

## A Chemical Defect Found (On the Losing Side Remix)

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# A Chemical Defect Found (On the Losing Side Remix)

by [AreteArt](#)

## Summary

A remix of missselene's "On the Losing Side."

After Mary's death, John moves back into Baker Street. He and Sherlock stumble into a relationship, or something of that sort.

Sherlock's rather giving when it comes to sex, but that doesn't mean he and John ever talk about it.

## Notes

This is John's POV of the events in "On the Losing Side," with a couple more scoops of angst on top for piquancy and such.

UnBritpicked, unbetaed, hopefully readable nonetheless. Concrit welcomed!

- Translation into Русский available: [Обнаруженный химический дефект \(ремикс «На стороне проигравших»\)](#) by [Little\\_Unicorn](#)
- Inspired by [On the Losing Side](#) by [missselene](#)

It started on what *would* have been John and Mary's first anniversary.

He wasn't sure what to do about that. The six months since she'd gone into a very premature and ultimately fatal labor had been a storm of confused emotions, settling into a grey haze. There was the shocked numbness. The dull plodding through unending days, trying to make arrangements and see things through when everything was so blank. Pain that sat heavy in his chest and derailed so many trains of thought. Nebulous but agonizing *ache* at the thought of the daughter he held only once. *Rage* that the universe had seen fit to send him on in the face of yet more loss, not only of his wife and child, but of the father he would have been.

Misery at the thought that it wasn't faked this time.

Shamed relief that Mary could just stay Mary, now, no other initials or jump drives or silenced pistols getting pulled on anyone.

Guilt, weighing down like his pack on a ruck march, unceasing guilt at the thought that he wouldn't have to worry about failing them, now, wouldn't have to figure out how to balance his family and Sherlock. Wouldn't have to fret about leaving Mary alone with the baby while heading out on a case; wouldn't have to leave Sherlock without backup while being a dutiful husband and dad.

There was more, buried deeper still beneath that guilt. Hiding in a box under a trapdoor in a corner in the cellar of his subconscious was the question of Sherlock and companionship and whether it might be possible, Mary being gone, for their friendship to...shift a bit (*a lot*). Morph into something closer than fondness, into some kind of...intimacy of body and mind.

But as the guilt was quite heavy enough, John never let himself admit that the question was there, much less head down and address it in straightforward words like something achievable.

No, by far the better option, for tonight at least, was the old Watson standby: cover the greyness with a golden wash of lager and whiskey. The colour would recede before long, but he could commemorate last year's celebration with a few hours of numbing the numbness: a sort of tribute to Mary and her ability to make him *feel* when he'd been convinced he'd never feel much of anything again.

It went splendidly at first.

Sherlock was busily examining some grit and clay under his microscope ("*Akadama*, John! Obviously the nurse stole the bonsai!") and, from the look of his laptop screen, comparing different styles of newly-released sneakers on a dozen different tabs. John was free to sip his beer and read his novel in peace, though Sherlock did shoot him a look when he got up to swap the empty bottles for the Oban and a tumbler. John wasn't sure what the look meant – it could be anything from "I'd better keep an eye on you lest you follow family tradition" to "Jooohn, that whiskey's from a *case* and the least you could do is pour me some" to "I

suppose you've figured out by this point how much alcohol you can ingest before it renders you more obtuse than normal” – so he pulled out another tumbler for Sherlock, poured them both a healthy measure, and returned to his book.

Not that he read it for long. The characters, already a bit fuzzy in his mind, and fuzzier still after a glass of whiskey, faded away as he watched Sherlock clear away his samples, shut the tabs with a tap of one elegant forefinger, and retrieve his violin to play something mildly frenetic. John clutched at his glass, drinking automatically and then refilling it to give himself something to do, something to focus on that isn't Sherlock's shoulders or wrists or eyes or –

Erm, ah. *Whiskey*. Right.

Later on he will blame the Oban for how hard he didn't mean to giggle at Sherlock's dramatic bowing (Bartok *would* bring that out in him), and for how he managed to upset his empty glass by dropping the long-forgotten novel, and most especially for how he let the question of attachment-to-Sherlock out of its box and up from the cellar into the very forefront of his somewhat-conscious mind. Not that the whiskey can take the blame for Sherlock's arresting eyes or the lightness of his expression or for Sherlock generally, but it's surely responsible for turning John's eyes so treacle-slow that he is caught staring. Surely that's the reason he trips over the words “Well, time I head to bed” and has trouble rising from his seat to flee upstairs. Surely the whiskey is what tilts the room as Sherlock takes his wrists to pull him up –

– or perhaps that's just momentum. Or astonishment. Either way, John's arms are suddenly slid under Sherlock's and Sherlock's stooped just enough that their faces are level and though John could claim his mouth opened in surprise, he knows that he started the kiss, that he really is trying to figure out that long-unanswered question. Sherlock isn't the only one who likes figuring out puzzles, after all. Eventually, when his head is clearer, John will puzzle out just how he got here, and how they avoided kissing messily like this before now, and how Sherlock can be convinced to kiss mid-case. For now –

“John, are you sure – ”

For fuck's sake.

