

Closer

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Closer

by [14winters](#)

Summary

Sherlock goes to Joan for a favor. She accommodates him.

Notes

I started this on a whim for [nairobiwonders' fic Friday](#) (a.k.a. our fandom effort to survive 1/20/17) and was too tired to get the scene fully formed the same night I started it. I had no plan going in, I just wanted to play out a certain scenario, and this is the one that popped in my head and grabbed me enough to keep me from dozing off and failing to fulfill nairobiwonders' request before 1/20 was over. Only part of it was originally posted to tumblr, and that portion has been edited since. Takes place sometime between 5x11 and 5x12 (or a little after 5x12 if you prefer, since the show doesn't really provide us with a clear definition of how much time passes between episodes). I started this before 5x13 aired, so unfortunately this is not the missing scene from 5x13 that so many would want, but my feelings about 5x13 may have infused the latter half of this scene a bit.

This doesn't take place in the same universe as my Love Is Touching Souls story, which I would call my Main AU (and which has several chapters planned and in which I imagine they get together non-platonically in season 4), but it's the same basic expression of my headcanons of how they become physically intimate—by a slow breakdown of invisible barriers both of them refuse to outright discuss.

I feel guilty for writing about Sherlock's addiction, rather than focusing more on Joan, but because that's the idea that fueled this scenario, it just stuck and I had to carry it through. Having it be through Joan's POV, however, I hope I was still able to give her some worthy attention throughout. This was also a very indulgent scene for me - that was the entire point from it's conception on 1/20. Any constructive comments are greatly appreciated!

A Request

“Watson?”

Joan was pulled out of her doze far too easily by the tone in Sherlock’s voice. He would never intentionally wake her up this way.

She turned over in bed to face her doorway, where Sherlock stood, his hands tucked tightly into the pockets of his sweatpants, his torso bare exposing his swath of strange tattoos and the erratic nature of his breathing. He looked furtively at her through his lashes, his forehead showing a few extra wrinkles.

Her bleary confused stare immediately shifted all the way over to concern. “What is it, Sherlock?” She had barely gone to bed half an hour ago, and it wasn’t like Sherlock to bother her after she’d chosen to go to bed—at least not for the next six or seven hours.

“I had a, uh...” He looked away from her, pursed his lips, an unfamiliar action for him. He was obviously berating himself. “A request,” he finished, glancing from her face to the floor. A twitch in one of his arms told her he was struggling to keep his hands in his pockets.

She let her expression return to confusion. “Okay,” she said, letting him know with the cadence of the word she wasn’t annoyed, hoping he would look up at her. “Is something wrong?”

“No I only...um.” His wandering gaze went from the floor to the ceiling, and he began bouncing only slightly on his heels, the move so subtle only eyes as keen as hers could catch it. She would bet his pulse was increasing right now. She raised herself up on one elbow, pushing her braid over her shoulder and trying to catch any nuance of expression that would tell her his thoughts. She’d learned to read Sherlock well enough over the years, that even with only the hall light illuminating him from behind, she could tell he was embarrassed, not only anxious. It was in how he held his shoulders down, his hands in his pockets rather than out for her to see, his eyes wandering more than they ever did. Sherlock’s eyes were always focused. When they were not, it meant one of two things—he was extremely unsure or he was under the influence.

“I had an encounter earlier that I thought you should know about.” He finally got the words out, managing to focus on her face for more than a heartbeat. “It was with a, uh, drug dealer.”

“I take it this drug dealer was a member of SBK?” Joan ventured, knowing Sherlock was still not one-hundred percent on board with Shinwell remaining an informant—his hands-off approach to Shinwell’s training was proof enough of that. It had nothing to do with giving Joan “the honors,” as he kept referring to Shinwell’s training as, in that wry yet cheerful way he had.

He gave a slight nod, to the side as if he only begrudgingly admitted it. She had no idea why—she was sure he had good reason for talking to a member of SBK. They had to learn their enemy just as well as Shinwell had, after all.

