

The Black Pearl

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The Black Pearl

by [Eldritchhorrors](#)

Summary

Sherlock has something to tell John, and he wants to do it with music.

A Cold Song oneshot side story. (Can be read as a stand-alone.)

Notes

THIS IS NOT COLD SONG 7. THIS IS A ONE-SHOT IN THE COLD SONG UNIVERSE THAT TAKES PLACE AFTER THE MAIN ARC. COLD SONG 7 IS COMING SOON.

The wonderful and very patient Mid0nz won this long ago for the AO3 fundraiser auction. The request was simple: The Goldberg Variations and Violin Porn. The execution was...not so simple, but I persevered. I was too antsy to wait for a violinist to beta this, so please forgive any errors. It was, however, betaed by an invaluable Pennypaperbrain.

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

The Black Pearl

“Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and that which cannot remain silent”
— Victor

Hugo

This one was a contrapuntal nightmare. Tempo? Decrease the tempo to sustain the notes; give them room to breathe. Might help.

Sherlock played a few notes, then a repeat with a small modification. He played that through to an obvious conclusion, imagining a cello, a viola, joining him...weaving together to...no...

No.

Not quite right.

The voices of the strings were muddy there. Perhaps if he divided the bass line between the cello and the viola? Would that be too...

Sherlock made a small notation then picked up his bow again. Not the usual bow. This had been a recent gift from John, though he was sure that Mycroft had guided the purchase. It was a modern Baroque-style bow; shorter, lighter, less hair, an 18th century voice that made Bach so real and accessible that it felt like centimeters separated them, rather than centuries.

He'd had a previous Baroque bow but it wasn't up to the standard set by his violin. It had been a tool only. Nothing covetable.

And Sherlock had been very covetous lately.

The staff paper was penciled over, erased, penciled again, inked, crossed out, and numerous notes lined the margins. He was writing himself into a black hole that would necessitate playing fourths. Sherlock frowned at his notations, wanting to start again but not sure where. What was salvageable? What should be tossed in the rubbish? With a sigh of disgust he sat his violin and the bow on the chair then balled the sheet music up in his fist and threw it out the open window.

He hit the play button on his computer before he gathered his plaid dressing gown around himself like swaddling to lie on the sofa.

Glenn Gould's 1982 version of the Variations filled the room...again.

Not that the repetition was trying. It never got old. It never became trite, or tired. It could never be overplayed, just misplayed, and sometimes brutally at that. Some misguided arse

had transcribed it for *marimba*. As if that was a real instrument.

Gould's later version was a work of art. No slavish purist thought. A slower tempo, no insistence on repeats; no endless da capo, da capo, da capo like so many other classical drones trying to recapture the zeitgeist of 1741 even though they were hampered by modern instruments and modern thought. The irony was that in doing so most of them lost the greatest of Bach's qualities: innovation. Bach himself never tried to completely recreate someone else's work; he reimagined it.

Gould didn't just recreate. He was a *genius*.

Gould streamlined the Variations until they were slim and well-oiled. They were Bach, but pared down. Bach, skeletonized. Bach, but also so much of Gould that there was no comparison to anyone else's Goldbergs. There was nothing extraneous, nothing unnecessary. The audience was given everything they needed to draw a clear plan of Bach's architecture, a clear portrait of Gould, kunstmaschine warts and all. Gould could not be copied because he was such a unique unit.

That was what Sherlock wanted: he wanted his Goldbergs to be uniquely...

Sherlock sat and listened through the Aria and the first 14 Variations. Then the 15th started and the mood shifted from light and joyful to a sudden devout introspection, as if Gould was performing his own intellectual and emotional vivisection.—It possessed that kind of severe razor-wire beauty. The canon's mirrored voices followed each other, torquing the previous idea into a completely new thing, continuing the conversation like a game of telephone as each voice changed the meaning just enough. The finish with its open fifth was transcendent, a soft fade to nothing, a false ending before the overwhelming opening of the 16th birthed the second half like a phoenix.

Perhaps Gould *was* performing his own vivisection. This version was harder to understand than Gould's earlier recording. An older man's Bach; the Bach of a man who had known both joy and pain, not the Bach of a 22-year-old who was showing off the perfection of his technique.

Sherlock closed his eyes to better envision the structure of the music, how its forms could be transcribed to string, how this version could be understood through a different medium.

32 Variations. 32 bars to a theme. The mathematical purity needed to be maintained as much as possible. He'd heard some people claim that Bach was overly technical and mathematical, but what they didn't realise was that Bach found God in the numbers: perfect Pythagorean proportions, holy trinities, diagonal symmetry. Even looking at the sheet music was a revelatory experience, because the numerical perfection was so self-evident Sherlock was surprised that it wasn't included on the Voyager golden record. It was beauty, but also mathematics presented in as basic a form of communication as binary. A technical piece made into music by the application of pure soul.

