

## Lights, Camera, Reaction!

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# Lights, Camera, Reaction!

by [AlJeDd](#)

## Summary

Sherlock has been following a case for days, and wants nothing more than to go home, sleep for a week and eat his weight in takeaway. The press have other ideas, and after an interview goes awry Sherlock is left reeling with sensory overload, leading to a meltdown. John comes to the rescue, but will little Lock be alright?

Warning: contains autistic meltdowns, men crying and sensory issues. Read the tags.

## Notes

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

# Chapter 1

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

John feels like he's been repeating the mantra all day, and he's not sure he even believes the words either. *Hang on in there, just get through the day.* At the end of this media circus they have two fathers waiting to take over their care, but until then Sherlock is the centre of attention for all curious eyes.

In the lead-up to this moment Sherlock has admittedly worked his backside off. With John working in the surgery – still on locum work as to not affect his need to be on cases – Sherlock has taken to solving crimes part-time. Not that anyone had ever considered his line of work to be a proper employment by any means, but having reached the end of their collective tethers Holmes wants to be certain he is there for his partner in times of need.

Following a scuffle in a pub bathroom that had sent John home bruised and afraid (and a lot more affected than he would ever admit), the boyfriends had taken to Mycroft and Greg's manor to recoup and sort their issues out before it could deteriorate irreparably. Had that been the case, the end result surely shattering their relationship, Sherlock would not have known what to do with his life that would have bore a John-sized hole, but thankfully they are back on track, thanks to Sherlock's diligent work in bettering himself.

However, there has been a repeated issue revolving around a new fear of John's as he struggles to integrate into society again, wondering if he'll be attacked unsuspecting or followed home where he could bring danger to their door. It is not as if his fears are unfounded – their jobs are far from considered safe and no matter how careful one may be there is always peril lurking around the corner. Being within Sherlock's sight helps, they've found, and a rule has been established that Sherlock must not run off into danger without first informing someone and awaiting a companion. He has since recognised that his life is not worth the capturing of a criminal.

And so here they are, almost twenty-four hours after Sherlock had first requested John's assistance in a case he had solved mostly from the flat. It was the legwork that required a second hand, and in that Sherlock only trusted his helpmate. The chase had been wild, to say the least, in that their suspect had evaded the police for months and escaped the clutches of several constables in such a short period that Scotland Yard had actually assigned Sherlock to the national manhunt.

His deductions had led them to believe the man was yet to leave London, and he was right, for they'd found the serial abductor in an industrial estate that had helpfully guided them right to the location of several missing businessmen. It was all in a day's work in Sherlock's eyes, who had been keen to dust his hands off and walk away from the scene without further comment. Gloating was not one of his most attractive traits he'd been told (in much less polite words, one must note), but the abducted businessmen had been adamant that he was their saviour, and for that, a public celebration was in order.

So now they stand on the steps of the hospital, having not even had chance to go home and rest before the paparazzi had swarmed. It was all planned, Sherlock told John; one of the victims had called ahead to ensure their speech of gratitude had a much wider audience. Only moments after discharge, where miraculously nobody was injured beyond superficial scrapes and bruises, three men stand with their families in a sea of cameras and reporters bustling to ask their questions before the infamous Sherlock Holmes runs out of patience.

Sherlock can't help but feel hounded- he's running on fairly little sleep, his body protesting the lack of sustenance now that he's been coerced into partaking in somewhat of a routine that involves a night of sleep and a belly full of food, and what he wants now is to crawl under his duvet with John curled around him so that he can sleep for a week. As the businessmen scramble to earn the most screen-time for the evening news slot, John glances at his partner with a frown. He's registered Sherlock's irritation, but there is little they can do until they are excused, so for now Sherlock will have to endure.

Endurance is looking to be a much bigger challenge than either of them had anticipated. With a press run performed with so little warning Sherlock has not had time to adjust to the sudden onslaught of sensory input, much less articulate questions and form appropriate responses that involve emotional feedback (not that Sherlock possesses emotion during interviews, but in the past he has at least had the energy to feign so). In summary, he is very tired and his energy is waning by the minute, not helped at all by the burst of activity around him that is, at current, unavoidable. Apart from the two cameras metres away – streaming live their interview on the doorstep of the Royal London – there are a handful of clambering reporters all holding out microphones or mobiles with voice recorder apps open and waiting.

A remarkable part of sensory processing disorder, or even that of autism, is that the person can sometimes hear electricity. To some that may be surprising, but to those in question it is frustrating at best and intolerable at worst. The high-pitched screech is somewhat disguised among the other noises but Sherlock can still hear it alongside the influx of sensory input he is receiving at a pace faster than he can process and register. John shifts closer, one hand discreetly rising to nudge at his pinky finger, their signal for checking if the other is all right. Sherlock blinks downwards, signifying that for now, he can continue. They are mostly listening, really, smiling at the thanks and praise of the families, who are the centre of attention and quite happy to answer any and all questions surrounding their ordeal.

