

My Creed is Love

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/10568067) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/10568067>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Sherlock Holmes & Related Fandoms , Sherlock Holmes - Arthur Conan Doyle
Relationship:	Sherlock Holmes/John Watson
Characters:	Sherlock Holmes , John Watson
Additional Tags:	Hurt/Comfort , Illness , Sherlock is a prat , Dogs , Story: The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter , Pompey - Freeform , First Meeting , Alternate Universe , Modern AU
Language:	English
Series:	Part 4 of Oh! how I love
Stats:	Published: 2017-04-08 Words: 6,284 Chapters: 1/1

My Creed is Love

by [Ellipsical](#)

Summary

Sherlock has the flu and is a bit of a dick. Story of when they first met.

Notes

Modern ACD AU. It would probably help to read the ones before this, but can be read as a standalone. Part 2, in Paris, is the next in the series.

Title taken from [Keats' love letter to Fanny Brawne](#):

My Creed is Love and you are its only tenet – You have ravish'd me away by a Power I cannot resist...

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

This next tale is rather painful for me to relate, however, if I am to set down an accurate account of what John means to me, which I see now is the point of these little exercises, then I must deal with the ones that paint me in unsavory lights as well as favorable. God knows the former outweighs the latter.

If you have read John's stories of our adventures then you have an idea already of the malignant torpor that plagued me when I was without sufficient stimulation for long periods of time.

It was always lurking in the wings, but when I had no work to hold it at bay, it stole in like a fog.

Black and billowing, poisonous and thick, it filled my veins with lead.

Sometimes I woke up with it already clouding my brain.

Sometimes it seeped in over the course of a day.

I could not do anything to quell it. Cocaine was the only solution I had found that honed it. Turned it into a blade I could wield; whet my brain until it was lucid and sharp once more. But, alas, cocaine was no longer an option.

Pity, that.

Not even John could stop it and wasn't that one of life's more cruel tragedies?

That love was not enough to make you whole?

That though you love and are loved in return, you are still the same man you ever were, complete with odious black moods, an oftentimes churlish disposition, an outsized ego, and a lingering dissatisfaction with the world. How? How could I be dissatisfied with the world when John Watson was in it?

Like I said, it was a tragedy.

I was never a more miserable creature than when one of these moods coincided with an illness.

The night in question, well, let us just say that I was in rare form.

I had been ill for some days. It had started with a headache which had quickly descended into a fever and some intensely painful intestinal cramping. The flu is completely undignified. To be exposed like that before your husband, your lover, helpless and disgusting and weak—it had left me irritable and embarrassed and itching for a row.

I was sitting in my chair in Baker Street, my feet pulled up, my heels tucked underneath me. I was wrapped in my dressing gown, still dressed in the pyjamas I had been wearing the night before. I was stewing a bit in my own filth; I stank of sweat. My skin was greasy, my hair

falling limply across my brow. I am, as John will tell you, a wallower. When I was in one of these states I tended to compound it by giving in and miring myself in misery. I allowed the lethargy and despair to drown me. I whinged and moaned like a child. It was pathetic.

John was sitting across from me in his arm chair. There was a cup of tea, long gone cold, at his elbow, a paperback novel split open by his left thumb across his knee.

He was not reading it. Instead he was staring at our rug, his eyes shuttered to me, a fan of golden lashes shading his cheek.

He was turned in his chair with his back to the hearth, legs crossed, one over the other. His feet were socked in black; he was dressed in jeans and a thick, woolen jumper. The color was a deep forest green. It turned his eyes a muddled brown from this distance, so dark as to be almost black. The light from the overhead lamp minted his hair in sterling and sapped the gold from his skin tone, leaving him looking a bit sallow and wan.

His fingers stroked absentmindedly over his lips and his head was tipped towards the back of his chair, exposing the side of his throat to me. The shell of his ear.

There was a patch of skin, just beneath John's left ear.

Now this patch of skin was nothing special. Was it soft?

God.

It might be the softest place on his body, downy silk against the tip of my nose when I burrowed there.

You have undoubtedly heard of homing, that mysterious instinct inbred in an animal's DNA that enables them to return to the exact place of their birth to breed or lay their eggs or, alternatively, leads them to their migratory resting place.

