window nearby Greg's seat, perching himself on the bench underneath the windowsill. "Head-on collision, it was instantaneous."

Lestrade winced sympathetically. "How old was Sherlock?"

"He turned seventeen three days after the accident."

Mycroft spoke so clinically about the ordeal in a way that made Greg unsure about how to approach the subject. Sherlock had always been vague, as if speaking about the tragedy irritated him. He was beginning to think that in hindsight, it must've been his way of masking the raw and painful emotion that he'd never truly dealt with as a child.

He sipped silently at the cool spirit in his hand, taking in the new information, and watching Mycroft's hardened expression turn gradually to that of an exhausted man.

"We're close, Mycroft." he said, staring hard at him until the genius' eyes met his. "We'll find him."

He didn't say anything, but let his head fall back against the wall instead, a slight flush coming to his face as his eyes darted uncertainly to the other man. His composure slipped before the teacher, as he ran a hand over his face, his voice coming out weaker than before. "I've let her down."

Lestrade turned in his chair, concern laced into his expression, "Who? You haven't let anybody down, Mycroft-"

"I was supposed to look after him."

Greg paused, placing his glass tumbler on the nearest table, "It's not your fault. You know what Sherlock's like, he's-"

"I shouldn't have left the country." he shook his head. "I knew I wouldn't be able to watch him as closely as I could from London."
"Look, he's a young adult himself now, you can't control his actions. There's nothing you could've done."

Mycroft's voice shook slightly, to his own horror, and to Greg's shock. He withdrew slightly, folding an arm over his stomach protectively, ashamed at his emotional outburst and silently cursing at how the alcohol had loosened his self-control. "I should have stayed, I promised Mummy I'd look after him, after..."

"After what?" Greg asked, shifting in his seat so he could reach a hand over to Mycroft's arm. He curled his fingers around his bare forearm, hoping that it came across as supportive. He stared at the man's closed eyes, wishing he could ease his suffering in some way. "After what, Mycroft?"

"What was your first impression of me?" John asked, his face peeking up from under Sherlock's arm around him.

They'd cleaned up lazily, pulling the covers back over themselves in a silent agreement that they would spend the rest of the evening in bed, instead of going down to do something productive like the washing up, or tidying up the living room. Instead, they slouched against each other in bed, mostly in silence as Sherlock read John parts of a new book he'd picked up at one of their visits into the village, it was originally named *The Bee Book*.

Sherlock looked down to the man next to him, confused. "Why?" He gave the teacher a look that said: *what has been going through your head in the last five minutes in which we haven't spoken?*

John shrugged, tightening his hold on his younger lover, he'd threw his arm across Sherlock's bare chest whilst he'd laid on his back reading. He'd found that it was quite impossible now to not be touching Sherlock Holmes at any opportunity he had, *especially* a Sherlock Holmes sans clothes.

"I just wondered, I don't think you ever said."

Sherlock folded the corner of his page, shutting the book and placing it on his lap as he dug through his mind for the memory. "I was frustrated...on paper you seemed so ordinary, boring, even."

"Hey!" John said, nudging him in the ribs. Sherlock continued unaffected, grabbing John's arm mid-jab and bringing it to his chest.

"But there was always something extraordinary about you I could never put my finger on, something that captured my attention immediately. I'm afraid you haven't lost it since."

"You are quite the romantic, you know." John smiled dreamily up at him.

Sherlock snorted, picking up his book again. "Are we talking about the same person, here?"

John slapped his arm playfully, "Sherlock Holmes, you cannot fight me on this-

"Nothing I've done so far constitutes remotely as an overtly romantic gestur-

"You brought us here!" John cried, propping himself up on his elbow to face the young man properly. "You organised all this, the gorgeous cottage, the remote town, just so we could be ourselves, and be alone. Tell me that's not romantic."
Sherlock paused, clearly in thought, before he rolled onto his side in John's arms to face him. "Yes, but I only did all of that because it was hurting me to see you the way you were. It was like you'd had the life sucked out of you, all because of me."

John stroked his hand down Sherlock's pale cheek, his eyes flitting across his handsome features. "It wasn't because of you. The only time I felt normal was when I was with you." he admitted, feeling Sherlock's fingertips at his wrist. "It makes all of this worthwhile. The secrecy, the running away, the potential of losing my bloody job. I'd do it all again in a heartbeat."

Sherlock went still, and John feared he'd gone too far, knowing of Sherlock's difficulty to process emotion on occasion. He'd just about worked up an entire rambling apology in his head and was about to release it when Sherlock leant forward to close the gap between their lips, effectively silencing him.

John knew right away that his lover had conveyed with one action more than he could have with any spoken words, and was grateful then and there for Sherlock's silent nature. Many had argued over the years that the young man was incapable of emotion, though John was only just beginning to understand that the truth was precisely the opposite; for some reason he'd just been the only one allowed close enough to see it.

John knew. Sherlock understood. There didn't need to be any words.

So no more was said, they chatted needlessly and sporadically until falling asleep without the knowledge that their sheltered fantasy life up in the breathtaking Scottish hillside couldn't last forever, and that sooner or later, their world would inevitably come crashing back down around them.

Chapter End Notes

My sincerest apologies for the amount of time it has been since my last update. Life very much got in the way, but it seems to be co-operating now, and we are now nearing the end of Fire and Ice!

I shall be deciding soon how many more chapters I should upload, and then I guess I could do an epilogue if there is demand for it, however I shall leave it up to you lovely people to decide if you want it or not after you have read the ending ;).

Thank you so much for reading. Big love to you as always. - E

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