He tries to drown out the surrounding background sounds to scarce avail – the shuffling of feet on the stone steps, the clatter of wires from cameras and microphones against the pavement, the hum of electricity, the rumble of car engines nearby, as well as the automatic doors behind them whirring and whooshing when triggered by a passer-by. That is only the aural input. He also has to combat the sunset, which burns bright on his retinas and the flash of cameras that sear spots onto his vision. His skin feels tacky with sweat and grime and blood that is not his own (John had done his best to wipe it off but two-ply tissues can only do so much without the help of water) and he is in dire need of a shower and clean clothes.

On top of all that, hunger and fatigue excluded, his bladder is twinging. He's not had the opportunity to pee in a number of hours and now that he is stationary with no other mental distractions he is becoming well acquainted with the protest of his bladder. Feet shuffling, Sherlock swallows, his throat clicking that alerts John, who snaps to attention. "Alright?" He

asks, frown hardening the creases of his face. Sherlock nods imperceptibly but before John can press – as he is wont to do – a reporter captures their sight with a wavering microphone.

“Mr Holmes, how did you do it?”

Sherlock resists the urge to speak his mind, in which he would not-so-kindly tell said reporter where to shove their microphone. “I simply observed the facts and evidence left behind by the suspect and followed the clues to the building in which he was residing in.”

“But how did you know the victims were being housed there?” Sherlock thinks that is an interesting use of terminology, but holds his tongue as he feels the heat of John’s stare on him.

“I didn’t,” he replies truthfully, head pounding. At least the questions take his mind off the pressing need to urinate. “The suspect led us right to the three gentlemen; his intellect was not as intact as he may have believed.”

“So you didn’t know the victims were there prior to their discovery?”

“No. We found them during our bid to arrest the suspect on suspicion of kidnap and assault and it was there we found the gentlemen.” Sherlock is loathe to repeat himself but he swallows his acerbic words, willing the interview to be over so he can make an escape. Sensory overload has gone from creeping up on him to hurtling at an athlete’s pace towards a meltdown he suspects he is too tired to curtail.

John shifts, casting glares toward the crowd of malingerers holding cameras, willing one of them to dare ask another question. There are still a few oblivious folks among the group, however, and whilst others step back to address the victims or take their leave they, alternately, dive on the pair like vultures. One steps forward a bit too close and Sherlock retreats, the slightest movement only John notices in a bid to distance himself. He is moments away from shielding his eyes, and John knows he is close to escaping, and he wouldn’t blame him either. The lack of gloating alone tells John all he needs to know about Sherlock’s mental state, but he shall not intervene unprompted so not to embarrass Sherlock.

“How would you describe your relationship with Mr Watson?” This time Sherlock cannot resist sneering.

“*Doctor* Watson is my blogger and assistant.”

“Perhaps more than that? Or do you still consider yourself a bachelor, Doctor Watson?”

“That is none of your business. Are we finished here?” Sherlock snaps, his eyes a fiery pit of danger. John is not comfortable sharing their relationship publicly and Sherlock will do anything to respect that, as he finds the opinion of the public to be tedious anyway.

A final brave (and potentially stupid) participant roots in their satchel for a moment before they hop up the steps, getting right into Sherlock’s space without warning. John is there in a flash, arm raised to blockade the woman from donning Sherlock’s head in a deerstalker without permission. Sherlock recoils, biting down on his tongue to restrain a whimper; it’s all

gotten too much and to handle a stranger touching him is intolerable right now, his mind threatening to slip amongst the stress. *Hold on*, he thinks.

“That’s enough now, thank you.” John nods curtly to the reporters and seizes Sherlock’s arm in his dominant hand.

It is only after a moment that Sherlock pauses in his steps, but with the grip on his bicep he is forced to keep moving. They are retreating in the opposite direction, and whilst the quietening of their surroundings is blissful he is confused. “Why are we going back this way?”

John brings them through past the reception desk in the main hub of the hospital and rounds a corner into a mostly empty corridor containing toilets. “You clearly need the loo,” and then, leaning in, he adds much quieter. “Do you need me to go in with you?”

Sherlock blinks several times, struggling to process the question in order to formulate a response. John tuts gently, pushing him through the doors to enter the gent’s bathroom and guides him over to a cubicle where he waits patiently outside for Sherlock to finish his business. Though it is quiet, the fluorescent lights above are much too bright and emit a buzzing that hurts Sherlock’s ears. It is the proverbial tip of the iceberg and he stumbles from the cubicle clutching his ears, eyes prickled with frustrated tears.

“John,” he mumbles wetly, searching for him blindly. His partner is there in an instant, pulling them from the bathroom without washing his hands – there are more pressing matters and he’s hardly dirty. John finds a barren side room in which the door can be locked and immediately switches the lights off.

Sherlock pulls away as John fiddles about with the lock and lights to sequester himself to a corner, dropping down into a crouch with his head pressed to his knees. He’s past the point of overwhelmed now, that even the darkness and quiet do little to ease off the panic and pain overriding his senses. It’s at a stage in which they will just have to ride out the meltdown and pray they are not disturbed – but Sherlock has no doubt that John will send away anyone who might come knocking. He allows the mask to slip, whimpering into his knees as burning tears dampen the wool of his trousers.