Sometimes Sherlock resented Bach, on the days when his music was less an epiphany and more of a cabalistic death spiral. There was something lacking inside him that just couldn't get the numbers to *work*.

Those moments were fewer now that he had John.

He was meditating on the marriage of violin and cello, different ways in which they could communicate the melody together, when he heard John on the stairs. He'd had coffee with Mike, and coffee had turned into lunch turned into a visit to Bart's. Sherlock hadn't deduced it; John had texted him.

"Hello," John said. Sherlock didn't even open his eyes, just scrunched his toes into the sofa and concentrated on the music. The 17th Variation. Toccata. Fast tempo, hand crossing, showy. lighter, airier, without the deep substance of the previous two Variations. Mycroft had always played it with a much slower tempo and made it work, but Gould's gay handling with its sparkling empty-headedness seemed right in its context. Or it could be his gut reaction against anything Mycroftian.

He'd grown up with Mycroft's, so maybe that was why he preferred Gould's, even though Mycroft's version was the less common. Familiarity and contempt. Mycroft was usually very traditional, with all the repeats and flourishes, but he seemed personally offended by the flighty arpeggiation of the 17th, as if Bach was deliberately paining him. His Goldberg's usually clocked in at an hour and eighteen minutes versus Gould's sleek 48.

But Mycroft had to be fat and overindulged in regards to *everything*.

Sherlock heard John doff his military green jacket, shaking it before placing it on a peg. The scent of the room took on the brisk air of the park rather than the micro-local street smells from the open window. Car fumes and Speedy's grease mixing with the sudden scent of cut grass.

"You been there all day?"

"Transcribing."

"Looks like napping." John snorted in amusement as he rummaged in his pocket for the usual coins to toss in the change bowl and Sherlock knew that the amusement was directed at him.

"What?"

"The music."

Sherlock bristled. "What's wrong with the music?"

"Not very you, is it?"

"I'm not listening to it because it reminds me of *me*. Well. Not most of it."

"Then why are you listening to it? It's not Mycroft is it?"

Sherlock cracked his eyes because John sounded alarmed. "Heathen. You should recognize the Goldbergs." He closed his eyes again. "And no, it's not Mycroft."

"The Goldberg Variations. Didn't you..."

“I’m listening to them because they remind me of *you*.”

“You told me. When we, ah...when we.”

“I believe so.”

John sat. “Doesn’t sound much like me, though.”

Sherlock held up his hand, one finger pointed at the ceiling. “Wait for it.”

“Wait for what?”

But Sherlock was breathing with the runaway music, letting the mad ascending then descending mania of the 17th come to its natural conclusion, ebb and give way to the 18th

“And there you are. Canon in the 6th.” He withdrew his hand, point made.

John barked a laugh, still skeptical.

“Listen to how poetic it is. The bass line, John. The bass line!” Underlining a piece that was really the heart of a child.

John quietened and listened to it with him, both of them caught by the sweetness of the music. Sherlock felt at peace in that moment, sharing that perfect beauty and lightness of body with John.

It was over much too soon. The final note decayed and the 18th gave way to the 19th.

“Rather short, wasn’t it?”

“And how is that unlike you?”

Sherlock could feel John’s glare and smirked. “Don’t worry. You’re more often like an etude: short but *difficult*.”

John leaned over to hit him with a pillow but Sherlock was too fast for him. He snaked out a hand to grasp John’s wrist. Sherlock sat up and looked at John.

John was startled by the move, mouth slightly open, brows raised. He dropped the pillow and Sherlock batted it aside.

“I don’t think you quite understand.” Sherlock tried to keep the humor in his tone, but he must have had an interpersonal failure because John got his serious listening face on and sat next to him on the sofa.

“Then tell me.”

“I’m transcribing it. From piano to string trio.”

“Why not solo?”

“The Variations are polyphonic; the violin is usually monophonic. The violin can’t do all of the heavy lifting, I’m afraid. I can fudge it and perform the Aria solo, but the rest of it won’t work.” He knew exactly what John wasn’t saying. How would Sherlock even work with two other musicians? He wasn’t even sure himself, but this was a matter of extreme compulsion, and Sherlock was never one to deny his more harmless compulsions.

Or the harmful ones.

“Hasn’t someone already transcribed it?”

“Yes. But it’s not...” It’s not you. He could feel it flickering on the tip of his tongue, but it was arrested by a deeper truth. He didn’t just want to transcribe the Goldbergs; he wanted to make them *Sherlock’s Goldbergs for John*.