He shushes Sherlock with a few words and an insistent kiss, which must be answer enough because Sherlock stops with his silly questions and snogs back properly. It is warm and wet and sends his head buzzing almost as much as the whiskey did. No, more; whiskey doesn't send his blood pounding through his ears, thrumming through his fingertips, rushing south, the way the kisses have. John doesn't think he's ever been this hard so soon after drinking so heavily. Must be down to Sherlock and his ridiculously thorough tongue, elegant fingers clutching at John's back like he needs John as much as John needs him.

The thought is dizzying, ripping a moan from John's throat. He's thrusting helplessly against Sherlock's thigh, dimly concluding *This would be better yet if we didn't have all this clothing between us*.

Feeling the weight of Sherlock's cock starting to grow hotter and heavier against him decides it: they should be naked right now. But somewhere through the fog of John's drunken lust comes the realization that he is not at his most dexterous. There's no way he could manage to unfasten Sherlock's trousers without the risk of catching Sherlock in the zipper, which would surely throw a wrench in the proceedings. *Hell*, he thinks, and goes for his own belt and zip, hoping Sherlock will follow suit.

But instead of stripping, Sherlock shoves John back into his chair abruptly, kneels between his legs, making his heart pound faster yet. The thought of Sherlock on his knees, all his focus turned on John's crotch, his fingers so careful and face so intent -

He can't look. He *can't* look. It is madness enough that this is even happening but there is no way John wants it to end as quickly as it *will* end if he watches Sherlock watching him. *God*.

John's breathing heavily and quivering a bit before Sherlock's lips have even touched him. The thought of that, coupled with the actual sensations of *those lips* wrapping, sliding, wetly warmly sucking and licking and - *holy hell*. John really can't help how his body jerks, how he moans and shudders under the onslaught. He reaches out to rest a hand in Sherlock's curls: partly in hopes that it will help him control himself better, partly to indicate silently how close he is, partly to gratify his long-stifled desire to feel Sherlock's hair. Sherlock moans at the contact; the sound vibrates through John's entire body, and taking it as a sign of Sherlock's enjoyment makes John curse and thrust, helpless and hard.

He is moving faster and faster, closer and closer to the edge, deeper down Sherlock's throat (*oh God*), until all goes spotty with pleasure: an open-eyed phosphene.

He cannot move, cannot speak, can only breathe through the aftershocks. Darkness falls before he can manage a glance or a smile or a word.

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Morning.

Light from the window stabbing his face. Which isn't right, unless he'd slept past noon somehow. *Ugh*. John's mouth is cottony, his head is throbbing in pain, and his neck creaks in protest when he tries to lift it from - oh. From his chair -

Oh.

*Shit*.

It has been years since waking up has called for so sudden and overwhelming a panic. Sirens are going off in his head: *you shoved your cock down your flatmate's throat you were drunk so drunk you told him to shut up and grabbed his hair oh God oh God you held his hair and*

*fucked his face shit you fucked **Sherlock's** face oh hell how badly have you fucked this all up oh bloody fucking damn everything.*

The hangover is worse than he's had in months, but it's almost a merciful distraction at the moment. Focusing on standing and stretching keeps him from imagining what invective Sherlock might throw at him or how he'll glare before icily ordering John to take his things and leave the flat.

He turns toward the kitchen, intent on making tea before confronting the utter mess of his life, but stops short when he sees Sherlock at the table. His eyes have dropped to a spot on its surface. Awkward, that he can't even look John in the eye right now, but honestly John prefers that to the tongue-lashing he expected.

And then Sherlock startles him again, almost as much as when he pushed him into the chair last night: he shoves a glass of water and some paracetamol toward him. John thinks, somewhat wildly, that it's not impossible for the water to have been poisoned – but then, Sherlock doesn't actually look murderous. His quiet “Here” of invitation cuts off whatever groveling or excuses or apologies John might have made. The fact that *Sherlock* apologizes a minute later confuses John utterly, but his head is still pounding and he doesn't have energy for anything beyond a mild protest.

He gives up on getting tea and escapes to the shower.

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The next few days, John is very careful in all his movements. Sherlock may have declared “It's fine,” but John remains disgusted by his drunken self's apparent tendency to take advantage of his best friend in contemptible fashion. The disgust layers itself neatly over John's load of guilt; it's heavier still, but seems to keep the numbness and anger and grey dullness at bay. It also discourages him from drinking any more alcohol, even when he's offered some free by the redheaded waitress from the golf club.