That patch of skin just below John's left ear was mine. I returned to it again and again without fail. It carried his scent most clearly there. The sweet smell of his skin and the brine of his sweat, the residue of his soap and the biting green scent of his shaving cream, the sharp animal smell of his hair. When I am tucked there, just breathing him in, I am centered. I am home.

And yet, even as I looked at it longingly, aching to climb into his lap and nuzzle there, I found that my most primal instinct was at war with something else. Something vicious and snarling. Something I could not seem to conquer no matter how hard I tried. It was my nature; obdurate and tenacious. He was thinking so loudly, you see, he was practically screaming, there in the middle of our sitting room, and I could not stand it any longer.

The second before I spoke I knew I had better not. *Don't*, I whispered to myself. *Don't*.

"Oh, leave off will you?" I snapped, breaking the silence with the blunt force of a bludgeon. John blinked up at me, eyes wide, and something bit at my chest—regret—but I ignored it. "I

can't stand it," I said, detesting myself, but unable to stop. "Will you kindly go somewhere else to lament the state of your life?"

"What are you—?"

I didn't let him finish.

I should have. I should have done a thousand things just then. Any one of them would have been preferable to what followed. I should have asked him to draw me a bath. I should have let him feed me the soup Mrs. Hudson had made. I should have put my head in his lap and let him stroke my hair. I should have pressed my chapped lips to his and let him shut me up that way. I should have insisted he take me to Sussex. Let him curry me around the village until there was sea salt crusted in our hair and beads of mist collecting on our cheeks. We could have made love.

Instead I charged into his mind and rifled it's contents, dumping them unceremoniously out on the rug like so much litter from a kitchen drawer.

I was not proud of it.

I was *never* proud of it.

He was reading a novel about a family. It was a spy novel yes, but this particular book in the series centered on the spy's family, who were kidnapped. It was not hard to see how John's mind had wandered, aimlessly he no doubt thought, to the young boy currently spending his Christmas hols with his grandmother one flat below. Billy had arrived three days before, right before I had fallen sick. He had been up to keep me company just that morning now that the worst had passed, while John had gone out to do the shopping. It was Tuesday after all.

And—it was in all actuality not the first nor the last time— John had been thinking of what we didn't have. Namely, children. A family. I didn't blame him for thinking those thoughts. Those ghost lives, the ones we could have had if we had made certain choices differently, they haunt us all. We saw someone living them and we think, ah, that could have been me. It does not necessarily mean that we would give up what we have, but they shine a bit don't they? The grass was always greener and all that drivel. It was cliché because it was true. For most.

John was only human.

I did not begrudge him the odd regret. He would have been a wonderful father. A magnificent one. Alas, he unfortunately fell in love with me. And I cannot give him all the things someone else could. I am all too well aware of what he could have had if I had never met him, trust me. It is only natural then that he should have moments to dwell on those lost men he could have been. Those tow headed children with his blue eyes. Smiling his smile. I should have let him do it privately.

But, as I said, I was not at my best that evening.

It is not an excuse, merely an...an explanation.

So.

I eviscerated him. I shouted. I made a fool of myself and I humiliated him.

John Watson was one of the most long-suffering men I have ever met, he married me, that is all the evidence you need, but he also possesses a bull dog of a temper and it flares hot and quick when roused. I could see it building behind his eyes as he glared up at me. Two red splotches scorched into his cheeks. His lips pressed together, his jaw clenched. His hands in fists on the arms of his chair.

Don't, I thought, frantically. *Don't*.

He knew me. He knew my methods. He knew how I got in these moments. He knew how low I stooped. He knew that he would bear the brunt of it. He tried his best to head them off at the pass, but when I was seized I was often lost to reason. He watched me with all the circumspection of someone sizing up a wild animal just loosed from a cage. The analogy was an apt one. I was not in control.

When I had exhausted myself, when I stood panting, drenched in a cold sweat, with my stomach in knots, he rose.

He did not say one word to me. He didn't have to. His eyes.

His eyes.

He exited the room with what dignity was left to him. In these moments his military bearing props him up. He knows how to take a hit, my John.