Sherlock stood and scrubbed a hand through his hair, scowling at nothing because he didn’t have the words. There was no way to tell John just what he meant by that, not without John turning what was an intellectual and spiritual exercise into sappy bourgeois romance. There was a huge gulf there: the difference between definitions of love. Simone Dinnerstein’s Goldbergs wrapped love up in ephemeral romantic trappings that ultimately left him hollow because that kind of window dressing was an elaborate lie; a fancy pudding that didn’t kill the craving, an empty meringue shell.

That was why Gould spoke to him. There was no romance in Gould; he publically detested emotive composers like Mozart and Beethoven. No frills, no lies, just a spare intensity that said more than any sentimental interpretation ever could.

Quiet yearning.

Love wasn’t in the rehearsed moments framed by tedious planned dinners or nights out at the theater. It existed most in the quiet moments in between; in the hard moments, in the moments when it seemed most fleeting. The minor keys nestled like modest Easter eggs or unpolished gems among the showy major keys.

Gould at 49 knew it, but he could only communicate that through the music because music was the only place where Gould *lived*.

Sherlock couldn’t think of another way either. And yet he couldn’t get it *right*.

It was infuriating. He had so much to say, but the only way he felt he could say it was not cooperating.

He stripped off his dressing gown and tossed it over the back of the sofa, leaving him in plaid bottoms and a navy tee. He went to his violin and plucked it up; plucked it like he wanted to pluck John’s heart. He spun towards John, bringing the violin to his chin at the same time; touching that beautiful bow to the strings. A light tap there before it rested, waiting for Sherlock to move into it.

“The Aria. Have you heard it?”

John licked his lips. Yes. Good.

“No. Or not that I remember.”

Sherlock leaned forward, and tried to make John believe. “You’ll remember it.”

Sherlock moved into the first eight notes, moving the bow with muscle memory and no thought other than John (*JohnJohnJohn*) required to play it. The Aria was like breathing; automatic, universal, simple motion that belied the complexity underneath, a generative force that was nearly impossible to stop once it had been set in motion. Eight notes like the cytokinesis of a cancer cell, beautiful geometry at a nano level that grew and spread till it filled the whole of you, Bach metastasized in each cell.

It was like John. So deceptively simple. Self-effacing. At first glance, perhaps even second, John looked like he should be the most bloody boring man on the planet: small, spare, horribly inculcated patriotism, khaki clothes, dishwater hair, silly snub of a nose. The Variations were the same: practically an hour of G major. There were 14 canons based on the first eight notes alone; they should have been a study in *paint drying*. And yet they were steadfast, instead of dull.

Sherlock moved towards John as he moved into the music, looking at John as his body flowed into the notes, coaxing every reflection of how he felt from the violin. This was not a static piece, despite its meditative tone. It moved like water, with all of water’s elegance and power, like water from a fountain, a plaintive stream in a Zen garden.

Sherlock swayed into that sound, holding the violin like a delicate lover, and he had to close his eyes against its tender beauty, which revealed more than he was comfortable with. Eyes closed because he found he couldn’t look at John and strip his heart so raw at the same time.

That’s what he wanted to give John. He wanted to share the rest with John, just like he could share the Aria. All the things he could not express, all of the half-formed praise and adoration that never crossed his lips, all of what John meant to him, encapsulated in this kitchen-sink of a work. Everything but the kitchen sink; a French overture, quodlibet, canons, fughetta, Baroque dance, arabesques.

It was a slower tempo than he was used to, but he wanted to draw it out, underscore the sensuality, like an erotic tone poem, give each note its due before sliding into the next like skin on new cotton sheets. It was four minutes of pining and want and filling the hole that sometimes opened in his chest and he was *exposedexposedexposed* and elated and too many other things that he couldn’t recognize or name.

He cracked his eyes open as he played the final notes that were writ large within his flesh.

Sherlock looked at John. He stood just in front of John, between his parted thighs. John was staring at him with a fierce concentration, lips slightly parted, breathing harsh as he gripped the arms of the chair. He wetted his lips with the tip of his tongue. John did that constantly, but Sherlock never failed to zero in on the movement.

And that's when Sherlock realised that his own breathing was harsh, lungs doing double time even though the Aria was languid and soft. This. All that the Aria was building up to: a sudden exaltation.

The violin was placed on the table. So was the bow. He randomly selected a Variation and pressed play on the computer (the 13th, pensive and bittersweet) before turning back to John. John stood up. Sherlock hadn't really moved from his spot so John rose into Sherlock's space, against his length. It was Sherlock who moved into the kiss, ducking down. He didn't often initiate kissing, but this felt necessary. He wanted John's taste. He wanted to feel the smooth sides of John's tongue gliding against his own like the music moved. He wanted to feel John's quickened pulse, know at a cellular level how affected John had been just listening to him play. And then...then...