The golf club case, John decides later, was just what they needed. Working so closely means they can't avoid each other, for one. For another, catching a kleptomaniac caddie *and* revealing the whole league to be a front for some kind of bank-robbing cult is gratifying to Sherlock and the Met alike. The whole thing keeps John out of that grim grey hole of dull despair, giving him a goal and a purpose; moreover, he's diverted for fully half of dinner by the connections Sherlock draws between his investigations of the red-headed league and the bonsai case. The silence of their cab ride home is much more comfortable than the ride out.

But the air abruptly disappears from the room again when the two of them almost trip over each other in the kitchen. It's suddenly much warmer than the average August evening.

John's eyes fall to Sherlock's lips; he cannot tell whether or not Sherlock would welcome a kiss, and he is desperate to avoid taking more than what's offered. He is a touch surprised by Sherlock swaying closer before withdrawing hastily, but he can hardly blame him for his retreat to the bathroom.

John sets to work typing up the case, but it's not quite as agreeable as it normally is. He can hardly recall any of the faces from the golf league, because his whole mind is taken up with Sherlock dashing down the fairway, Sherlock chuckling through a mouthful of prawn toast, Sherlock's eyes wide and dark before he leaves the kitchen. It's all preposterous, and John is irritated with his drunken self for interrupting whatever Sherlock was going to say before the kiss and the blowjob the other night, because God knows he can't ever deduce Sherlock's thoughts or feelings from what he does.

After the shower's shut off and Sherlock's returned to his room, John summons up his nerve. He's complete rubbish at such things, but obviously they need to talk about this, at least a bit. John has no idea what he'll say, but hopefully he can express his own interest in a – in a deeper and closer relationship, and get some confirmation that Sherlock feels the same. *If* he feels the same.

Surely his hesitation is audible in his footsteps. He stops on reaching the door, peering in to ascertain whether he's welcome. Sherlock's eyes lock with his, and he swallows as Sherlock reaches out to turn out the lamp. Somehow that seems more like an invitation than discouragement; it's extraordinary how clearly Sherlock can communicate without saying a word sometimes. His limpid eyes draw John forward, until he stands beside the bed, trailing a hand over Sherlock's temple.

Whatever words John meant to say get lost on the way to his mouth. *Bollocks to this*, he thinks, and so he attempts to convey all his inchoate thoughts and feelings by kissing Sherlock as fervently as possible. They are sprawled out over the bed, and John honestly doesn't know quite how that happened. He takes a breath and manages to get out "Please. Please, I need -" *I need to know you want this. I need to hold you. I need to know you're okay with my doing this. I need to show you how much I care about you. I need to show you that I'm not just a drunken idiot. I need you.*

There are so many things he could, should say right now, but they're all caught in a bottleneck and then Sherlock steals all the air from his lungs and the thoughts from his head. This is quite unfair of him and John will accuse him of thought-thievery next time he disparages John as slow-witted. He'd really been so determined to *talk* about this but Sherlock's licking at his nipples and opening his trousers and surely it is too much to expect any kind of thought from him right now.

He'd wondered over the weekend whether he'd just imagined Sherlock going down on him as being utterly phenomenal, the hyperbole of a drunken mind. But clearly he hadn't. If anything, his drunken mind had failed to report on some significant details: the cleverness of Sherlock's tongue, the devastating effectiveness of his fingers, the sensuality of his hollowed cheeks, his purposeful licking and sucking at John's cock. Nor was John prepared for the sensation of Sherlock's hand cupping his sac, his nose pressed into John's pubic hair, his fingers stroking at John's perineum until John's moans turn to shouts.

Pleasure still shuddering through him, John tries to remember the last time a blowjob had left him so satisfied and so utterly spent. Nothing whatsoever comes to mind. He knew Sherlock was capable at pretty much everything he set his hand to, but never dreamed that proficiency would extend to sex.

“That was - wow,” he manages, and sits up with a gesture to ask “Do you...Um, I mean, should I --?” Which is a very graceless way to ask if he should attempt to do the same for Sherlock, but Sherlock understands him even at his least coherent. He looks mildly panicked at the prospect and declines, indicating that he’s already finished, and heads for the bathroom in a curious echo of his earlier departure from the kitchen.

John is left blinking after him. Most of the warmth left the room with Sherlock, and with the sudden chill his brain comes back online. *Bloody hell*. That wasn't what he meant to do at all. Sherlock getting him off was lovely to say the least, but he really did want some kind of *verbal* acknowledgement of whatever this was. Having received none, he supposes that it's not quite on to just fall asleep in Sherlock's bed. Rather than wait for Sherlock to return and shoo him out, John heads upstairs to his own bed, leaving Sherlock his privacy and peace.

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Waking up the next day is far pleasanter than that panicked Friday morning. John stretches luxuriously, relishing the warmth of his bed and the pleasant lassitude of his body. Last night really did happen, and John wasn't drunk this time, so presumably Sherlock was alright with it. John certainly didn't make any requests (much less demands) of him beyond kissing, so he can stop torturing himself with reading articles on the definition of informed consent.