“He offered to sell to me. Said he could recognize a user, even a former one,” he continued, rolling one shoulder in suppressed irritation. Anger was creeping onto his face, but he was holding it in.

“I seek not only your counsel, Watson, but your...reassurance.” His eyes locked with hers, and he was clearly biting the inside of his cheek, hard. He wanted to lash out—this was not the same restlessness she’d seen a few weeks ago, when he’d stopped going to meetings. This was a barely controlled hatred—at loss of control, loss of focus, two things that were the cornerstones of his sobriety, as she’d warned him so recently, when he’d insisted on his intellectual superiority.

“You know you can talk to me, Sherlock,” she said, feeling sleep pull at her but knowing Sherlock needed someone now. If this had been four years ago, he might even have said the word “relapse” in earnest. Now they knew each other too well—he would not be so forward. He knew enough to fear his effect on her. It pained her to think of it—to think of what his last relapse had damaged, but it wasn’t something she could dwell on now.

He nodded more energetically this time, his words coming out hurried, “I know this, Watson, and you know I value your support. I only hesitate to ask more of you now since our partnership has drifted so far from the one between sober companion and client—” He bit off the end of the sentence, his gaze wandering to the window behind her. He was searching for the words now, holding his entire body tightly bound close, as if he feared the words that he sought.

“Sherlock, please look at me.” He did, albeit hesitating for a good second, searching that blank darkness past her window for a last futile moment.

“We are friends. Just because I was once your sober companion doesn’t mean I am any less your friend now. If it helps, view me as an Irregular that you just happen to live with,” she said, holding out her left hand palm up to punctuate her suggestion. He gave her a skeptical side-eye, but was still listening, so she continued. “My background as a sober companion only makes me a friend specialized in giving support when it comes to your addiction. We are no longer sober companion and client, and we don’t ever need to be again. But that doesn’t mean you have to feel bad for asking me for help. Friends are supposed to want to help each other.”

He was uncannily still for a few seconds, studying her with a scrutiny she recognized as completely selfish—he only looked at people that way when he was deducing how they could be lying, even unconsciously. And Joan knew, even unconsciously, she was telling the truth.

“If I were to ask you, Watson, as an Irregular and a friend, if you felt comfortable sharing a bed for the night, would you object?” he said, a rasping in his voice that betrayed his fear.

The words hung between them accompanied only by Joan’s increased, staccato heartbeat spreading through her limbs. Could Sherlock see that?

Her expression didn’t change though, so she felt safe enough to reply. “No. But I have to ask why.” Her words came out measured, a careful slowness that she knew Sherlock could read as trepidation. Hopefully he read nothing more.

He bounced visibly on his heels, once, twice, his eyes wandering again. “When I was using, I found it more satisfactory to distance myself from others. Not only socially but physically. Physical touch was more abhorrent to me then than it ever has been—or ever will be.” He stopped to study her expression. Nothing had changed, he had to be realizing. She was listening in her nonjudgmental way, waiting. He took a slow, audible breath, his chest expanding, before he continued.

“As you know I have usually taken on an exercise partner to use whatever excess energies may be hindering my deductive processes. But this exercise also stimulates my mind and detracts from those excess energies that...” Here he finally took one hand from his pocket, gesticulating with a few circling motions his struggle to express something that so troubled him, “...those energies that make my addiction more tangible to me.”

She took a slow breath herself, gathering her courage. “I’m not having sex with you.”

He held up a finger. “I did not say that, Watson, allow me to elaborate.” He could not look at her after she’d said the word “sex”. It was strangely amusing to see him uncomfortable at something *she* had said. She let her mouth twist in a wry smile.

“It is not the actual sexual act I have found to detract from that energy which brings me closer to my addiction, but the...” He moved his hand back and forth between them, bouncing his heels at the same time now that he was finally getting his difficult message across. “...contact, you see. So I thought, perhaps, if you were not opposed we could...”

“Share a bed,” she finished for him, seeing he’d taken his other hand out of his pocket and had begun to fidget in a decidedly stressed fashion.