Sherlock pulled up John's jumper, and John let it be pulled. They could barely break the kiss to get it out from between them and it was only an instant before Sherlock was again eating John's breath, nipping and sucking his lips red. John's belt buckle jangled loose, then the fly of his trousers parted. Sherlock shucked them down and pulled the thick elastic band of the briefs down, until it rested under John's cock, plumping up his bollocks. Sherlock stroked the seam between them and John's answering groan was almost buried underneath the pulse of music, G, F-sharp, E, D, but Sherlock could feel the resonance through John's body, the bass seducing the melody.

Sherlock tried to get John out of his trousers and pants but John was still wearing boots which made them both laugh into each other's mouths as he was hobbled at the ankles. The music was bouncing now. Happy, boisterous triads, and it was amazing how it could suddenly transmogrify from a fragile bittersweet to such jubilation, from Hamlet to humor in one breath. Sherlock pushed John onto the sofa and left him to wrestle with his shoelaces as Sherlock went to the junk drawer to fetch a bottle of lubricant. He shed his own clothes on the way back, leaving a trail behind him.

John was naked on the sofa, Sherlock's dressing gown spread across the seat, and it was Sherlock who spread John out beneath him as he crawled up John's body, pinning him with his weight and caging him in his arms.

John couldn't direct this time. Sherlock had something to say to him.

There was something about full-body contact that couldn't compare to any other act. Some people could romp their way through an entire evening only touching mouths, hands and genitals, but there was an indescribable closeness that felt deeper than the body every time he laid himself out and pressed against John.

He needed that particular closeness now; could not bear to say it all with any space between them.

It was an almost unbearable thing, the way their skin met, and he couldn't help but groan into John's neck when they nested together. "Bach was one of the greatest geniuses the world has ever seen." He filled his palm with lubricant and slid it between their bellies, not grabbing their cocks, but spreading the silken wet between them to help them slide against one another.

John's breath hitched and his eyelids began to flicker and lower. "So he had lots in common with you?" John laughed, but his mind was visibly on the sudden slip-slide and not Sherlock's words.

Unacceptable.

Sherlock dipped his head to nip John's chin. "I'm no Bach. I'm more of a Britten. A Shostakovich. I'm too..." He pulled back just enough to adjust, then thrust his hips in a long, slick glide against John's cock. "...bitter. Individualistic."

"What was Bach, then?"

"Glorious." Sherlock still had a palm with a film of lube, so he spread it further, up John's chest, rubbing his nipples in the process, before he settled more firmly atop him so that they were doing a slow writhe against each other, letting their bodies accomplish all the friction without aid of hands. They were in no hurry, yet.

"Other composers' work mirrors themselves; you see their inner self. But Bach didn't reflect himself, he mirrored all of humanity as it is." The music fell into an eliding chain of notes, and their bodies followed as Sherlock moved with it, an offset rhythm of hipbone against hipbone.

"The Variations."

"Mmm." Sherlock licked a trail up John's collarbone, over his bobbing Adam's apple, finding his way to John's ear when he inhaled deep to smell John and sweat and the moist spearmint of autumn. "Can't you see it? Obvious theme. A little simple."

"Hey!"

"But then he adds to it." Sherlock lifted himself a bit, but didn't stop his easy back and forth. He rode Bach's subtle harmonic scheme for a time, listening to John's hitching breath, gentle little puffs of air against his skin every time he exhaled. But he couldn't keep the words inside. This may be the only time he'd be able to say it all.

He was almost nose to nose with John, only pulled back enough to prevent the indignity of going cross-eyed. "It's so precise and regimented, like it was designed by a soldier, but then the theme keeps winding in and out and these layers of complexity keep blanketing it, until it's a cubist portrait of humanity...every facet visible bar hate and fear."

John looked at him for a moment then leaned up for a kiss, but Sherlock eluded him by pressing his cheek into John's slight stubble.

Bouncing, laughing, boisterous. Criss-crossing and leaping, humorous, flirty, generous with praise and spirit. "The Goldberg's are joy. The infinite possibility within the human heart, celebrating the good that is within humanity..."

Sherlock was finding it hard to breathe. "...in all its variations." The rapid thrust of the 24th surrounded them, but it didn't speed their bodies as Sherlock moved them in an agonizingly

smooth counterpoint. The music wasn't so much participating in the sex act as observing it, and being observed. "And that's you, John."

The music stopped, teetering in silence for one moment, before falling into a minor key. This time the music fell into the rhythm Sherlock had already set. It seemed normal for the space of several heartbeats, then the G dropped to a jarring F sharp. Then an ugly F natural.