“Alright Sherlock, you’ll be okay. Remember to take deep breaths, that’s it.” John murmurs nearby, keeping his distance so not to corner Sherlock. As Holmes works through the sensory overload, now rocking back and forth to comfort, John sends out a text to their ‘family’ group chat, informing their surrogate fathers of the situation. Mycroft responds with a driver that shall be there as soon as Sherlock is ready to go home, but warns to not hasten their exit before he is over the worst of his meltdown.

Sherlock presses his face harder into his thighs and squats lower, exerted muscles screaming over the position but unwilling to unfurl from the safety of his own body heat. John wordlessly steps closer to drape his coat over Sherlock’s head – not only will the added darkness soothe him but the weight will help recalibrate his equilibrium. Sherlock inhales deeply, and though John praises him for being mindful of hyperventilation it is not the reason he does so. The coat smells strongly of John; the heady scent grounding and all-encompassing as it has not been washed in quite some time. Sherlock thinks it feels rather

like being enveloped inside of John and within seconds he settles down, albeit still rocking, and notices that his tears have abated.

“Okay?” John asks, placing a heavy hand on his shoulder. The applied weight helps too, and once again Sherlock credits John for ameliorating a situation on his own without much experience. Sherlock’s meltdowns are usually few and far between as he has had a lifetime to identify his triggers and avoid them, as well as forming coping mechanisms against the overwhelming amount of sensory input he absorbs on a daily basis.

Though they are unlikely to return to their flat – where some people would describe their home as a dank, victorian squalor, but he would attest to the lack of light input and soothing scents – he knows the manor is well equipped to keep him calm after a meltdown. Slowly, for they both know rushing could potentially trigger a latter half of a meltdown much worse than the first, Sherlock emerges from the sea of coats sniffing, at war between headspaces. John is there, smiling down at him with warm eyes, but Sherlock can see the smallest crease between his eyebrows that belays his concern and flashes a wan smile that does little to convince his partner that he’s all right.

Instead of asking, John gradually removes his coat from Sherlock’s shoulders until it slides free, waiting to see if Sherlock can cope without the comfort. He does, bravely getting to wobbly feet though they stand there for a moment so that his balance can regulate. He shivers, an after-effect of the meltdown, so John wraps his belstaff around him tighter, adjusting the navy scarf beneath to sit snug against his chest as a makeshift shoulder weight until they can get home. “There’s a car waiting for us outside. Take your time.”

Sherlock is too tired to protest, and he isn’t sure he could handle a cab even with his bout of stubbornness. Besides, going home - or to the manor, his second home - seems like a distant dream and anything that can get him there faster he shall accept. With that, he straightens, and whilst his posture speaks of controlled confidence his face is still slightly ashen and hair mussed from the coat. John mutters sotto voce, using some tap water to temporarily stifle wayward curls into a nest at the back of his head in a poor parody of his usual hairstyle, but for now, it’ll have to do. Sherlock doesn’t really care - wants nothing more than to snuggle up in his boyfriend’s arms in a darkened room for a while and forget about the problems of the world.

“Ready?” John asks, squeezing his hand.

Sherlock squeezes back. “Ready.”

## Chapter End Notes

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## Chapter 2

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Sherlock miraculously staves off his craving to regress during the drive from the hospital to the manor, which is a feat John expresses his pride in. They stumble through the front door like newborn fawns, Sherlock's balance off-kilter as his brain slowly reboots. He needs taking care of, plenty of coddling and comfort, and John is more than happy to be the one to provide.

First of all, John says, they need to have something to eat. Tea is currently off the menu, but water will suffice, and a half-eaten packet of biscuits - *Hobnobs*, a favourite of Sherlock's - are enough to feed him some sugar before he can have something proper to eat.

Holmes nibbles on a biscuit, eyes watery and wide, having regressed almost as soon as they got in. John wanders about, keeping the kid in sight at all times, shovelling down several biscuits himself as well as two glasses of water. "Come on spud, shall we go have a bath?"

"Yeah," Lock mumbles around his mouthful, crumbs spraying from his lips. He is taken in arms and carried up the stairs with the button and fly of his trousers undone and shirt hanging from his shoulders.

John sets him down on the bath mat so he can adjust the taps and get the water going in the bath before he turns his attention to the tot on the floor. Lock is still munching away, quite content to let John take over, sippy cup held tightly in his left hand. Watson is efficient, leaving him for only a moment to collect a towel, a set of warm, long sleeved pyjamas and a nappy. He leaves the socks for now, as sometimes Holmes cannot tolerate anything on his feet, and with Mycroft's level of hygiene there is little chance of him finding bitty crumbs on the floor (with the exception of the small mess Lock has made of his biscuit).

"You okay baby?" Lock nods, lifting his arms for his dress shirt to be tugged down his arms then lying back for his lower garments to be removed. Once nude, John finds his basket of bath toys to keep him occupied, though he doubts the kid has any energy to play and it will likely be a quick scrub down before a snack and a well deserved nap.

In the meantime Lock sits on his bum, skin prickling in the cool air despite the steam from the bathtub, and begins to rock to self-soothe. Not a word is said about the action, except for a sneaky thumb being replaced by a dummy as Holmes has still not washed his hands since using the toilet. Bar the susurrus of rushing water, the room is silent, and John supervises from afar knowing Lock's skin will be hypersensitive, so any and all touches must be, for now, reduced to only what is absolutely necessary. When the water has risen to approximately thigh level John turns off the taps and guides Lock into the bath by supporting his arm during the big step over the rim.