He finally lowered his gesturing hand and gave a small nod, eyes on the floor, pursing his lips again. “Precisely.”

She looked away from him, gathering her thoughts, and trying to slow an irritable racing heartbeat. If she thought Sherlock was manipulating her in any way, she would’ve stopped him before he’d barely begun. But this was not manipulation—she’d seldom seen him this vulnerable, not since his relapse. He didn’t want to elaborate, but something about that SBK dealer had shaken him. They would talk about it later, but now was not the time for dissecting and deducing. It was nearing 1am, and Joan had no real reason to object to Sherlock’s request.

She scooted farther to the left of her bed, pulling back the covers for him. “Alright, you can share my bed with me, but if you start kicking in your sleep you’re out. And turn the hall light off please.”

Sherlock was still for a fraught three seconds before he sprang into motion, going to turn the hall light off and rushing back to her doorway like a recalcitrant child. She lay back on her pillow, moving the one other pillow she had to the right side of the bed for Sherlock. He saw her movement and took that for definite permission, coming to her bedside and climbing under the covers in not slow, but careful motions as if he waited for her to take back her words.

But only the rustle of bedsheets filled the room as Sherlock settled next to her. They both lay on their backs, staring at the ceiling, Sherlock as silent as he was capable, waiting for her further approval. She bit her bottom lip to hold back an irrational smile.

“Sherlock, you said physical contact helped you focus your energy away from your addiction,” she said, still looking at the ceiling. He didn’t move. She gave a small sigh. “What would you like me to do?”

A few seconds passed. Then he raised his left hand, palm up toward her. “Hand, please.”

She turned to look at his profile. His eyes were closed, his lungs expanding far too fast for her liking. She silently gave him her right hand.

He exhaled, long and slow. She found herself looking at the tattoo on his shoulder, the one of such great detail she’d never been able to determine exactly everything it contained. It was too dark now, but it occurred to her she had never asked him what the tattoo was, or why he had gotten it.

“Would it help to talk?” she said, her voice coming out a bit quieter, the reality of the darkness and their closeness settling in. She wore shorts and a tank-top for her pajamas—their skin to skin contact had never reached this level of potential. Her mind whirled in uncertainty for a few seconds, not knowing what to feel except for a familiar worry—for Sherlock and for her strange reactions—and an unwelcome excitement.

He was silent for much longer this time. His breathing slowed (and so did hers, though she never acknowledged that it increased in the first place), his grasp on her hand remained relaxed, his eyes closed. She knew he wasn’t asleep—he was thinking, considering. Her words or something else, she could only guess right now.

“No, Watson, I think...” His voice had grown softer as well, and his head turned toward her. “Can I move closer?”

She had turned on her side to face him, and at his question her hand unconsciously tightened on his. She gave a single nod to confirm her agreement, a millisecond later realizing she wasn’t really sure what she’d just agreed to.

He let go of her right hand, only to take her left hand and move to drape it over his chest. He moved with a caution she’d seldom see him express, slow, the little contact between them growing into a tension she wished she could shatter. He held her hand so lightly he barely pulled her, more he was directing where he wanted her to go, letting her move of her own accord.

He was so warm he was almost hot, and if Joan had not been a surgeon and had not known Sherlock was nowhere near ill, she would’ve thought he had a fever. In contrast her skin was cold against his. She moved closer to him to move her arm further across his torso, the prickle of his chest hairs sending foreign but welcome chills down her back. She hoped he didn’t notice the goosebumps rising on her skin (how could he not notice).

Her forehead touched his shoulder, and they spent several minutes settled thus, her feeling his chest rise and fall beneath her arm, him holding her hand gently in his own. Joan could not summon sleep. She was no longer even tired. It may have been approaching 2am, or 3am, she would not know. She feared moving closer, that he might feel her heartbeat increasing again. But then she realized he could feel her pulse as clear as day against his skin. Something in her shifted, and fear rose, but she didn't know what to do with it. Her hand clenched into a fist under his, and she closed her eyes against the fear, seeking the empty blackness behind her eyelids to give her some calm.