He rises, showers, and dresses, deciding that a full English will be a good start to the week. There's work to go to, but somehow a fry-up always lends an air of holiday to a morning, and he'd like to think that he's starting to leave behind those hazy days of grief in this new romance. Relationship? Well, it's the start of *something*, at any rate, and that thought makes it suddenly less pressing to put words to whatever it is they have together. Who was John kidding, to think he could make either Sherlock or himself express any emotions on a matter when anything less than life and death is on the line? Better to let this unfold more naturally.

And so he beams at Sherlock, who is mildly startled at John's exuberance this morning, and they eat and head to their respective work, and eventually return to spend the evening companionably puttering about the flat. John thinks about all sorts of things - the new Labour candidate, whether he should make risotto tomorrow, the BMJ's description of the NICE's guidelines on intrapartum care - but eventually his thoughts circle back around to Sherlock, sitting in his chair reading some treatise on natural pigments. John smiles and dog-ears the page of the BMJ that mentions periorbital necrotising fasciitis for Sherlock's later perusal.

There are no touches or kisses or anything else that evening, but the air of cordiality remains as John eventually gets up and prepares for bed. The next day is much the same: John spends the day doing exams, making diagnoses, idly wondering what Sherlock's up to, and comes home to find him measuring frog skin with the calipers. John suspects this has little to do with understanding the frog's bodily systems and poison glands, and more to do with Sherlock's rather idiosyncratic ways of entertaining himself. Once again, he smiles fondly and bids Sherlock good night.



He wakes all too early Wednesday morning to the rattling of a rain shower, one which soaks his socks and some five inches of his trouser legs between the Tube station and the surgery.

The new secretary spends half the morning complaining about her boyfriend over her tea and the other half criticising some reality show in obsessive detail. A series of texts arrive from Sherlock about some especially vexing clients: *Really, I don't see why it's so difficult for people to admit that their spouses have cheated on them or that their employees have embezzled funds. Surely if they can present the data to me, they can also see what's staring them in the face.* There's a really annoying Man U fan on the Tube as he heads home, it's raining again, Tesco is a crowded mess, and his shoulder is twinging as he climbs the stairs to the flat.

All in all, it's the sort of day where he'd normally drink his tea, eat dinner, and then unwind with a bath and a wank - but Sherlock's in the loo. Has been for some time, actually. John wonders if he ought to prepare himself for the possibility of cleaning frog guts out of the tub before soaking or showering. Not that it would make any sense for Sherlock to experiment with frog guts after showering himself, but then Sherlock's not always sensible about such things. John ends up sitting to read the paper, though he has to reread the article about a thwarted terrorist plot about 3 times before any of it registers. He tries focusing on a blurb about Andy Murray, but fails. At which point Sherlock finally exits the bathroom, dressing gown very loosely tied.

John forgets about the bath.

Sherlock gives him an unreadable look before heading into his bedroom, leaving the door completely open behind him: the most blatant invitation John will ever get from him, in all likelihood. He's anxious not to appear too eager and so takes his time folding up the paper and rinsing his mug. There's a flutter of anxious anticipation in his stomach, but John takes a breath, squares his shoulders, and heads into Sherlock's room.

The light is off, and so is Sherlock's dressing gown. The thought of him naked beneath the covers makes John's stomach flutter again; he'd missed out on touching Sherlock, the past couple times, but maybe he'll get to trace over his body now. So. Shoes off. Jumper off. Trousers off. Before he can remove his shirt or pants, Sherlock reaches for something and then for John. For a split second he thinks Sherlock's trying to shake his hand, but then he realizes he's been handed a condom.

God. Are they really doing this already? Pretty much all of John's experience is with women rather than men, but even so it feels like skipping a step somehow. Granted, Sherlock doesn't have breasts to fondle, but it's not like John has exhausted any of the other possible delights of their bodies yet. Hell, John's not finished kissing him when Sherlock pulls away to settle on a pillow and spread his legs.

Still, it would feel churlish to decline, especially when Sherlock has, evidently, gone to the trouble of getting himself loosened and lubed up like this (no *wonder* he took so long in the bathroom). It is the weirdest mix of submission and bossiness John has ever seen: Sherlock's lying there before him, a little bit like a gift-giver eager for his parcel to be unwrapped and a little bit like a child anxious to take a test before he can lose his nerve. He's open to be taken, but clearly he moved at his own volition and on his own inscrutable schedule. John tries to

prepare *himself* for it by peppering kisses down Sherlock's back, but Sherlock inhales sharply as if to say *Get on with it*.

Fuck. Okay. John was already half-hard at the thought and the feel and the sight of Sherlock naked. He has to give himself a few strokes in preparation, but all in all, this is far from a turnoff. He puts the condom on, slicks up, and (nothing else for it) presses inside. A sort of white noise fills his ears: it's so tight, tighter than anything John's felt before, and despite the stretching it hardly seems possible for John's cock to fit inside Sherlock this way.