The downstairs door had barely shut behind him before I was bent over the kitchen sink dry heaving.

There was nothing inside me to come up. Not even bile, which is what I deserved.

I had been brushing off his attempts to get me to eat all day.

The room reeled, off kilter, and I sank down to lie on the floor, my cheek pressed to the blessedly cool lino.

I do not know how long I lay there.

When I came to, he had not returned. I fumbled in my pocket for my mobile.

The call went straight to voicemail. My texts were ignored.

They had not seen him at his pub. His club, where he plays billiards with Stamford, said the same.

Where? Where would he have gone?

I called Stamford and Lestrade. Nothing. No one had seen him.

Now that the relief had passed—that relief that comes at such a high cost and which I truly don't understand, but find necessary none-the-less (*Necessary for what? I wonder now, looking back. To make him hate me? To make him see me the way I see myself? To drive him away so that I can be alone once more? I am not sure I will ever know the answer*)—I felt sick with self-loathing and panic. What if tonight was the night he never returned? What if this was it? The last straw? What would I do then? My stomach cramped at the thought. I must find him. I must.

I put on my shoes and coat, not bothering to change out of my pajamas and dressing gown. Needs must.

The air outside was brisk and stung my cheeks and eyes. Fairy lights strung from the lampposts twinkled above me. I winced and squinted against the passing headlights of a car that drove slowly past. My head throbbed. My stomach churned.

Think.

Think.

I don't know what made me think of it. It had been years since we had had any reason to go there, but I found my feet carrying me thus without a second thought.

I followed the path into Regent's Park and for a brief moment could almost feel the weight of the lead in my hand, hear the clatter of nails on the pavement. I pulled my coat tighter around me and ducked my head into the wind, dread a cold stone in my belly.

The walk took perhaps a half hour. As I crossed over the Prince Albert Road, the London Zoo dark and quiet on my right, my steps quickened, my heart racing in my chest. It began to rain lightly as I walked, collecting in yellow puddles at the base of the lampposts.

Primrose Hill rose before me, a dark patch in the dizzying sea of London's lights surrounding it. I stopped and spun around, my eyes searching the blackened hillside.

Where? Where?

We had never had a specific bench. More often than not we were content to traipse about the hillside itself.

I would just have to search them all.

And what if he's not here? A small voice taunted. *What if he's finally left you for good?*

"Well, then I couldn't blame him," I muttered under my breath.

It took twenty minutes and the hems of my pajama trousers were sopping wet and catching beneath the heels of my shoes, but I found him.

He was sitting at the base of the hill looking up it, not out, over the city. The yellow lamplight broke over his head like a yolk, staining him a lurid mustard.

I hurried toward him, air filling my lungs. I hadn't fully noticed how afraid I was until right then. How afraid I had been that he wouldn't be here, that my homing instinct had ceased to function, but here, here he was, and I was nearly sick again from the relief of it.

As I approached the bench, he stood and without a look in my direction, began to walk away.

"John," I said, unable to let him go even if I knew deep down that he would be better off. Have I said before that I am an irredeemably selfish bastard? No? Well I am. Add it to my list of faults. The ranks of which are legion.

I hurried to catch up with him.

"No," he said, when I fell into step beside him. I knew better than to touch him. He would throw me off. He didn't like to be cornered. It was why he left, rather than give me the domestic I sought. He tried to avoid the inevitable: terrible things said in anger. He was smarter than me in so many ways. If only I had been intelligent enough to learn from him. I might have avoided hurting him the way I did.

"John," I said again. A plea. I had no ground to stand on. I knew it. I had been an ass. I didn't deserve him.

"No."

"Please."

He would not look at me.

"I'm sorry," I gasped. "Forgive me, please. I—"

He came to an abrupt stop.

Who knows what he would have said if we had not be interrupted. I still wonder about it years later. If fate had not intervened in that moment would I have finally gotten what I wanted? For him to grow as tired of me as I was of myself and leave me finally and for good? It was exhausting trying to be the man he believed me to be. It was one of the most tiresome parts of marriage surely. That you are constantly forced to confront yourself. When I lived alone I could be as human as I pleased. A malcontent. A misanthropic narcissist. Now, married ten years, I had to constantly reform myself, to compromise and collaborate and control my bad habits. At times it seemed an impossible task. But I tried for him. For him I would do anything required. It did not mean that I didn't consummately fail at it it at times.