Instead she felt Sherlock's heartbeat, beating nearly as fast as hers, and this small detail made her open her eyes.

Sherlock was looking at her. She lifted her head, blinking a silent question at him, feigning nonchalance. He took his hand from hers, and lifted it to her face, holding his hand just above her forehead.

"May I?" he said, that rasping back in his voice, the words coming out a whisper that barely brushed her cheek. She nodded.

Turning his body so he lay fully on his side, he smoothed his hand over her hair, and though she couldn't see his expression, she felt his hesitation. He wasn't fully touching her, holding his hand just a hairsbreadth away. She could feel that hesitation just as much as if he'd grabbed her. She was about to say something, when he began undoing her braid.

She hadn't even noticed him pulling off the hair tie, only registering peripherally that he had moved his hand to her braid, pulling it over her shoulder. Now all she could focus on was what little she could see of his eyes, intent on the braid he was now undoing, as if it was another experiment that had caught him unawares, that he could not help but explore.

His fingers ran through her now loose hair, again and again, until she could feel the static against her neck, but also the brush of his fingers, sending more chills through her.

"You are cold, Watson," he stated, his voice barely above a whisper, but still holding enough of his familiar authoritativeness to make her roll her eyes. Which he couldn't see.

She moved her hand away from him, the contrast between the lingering warmth on her skin and the cold of her room sending an unwelcome tension into her muscles. "My skin is cold. I feel fine. If I was really cold, I would've worn different pajamas," she said, letting a note of annoyance enter her voice, since she couldn't clearly convey it in the darkness. He must have felt the goosebumps.

"I hadn't noticed you're often so cold," he added, the same feigned nonchalance she had adopted in his tone. She could tell it was feigned not only because she *knew* Sherlock, but also in the way he still ran his fingers through her hair, neither slowing the movement nor hesitating as he spoke. Joan couldn't decide if his action was soothing her or making her nervous. From the static traveling from her hair to her skin, to the many accidental brushes of his fingertips against her neck, Joan felt she had to be nearing sensory overload herself, and had to engage in verbal discourse with Sherlock to lessen the load.

“That’s a bold statement—you admitting you don’t notice something,” she said, knowing he could hear the smirk in her voice.

His fingers now tucked her hair behind her ear, then peripherally she saw his hand go to her wrist. “Not at all. I’m admitting I haven’t had the opportunity to observe something that I should have noted about you,” he said.

Joan ignored the implication that he may have been looking for an opportunity to “observe” her with more than his eyes for quite some time. “If I was really suffering under the terminally cold state of the brownstone, Sherlock, you would’ve heard about it long before now.” He was loosely grasping her wrist, his fingers moving inquisitively against the bones and muscles, from her wrist to her palm. She instinctively closed her fingers over his, to stop them moving.

“Are you usually so argumentative with your bedmates?” he said, and something in the way his voice lowered made her think his pulse had to be going as fast as hers. Unable to keep his hand still in hers, he extracted it, leaving her with the temptation to initiate her own exploration.

“Are you?” She held his wrist much as he had hers, but kept her fingers still. In the back of her mind she began to count the beats, like she had with countless patients so many times in the past.

“I asked first, Watson, don’t be contrary,” he said, his false nonchalance going into false annoyance.

She laughed, more at herself than at him. His pulse jumped against her gentle hold on his wrist. She didn’t let go. “I usually don’t discuss my body temperature with my bedmates,” she said dryly, trying to gauge his body language in the almost nonexistent light. The muscles that her hand could feel were relaxed, his breathing had slowed to normal, his eyes were trained on her face. But what was going on beneath his skin told her something different. She wasn’t sure how much she wanted the full answer.

He only hummed in response, and they spent a few seconds studying each other, more with their nerves than their eyes. Sherlock’s pulse didn’t slow, but neither was it frighteningly fast. She withdrew her hand from him, bracing for his question.

“Did you gather the information you wanted?” he asked, the feigned annoyance gone.