"Good job baby! Do you want your water?" Lock nods, and is delighted to find that his sippy cup floats, which means it is now officially a shipwreck for his plastic fish to find. Amongst



their vast collection of bath toys is a small diver in red swimming trunks with a snorkel that bubbles when held under the water, and John drops it in, knowing any distraction will help to keep Lock from becoming upset when it is time to wash his hair.

Beyond a whine as his head is tipped back, John has washed his hair enough times to know that cupping one hand before the flow of water prevents it from dribbling down his face, and Lock trusts that no pesky water or shampoo will find its way to his eyes. He is more chagrined that with his head back his sight is limited in seeing his toys, but John is quick, perhaps even quicker than Mycroft, and has his hair washed and rinsed in under three minutes. Sherlock can have a proper shower at a later date if need be.

The tranquility of the bathroom and the heat of the water coax Lock down deeper into headspace, the lethargy finally catching up to him now that he is no longer proactively battling against it. The scented soap is only lightly fragranced to combat his olfactory sensory issues, for anything stronger would only cause a migraine, and the silky glide of the product on his skin feels heavenly. With each area of grime and sweat washed off Lock is soothed, feeling much better already. He stops flinging his toy diver off the top of his cup and instead spits out his dummy into the water (which also floats, interesting to note) to take several big slurps of his drink. Throat parched, he drinks like a man possessed and by the time he has sucked the cup dry John announces that they are all done.

Bundled in a poncho towel little Lock sits on the toilet seat and watches through hooded eyes as his legs are dried, followed by his hips, a thick nappy taped on preemptive to an accident before his upper half is delicately dabbed dry.

“Good boy. Come on, I think some jam on toast is in order.” John doesn’t wait for Lock to ponder the prospect of food as he lifts him up onto one hip.

John is tired too, but ignores the protests of his body in lieu of carrying his baby downstairs to the kitchen - he would do anything to ease Lock’s suffering, so if his back is sacrificed in the meantime, well, he thinks, it is all par for the course. Lock is wrapped firmly around his torso, John steadying him by using his forearm as a seat for Lock’s padded bum whilst the bread is toasted. He sets out the strawberry jam, ensuring he chooses the seedless jar (labelled in thick marker) because if Sherlock is picky with food, then Lock is downright intolerant. He’s additionally fussy around textures as a little boy, as there are some foods he can cope with as an adult but refuses to even look at when little.

Lock startles when the toast pops up, head stuffed in John’s neck to dampen the noise against his sensitive ears. He whimpers, feeling tearful and irritable by the burning in his eyes, so John is far from surprised when Lock begins to cry, shoulders shaking and limbs trembling. John restrains a tut, instead squeezing Lock closer, cheek pressed to his hair, and navigates the kitchen with limited sight and one hand.

Miraculously nobody is injured, especially when the hot toast is fished from the toaster, but Lock is quiet as John sits them down at the kitchen table to spread the jam. Lock is very particular on how it is done – thinly spread to each corner, no globules, and certainly no visible mixture between the butter and jam. Normally John would be happy giving him just jam, but Lock could do with the calories and fat from the butter.

John hums, gently drawing Lock back from his chest so that he can spin him on his lap. Back to chest, Lock snivels, opening his mouth for John to feed him hunks of toast, though he still somehow ends up with jam sticking to the corners of his mouth. John's right hand has fared much worse, but a wet napkin puts paid to the sticky residue. Watson is proud to note that Lock's oral sensory issues are not impacted by the food, and if he listens closely he can hear the babe's grateful tummy grumbling away in the beginnings of digestion.

"Good boy," John whispers, turning his head away so that his breath does not wisp Lock's hair and upset him. Lock sighs, sinking further into his lap. There will be no more speaking on his behalf, and John wouldn't want him to, not when he understands the effort it takes Holmes to speak in general. "Shall we have some milk?"

Lock whines even though he has agreed to take a bottle, not wanting to leave the warmth of John's embrace. He doesn't have to wait long, as they reassume their positions, though this time Lock is seated upon John's cocked hip to allow free use of both of Watson's hands for heating full-fat milk on the hob. He keeps a close eye on the liquid because it can quickly stick to the bottom of the pan and ruin the batch.

"You okay? Milk's nearly done now sweet boy." Lock doesn't respond, sniffing against John's jugular vein. John cups the back of his head, swaying them gently and having to make a conscious effort not to hum aloud. He pours the milk into a bottle with expertise, screwing the lid on tight as they traverse back up the stairs to Lock's bedroom.

The glider chair is more than inviting, and John slumps down into it heavily, unable to conceal his grunt. Lock doesn't seem fazed, luckily, his head rolling back into the crook of John's arm. Gangly legs are thrown atop at the armrest, toes wriggling when the warm teat reaches chapped lips. Lock suckles with his eyes shut, whimpering every so often between short gasps of breath through his nose until John chuckles sotto voce and holds the bottle away for him to breathe.