He takes it slowly, gently, trying to ease in and give them both time to get used to it.

Sherlock says nothing, so John must gauge for himself when it's time to start moving.

Sherlock's breath hisses beneath him, and that's it. He's...worryingly quiet. Normally, John gets more feedback than this and can speed up, slow down, go gently, or pound harder and deeper as instructed. But aside from a gasp and some sharp inhalations, Sherlock is utterly silent. It makes John a little self-conscious. This *thing* is already so unverballed that it's like walking through a room full of tripping hazards in the dark. He's anxious to avoid anything presumptuous, so he moans and curses but doesn't cry Sherlock's name in case that's overly sentimental and off-putting.

Is this - is this doing anything for Sherlock? Could it? Does he hate it? Well. There's the moment when John first brushes his prostate: he lets out a whine and bucks involuntarily. He hasn't really moved otherwise, so John takes this as a positive indication. His own body reacts accordingly; his thrusts go faster and deeper and harder and he hopes Sherlock's as close as he is.

Time moves oddly as John's movements speed up. He wants to stay here forever; he can't possibly last much longer; his left arm's about to give out. Everything blurs as he bottoms out and his balls draw up.

*Oh.* Fuck. Fuck, he just came inside Sherlock.

John collapses and lets that thought wash over him.

He wants to roll Sherlock to one side and hold him tightly. But that might be unwelcome, so instead he resumes stroking Sherlock's hair - he's not refused that yet, and John would rather not let the warmth in his chest cool so soon by setting himself up to get pushed away. It's quite awkward enough when he realizes Sherlock isn't hard. At first John thinks he's come untouched, but...that's hardly likely, is it? He must have found it all so unstimulating. But he doesn't throw off John's hand, and in fact kisses his wrist. John gives him a goodnight kiss on his forehead, which seems safer somehow, and leaves before he can give into the temptation to wrap his arms around Sherlock's body and cuddle him suffocatingly close.

John's heart rate still hasn't come back down by the time he's gotten upstairs. He's warm, but his bed has never been so cold.

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Thus begins a sort of routine wherein they shag regularly but steadfastly avoid talking about it. Even as he bites his own tongue on any mention of them, John doesn't know how these

nighttime assignations stay so completely separate from their daily life. It all stays out of their interviews with clients and consultations with NSY. It doesn't bleed into their texts or into tête-à-têtes with Mycroft. It has no effect whatsoever on Sherlock's treatment of him during the day, except that it must make Sherlock yet more observant: he always initiates these...occasions...on those days when the dull aching greyness threatens to return. John always gets off before he can go under, then spends a day or two puzzling over what they are to each other and what it might mean. He can never come to any satisfactory conclusion, but he does know that he thinks less about Mary, less about his daughter, less about the grief and more about what the future might hold for him and this man he's invisibly tied himself to. It is a tie of some sort, isn't it? John ponders and ponders.

Immediately post-case, there are only ever blowjobs (probably for the sake of efficiency, or some kind of Mind Palace Maintenance Reasons). Sex is a very focused affair; if John were to describe his sex life in economic terms, kisses would be of greater value than they've ever been in his life for their comparative rarity. Some things – drawing out the aching pleasure on purpose, hearing Sherlock say his name, daring to say Sherlock's name, getting Sherlock off with his mouth, hell, getting Sherlock off, full stop – have never happened at all, and so take on monumental importance in John's mind. Bed-sharing. They don't do that. Sherlock's never actually *ordered* John to leave his bed, but he's never been encouraged to linger and he doesn't wish to disrupt Sherlock's sleep by staying where he's not wanted. He doesn't want to disrupt any of it, this *something* that feels so tenuous, so fragile, like it might break or disappear if he looked too hard or prodded at it.

Which is why John doesn't ask the questions weighing on him: why does Sherlock always bite his lip against making any sounds? Why does he stay on his knees or his side and never let John see his face? Why can't he even trust John with the way he normally *smells*?

So many of John's idle moments - tea breaks at the surgery, riding the Tube, waiting in a queue at Tesco - are spent turning these and other questions over and over in his mind. It's odd that Sherlock's so eager to give blowjobs but not eager to receive them; to John's way of thinking, this breaks their pattern regarding tea-making, most types of cleaning, and the purchase and preparation of food. Maybe it's a control thing? Is he self-conscious about how he looks during orgasm? John doesn't know what to make of it. The only time a partner has been so eager to focus solely on his pleasure was the time his girlfriend had been cheating on him with some musician and felt guilty whenever she and John were together.

He wonders why Sherlock only ever goes down on him and never lets him reciprocate. He wonders why Sherlock always lubricates and stretches himself out instead of trusting John to do it (he's a *bloody doctor*; surely he'd do it properly?). He wonders why it is that Sherlock kisses more eagerly than anyone he's ever known, but also pulls away more deliberately and insistently than anyone ever has.