“That depends,” she said, moving to lay on her back again, giving her answer to the ceiling. “Are you going to confirm or deny my deductions?”

“Which deductions are those?” he asked, a playfulness in his voice that let her know he was smiling. His toothy grin that almost looked like a grimace most of the time, but it was only that kind of expression that accompanied this brand of uneasiness.

“You’re nervous. About being in my bed with me or touching me. Yet you’re still here,” she said, her increasingly strong and quickening heartbeat wanting to cut off her words. She was all but vibrating, he must be noting it, even if he wasn’t touching her in that moment.

“I confess, it is a foreign sensation, being in your bed. With you. I am adjusting,” he said, hesitation in his words, his smile gone.

Another implication, this time of having spent time in her bed when she wasn’t around. She suppressed an eye roll. Not that it mattered. She kept her eyes resolutely on the ceiling, unconsciously fearing whatever else he might ask of her if she turned toward him.

“I won’t be offended if you want to leave,” she said, and it was the truth. She knew Sherlock was very particular about the circumstances under which he let people touch him. Maybe he hadn’t expected her to agree to this.

He held back his response for a couple heartbeats, and she knew what he was going to say. “Do you want me to leave?”

She did not let herself hesitate. “No, I’m fine with you staying here.”

His next words came out quicker, with a different sort of excitement she had no idea how to interpret. “Yet your body is expressing signs of nervousness as well.”

Of course he would say that.

“That doesn’t mean I don’t want you here,” she said, careful to reveal nothing in her tone except the telltale stubbornness of trying to get her meaning across to him.

A couple beats of silence passed, in which she knew Sherlock’s thoughts were rapidly stumbling over each other. Live with the man long enough, you could practically hear him thinking.

“Do you feel obligated to me, Watson?” he said, his voice coming out uncharacteristically soft, not authoritative nor distant.

“What is that supposed to mean?” she said, the balance between her patience and her anxiety wavering.

“I’m afraid I...inspired feelings of guilt in you when I asked for this favor.” He actually sounded like he believed what he was saying.

“No, Sherlock. I’m not feeling guilty,” she said, a few muscles relaxing as she said the words. He would believe her, as long as she said it outright. “For someone who prides himself on reading people, you’re doing a sorry job of it right now,” she added, turning her head to smirk at him, forgetting he couldn’t see it.

There was a longer stretch of silence. She could hear him breathing through his nose. He wasn’t sure how to respond.

“Is this helping you?” she said, making her words softer.

She felt his eyes on her—he wanted her to clarify. Needed her to, she suspected.

“This—” she continued, moving her hand back and forth between them, much as he had earlier. “Being with me right now, is it helping you?”

“Yes,” he said simply, as only Sherlock could. But she could feel his frustration, it was like an aura he put off. His one-word response didn’t sound angry or frustrated, it was the fact he’d only *given* her a one-word response that revealed his difficulty communicating.

“Then of course I don’t feel obligated. I want to help you,” she said, almost whispering on the last sentence. She couldn’t pinpoint why it had been harder to say than anything else.

So instead of trying to figure it out, she took a couple deep breaths, waiting for Sherlock to speak or move. His right hand still rested between them, where she had left it. The flicker of his lashes let her know his eyes were downcast. The silence was pregnant with something, and even as she studied Sherlock for any sign, she knew she was waiting for him, not the other way around.

When his right hand moved towards her, Joan turned on her side again to face him, giving him her left hand just as he reached for it. But instead of pulling her hand towards him, his hand continued up her arm.

She fought not to stiffen. She took another deep breath as his hand reached her elbow, his touch so light part of her sleep-deprived brain was trying to insist she was dreaming. Then his fingers skated up her bicep, and she felt the goosebumps rising beneath his touch. For several long seconds all she could do was focus on breathing slow, steady breaths. She had no idea how convincing her façade of calm was to him, but all she really needed was to convince herself.

When his fingers skated over her collarbone, the struggle to keep her breaths slow and steady became decidedly more difficult. She was about to reach up to his hand, to pull it away or pull him closer, she hadn’t thought that far ahead. But then his hand moved down, skirting the neckline of her tank-top.