"Easy now baby, it's not going anywhere." John huffs, a smile playing at his lips as Lock whines and reaches out for the bottle. Relenting, John snuggles down into the chair, head back, eyes shut, listening to the soft sounds of Lock's suckling and the click of his throat as he swallows. They are both exhausted, overwhelmed and in dire need of comfort.

John only realises Lock has reached the end of the bottle when there is a series of high-pitched screeches as Lock sucks at air. As he slips the empty bottle from his mouth with a small pop to set aside on the sideboard, Lock sighs, his tummy full and warm, muscles lax from the heat of the bath and John's natural temperature. He is the most relaxed he has been in days, but that doesn't mean they're out of the woods yet. He is still suffering sensory overload and becomes restless, head twisting side to side against John's arm.

Watson frowns, sitting him up with several placating pats to his padded bum. "What's the matter? Are you hurting?" Lock whines, eyes squeezing shut as his hands fist and unclench. Then the tears restart.

If John wasn't so tired himself he'd have more patience, and although he does possess a modicum of sympathy for the little lad he also has to bite down on the frustration trickling through his veins. He refuses to allow emotion to override his decisions, and after a moment

of racking his brains for ideas he decides distraction will only further distress Lock. Instead, he stands them up with a heave, first retrieving a thick blanket slung over the footboard of Lock's cot, setting it down on the changing mat before Lock is lay down on top.

Muttering sweet nothings to the babe, John makes quick work of swaddling him from his head to his toes. The excess blanket is folded beneath his feet to ensure he is all bundled up, arms crossed at the chest, and finally he begins to settle. It's a trick he's stolen from Mycroft that seems to work wonderfully.

The hood he has created using the edge of the blanket flops over Lock's eyes, drowning him in softness that only serves to make him look tiny and vulnerable. The sight melts away the last of John's frustration, and now that Lock's ears are covered he isn't afraid to make noise, for the sounds will be muffled.

Sometimes a bit of light therapy helps, so John leaves Lock where he is, safe on the changing table, to switch on the ocean light set on the bedside table. It is beautiful, colourful waves dancing across the walls and ceiling, but Lock cries out, eyes squeezed shut against the onslaught.

"Nope? Okay, sorry baby." Wincing, John pulls the plug and moves to shut the blinds over. The sun is setting, leaving a weak stream of light to navigate the bedroom, which is fine by John if it keeps the babe calm.

Lock relaxes again, content to rock in silence, a dummy in mouth, eyes shut but not sleeping. John feels selfish for willing time to move faster, as it means his fathers will be home to take over. In the meantime, he will take whatever shuteye he can find, even in fits and drabs, all the while ensuring Lock is calm and comfortable in his fluffy prison. Perhaps he'll regress later.

## Chapter End Notes

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# Chapter 3

## Chapter Notes

For [Lvrboydontery](#)

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

The meltdown sucks dry the energy from Lock, leaving him both unconscious and unrousable for the foreseeable future. John decides it is not worth jostling Lock when he is properly asleep, so during the brief period in which he is dozing Lock is transferred to his cot for an exceptionally early night. The toast and biscuits will suit him just fine for the time being, though a full night of sleep should encourage his hunger to return with a vengeance as it so oft does after the slumbering period of an end-of-case crash.

John tidies the room in silence – Lock’s duvet shifted temporarily to the floor whilst he is swaddled, the empty milk bottle removed from the sideboard. He lingers long enough to switch on the baby monitor and take the receiving end with him for constant surveillance, not that he deems it vital, and heads downstairs to prep for dinner. It is the least he can do to keep idle hands busy when he would otherwise fall asleep and disrupt the small modicum of routine he intends to maintain around cases. He mentally notes to remind his fathers that they are in dire need of a food shop within the next couple days, which he is happy to do if their evening is taken by Lock, should he wake.

He moves onto washing their few dishes from earlier, and, on second thought, checks the dishwasher. It is full, so he empties it, moving comically slower than usual to ensure the clinks of dishes do not accidentally disturb the sleeping child upstairs. On the monitor, there is no noise except for the thicker breaths of a sleeping tot and a more rarer wet noise as he sucks absently at his dummy. There is little else to do once the kitchen is clean, so John retires to the living room to watch some television whilst he waits for Greg and Mycroft to arrive home.

He does not have to wait long for company, which he so desires to stave the steadfast fatigue clinging to his mind. Upon hearing tires on gravel outside the window, he steps to the front door and opens it – easier to control the sound of bustling men and prevent, again, waking up Lock. Still the monitor clipped to John’s belt loop gives no indication of such an event and he puffs a sigh of relief, warning his friends to tread quietly with his index finger pressed to his pursed lips. Mycroft has shared a ride with his partner and observes John thoroughly, detailing their day without a word spoken. John allows it, begrudgingly, and after the scrutiny is over he moves with Greg to the kitchen to click the kettle on.

As the water boils they get talking, first a brief rundown of Greg’s day once Sherlock and John had departed, then how Mycroft’s day was (as he cannot divulge any further information than that). The remainder of the conversation focuses on John and Sherlock’s

experiences, leaning more towards the triggers that set Sherlock off. His meltdown was expected, perhaps, but not in such a public area – even during such stressful circumstances Sherlock is commonly capable of maintaining a level of control until he can retreat to a place of privacy in which he trusts to allow the upset to subsume him.