There's one unpleasant morning where it occurs to John that the kissing might be some kind of bizarre experiment: an extension of Sherlock's ability to masquerade and cry on command and generally pretend at feelings. Sherlock booping Janine's nose (not to mention the subsequent snog) comes to mind and replays in his head until John feels equal parts nauseated and infuriated. He makes a single cup of tea to show his pique, almost burns his throat drinking it as fast as possible, and heads to the surgery. Between patients, he

remembers that the entire Janine situation (including the ring box) was for a case. Surely there's no case that requires Sherlock to kiss John, much less...any of the rest of it. Or is there? He strains himself with vigilance over the next few days to see if Sherlock mentions any flat-share murders or confusing domestics, but the oddest thing they get is a Keurig poisoning (which evidently dispatched a different secretary at Osborne Clarke than the murderer intended).

This leaves John ruminating on the same questions as he keeps unrelentingly close-mouthed about his thoughts and feelings toward his flatmate.

He isn't hallucinating all of these occasions, he's not. So there's certainly something afoot, *something* between them. It's as close as they can be, isn't it?

And yet.

The fact that Sherlock stays so self-contained grates on him. They're so close but still so far from the intimacy John longs for. Curiosity fills him, making him a bit jumpy, since after all it could end at any moment. Sherlock *must* know what John feels, but John has no way of knowing what Sherlock's thoughts on the matter might be, and the frustration of wondering alternates with the fear that he'll screw it all up.

The old greyness has been supplanted, mostly, by this new haze of questioning apprehension. There's no one he really wants to ask about it. One day, for the hell of it, he tries Googling *why won't my boyfriend make any noise?; partner quiet during sex a problem ?* From which he gathers that a lot of anxious girls (along with some doctors of dubious provenance) had been exchanging counsel, sagely advising each other that "Men will express themselves as they wish and pressuring them to do otherwise is inconsiderate." And that's that.

Well. There's no denying that *Sherlock* would express himself however he liked. Whether or not it'd be inconsiderate to encourage him to change struck John as moot, given that the whole thing sounded so futile.

Or is it?

Not bothering to clear his search history (may as well let Sherlock see the questions he's been asking himself), John does some further research. Then he waits for evening to come.

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Thanks to the internet, John has an idea of what he'd like to happen in the bedroom; once again, trying to speak hasn't gotten him anywhere. Thankfully, John manages to get Sherlock situated as he likes by the simple tactic of tugging him into place. It's a little awkward.

There's no dignified way to lie down with one's arse in the air; if there were, Sherlock would manage it. But whatever resistance he might have shown melts when John says a quiet "Please" and goes through the normal routine of preparing himself.

Sherlock's so *tractable*. How does he manage that while evading or shutting down any and all attempts at conversation? It's a wonder, really. A different sort of wonder, thankfully, from the fact that John is able to do this with him: palm his cheeks, grab his hips, push inside

the tight heat of him until he's fully seated. Supposedly this position will allow for John to stimulate his prostate like nothing else. Hopefully each stroke will do what speech can't: convey how desired he is, how much pleasure John wants to give him.

John thinks it's going well; his legs are burning and he's driving himself mad with the pace, of course, but it's steady and it's firm without being rough. The moment Sherlock actually takes himself in hand for once feels like victory, and John tries to...*encourage* him by intensifying his thrusts. He's still hesitant to say anything, to praise Sherlock for it, but he can tell when Sherlock's reached the point of climax both by his guttural moan and by the way his body clenches around John's cock. It's so hot and tight and close and just fucking *beautiful*. John soon follows him over the edge, coming and coming like he never has.

*God, I love you*, he wants to say, but resists the urge. "God, that's one for the books," he murmurs instead, collapsing atop Sherlock and trying to get his breath back. Sherlock, shivering, says nothing, but curls up away from him. He's breathing hard, harder than John at this point. John waits for his gasps to slow, but if anything, they speed up. *Almost like a panic attack*, John thinks. Then he realizes: Sherlock didn't want him to see this. Whatever else Sherlock does or doesn't like, he doesn't want John to witness him in the throes of orgasm.

John tries to soothe him, though he hardly knows what to say. "You know it's alright if – " *If you enjoy it. If you lose control. If you break apart in front of me.* But Sherlock cuts him off, insisting once more (and fooling no one) that he's *fine*. Which is preposterous, he's clearly not, and John wonders how many times they'll interrupt each other or themselves before actually managing to communicate anything of note.

John sighs and gets to his feet. He likes the quiet moments after finishing, the occasions of touching and kissing and lying together in stillness, but clearly none of that is welcome right now.

But this is just a retreat. He'll ...he'll make a plan and carry out a tactical strike later on.

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The next morning, John's thoughts have coalesced into strategy of a sort. If all this *is* some kind of bizarre experiment, some exercise in seeing how much of John's focus he can command – and John hates to think that of Sherlock but honestly can't put it past him – then John will attempt to experiment in kind. It is not very rigorous, but he's not sure what to do, other than observe what he can when he breaks the pattern and kisses Sherlock, in broad daylight, outside his bedroom.