“Sherlock—” His name came out a whisper, much weaker than she’d intended it to. But then his hand stopped above her left breast, and he laid his palm flat over her bare skin. Over her heart.

“Do you have any positive feelings about the human heart, Watson?” he asked, his tone neutral, almost inquisitive.

“I’m not sure what you mean,” she said, her words coming out strangely flat as she fought to keep from sounding breathless. He knew exactly how hard her heart was pounding. Feeling it beat against his hand was the most uncanny sensation of vulnerability and warmth she’d ever experienced.

“There is a prevailing view that the heart and mind are at war. Emotion versus intellect. Primeval urges versus reason. For most of my life I thought it utter nonsense,” he continued, obviously gearing up to deliver her some profound deduction. His hand did not move. Joan could swear the heat between them was growing, their faces only inches apart, breaths

mingling. Her left hand rested on his right forearm, the strength she felt there reassuring somehow.

“Then I met Irene. Moriarty. And I was confused. For a brief time, I thought my heart had taken over my mind,” he said, with a mix of disdain and what others might mistake for fondness. But Joan knew it was actually pain. An emotional pain Sherlock had only just begun to process. She let her left hand move up to rest over his hand that he still held over her heart. Peripherally she realized he was anchoring himself, to something physical that was outside his mind.

“And then I met you, Watson,” he said, his voice dropping to a whisper. He was afraid to say whatever deduction he was gearing up for. She let her thumb skim over his knuckles, hoping he took it for reassurance.

“Your training, and then you triumphs as an investigator made me realize how much better, sharper you made me...intellectually,” he said, and she could hear the apology in his voice, one of many he’d never been able to articulate.

“But it wasn’t until Kitty left that I recognized—” He cut himself off, a new anger fueling the heat between them.

She’d been able to slow her breathing to normal, but only just. She still took one more slow breath before speaking, feeling his hand move unyielding against the expansion of her lungs. “You couldn’t keep your emotions apart.”

“It is not something I am proud to admit. It has affected how we do our work together. I told you several weeks ago that the work we do is only important to me because I do it with you. I believe without your partnership, I would be a worse detective. I would be—”

He struggled to find the words, his eyes downcast.

“You’re afraid you would let your addiction take over,” she said gently.

His answering silence was enough to confirm his agreement. The tensing of his muscles traveled from his arm, through his hand, to push against her heart. She could tell part of him wanted to pull away from her, but it was not because of sensory overload. The same fragile vulnerability she felt was now coming off of him in waves. She let her hand completely cover his, holding him to her.

“Sherlock, when you left for London, you were under the impression our partnership was going to end no matter what you did. So you ended it. And you found Kitty, you put her on a path to healing. And you didn’t relapse,” she said, keeping her voice steady against every fiber of her being that wanted to scream in anger, to hide in fear.

“I was in New York with you when you did relapse,” she said, pausing to let the pain of that statement sink back down to the bottom of her heart where it belonged. But Sherlock’s hand did not move from her, it remained steady. In a way it felt he was holding her even though he only touched a small part of her.

“I can only contribute so much to how you maintain your sobriety. But I do not control it. You do. You know maintaining your sobriety is about knowing your triggers. If I was gone tomorrow, you would have to find your way without me. And you could,” she finished, letting the hardness of her words sink in. Their eyes locked briefly, and even in the darkness she knew Sherlock was listening more intently than he had before.

“I do not mean to burden you, Watson,” he said, his voice going quiet in a way that made her heart jump with anxiety. It was as if he was drawing out stronger emotions in her, not by force, but merely by his proximity.

She gave a small shake of her head, wishing she could push his shame away. “Your sobriety is not connected to another person. I am not Moriarty. I have no intention of crippling you emotionally. I will do all I can to help you stay sober. But I am a support for you, not a crutch.”