Sherlock stopped moving and ran one hand through John's short hair, telling John without words that he wanted him to pay attention.

"This is the 25th."

John tried to buck up, get some more of the maddening friction against his prick, but Sherlock's point was more important and he held his hips fast. John cleared his throat so he could speak, but the result was still buried in gravel. "It's slow."

It was. The bass fighting the melody in an almost halting adagio. "It's called the Black Pearl." John's nose scrunched up, and Sherlock wanted to bite it, but he denied himself with rare self-restraint. "When I said that the Goldbergs had little of me in them...I didn't mean the 25th."

John stopped trying to coax Sherlock into resuming their frottage and listened, really listened.

Sherlock...Sherlock felt even more naked, if it were possible, and buried his face in the crook of John's shoulder. Because he knew what John would hear.

There was a fundamental loss of purity in the 25th. The Goldbergs lost their innocence with a quiet, despairing trip of keys.

Deep sadness; beauty in a gentle destruction. Seductive sense of loss.

You could hear it degrade, little by little, the bass line crumbling until you couldn't tell if it was trying to save itself or take the melody down with it. It was an almost poignant fall, even knowing that it would eventually be picked up again, because the damage was already done and the Variations would never be the same.

John. John understood. His arms wrapped around Sherlock and pulled him hard against his chest as he kissed Sherlock's cheek, chin, throat, over and over, as if to say 'I'm here; it's getting better.'

"That's why. That's why the rest is so important."

"What do you mean?"

"You really don't know, do you?" Sherlock hugged John back, too tight.

Sherlock's voice dropped to a whisper, as if that would make it easier. "You are the surrounding joy that gives the Black Pearl any meaning."

John made a choking noise, then laughed, and Sherlock found himself kissed. He'd expected a hard snog but this soft prelude was anything but. Smooth lips meeting and glancing off each other in small increments. The bare touch of tongue. It was languid and unhurried and so much of John concentrated in every small touch; John communicating with Sherlock in the easiest way he knew. Something changed during those small tastes. Despite John being on the bottom Sherlock lost what nominal control he'd held, but he didn't miss it. He was seduced into following John's mouth.

John smoothed his hands down Sherlock's arms and shackled Sherlock's wrists with gentle fingers before rolling them into place, bracing himself above a prone Sherlock. He looked down for a moment, and Sherlock couldn't tell exactly what he was thinking. He looked...humbled. But that wasn't right. John had no nee—

John dipped his head, but instead of sweet kisses, he bit. John had Sherlock's lower lip between his teeth and Sherlock could feel the pressure increasing, increasing, increasing, *he was going to bruise*, before he pulled away. John's eyes were burning and bright as he licked Sherlock's slight stubble, then placed a kiss on Sherlock's reddened lip, feathering it away into a nuzzle at his cheek. There were more barely there kisses, a puff of air against skin rather than the drag of flesh on flesh, before John clamped down again, gnawing the corner of his mouth raw. John didn't usually leave visible marks, anything lingering could be covered by his clothing, but this would be visible in the most obvious way possible.

The lips are delicate tissue, so many nerve endings, 2500 nerve receptors per square centimetre, and the pain...the pain was exquisite. He gasped into John's bared teeth. This time the pressure kept ramping up until Sherlock felt a sudden give and the taste of iron filled his mouth. His lip split at the corner and he knew he'd be tonguing it for days, remembering this every time he did.

When John returned Sherlock was once again treated to tender exploration. John's lips traced the structure of his face, soothing the ravaged areas with warm intent even though he looked increasingly feral and possessive, a streak of red smeared across his lips and right cheek.

John was *lovely* like that.

The music dipped for the last time before a sudden cacophony of notes. The 26th Variation leapt into being, almost too many notes to conceive as Bach let his spirit free, and John surged into motion with it. Like Bach, the very moment he let go also became the moment of attainment. It was an ecstatic flurry, within the music, within them, as John ground down into Sherlock, hard. Hips snapped just as teeth snapped at Sherlock's throat; trying to put a mark there as well, trying to make up for the leisurely slide of before with a rapid, brutal motion. This was a fierce happiness, crackling like an aluminum firework. Sherlock held on, letting John guide them as the harsh strontium red of blood vessels bloomed behind his closed eyes.

John drew his head away from the brutal ravaging of Sherlock's collarbone and keened at the way they shifted together, swollen cocks sharing the smooth friction of silicone lube on belly and hair, squeezing together as they pushed against iliacus and sartorius.

“Sherlock.”

“Mmm.” The final Variations were rapture; a composer singing his profound joy to a God Sherlock was sure could not exist anywhere else. Bach had made a Platonic ideal manifest.