Sherlock, it seems, is not uninterested in having his neck kissed. He falls in enthusiastically when John's lips leave his neck for his mouth. John intends to go for his earlobes whilst stroking his cock, and then see what it's like to suck *him* for once.

Except that Sherlock cries "No!" and pulls away at the very first touch. Not terribly far, just enough to tug at John's trousers and give him the most insistent blowjob of his life.

As John regains his wits, all he can think is *Damn it*.

*So much for reciprocity.*

It's very odd to be disappointed in the wake of an orgasm (especially one so exceptional as that), but it pretty much confirms John's theory that whatever the *thing* is, it's not about both of them, not really: it's about Sherlock being possessive of John and exercising control over as many aspects of his life as possible, without letting John do the same in exchange. The thought hollows John out. Another silent shag a few days later steels his resolve to stop all of it before he falls any further and inevitably gets hurt worse. Maybe they can work their way back to an earlier version of normality, but they can't carry on as they have been.

That thought sits in John's throat as he drinks his tea one evening. It's jagged and painful, all the more so for its truth, and it keeps him from meeting Sherlock's eyes. However, stealing glances at the rest of his movements makes it clear that Sherlock's about to start his regimen of preparation. So John takes a breath and stops him. "I can't go on like this. I – I've tried, really, but I just can't."

He isn't sure what he expects. Maybe a straight-up denial ("Of course you can"), maybe a "Why not?" or a "What's wrong?" or "What do you mean, *'like this'*? Be specific." But instead Sherlock blinks, turns slightly away, nods with a murmur of "I see."

Seriously? This is all he gets on breaking the silence? "Is that all you have to say?" At least his anger keeps him from looking too despondent for the time being.

Sherlock looks him in the face, briefly. "What do you want me to say?" His eyebrow is quirked. Possibly the preface to rolling his eyes, perhaps a dare.

John takes the dare, as he always does, rushing in even when it'll prove to be an incoherent mess. "I don't know, anything! Ask me why! Or does it mean so little to you?" *Does it mean anything to you?*

Sherlock turns back to face him, eyebrows furrowed as if in confusion - or perhaps impatience, since he goes on to say "I know why, obviously."

Well of course.

Of course he knows how John feels, of course he thinks it's ridiculous, of course any and all matters of sentiment disgust him utterly. *I've always been able to divorce myself from feelings - the grit on the lens, the fly in the ointment...*

Whatever fight John had in him drains out. "Oh. So I suppose you really just don't care." *Should have known. Damn it all, Watson, you should have known.*

Sherlock huffs, and there's no time for John to brace himself before he bursts out in frustration, "Of course I care, but what use is it?" *What.* "I can't bring her back," *wait what - Mary?* " - and I can't turn into her," *what the hell, Sherlock* " - and I never expected to be an adequate replacement in any long-term fashion." *Oh. - oh shit. Oh, SHIT.* "I don't know

what more there is to –” Sherlock cuts himself off, thankfully, because John does not have the words to do so just now. Blood pounds in his ears.

He manages to suck in a breath. “What? Sherlock - what are you talking about?”

Sherlock blinks again, regarding John silently and warily, leaving John to assemble everything (*enjoyment of neutral touches, recoil from my touching his cock, avoidance of orgasm, always giving head, never letting me open him up, **adequate replacement***) into horrifying sense.

“Oh my god.” John might actually pass out. Good thing there’s a chair behind him. “Oh my god. You think I’m – using you.”

Sherlock protests that he’s *fine*, which is the stupidest most useless word right now because it’s wrong and John is the worst person to have taken advantage of his best friend, who thinks he is a *fucking stand-in* for his *dead wife*. And was happy to do so. Jesus Christ.

“I’m an idiot.” That’s all he can say. How could he spend *so much time* thinking about this and still miss it? How did he fail so badly? How did he give Sherlock the impression he wanted to...to *fuck* him, unfeelingly, while thinking of someone else? If he weren't so busy being horrified, he’d be utterly pissed off at Sherlock for believing him capable of such a thing. “I thought you...you were always so reserved, but I thought that was just – how you are, I was trying to accept it and I...oh my god, all this time I was upset because you didn't want me to get you off, and you were...you were – “ He cannot finish. It seems like the most paltry and picky and pitiful thing to get upset about, considering the reality.

“I’m sorry?” Sherlock has never looked so uncertain in his life, as far as John has seen; he hates that he’s reduced the most self-assured man he knows to this bundle of apprehension. Damn it all.

“Jesus Christ. You have nothing to apologize for.” How on earth is he supposed to make this clear? “You...just, just listen to me now, okay? You are *not* a – replacement, or anything like that. You’re...you. You’re who I want.”