“No, I do not mean to imply that. It is just—what I feel for you is not—it’s not something I can separate from my intellect. Not like Moriarty in her ruse as Irene.” Sherlock moved his hand from between her hand and her heart to run his knuckles over her collarbone in what could barely be called a caress. It felt more he was asking permission to go further, but Joan had no idea in what direction. “Then I was only battling my emotions. A separate entity, an enemy. But you are the only one who could show me...”

“What?” Joan still managed to keep her breathing even, her left hand loosely grasping Sherlock’s wrist. His fingertips lightly tracing up her neck to her jaw no longer sent chills through her. Her skin was warm against his.

His voice came out lower, quieter. “Emotion is not a detriment to intellect, but is rather a gain. A stimulant, if you will.” He was concentrating on moving his fingers so lightly over her jaw and cheek, if it wasn’t for his body heat and his soft breath against her skin, she would doubt he was there.

“How scientific of you,” she said, her smile unmistakable to his fingers, as well as infusing her voice.

His fingers halted at her hairline, his palm almost cupping her face. “You are teasing me,” he said, without offense.

She couldn’t stop smiling. “More your word choice.”

“How would you put it, Watson?” His face was mere inches from hers, yet his hand hadn’t moved. It was as if he was maintaining some equilibrium within himself, the stillness in him was so sharply concentrated.

“I think you mean to say letting your emotions affect your actions has not been the disadvantage you long imagined it to be,” she said, her voice nearly at a whisper.

“After a fashion,” he whispered back. His eyes were darting almost everywhere except to her eyes. She knew he looked from her hand at his wrist to nearly everywhere on her face except

her eyes, including her mouth. His pulse was jumping against her fingers, and it was almost as if the stillness in him was beginning to vibrate.

She slowly let go of his wrist. “Hmm. I’m tired, Sherlock. Will you be okay if I go to sleep?” she said, speaking a bit slower. The quiet vibrating energy in him moved from his hand into her, but he distilled it by lifting his hand from her skin and running his fingers one last time through her hair.

“Of course, Watson,” he said, the words almost sounding normal, for Sherlock. But there was a stiffness in them, not at all like Sherlock’s usual politeness. Joan let the silence stretch between them, both of them motionless, listening for something from each other.

His hand rested half-curved between them. Joan brushed her fingertips to his knuckles, letting her upper body relax into the mattress. Sleep was taking over her brain, but the tense alertness coming from Sherlock was palpable, pulling her back.

“You can take my hand, if you want,” she whispered, her tiredness only yielding slightly to the gentleness she put into her words. She closed her eyes just as she felt Sherlock’s hand take hers again.

Guilty Pleasures

Chapter Summary

[I was asked by letsjuliep on tumblr](#) to headcanon Sherlock's guilty pleasures. This is what resulted.

Chapter Notes

This was originally written before "Closer", and it heavily influenced how I wrote Sherlock in that story, so I thought I'd post this as a companion to "Closer". It was also originally a headcanon that sort of turned into a character study...I never know where my writing is going. If I plan too much I get scared and don't try.

Sherlock's guilty pleasures, if he would ever call them that and he doesn't, are mostly tactile. He's always been the one who needed to touch everything he was interested in, whether it be the first jar of honey set in front of him as a child to the first corpse he was allowed to examine to the last bomb he dismantled two weeks ago with Joan eating cereal quietly in the background. But when it came to people, Sherlock learned quickly his tactile nature was incompatible. People, living people, did not like to be touched—usually. So many rituals were involved when it came to exploring people through touch. That was possibly why solving murders drew him in so deeply and so quickly when he was an adolescent. The dead told no tales; they also didn't react when you tried to duplicate the methods that killed them. But Sherlock never had any desire to kill the living to touch them—he just preferred the living not react so adversely to his questions—questions which were always too invasive and offensive, according to his teachers, his peers, his superiors, his associates, his Irregulars. But if his questions were forbidden and tactile exploration was forbidden, how else was Sherlock supposed to explore the world of the living except through those who had had their lives forcibly taken?