“Sherlock.”

John slowed the twisting of his hips and Sherlock made a noise of frustration because he was so close and the disruption to that quickening rhythm put it that much further off.

“Sherlock!”

Sherlock emerged from his submissive fugue enough to still himself in John’s grasp. He could feel a trickle of blood sliding down his cheek, following the hollow curve there on a journey towards his earlobe. He could feel the tremor in John’s flanks and the other small movements that even John found impossible to stop completely. “What are you doing?”

“What do you want?”

Sherlock averted his eyes and swallowed. “I want exactly what you’re doing.” He paused briefly. “Except harder. Maybe faster.”

“No.” John nudged Sherlock’s chin with his own and flexed his grip around Sherlock’s wrists until Sherlock obeyed his unspoken order and looked him in the eyes. “You know what I meant. Why is this so important?”

Could he feel Sherlock’s hesitation? Did he realise how easy it was for Sherlock to hide behind the sex? The music? He must. John’s empathy was a blessing as well as a curse.

Sherlock opened his mouth, tried to speak, but the words wouldn’t come. Not the right ones, anyway. “The transcription.”

John’s mouth turned up at the corner, clearly not believing him. “There’s an obvious solution for that.”

Sherlock shook his head in denial. In denial of John’s solution, in denial of Sherlock’s inability to speak his mind about something so...so...plebeian. He had no problem telling people what was what, but asking for something was fraught with anxiety. *People had a habit of saying no.*

“Sherlock. You don’t have a string trio.” John licked at his chin, lapping at the blood. Probably spreading a pink film all over rather than getting rid of it.

The thought of this only being an academic exercise instead of physical possibility rankled. “No.” Sherlock glared at him but John only smiled, blood tinged teeth, sweaty hair sticking up in spikes, indulgent and stupid with sex hormones. “Thank you. I do realise.” He raised an eyebrow. “Can we resume the sex, please?” They were still sliding together, banking the heat between them enough that the boiling point was still just *there*. Sherlock wanted to keep tempo with the music in its mad dash towards the end, find his end in the final cascade of sound. It was *pulling* at him, begging him to complete, but this was John’s domain and Sherlock was chickening out.

“But you do have a pianist.” John let go of one of Sherlock’s wrists and tapped his fingers against Sherlock’s chest in a parody of playing along with the leaping melody. Sherlock kept the abandoned wrist where John left it.

Just because there wasn’t a band around it didn’t mean it wasn’t tethered.

“Don’t be absurd.” Sherlock looked away, but John brought his eyes back around by grasping his face. John looked as calm as possible, but the grip on his chin was firm, thumb drilling in to the flesh at the very tip.

“Sherlock.” His voice was gentle. “Transcribe it for piano and violin.”

“He’d never.”

“He would. I’m positive.” John rested his face on Sherlock’s chest like a spaniel, still looking at him. “You’ve both come so far. He wants to be there for you.”

John took his hand away and didn’t protest when Sherlock broke eye contact again. “I’ll consider it.”

The smile that John gave him in return for that half-arsed promise was so luminous and genuine that Sherlock privately resolved that he would tell Mycroft in no uncertain terms that he would be playing with his brother. Even if he had to take a case or three in return. Even if he had to threaten the Commonwealth.

“And then promise me,” John said.

“What?”

“That you’ll tell me what’s really on your mind.” John drove down hard with his hips, an ardent embrace of the maniacal winding of the music, surprising a grunt out of Sherlock. John’s eyes became heavy lidded as he bent his head down to administer a kiss or a bite, but Sherlock was still blinded by that smile, and by a sudden nameless fear. He hadn’t said nearly all he’d wanted to say. He hadn’t told John that...that..

...Dammit. That’s what the bloody music was for.

The 28th kicked in and it seemed appropriate for this moment in time. A disjunction of leaping eighth notes held together only by the continuous exuberance of the left hand; a rapid and unexpected texture that nevertheless settled into a beautiful linear chromatic palette.

Sherlock ducked John’s kiss, surprising a perplexed little *oh* out of him, and grabbed John’s hand. He stared into John’s eyes as he deliberately threaded his wrist through John’s fingers and then brought his arm down to rest near the other pinned wrist. Sherlock arched his neck, baring his throat, presenting himself as the picture of submission. John’s eyes went wide and his fingers lost their slack, tightening on that wrist until Sherlock knew there would be blue thumbprints in his future.

He undulated into John. A tease and a promise.

“Sherlock. What--”

He cleared his throat. “Bondage, John.”

“Bondage.” John looked confused. “Your hard limit. Why?”