One eyebrow flies upward. “You've made it clear on numerous occasions that you aren't interested in men generally and me particularly.”

Which was true, but it isn't the case anymore and he thought Sherlock would have picked up on the change given how many times John's buggered him into the mattress by this point. *Most observant man, my arse.*

“Now I certainly wish I hadn't.” He sighs and stands, because he needs to look Sherlock in the face to say this. “I know I said that, but Sherlock, the last time was years ago and I - I love you.”

There. It’s done. He’s said it. Sherlock's utterly unresponsive, but that makes some amount of sense, because John can hardly believe he’s actually admitted it aloud. “I don’t find it easy to say these things.” *Understatement of the century.* “But I should have told you at the start. I love you. I thought you must have...deduced that.”

Sherlock stands frozen, though he rouses a bit when John kisses him very softly. "John," he breathes, eyes wide and disbelieving like he can't assemble any of what he hears into sense, much less truth. John feels another pang at his shock and breathes apologies into his lips, pained by Sherlock's automatic reply of "It's all right." It wasn't, it really wasn't, and John can't stand him saying that, can't stand being reassured by the very person he's hurt, can't stand him waving it off like his own feelings and desires don't matter next to John's.

Which is why he takes Sherlock by the elbows before he can kneel down once again, and tugs him by the hand to his room.

The most important thing at present, John decides, is teasing out what Sherlock *actually* wants and what he does because he's convinced it's what John wants. He might not even want to remove his clothes, considering how often he'd keep them on for giving John blowjobs. So John removes his shoes and nothing else before getting on the bed. He strokes at Sherlock's hair meditatively as he attempts to make himself clear.

In the end, it's lovely, really. For once, they take time to talk, time to touch, time to kiss and kiss. Time for *everything*, it feels like, hanging suspended in an unending moment. John marvels at all of it: how different it is from the past few months of silent shagging, how differently he feels when they are talking *to* each other about this, and how differently *Sherlock* behaves throughout: shy and rather sweet as he asks for a kiss, terribly earnest as he runs his fingers over John's body, brilliantly focused and beautifully present.

They are finally face-to-face, which heightens the delight of each touch and each look even further. At long last, John is free to say Sherlock's name as much as he likes and touch him all over (quietly thrilling, letting his hand dip down the trail of hair from Sherlock's navel to his cock), driving him to the brink as Sherlock has brought him to it so many times before. Sherlock tries to bite back his sounds at first. It's rather endearing, and the sight of him biting his bottom lip is unexpectedly hot, but John's been waiting for an honest reaction to an honest touch for too long. When John tugs at that bottom lip, Sherlock licks at his fingertips, then lunges forward and tries stifling himself by moaning into John's mouth; it thrums through his lips, so that's all right. John experiments a bit, trying to figure out which strokes or flicks or tugs of his cock will make Sherlock gasp and cry out.

So far, so good. So very good: Sherlock's fluttering eyelids attest to that. On a whim, John draws Sherlock's hand (such gloriously long fingers) around both their cocks, and *oh*, that's the ticket, right there. Bloody hell. It's a marvel, how close and intimate it feels without anyone being inside anyone else, how looking into Sherlock's eyes and fucking their joined hands is so much closer than fucking Sherlock's arse. Eventually John has to close his eyes in the face of it, especially when Sherlock utters his name in a rasping growl like nothing he's ever heard. Bloody fucking *splendid*. John responds in kind, urging him, "C'mon, Sherlock, come for me, *come for me*."

Which he does, thick and hot, spine arching back and face awash with bliss. It's like Sherlock's deduction-epiphany face has been distilled into a spirit of pure sex: his lips go round, his eyes as huge and deep as the sea, and his breath stutters as he freezes in ecstasy.



John curses at the sight of it, thrusts helplessly against Sherlock until he, too, goes over the edge.

Mad. Utterly mad. Partly because John might have just destroyed some key parts of his brain with an overload of pleasure. Fucking hell.

Gradually their breath slows, heart rates falling, all going quiet and calm. John summons up the energy to tell Sherlock exactly how breathtaking his face is during orgasm, because there is no way he ever wants to miss that again. He is laying kisses on his lips, his temple, his brow, et cetera to hammer home the point, when Sherlock blinks twice and asks "Did you mean it?"

"What, about your face?"

"Everything." Sherlock is quiet, avoiding his gaze. It gives John an echo of those earlier pangs, but now he has no reason to fear speaking the truth about it.

"Yes, Sherlock. Everything. I... loved Mary, and in a way I'll always miss her, but that—that doesn't change how I feel about you. I meant everything, and I won't ever say something I don't." It's true, God help him. Sherlock's eyes widen a bit at his tone, warmly inexorable, before he tucks his face against John's shoulder.

And there are sleepy kisses, and warm bodies close together, and soft whispered words. Words enough, finally, to content John with the knowledge that this *something* is love, and that both of them have what they most wanted.

At last, all the greyness is gone.

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