Greg leans against the wall, one palm atop the other and pressed against the twinge in the small of his back. “So he’s asleep now then?”

“Yeah, has been for about half an hour. It really took it out of him.” John says, placing the monitor on the countertop.

Mycroft sips at his tea. “Has he eaten?”

“Jam on toast and about five Hobnob biscuits. And a cup of juice and a bottle of milk.” John huffs. “He had more than I expected he would, to be honest.”

Mycroft hums. “I recommend we leave him to sleep overnight. I’m sure the rest is sorely needed, though I would still like to check on him.”

“That’s if we can keep him asleep the entire night,” Greg laughs quietly, head hanging down. “I think I’ll be joining him.”

“Oh, I assure you he will not wake.” Mycroft’s face is initially serious until he relents a soft smile and turns to address John. “I would like to sincerely thank you for support, and congratulations for handling a meltdown solo. I apologise greatly for our absence, but you did remarkably well.”

John’s cheeks heat under the lauding and he shrugs. “No need to apologise. At the end of the day he is my boyfriend.”

Mycroft looks ready to argue the point – that he is the one with more experience, that he believes Sherlock’s welfare to be his responsibility, but in the same breath he understands it is not his sole answerability to ensure Sherlock is all right during the hours of every day. He has John for that now, and Greg too, who is gradually becoming a more solid rock in Sherlock’s mind as a support system when big, not just during his sessions of regression. Instead, he says: “You are an exceptional partner to Sherlock.”

“Agreed,” Greg assents. “And thank you for sorting tea out, too. I’m starving!”

“Well I haven’t actually cooked anything. I can help, though. Or cook it all; you both look like you could do with the rest, no offence.”

“None taken. And nonsense! We shall work as a team! But first let us just check on the baby, and then we’ll be right down. Get the oven on.” John does as he’s told whilst the men tiptoe up the stairs to Lock’s bedroom.

He is oblivious to their presence, his dummy now hung loosely between parted lips. Mycroft removes it expertly, leaving it on the bedside table. He wants nothing more than to lean down a kiss Lock’s hairline, to remind him even in unconsciousness that he is there but that would

surely irk his sensitised skin, so he quells the urge by fussing with the edges of the swaddle, tucking the ends tighter in a way Watson is yet to master, fanning the makeshift hood away from his forehead to prevent the fluffy material tickling. Greg stands vigilant, looking down at his surrogate son with an innocuously unreadable expression.

They retreat without sentiment mentioned aloud, the door shut properly as they have the monitor and the barrier will help to muffle their sounds of movement about the house. It shall be a rule to remain downstairs until bedtime, in which John is to use the en suite and only the main bathroom if he needs to urinate in the night.

Over more tea and a pre-dinner snack John agrees that the best plan of action is to recover from the case in the manor which is more supplied for all headspaces, as well as serving as a private haven away from prying eyes (namely innocent Mrs Hudson, who enjoys fretting in person and flitting about the flat like a curious bird). It is also a place in which Mycroft can guarantee security and the presence of all members of their family should there be another incident. Not that anyone worries – in most instances Holmes' meltdowns are curtailed, or at the very least ameliorated by sleep, even more so when he remains so for the entire night.

They are not so lucky.

John wakes earlier than the rest of the house, unused to sleeping alone when big. He misses Sherlock's warmth and octopus limbs (though he would protest about it if he were here) but cannot disagree that sleeping in his own cot away from disturbances and potential sensory triggers is of benefit. In the time that Sherlock sleeps Greg and Mycroft wake, greeting John in the kitchen for a cursory mug of coffee and tea respectively, first checking Watson will cope alone all day with a potentially tumultuous Holmes before leaving for work in their own vehicles.

Holmes wakes twenty minutes after their joint departure, alerting John with his cries that can be heard without the need of a monitor. Watson braces himself for what is to come, holding not a single expectation as to better form machinations for his handling of the upset babe once he has more information. Lock is sat up, head in knees as he wails, the swaddle loose around his arms. He makes scarce acknowledgment of John's advancement beyond the flickering of wet eyes, though he shrieks when John attempts to make contact with his skin.

Without speaking John releases his hand from Lock's arm and sits on the floor beside the cot in view of the toddler, pausing only to lower the bars as he waits for Lock to come out of his own volition. It takes a while, no clock available to record an exact time, but John has not a complaint, his presence a silent support that Lock appreciates more than words can express. When he does feel ready to face a one-man world, Holmes swings trembling legs over the edge of the mattress, bare feet pressed to the floor. John smiles, gesturing toward the changing table. They both know it will be an arduous process due to Lock's apparent intolerance of physical contact, but they both also know that a wet nappy is never left unchecked in this household, regardless of the stare of the wearer.

John refrains from verbalising his praise, instead portraying so with bright expressions and feather-light pressure. Notwithstanding such mindful treatment, Lock still weeps, breath aberrated by the upset. His refusal to dress is not combated – besides, there are no plans to leave the house and pyjamas are a comfort to Lock. What he does need, however, is a full

tummy and liquids, which are conducive to a speedy recovery of mind and body. Lock is too little to argue the merits of brain over transport so sits at the kitchen table meekly.