Who knows what would have happened. Let us relegate it to the ghost realm, yet another path untaken, for right then, just as John had opened his mouth to speak there came a high-pitched howl from behind him.

We both jumped at the sound.

By the time my heart had started beating normally again John had already crashed into the bushes, following the peals of lonely yelps that heralded the presence of a puppy somewhere

within their depths.

He emerged a few minutes later with something cradled in his arms. It was soft and white and spotted with ginger spots; its eyes wet and dark with fear. It was shivering uncontrollably. I shrugged off my coat and slipped my dressing gown off. Putting my coat back on I folded the gray cloth lengthwise and, holding it stretched between my arms, I reached out. John placed the trembling ball into it carefully and, bundling it up within its folds, I clutched it close to my chest.

Without a word I followed John out of the park and, though we were only a mile or so from home, into a cab.

“Do you think—“

I looked up.

John stood in the doorway, one hand on the knob, staring down at me with an expression I could not parse. It was at once affectionate and exasperated and sad and wistful all at once. Mostly sad.

It made my throat ache.

“What?” I whispered, wanting him to finish his thought, wanting him to speak to me, wanting him to forgive me. Wanting him, wanting him, wanting him.

He shook his head, holding my gaze just a little longer, unreadable, before he began to undress for bed.

I watched him, propped up against his pillow and mine, the puppy snuggled into the crook of my right elbow, still wrapped in the dove-gray cashmere of my dressing gown. It snuffled softly as John, his back to me, pulled off his jumper and vest, his jeans and socks, and dropped them each in turn into our laundry hamper. It was close to overspilling.

He crossed the room to our dresser and pulled out a gray Pevensey Petrel's t-shirt and a pair of flannel pajamas. The motions were intimately familiar to me by then. The way the muscles in his back pulled and bunched, the way his scar wrinkled, the pink and white puckered skin folding up, before his shirt fell like a curtain over them. The way his hair fizzed with static before his hands smoothed it down. The way he balanced on first one leg and then the other. The way he hopped a bit, followed by a minute wriggle of his hips, the barest shimmy of his thighs, before the pajamas were seated on his hips.

He padded over to sit on the edge of our bed, taking off his watch as he went. He turned to me and gently tugged his pillow out from behind my back, laying it on his side. I scooted down, shifting the precious bundle onto the mattress beside me. The puppy merely yawned

and smacked its lips before curling tighter in on itself. Settling on my right side I adjusted the robe around her before laying my cheek on my pillow.

Without turning out the light John got under the covers and lay on his side facing me. He would not look at me, instead, he reached out and stroked his fingers down the curve of the puppy's spine. Unfurling, it rolled over onto its back, presenting its belly for rubbing. John smiled and my heart swelled from the simple sweetness of it.

"John, I—"

"Do you remember the day we met?" he said over me, softly cutting me off.

I swallowed.

Nodded. How could I forget? Those few lines sent from my mobile without a second thought had changed the course of my life forever.

"I'd barely had Pompey a month when I received your texts."

My name is Sherlock Holmes and I'm a friend of Mike Stamford's. He informed me that he recently gave his dog to you to help with your PTSD. He may have mentioned me. I'm a detective.

I require Pompey's assistance on a case.

You can find me at Bart's morgue.

Come at once if convenient.

If inconvenient, come all the same.

A man's life hangs in the balance.

It still made me cringe to think of the arrogance with which I had typed those words. I had stood on Mike Stamford's stoop, incensed not to find Pompey at home. Pompey was a keen little foxhound with a knack for tracking and I had used him on one or two occasions to great success. To find that Stamford had trained him as a therapy dog and given him to a friend with PTSD had made me livid and thoroughly annoyed. It had never occurred to me back then that I wouldn't receive what I needed. And so I sent those texts, rapid fire. Zero tact. All bravado. I wasn't above blackmail as that last line attests to. I hadn't even said please. It was a wonder that John had come that day. It was a miracle that his curiosity and boredom had proved a match for my pride.

