

Jukebox

(harmony through dissonance)

A bout of tennis-fic

by athens7 (Arial 11)

and mazaher (Verdana 10)

completed February 21, 2013

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(serve -- athens7)

"...and if they don't believe me now / will they ever believe me?", Steven Patrick Morrissey is singing while Sherlock walks the last few feet of pavement to the front door of 221B Baker Street. It's a warm Spring afternoon, the sky is blue electric and the sunlight feels so good on his face; no need for his coat, and the sunglasses are providing all the protection he could require. That it's John who'd been insisting for months on his wearing them (07/08/2010, 15:22:33 "*all that squinting is no good for the eyes, especially when they're as bright as yours. How could you ever deduce with less than perfect eyesight?*") and that he complies only when John's not there to witness, are facts he decides to dismiss as minor idiosyncrasies.

His steps up the stairs are in perfect sync with the rhythm guitar of the song's coda. He's already in the kitchen, the final notes still ringing in his ears, when a sudden voice coming from the living room causes him to, well, not to *jump*, nor to *flinch*, because that would be quite inelegant, but it certainly makes his breath hitch, just slightly.

"I didn't keep count, but I'm fairly sure Lestrade sent me about, um, fifty messages just to complain about your behaviour at the latest crime scene. What the hell, Sherlock, I've been gone for three days, and that's including this morning!"

John, sitting in his armchair, his torso twisted to speak to Sherlock. John, who wasn't here this morning or yesterday or the day before because... What was it? Harry's latest relapse? Medical congress in Cardiff? School reunion in Edinburgh? Data too irrelevant to be retained. No possible reason in this wide little world could ever be reason enough to leave 221B for more than a few hours, therefore it'd be a totally waste of effort on Sherlock's part to try remember the specifics of each instance of absence.

"I blame this Mister Morrissey. He seems to be the embodiment of misanthropy, and in all his songs he just keeps whining so loudly and so obnoxiously. Really, how adolescents all the kingdom over could ever stand to listen even for a few seconds to this self-assured, pompous, baritone croon completely escapes me" Sherlock replies, entering the living room, and hoping against hope that John didn't notice the glasses he just slipped in his pocket. John's observational skills are close to non-existent, except when it comes to Sherlock's person. Hmm. Better not to follow further that particular line of reasoning.

"Replace those 'adolescents' with 'Lestrade and I' and you'll have one of my most recurring thoughts. And since when do you listen to The Smiths? I thought it was only guys like Beethoven or whatshisname Ligati for you."

"*Ligeti*, John. György Sándor. And it's for a case."

"Oh, I bet", draws John, standing and going to Sherlock. He snatches one of the headphones and the iPod, starts listening, while the detective tries desperately *not* to focus on how good it feels standing so close to each other, sharing music.

"No doubt you have deduced it already, but there's been the most fascinating murder while you were away. You'd have to see the body as they found it to fully appreciate the sheer poetry of it. And I *know* that the key to the motive is hidden in one of The Smiths' first albums. It's *The Queen is dead* or *Meat is murder*, really, it was just so obvious, one only had to look at the pin attached to the girl's messenger bag to..."

"Hmm", is John's quite exhaustive, highly enlightening reply. Morrissey seems to be distracting him, and Sherlock really can't blame him (not to be taken as a compliment, Steven Patrick).

"No, no, this isn't right" John says then, as the voice cries, "*love is natural and real / but not for you my love*", and right before Sherlock can even begin to attempt re-building the exact route of the train of thoughts that just caused that oh-so-suspicious frown to form right between his eyes. *Damn*, he needed to know. But the moment is lost forever, because now John is smiling, all worry gone as suddenly as it came, and he's pressing *play*.

"You downloaded the entire discography, I see."

"Careful there with all those highly technical terms. You wouldn't want people to think you are actually up to date with this century. And when ever did I give you the impression of being less than thorough?"

"Oh, the sacrifices you make for the sake of truth. Where is it? Oh, there! Much more appropriate" He seems to be one moment away from sticking out his tongue.