The selected cereal is a favourite of Lock's and not an issue until the spoon clashes with the ceramic bowl, upon which it is immediately deemed intolerable and causes another bout of lachrymose that tugs painfully at John's heartstrings. The cereal crackles in the bowl – again, not normally a problem, but today the problems are stacking against an already sensitive toddler, and John wastes no time dumping such an irking breakfast.

“How's about soup? Chicken soup?” Lock hesitates at the suggestion, eyeing the can. “I can remove all the chicken pieces.”

That seems to mollify the boy, and he accepts the offer with a small nod. Relocated to the living room temporarily, Lock can avoid the smells that emerge when the mixture is heated up (in a pan, no less, for it is much quieter than a whirring microwave). He lies down sideways on the couch, fists tucked under his chin. John leaves him to it, wavering indecisively for a moment before shutting the interconnecting kitchen door. He alternately opens the backdoor for better airflow to rid the kitchen of the same smells and flits between checking on Lock and heating two cans of soup.

When it is done and John has meticulously picked out every morsel of chicken he can from the soup, Lock is called in to eat. He perches in a seat independently but requests with sullen eyes to be fed via sign language so basic even John can interpret. It is one of the quietest mornings they have ever experienced together, but John doesn't mind, especially as it seems to help poor Lock's continuous sensory overload.

Lock squirms in his seat, boredom creeping up in the absence of conversation or activity. John seeks out the children's iPad left on charge on the counter, setting it down with a cartoon at the ready. The noise makes Lock wince, hands leveraged to cover his ears until the volume is muted. John tried an alternative method, turning on the subtitles. That proves equally fruitless as Lock is both too young and too overwhelmed to concentrate on the words, so in a last-ditch effort John switches to baby TV.

That finally, blessedly is accepted, the screen dimmed too so that Lock can watch dancing fruits and cartoon animals frolicking without issue. It is another meltdown avoided, to John's relief, who puffs air from his cheeks like a deflated chipmunk. As a preemptive measure he also applies over-ear defenders to Lock's head to muffle the noise of the spoon against the soup bowl, therefore mitigating any further issues Lock may develop into the morning.

Ordeal over, John has a brief reprieve from panicking about triggering his little boy and sends Lock off to play for a while in the living room where the carpet dampens sound. All toys offered are soundless, to an extent, with no flashing lights or vibration options. Lock hones in on his farm set, to nobody's surprise, as he much enjoys sitting cross-legged and inventing entire worlds with the barn as his set and animals as his actors. He has farmers and associated equipment too, which are laid out into categories so specific John cannot label them.

Watson supervises from the couch, not wanting to risk a kick-off by washing the dishes. They can wait until the babe is napping – in the meantime John types up the case just finished; his peck-and-tap method of typing for once most beneficial due to the lack of noise and

disruption it produces. With the ear defenders on Lock cannot protest the slowness of his actions, as Sherlock has regularly likened him to the sloth from the movie *Zootopia*.

Past noon Lock shakes John from his zone of concentration by a singular whine. He looks up over the lip of laptop to find a very tired boy rubbing at his eyes. The tot is so exhausted he does not argue the pronounced nap, taking to his cot without help. He is asleep before John has chance to leave the room.

That routine continues for the remainder of the day and into the early evening – Lock waking, nibbling on an inoffensive snack, finishing a bottle or sippy cup independently then playing until he reaches an exhaustion requiring a booster nap. John cannot recall another time in which the toddler has doubly consumed so much and napped in one sitting.

When his fathers come home from work, Lock is delighted, his fugue state shifted by the (albeit quiet) enthusiasm of his daddy. Papa has a predilection for meddling, today showing his sentiment by fussing with drinks and blankets and further games until Lock frowns and throws his suggestions away from his seated position on the carpet. Daddy laughs, ducking as a stress toy is lobbed over his head.

Come dinnertime, nearly twenty-four hours after his initial meltdown, he seems to be returning from the precarious state of teetering the fine line between irritation and a meltdown. Though improved and wishful to sit at the kitchen table surrounded by his family, he is still opposed to touch and will not part with his ear defenders that are returned after each nap. Conversation flows around him, Lock nonverbal but capable of communicating through sign language and noises as he colours in a picture. He feels too lonely out in the other room, so this is a compromise he is willing to accept, even if surrounded by noise, bustle and various smells.

It is precisely then that their evening takes a turn for the worse. Still colouring at the table, ignorant to the movements around him, Lock's left hand clumsily scribbles as his right thumb is tucked between his lips. His jaw works around the digit, content – properly content – whilst his fathers potter about the kitchen. Daddy sets down a pan, as of yet unused, with the handle facing outwards from the counter.

At almost the same moment Mycroft backs into said pan, toppling the implement with a crash, followed by an unpleasant susurrus of metal on tile as it rolls around the rim. Everyone winces, their eyes snapping to assess Lock, who rightfully freaks. Rather than perform a meltdown in his seat he bolts, a common autistic trait he showed in childhood professionally named elopement.