This Variation started out expressive and delirious, held together by the smallest thread, but it melted into a smooth pattern, now. The moment seemed perfect. “I’ve been thinking that there is one type of bondage that might suit us both.” Sherlock was staring at him, willing him to understand what he was getting at. He needed John to-- he needed...

Ah.

John’s face took a moment to morph from confusion into...shock? Distress?

Sherlock just looked at him, uncertain and trying not to show it, before John fell upon him, tearing at his throat and wrists, suddenly wild and frantic to get as much out of Sherlock as possible.

There was a different sort of tension running through Sherlock as they fucked their way through the 29th. He’d just half-arsed the most difficult proposition he’d ever made, but it was almost impossible to think of anything beyond the music and John’s skin and the poetry of motion linking the two. He’d been so primed for so long that it wasn’t difficult for John to tap into the pure animal need for orgasm.

What they had together was enough, would have to be enough. John was still invested in who they were together: friends, colleagues, lovers, accomplices. This would change nothing.

The heavy chords and bright arpeggios carried on the motif of the 28th, but instead of coming together into a linear whole it started to pinwheel apart just like they started to come apart; a satellite breaking up in orbit. The pace John set was fast. Short clips of motion, a subtle corkscrewing of the spine adding a final twist to each thrust against each other. Their own pre come was adding to the mess between them and Sherlock could feel his bollocks drawing up.

They didn’t need a scrap of paper signed by a bitter civil servant to legitimize this. They were well beyond that. Legality and tradition had never entered into his consideration before. Why should it now?

The last few Variations were a short, sharp jaunt into insanity, marvellous coruscating feeling. It was a crescendo, not of sound, but of emotion. The physiological response on top of the psychological response and the ambiguity between them was too intense, had been building for too long, and Sherlock was suddenly gone, with a flash of antimony in his peripheral vision, clouding his eyes as he stared at John through the utter wreckage of his orgasm.

He shuddered through the opening strains of the quodlibet, shattered and oversensitive, writhing against John in a broken rhythm as sticky heat spread between them. It surprised a subvocal growl out of John, and spurred him into a faster pace. Sherlock could feel John’s eyes on him, watching him break apart, mind scatter, limbs and reflexes failing him.

John watched him fall into a sweet lassitude, as sweet as the quodlibet, taking what John gave him, even if the sensation was too much for over sensitized nerves. Sherlock going limp and giving himself over to whatever John wanted seemed to be John's breaking point, and he devolved into an uneven spasm and a short cry of ecstasy against Sherlock's wet chest just as the last notes of the final Variation tapered off into the ether.

Everything was quiet except for harsh breathing, just for a moment, and then the beginning notes of the solemn Aria Da Capo began its gentle repeat in the gasping quiet of their sexual aftermath.

John released Sherlock's sore wrists and collapsed into a dead weight. Sherlock wrapped his arms around John and closed his eyes, knowing that no matter John's answer, he still had John in every fashion that counted.

He brought one hand up to run it through John's mussed hair.

He'd asked John because John had been so invested in what it meant to be a normal bloke; marriage, children, steady income and filing paperwork together. The everyday middle class assurances that society had told him to expect. Sherlock wanted to offer as much of that as he was capable. No children, God no, but he could do the paperwork. He could show John that he was willing to go through the expected western rites of passage, not because he valued it, but because John did. He'd made the offer.

The ball was in John's court now.

And if Sherlock was mentally dissecting the reasons behind John's possible refusal, then that was Sherlock's problem.

John's heart was still thundering against his as he tried to regulate his breathing. John's breath was bathing his collarbone. John was there, and that was enough for him. It might have to be enough.

He was exhausted and sated and starving for a curry.

And maybe, just a bit, nervous.

John turned his head and scowled at him. "Did you mean it? You're not just saying that during sex, or pulling my leg, or an experiment...or...or..."

"I meant it."

John brought his hand up to the nape of Sherlock's neck, massaging the curls there as he kissed him again, making his torn lip twinge. When John pulled away he didn't let go, but the look on his face was clouded. "You don't have to do that. I know you think it's sentimental and meaningless."

"Maybe I want that with you."

John sighed. "If you're doing this just because you think I--"

“*John*.” Sherlock leaned in until he was almost nose to nose with John, staring at him with an intense need to make him understand. “How often do I do things that I really don’t want to do?”

John eased back a little, the cloud was lifting, but it wasn’t until John laughed that Sherlock knew that everything was going to be okay. John’s smile was so big he could barely kiss Sherlock, but he gave it a good try. It was a foolish grin that was going to hurt if he didn’t stop.

Sherlock let John’s joy wash over him and felt the hard knot of anxiety that had sat in his stomach for weeks dilute and dissipate. John wasn’t denying him. John wasn’t going to tell him that marriage didn’t make much sense between two blokes. *John wanted this*.