"If I remember correctly that was the first time I asked you to marry me and you said no," I said, brazenly changing the subject. We didn't need to dwell on the subject of my ego, tonight was yet another example that I hadn't changed much in the ten years we had been together. I wanted to remember, instead, that first glorious press of his mouth against mine.

Kissing up against his front door, a horrible little bedsit in Camden. Pompey at our feet and a satisfactorily closed case of the disappearance of a Manchester United player, which John

would later title The Case of the Missing Right-Wing, behind us.

“Come back to my flat,” I had said, my lips against his throat.

“I can’t,” he said, arching for me. “I’ve got Pompey.”

“Bring him.”

“Next time.”

“Mike told me you’re looking for a flatmate. I’ve found a place in central London. Move in with me.”

“I can’t move in with you, you berk! I don’t know anything about you!”

“Then marry me.”

John had just laughed and laughed and kissed me quiet.

Yes, I kissed him on the first day I met him.

Yes, I asked him to share digs with me.

And, yes, of course I asked him to marry me.

How any man or woman meets John Watson and doesn’t instantly want to make him theirs for all eternity is a conundrum the scale of which I will never solve. I resolved to not make the same mistake.

I met him and I knew him. And I could not, would not, let him go.

John chuckled. “I’d just met you. I would have had to have been completely barking to marry you the day we met.”

“Oh, but two weeks later was more sensible?” I countered.

“Vastly,” John murmured, finally meeting my eyes. “I knew all I needed to know by then.”

I sighed.

“Regretting it yet?”

“No. Are you?”

“I did try to warn you,” I said, my throat tight. “I wanted you to know what you were getting yourself into.”

“Yes, you’ve been trying to warn me for ten years. But I’m still here aren’t I? When are you going to give it up as a bad job?”

“I don’t believe I will.”

“And why not?”

“Because I don’t understand. I’ll never understand...”

“Understand what?”

“What you get out of this. What.” I stopped. Tried again. “What you see in me. I—“

“Do you mean besides getting to share my life with the person I love most in the world, because that seems pretty obvious, even to me.”

“You’re right you know, you should have been a father. You could have been one, but I was selfish and I knew what I was doing when I asked you to marry me. I wanted you to be mine...”

“Oh, and I suppose I had no agency in this? You know, you didn’t force me to make those vows, to stand up with you and promise you forever. You may be a genius, but you certainly can’t compel me to do something against my will. And as for earlier you’re going to feel very stupid when I tell you what I was actually thinking about.”

“I—“

“I wasn’t lamenting the state of my life, as you so gently put it,” he said, his mouth a grim line, his eyes thunderous, his brow furrowed. I was struck mute before his fury. He’s absolutely captivating when he’s like this, powerful and strong. I felt the faintest stirring of arousal and immediately tamped it down. “I was thinking about this morning when I was just about to do the shopping. You were on the floor in front of the fire teaching Billy to play chess. Do you remember?”

I nodded, beginning to realize that maybe I had made a grave blunder.

“You were chattering away about some Russian or other and—“ I opened my mouth in outrage, about to protest at ‘some Russian’, but promptly shut it when I saw the look in John’s eye. “—And you were actually eating the scones Mrs.Hudson had made for your tea and...” He paused here to take a deep breath. “And it very nearly broke my heart in half to see it.”

A very grave blunder indeed.

“John—“

“You,” he said, his voice hoarse and his eyes shining. Oh, god, if I made him cry I would never forgive myself. He mastered himself though, blinking rapidly until the sheen dissipated. “You would have been a fantastic father and that was the only thing I was thinking about when you so rudely read my thoughts aloud and started shouting some bollocks about me wanting a wife. I have a husband, thank you, and he’s plenty trouble enough for me.”

I am an idiot and I told him so.

“Yes, you are.” He was still glaring at me and I desperately wanted him to stop. I desperately wanted to be the type of man who did not necessitate such a look on such a regular basis. And there was the crux. I would earn another next week or in a month and we both knew it.