One need not know Lock's train of thought to locate him, as his screams are rather telling of his whereabouts. He is splayed on the floor of his bedroom, ear defenders thrown off in his distress. He would, at this stage, be likely to throw anything within close vicinity, but the bedroom is tidy and his toys are safely sequestered away in the cupboard. As the men enter the room, streaming forth to intervene, Lock scrambles backwards, heels scraping at the floor. He begins rocking, palms smacking at the sides of his head in unison in short, hard bursts.

Mycroft sneaks upon him during the stimulating distraction to remove the hands, dodging legs as they kick out blindly. Greg needs no instructions having learned now what to do,



swiping a folded blanket flat on the area rug. Lock is too violent to hold onto, so Mycroft briefly retreats to shut the bedroom door, a cursory glance failing to bely John's location in the house. Perhaps he is tending to the food so not to burn the house down. It is unimportant right now, and Mycroft switches his attention to Lock who is still screaming, though not utilising his entire lung capacity as before. The shrillness is hard to ignore but Mycroft comes closer anyway, dropping to his knees where he can weight bare from various positions.

Lock, in the meantime, has taken to yanking at his hair in lieu of beating his skull, an act which shall produce tangible evidence if he continues. The intervention is not taken without fight, the kicks worsening as now both men are required to carefully and intricately extract his hair from his fists and transfer his body to lie prostrate atop the blanket. Greg kneels on Lock's forearm with an appropriate weight to restrain but not injure as they tackle the other flailing limb inside a pre-made pocket of blanket that is folded toward his chest. The other follows suit shortly after, and when his upper half is secured Holmes settles somewhat, chest heaving angrily. His furious face is flushed, tears warping his vision, legs akimbo and struggling weakly against the power of two men currently much stronger than he.

In silence they use the lower portion of the blanket, now folded in on itself to cover his legs – not to pinion but to soothe. The weight helps to ground him back to earth, his movements unconscious yet significantly less tempestuous. In addition to his swaddle, as deemed safe by Greg due to the lack of pressure, a weighted blanket smothers his body from shoulders to toes. It is that which truly calms him, for the toddler is in no state to be touched beyond what is necessary, any of such will be muffled greatly by the extra layers.

Still he weeps, hitching breath needing gulps of air to sustain the throaty wails of his discomfort. Greg lies down, then, in a position similar to his son's, on his back, staring at the ceiling and willing the cruel world to provide his son relief from his sufferings. Mycroft, after a moment of contemplation, clambers down too so that they lie in a row, worrying not for the state of his suit, having already sullied it in the wrestle to prevent Lock from self-harm. They remain in such a bind until Lock's cries are softer, more controlled.

Lestrade gets up after three minutes to check on John, wondering with a flash of panic that he may have regressed during the stress of the predicament and is now little, afraid and alone. He opens the door without ceremony, half expecting a snivelling toddler to be crouched on the landing, pants wet from distress. He finds quite the opposite: a fuming, definitely adult John pacing like a caged animal in seething silence. He halts mid-step as Greg exits the doorway, almost bumping into him.

"Christ, sorry. Are you alright?" Greg asks, slipping into daddy mode despite John's obvious headspace. John grits his teeth, eyes flashing something dangerous.

"Is he?" He snaps.

Greg sighs, opting for truth. "No. He hurt himself but he isn't injured. Is the hob on?"

"No. Move." John doesn't mean to take his anger out on Greg, the incident to set this all of was an accident, he bears in mind, but he cannot help but feel resentful that he has carefully curated a day removed of all triggers and upset only to have that destroyed by carelessness. Greg frowns, compliant to the demand, understanding and regretful but unable to resolve the

issue. When John sees Lock his anger melts like snow in the sun, keeping his distance and using only the sound of his tread on the floor to alert the toddler of his arrival.

Greg lies down again on Lock's free side, communicating John's upset through eye contact with his partner. Mycroft glances at Watson who is leagues away from an emotional outburst as he had been a few seconds ago; it is anyone's guess how he has not procured emotional whiplash; alas, John is reassured that despite the hiccup Lock has been treated with the best care and respect he could ask for.

If tea is abandoned for the sake of Lock's wellbeing, then so be it, they think, sharing glances that portray the same sentiment. Lock is their priority. John joins them, lying on Greg's side where he can be seen but is not in danger of accidentally setting Lock off again, and for one blessed moment they are sanctimonious in their ability to hold steadfast in the face of struggle and torment. Lock stops crying, a gradual process that takes several revisions as his shame triggers more bouts of tears – feeling guilty for his disruption to the evening and of his histrionics. Only that his family do not for a second believe his comportment to be beyond an appropriate reaction to extreme sensory overload brought on by days and days of tumultuous work.

He does not speak such worries but Mycroft knows all the same. “You are not a burden, Lock Holmes. You are valued and loved and you should never *ever* feel remorse for your struggles. Do you understand?”

He thinks he does, but he's not sure he believes. He nods anyway, unable to raise his eyes higher than Mycroft's nose. Greg assents vocally. “Papa's right, little love dove. You are loved.”

This time John chips in, resting on his elbows with a gentle smile. “So very loved.”

That, Lock believes. He smiles back.

## Chapter End Notes

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## End Notes

Damn this is technically my 60th instalment in this series! Where has the time gone? Not that I'll be stopping anytime soon :)

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