John was going to get the best bloody Goldberg transcription *ever*.

“Knew you were going to say yes. I deduced it.”

“Shut up and kiss me, you smug liar.”

Sherlock decided this kissing thing wasn’t bad at all, sometimes. He particularly liked this kind of kissing, after orgasm, when it was no longer a means to an end. It was slow and intense, like the Aria itself. And the Aria Da Capo most of all.

It was the same tranquil piece, yet not.

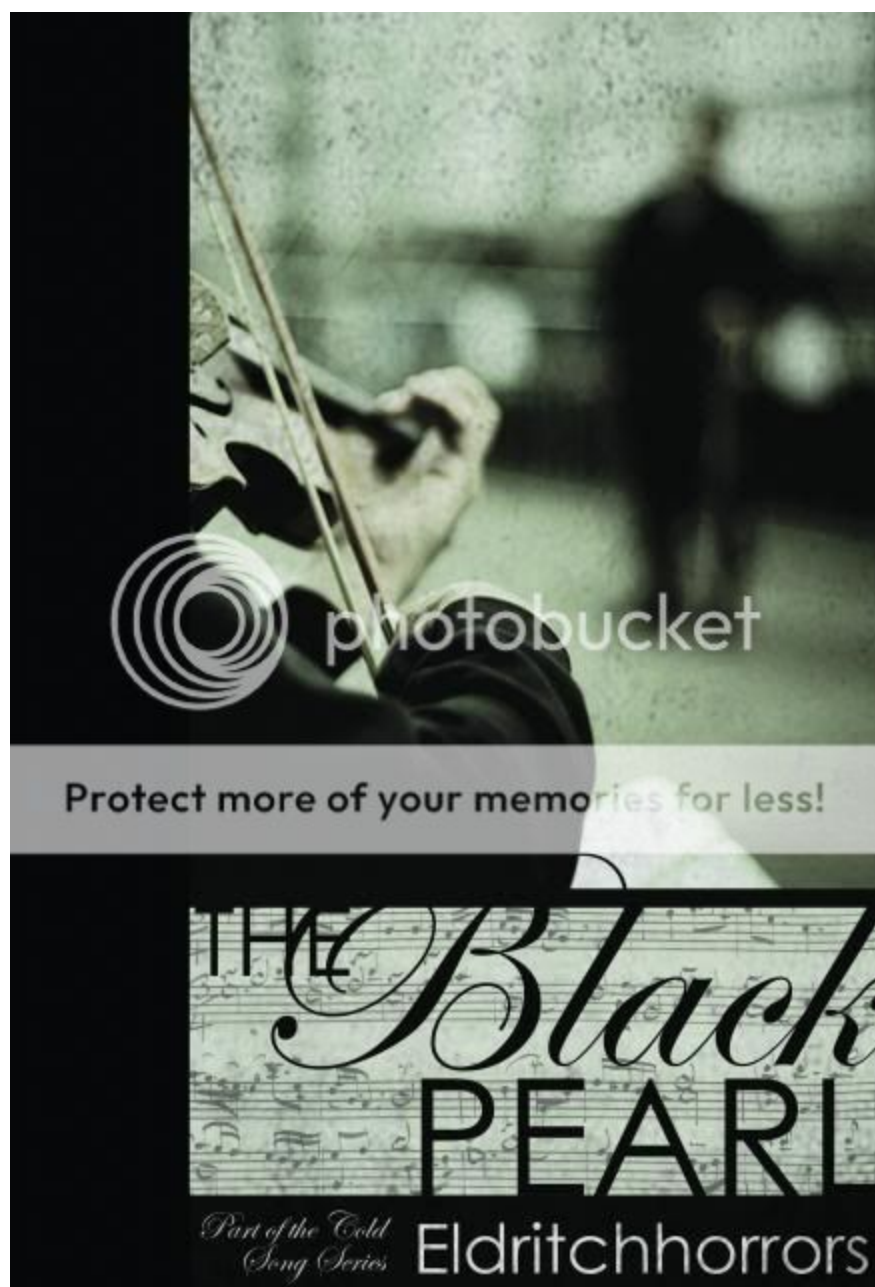
It was a repeat of the first Aria, yet not.

No one ever played it exactly the same way because you could never cross the same river. The Aria comes back around at the end, but you are not the person who heard it the first time. You are reborn; clean and enriched. Benevolent and filled with awe. And that was how Sherlock felt, there, covered in sweat and come and John’s comfortable weight, sticking to the leather of the sofa in a few places that hadn’t been covered by his dressing gown.

So much contemplative stillness at the end. A replenishment of soul.

And Sherlock was quite coming around to the idea of a soul.

Cover Art



End Notes

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