The bouncy opening riff of *This charming man* fills their ears. For reasons currently unknown, the piece sounds far more lovely now than when Sherlock listened to it on his own.

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(1st return -- mazaher)

John Hamish Watson, MD, is an observant man. Maybe he can't forge long chains of intellectual deductions, like his flatmate, Mr. Sherlock William Holmes, consulting detective, regularly does. But John is a diagnostician, and when gauging the extent of an internal bleeding in less than two seconds means the difference between a heart stopping and one going on beating, one learns pretty fast to use one's intuition.

Right now, Sherlock is showing off to DI Lestrade in a whirl of words about how *the jewel thief is the 14-y-o classmate who came in the afternoon to do homework with the second son, can't they all *see* he had mumps with complications less than two months ago, and what do they teach in school nowadays if the average policeman can't even catch worn-out figures of speech about family jewels? Of course it was the wretched boy who pocketed the pearl earrings, do go and read your Bram Dijkstra.*

But John isn't really listening, distracted by a fascinating detail only he seems to be noticing: as he gesticulates to Lestrade, Donovan standing with arms crossed at her boss' side, Sherlock's left foot is unmistakably tapping a rhythm on the pavement.

Now, John knows he's starting with a handicap where Sherlock's musical tastes are concerned. He can recognise a handful of classical tunes (Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, the bane of every recorder-wielding schoolboy; Tchaikovsky's *Dance Of The Sugar-Plum Fairy*, from his stint as fourth Nut in the Christmas recital where Harry played first Raisin; Bizet's *Habanera*

from *Carmen*; and strangely enough, Honegger's *Pacific 231*), but his tastes lean more toward old-style New Orleans jazz; there is a reason why he taught himself to play clarinet. As for pop music, he missed the Beatles, the Stones and most of Bowie for anagraphical reasons; he caught up with MOtown out of sheer passion. Among later stuff, some things he likes (most of world fusion), others he doesn't (nearly all rap), and he doesn't bother much to keep up with things. Of Sherlock's more esoteric tastes (György Ligeti, but also Benjamin Britten, Franco Battiato, Michael Nyman and The Penguin Café Orchestra) John knows absolutely nothing, and he'd rather have it remain so.

He's straining now, trying to decipher the constants in the tapping, and catch the tune. He is so *sure* it's a tune, if only...

He closes his eyes.

He listens.

Until...

Gotcha! John's eyes open wide. But no, it can't be: only this morning (well, early morning; well, actually 2:40 am) Sherlock had been playing for the 453th time the first five notes of Ferneyhough's *Intermedio alla Ciaccona*, or so he mumbled when John stalked into the sitting room to complain.

It simply can't be.

But yet it must: the more he watches, the more John becomes certain of the absurd truth.

Sherlock Holmes, consulting detective, is tapping on the pavement the rhythm of Ke\$ha's *Take It Off*.

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Notes:

William: a tentative deduction (possibly self-serving) by WILLIAM BARING-GOULD, *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street. A life of the world's first consulting detective* (1962).

BRAM DIJKSTRA, *Evil sisters: the threat of female sexuality and the cult of manhood*, New York: Knopf, 1996.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART, *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* K. 525 (1787), at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?annotation_id=annotation_609462&feature=iv&src_vid=1QHzI5HmXl4&v=tSL5-wxgvFY

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY, *Dance Of The Sugar-Plum Fairy*, op. 71, act II (1892), at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45INvNsdPLc>

GEORGES BIZET, *Habanera* from *Carmen* (1875) sung by Maria Callas (Covent Garden, 1962),

at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fZRssq7UIM>

ARTHUR HONEGGER, *Pacific 231* (1923) at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVprYE_BhK8

BRIAN FERNEYHOUGH, *Intermedio alla Ciaccona* (1987), at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UVPAsQS5yU>

KE\$HA, *Take It Off* (2010), at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Cra5UH_2mE

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(2nd return -- athens7)