Then there was sex. Something so distasteful at first, and only described as enjoyable in the most abstract of terms, Sherlock could not fathom why the majority of humanity sought it out with such blind fervor, despite embarrassing failed attempts and the ostracism that resulted from its lack in someone's life. Sherlock took it on grudgingly once he realized how coitus sharpened not only his senses, but his mental faculties. He could work longer, concentrate better, and solve quicker in the hours after he had sought physical, mutual satisfaction with another person. He wrote it off as a purely animalistic pursuit, only concentrated on so fully by the majority of humans for its evolutionary benefits and invigorating after effects. Sherlock only intended to take advantage of the latter. His subconscious only vaguely

acknowledged that sex was actually pleasant if he allowed his analytical, hyper-focused mind enough free reign to revel in the tactile pleasures it brought him. Yes, the fluids and the sounds were something he had to block out, to the best of his ability, but how could anyone dislike studying the curves of someone else's muscles and bones? How their hair became softer behind their thighs, or how their lashes moved when they were only resting or in REM sleep? Who could deny that it was actually quite miraculous how some parts of the body could relax at the same time others were tense in the midst of desire, or how the pulses on the neck and wrists became visible for only brief seconds before the body hid its secrets again? If Sherlock called anything a guilty pleasure, it was in how he both grudgingly accepted and longed for true physical acceptance from another person. If only because it allowed him to explore the living without censure, judgment, or the many varying levels of disgust he had encountered from his fellow humans all throughout his life.

Then he met Watson. A person who inserted herself into his life so fervently yet unintentionally, it was years before he realized how deep she'd embedded herself in his mind, his existence. And yet they barely touched. Watson was not an exercise partner who would allow him to find lustful satisfaction for a night and leave without questions or clinging touches the next morning. She was not the Woman who had ensnared and entrapped him like a butterfly pinned to a board. Nor was she a business associate who barely tolerated his presence and his towering intellect. She was his friend. A friend Sherlock had never sought nor believed he could ever experience. And her body was a mystery to him.

True, he noticed immediately how her freckles changed, disappeared and reappeared depending on what room she was in, what time of day it was. How the first time she wore her hair up made his heart sink and his pulse quicken at the same time. How the first time he decided to wake her from sleep, he'd stood in her doorway frozen for too many seconds, watching how she breathed and how she'd cast her hands over the covers, her careful, surgeon's hands relaxed as he'd never seen them.

For weeks after their first meeting, the memory of their first and only handshake and how he'd later insulted her medical profession haunted him. How could a person with such hands be the surgeon he had accused her of being? It was impossible. Her mind was too nimble, her eyes too adept, too focused, to have let carelessness kill a helpless patient on her table. Her eyes picked out details he had hidden about himself, from the world, for years. Secrets he would have never revealed without her carefully placed words, designed to taunt him, yet only drawing him further into the puzzle Joan Watson had become.

Their first kiss was like no kiss Sherlock had ever experienced. He could not concentrate on any one detail while kissing Watson for the first time. Unlike every other person whose lips he had touched with mouth and fingers, Watson's kiss was both unfathomable and a sensory overload waiting to happen. She was the ultimate guilty pleasure because she existed in his life, against his physical self, despite every piece of evidence that pointed to the impossibility of her presence. Touching Watson with even the pregnant intent of intimacy was like touching a mirage, the remnants of the dream on the edges of waking. Being allowed to touch her was not a question of why but of in what reality? In what reality was Watson, his first and closest friend, the only person to fully accept him, the same person to allow him to explore her body with his hands as well as his mind? Never in Sherlock's life had he been allowed to experience a person as he experienced Watson.

Guilty pleasures were not something Sherlock could name. If he had tried, all he would be able to imagine was Watson shutting him down with a hard stare and a sarcastic remark. “Guilt isn’t deserved, it’s inflicted,” she’d said to him once, after a long conversation about his relapse. He had agreed. Of course he would—Watson knew more of guilt than anyone needed to know, and more than she deserved. If he could give anything to her, it would be to give her something from himself that carried no burden of guilt. True pleasure, after all, was something they both had denied themselves for too long.

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