I felt, in that moment, weary and hopeless. I was tired and my stomach was cramping again, this time from hunger. I was grimed with sweat, my hair was lank and greasy. I smelled repugnant, of body odor and shame. I looked down at the puppy, unable to meet John’s gaze. When I spoke my voice was barely pitched above a whisper, “Why do you want me? I’m wretched. I hurt you. Even though that very idea is abhorrent to me. Even though I cannot countenance the thought of someone treating you poorly. I do it. And not infrequently.”

“Sherlock, you were ill. You’ve barely eaten in three days. You haven’t had a case in over a month. I understand why—”

I rolled over onto my back and drew my arm over my eyes. I was sick to death of myself and I could not stand his pity. “Don’t make excuses for me.”

“I’m not. I—”

We both heard it.

Three sharp knocks on the Baker Street door one floor below. John was already swinging his legs out of bed when the fourth one fell.

The puppy slept on.

It was the puppy’s owner. A beautiful Moroccan woman in a peacock blue hijab and her son, who it was clear had been crying, were plied with tea and biscuits (Of which I devoured five. John pretended not to be pleased) and the tale was told. The puppy had slipped out of his collar on his first walk in the park and run off. John, who had printed out a hundred notices that he had intended to hang up in the park tomorrow, had also put up an announcement on our website saying that we had found a puppy and a friend had seen it and called them.

The pup’s name was Dibi, which the woman explained meant ‘my wolf’ in Arabic and I repressed the urge to chuckle into my tea cup. The dog was a cocker spaniel! A wolf! What whimsy.

John praised the boy for his fine choice and the boy beamed.

Do you see?

Do you see what I am up against?

They left quickly, as it was past the boy’s bedtime. The thanks were profuse and genuine and the look on the boy’s face was one who has lost something most precious to him and then had it miraculously restored. John and I shared a glance over the boy’s head. We had been forcibly separated for two years in the events following Moriarty and the Reichenbach Falls.

We knew all too well that look of devastated wonder. That feeling of crushing relief when you believed all hope had been lost.

When they had gone John stood in the doorway that led to our bedroom and held out his hand.

I pushed to standing, my body heavy. With longing, with regret, with grief, with exhaustion.

“I need a shower,” I said, feeling somewhat buoyed by the biscuits. John nodded and did not say ‘I told you so’ and left me to it.

When I emerged, I felt renewed. Food and cleanliness: the two things John had been urging on me for the last three days, but I had been stubbornly refusing. It could have all been easily avoided if I had just listened to him and taken care of those two most basic needs. Alas...

When I walked into the bedroom, my pale skin blushing pink from the heat, I found John sitting up in bed, his chest bare, the duvet tucked over his lap.

“Come here,” he said, quietly, and, dropping the towel that I had been using to dry my hair, I obeyed.

“Sit.” He drew back the blanket and indicated the space between his legs. He was naked too, I saw, as I arranged myself, leaning my head against his shoulder.

The room was pleasantly warm. The radiator hissed in the corner and if I squinted I could see the tendrils of steam and heat rising off it, warping the red wallpaper above it.

John was solid and familiar against my back. He wrapped his arms around me and took my hands in his, threading our fingers together so that his palms were pressed to the backs of mine. He raised them and placed them just below my collarbones, our fingers curling into the notches. I leaned my head back and nudged my nose into the space just beneath his left ear.

There.

I was home.

“You flag cabs when I’m struggling,” he began, speaking softly, his lips moving against my cheek. I could feel the warm tickle of his breath, and the prick of his stubble. “When my shoulder’s aching. When my leg’s being a bastard. When I’m so hungry I think I might faint. Without fail you flag a cab and either take me straight home or to the nearest kebab place. I never have to say a word.”

I had no idea where he was going, but I was utterly content to just lie there, cradled in the warm curve of his body, held close. It wasn’t forgiveness, but it was close. Grace maybe.