"There's a place downtown where the freaks all come around / It's a hole in the wall, it's a dirty fr --" well, but the absurdity of the situation is reaching mastodontic, completely unacceptable proportions. (" --ree for all / and they turn me on, when they take it off") No matter how fast he spews off his usual blend of flashlight-deductions and razor-sharp insults, he seems utterly, stupidly incapable of overriding the smug petulant voice currently cluttering his working memory, taking up so much of his precious RAM. ("There's a place I know if you're looking for a show / where they go hard --") And now his foot! The Iscariot. He should sue that café (damn you John, and your stupid stupid need for regular sustenance) ("and there's glitter on the floor / and they turn me on --"), and, ugh, how can people ever willingly subject themselves to such torture? Stuck in a loop of top-chart-pop, synthetic drum machine and obtuse bass lines and a plastic refrain that wants only to strip him of his sanity. Really, this is lobotomy legalized. To add insult to injury, the... the "song" (the fact he can't be bothered to find a worse/better term tells the entire tale of his present state) is enabling all the most atrocious kinds of mental associations, like a poisoned

madeleine, serving him with washed-out polaroids of Uni ("*Lose your mind, lose it now*") and Seb ("*Lose your clothes in the crowd*") and dark alleys waiting for hoodies and no, no, he is *not* - going - there. Nothing at all like that time during his sophomore year, when he'd been having Gershwin's *Rhapsody In Blue* stuck in his head for about a week before deciding to bring the morphine solution up to 8% to try get rid of it; the drug had made it infinitely worse and infinitely better, in that the composition had persisted for five more days but the colours, nay, the shades of blue had been *glorious*, he had learned so much about the ocean and the sky and his mother's eyes and a police box, and still, and *still*, with all his previous experience, John's eyes had been an absolute novelty, really, just how impossible is the man? ("*right now take it offright now take it offright now take itoffeverybody take it off*") Argh. John Zorn, that's what he needs. Throbbing Gristle. The complete *2001: A Space Odissey* soundtrack!, with its cascades of voices and subdivisions of pulse and micro-polyphonies, its multiplications of musical atoms and addi(c)tive rhythms and arc strings tortured to their last breath. Or, oh, *oh*, even better, Cage's *4'33"*. Ah, self-delusions. Absolute silence is impossible to reach, just like absolute zero, he should know better by now. The real problem with him is inside, not outside; no change of scenery will ever help. Still. "... evidently my tolerance to dullness exposure is growing thinner with each passing day", he comes out of the dry spell just in time to hear himself say.

John is watching him with arms crossed and pursed lips, so it's safe to assume he's just finished a Bit Not Good tirade.

The ride back home is silent in a very piercing way, and Sherlock spends it all wishing there were an other ashtray or a snowball or a paperweight or a centrepiece for him to steal from the scene, just to make John look at him and laugh with him, if only for a moment, if only by using such a cheap trick, so unworthy of his genius, but he wouldn't care because it's John.

So he's finally home. And now what? The chemical melody and the clingy voice are still there, burnt sugar filling his nose, making him choke. Before he knows it he finds himself curled up in his bed, his violin resting on the pillow beside his head; no bow, oh no not at all, he really can't run the risk of starting playing the two notes that have been going round and round in his head (like a mental teddy bear) for eight hours now, he's been betrayed by his foot already, and then he'd have to burn it, and since it's not so easy nowadays to buy another Strad for two pounds from a half-blind second-hand dealer, this is the only feasible solution to keep both his violin and his mind whole. The silent wood is soothing in its own way, and the smell of rosin still permeating the strings covers the sugar, however marginally.

(This is how John finds him. Or is it the other way around?)

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(*3rd return -- mazaher*)

This is how John finds him.

After the silence in the cab. After the few soft words around dinner ("*Ethiopian?*" - "*Thai. Samosas, green curry rice. Ah, and tom yum kung.*" - "*Beer?*" - "*Tea.*"). After Sherlock has spent twenty minutes chasing his curry around the plate, and jabbing away the cherry tomatoes in John's som tum instead. After John has settled in his armchair like a dog who turns on itself and then curls with eyes closed and ears awake, expecting Sherlock to perch somewhere and talk through a day's work...