“You always let Pompey sleep with us even though I knew it bothered you to have him in the bed. You knew he helped with my nightmares so you adjusted. You are chivalrous to a fault. You take care of your clients and always see justice is done, even if that means you do not necessarily follow the letter of the law. You play the violin like a prodigy, you’re a beautiful dancer, and an absolutely hopeless romantic, but shhh, my darling, I won’t tell anyone about

that last one, I promise..." Here I begged him to stop, but he was incorrigible and did not listen to me. Instead he twisted his torso so that I was dislodged from my nook and forced to look up at him. His eyes were a deep blue and incredibly soft. "I can prove it. You are always buying me little things you think I might like. Sometimes your coat pockets seem like veritable magpie nests. Have you noticed how when I greet you sometimes I slip my hands inside them just to see? Oh, of course you've noticed. Let's see, you've bought me a jumper you claimed was the exact color of my eyes when we were on the beach in Barcelona. A pair of the softest leather gloves I've ever owned. A snail shell. A bullet. Books. Tickets to the symphony and, sometimes if I've done something good, a footie match. A butterfly. And, one very memorable time, a ring."

"I bought it the day after I met you," I whispered.

"How did you know?" he asked, his voice thick.

"Know what?"

"That you wanted me." He paused and drew in a deep breath. "I was shattered when I came home. Weak and injured and haunted. Pompey helped. He gave me a purpose of sorts and, I still don't know how it worked, but whenever he was lying on top of me I didn't get the panic attacks that usually followed the nightmares. But even then, I felt like a ghost walking through London. No one saw me. It didn't matter if I existed."

"Stop, John, please." It hurt to hear him speak of himself that way. To know that I had almost lost him before I had ever found him.

He shook his head at me and I quieted. "But then I got your texts." A small smile, half wonder, half rue. "And they were rude and obnoxious, but—" He laughed and I felt some of the weight in my chest lighten. "—But I went all the same didn't I? I'd never been more curious to meet someone before."

"And then you found me beating a corpse," I said, and he threw back his head and laughed harder.

"And then I found you beating a corpse!" he repeated joyfully, his chest vibrating beneath me.

"Well, I didn't know I was going to be meeting my future husband did I?" I said, in my defense.

"No, no, you didn't," John conceded. "And then, oh, God, what a day it was! Questioning all those Man United lads with Cyril and then going after that doctor with Pompey and tracking down Staunton at last. It was the most fun I had ever had."

"And I kissed you in the cab on the ride home."

He chuckled again and shook his head and the sheen was back, making his eyes glisten, and my heart hammered a bit in trepidation. "You saw me," he said, his eyes moving slowly over

my face. “No one else could see me, but you did. And for some reason, probably because you’re stark raving mad, you wanted me.”

“Yes, well I am not a fool,” I said. “When I meet the most extraordinary man I’ve ever laid eyes on, one who is intelligent and brave and kind and capable and devastatingly handsome, I do not let him go. It is only logical you see.”

“Ah, it was all cold hard logic was it?” he said, grinning, and my heart soared and I kissed the smile from his lips.

“I’m sorry,” I said, slipping my hand behind his neck and pressing my forehead to his. “I’m so sorry.”

“I forgive you,” he said, dipping down to kiss me again. He pressed me down into the pillows and straddled my hips, his hands in my wet hair.

“It’s our anniversary soon,” he murmured, his mouth moving down my throat to nibble at my clavicle. I arched into him and made an incoherent sound.

He continued, “We didn’t celebrate last year because of that case...”

I hummed. He had moved on to my nipples and I could not remember or care what case he was talking about.

“...So what do you say I take you to Paris and we recreate our honeymoon?”

I gasped and wriggled beneath him. He had done a rather interesting thing with his mouth just there, and I admit I was a little distracted.

“Well? We could celebrate your birthday too while we’re at it,” he said, sitting up and smiling down at me.

In the light from the lamp he was a warm buttery gold, butterscotch and toffee. He would melt like a caramel on my tongue. His eyes, as he bent to put out the light, were a crystalline blue.

He was an idiot if he thought my answer would be anything but yes to anything he asks of me ever. So I said it, over and over, as we moved together in tried, but true ways. And when we were both spent and our breaths and hearts had quieted, I wrapped him in my arms and burrowed into my refuge, breathing deep his scent as I fell asleep. I don’t deserve him, but I try.

I try.

And tomorrow I will try a little harder still.

End Notes

Pompey



Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!