After all this, instead, Sherlock picks up his violin, leaves the bow, and disappears in his room. Ten minutes later, John begins to be concerned. Too long for picking up rosin, or spare strings, or whatever it is that a violinist may need on any given weekday evening. Too silent for something completely different to have hijacked Sherlock's attention toward a different plan: Sherlock's plans are rarely silent. Much too strange, coming at the end of an apparently commonplace case, devoid of unusual features as well as of an unusual degree of conflict with the Met.

The day had seemed average. The evening does not. John has learned enough by now (from Sherlock, and also about Sherlock) to see that something's amiss.

He's also aware that Sherlock's solution to any issue he can't solve, or he won't face, or he wants to keep private, is obliterating himself in silence and solitude. Breaking in could be not only dangerous for the intruder, but disastrous for Sherlock himself. The last thing John wants is baying at the hole where the fox has burrowed. It's either coax him out (but how?), or venture in (but when?).

He decides to wait for half an hour longer.

His resolve crumbles at the 21st minute; after all, he argues to himself, the longer he waits the more likely it will be that his inquiries appear born of annoyance rather than care. He stands up, straightens his shoulders, and steps to the closed door of Sherlock's bedroom, making just enough noise that, if he's awake, he will know John's coming. He clears his throat, then knocks softly. No answer, but the door clicks ajar. Five seconds, then he knocks again, the wooden panel sounding flatter, creaking slightly on its hinges. Silence.

"Sherlock? May I come in?"

"If strictly necessary."

The tone is ...dead, in a way John remembers with a chill from black-robed mothers telling in Pashto about children stepping on landmines.

"All right, I'm coming in."

Sherlock is curled, fully clothed, on top of the covers, his back to the door, his hand on the violin laying at his side, the scroll making a dip on the pillow like a tiny blind head.

"What's up?" John schools his voice to neutrality, erasing any hint of alarm, annoyance, or apprehension. He wants to help, but Sherlock is capital at drawing blood while fencing with words, and John knows enough not to step into a match he'd lose.

"Nothing." Sherlock doesn't move. John is pretty sure his eyes are closed.

"What's down, then."

A moment of silence. A small voice: "...Me."

"Want to talk about it?"

A minute shaking of the head, fingertips tensing on the smooth tawny belly of the violin, pressing on the smooth edge of the tailpiece. "I ca— can't tell. Not now. Doesn't matter anyway."

John tries to imagine what the issue may be, replaying in his mind the events of the afternoon. He remembers Sherlock staring at him for a moment after his tirade, just when John had been at the end of his tether at how the newest member of Anderson's team seemed to be trying to cross Sherlock at every step, like a zealous dog barking out his human's repressed aggression. Maybe he's mistaken John's silence for disapproval? And Sherlock tapping, it must have had a meaning... Out of the blue, he asks:

"Why Ke\$ha?"

Sherlock's shoulders tense suddenly, then relax, defeated.

"Because, who's the freak? and what has he done? It was only glitter on the floor. Or maybe I should say litter. In any case, it was long ago. Saved in an external back-up drive."

Litter, not glitter. Oh God.

"Listen, whatever it is, I won't change my mind about you. I know enough about who you are to not mind what you may have done, or been. Or— or endured," John ends lamely.

"You don't owe me, John. It's a little sad story, it's long past, it's nothing to do with you, and you have no obligation. As I told you, just let me alone, and I'll soon be right."

John slips sitting on the floor. Without thinking, he finds himself repeating the first few lines of some French poem he read somewhere.

"`Let in the muddy dog, all the worse for those--' "

"Faites entrer le chien couvert de boue / Tant pis pour ceux qui n'aiment ni les chiens ni la boue / Faites entrer le chien entièrement sali par la boue / Tant pis pour ceux qui n'aiment pas la boue / Qui ne comprennent pas / Qui ne savent pas le chien / Qui ne savent pas la boue / Faites entrer le chien / Et qu'il se secoue..." Sherlock's voice cracks minutely here, and he stops for a moment. "You saved many lives, Doctor Watson, including mine. But have you ever *changed* a life as you have changed this one?"

"No, well. Probably not. How?"

"I was very young. It appears that when I was so young I was miserably lacking in imagination. I tried to do what was expected of me. Then I couldn't stomach it anymore, and went on to do the *other* set of expected, dull things."

"Things like..."

"When I met Lestrade, I was permanently high on coke. It was the only way to endure what I had to do for the next fix. He pulled me out by giving me something as good as coke, but cheaper, and legal. Cases. But I was dead, because I could stand being alive, at least sometimes, but nothing I did could make me like it."

"I know the feeling."

"You do."

"And what then?"

"Then you forgot your crutch and ran after me. You jumped between rooftops. You saved my life for the first time. But not really: you gave a life to me when I didn't have one. I had thrown mine away." Sherlock rolls over, stares at John with wide eyes. "So, Doctor, you haven't lost your competence at changing the world. I can tell you that you never changed it as much as you did since you came back home after invading Afghanistan. But sometimes... like this afternoon... when they look at me as though they expect me to jump through hoops at the crack of a whip... it's like I'm performing for the next fix all over again."

"A bloody circus."

"A bloody freak show."

"You know you're not a freak."

"Sometimes knowing something yourself is not enough."

John sighs. He thinks about his life in the beige rented room, the bed pushed next to the radiator to gather every shred of warmth during a whole drab, rainy autumn in London. About his nights, sleep a tense line broken by gunshot. About his daily apple and his mug of tea, the RAMC logo trying in vain to remind him of John H. Watson, MD, and of Capt. John H. Watson, Queen's Commendation for Bravery. He thinks about how he fought against the very idea that Dr. Thompson could help him feel better, and about how instead he embraced at once the exhilarating feeling of running on foot after a cab. How they laughed, side by side and breathless, in a dark narrow hall, a search-and-destroy team of two. How John would kill, (did kill) to keep for himself this light which warms his heart right now, while he's sitting on the floor in a bedroom in a flat in NW1 London, listening to the loneliest man he's ever met. The boy with the thorn in his side.

John wants to take the thorn out, but it's so hard to get near enough. He only has his words.

"You know, you did also give me something. You gave me back myself, and I won't lose it again."

He rolls forward on his knees, reaches out to touch his finger to the line of life on Sherlock's upturned palm. Sherlock curls his hand around John's.

And this is how they find each other.

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Notes:

"I get in the dumps at times, and don't open my mouth for days on end (...) Just let me alone, and I'll soon be right": Holmes' instructions to Watson about how to deal with him as a flatmate, in ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887).

"Let in the muddy dog": *Tant pis*, by Jacques Prévert.

Faites entrer le chien couvert de boue / Tant pis pour ceux qui n'aiment ni les chiens ni la boue / Faites entrer le chien entièrement sali par la boue / Tant pis pour ceux qui n'aiment pas la boue / Qui ne comprennent pas / Qui ne savent pas le chien / Qui ne savent pas la boue / Faites entrer le chien / Et qu'il se secoue / On peut laver le chien / Et l'eau aussi on peut la laver / On ne peut pas laver ceux / Ceux qui disent qu'ils aiment les chiens / À condition que... / Le chien couvert de boue est propre / La boue est propre / L'eau est propre aussi quelquefois / Ceux qui disent à condition que... / Ceux-là ne sont pas propres / Absolument pas.

(Let in the muddy dog / Too bad for those who love neither dogs nor mud / Let in the dog covered in mud / Too bad for those who don't love mud / Who don't understand / Who don't know about the dog / Who don't know about the mud / Let in the dog / And let him shake itself / One can wash the dog / And one can wash water / But one can't wash those / Those who say they love dogs / Provided that... / The muddy dog is clean / Mud is clean / Even water is clean sometimes / Those who say *Provided that...* / Those are not clean / At all.)

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