

Planting an orchard on difficult soil

by mazaher

October 22, 2011

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This is a first time story. But nothing graphic will be seen, because I realised while writing that-- I didn't want to intrude.

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*Let us plant today
The seed which will be
the tree of us.*

-- LEONARD NIMOY, *Let us join the ages*
(*A lifetime of love*, 2002)

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The woman is running up the stairs, a flash of beige-and-tan jumpsuit. The door to the roof slams open, then shut, then open again as Sherlock rushes up and out, hot on her heels, John following half a step behind and panting. Feet beating on the cracked concrete, one pair of tennis soles, one pair of slick leather, one pair of half-rubber, Goodyear welted. A reversed sky of night lights under the overcast covering London. The woman speeds up as she approaches the edge, staring at the next building, measuring the distance. Sherlock is gaining ground, lengthens his stride. The woman leaps and screams, just as Sherlock's left foot pushes hard on the last step, propelling him forward-- but John sprints up, catches Sherlock's coat by the left sleeve, turns him sharply around to an abrupt stop, so unbalanced that they both fall, John on his back, Sherlock splayed upon him.

"Fuck, John!"

"She's fallen. She's *fallen*, Sherlock, for the love of..." John is breathing hard, the sharp taste of lactic acid in his mouth. "Twenty feet is much too wide to leap over, even for you!" Sherlock points his arms on the floor either side of John's shoulders. His eyes are closed, his mouth a tight line, hands knotted in hard fists.

"Right. You're right, of course. I'll just have to work my way to her boss through someone else. I'll catch them."

"We'll catch them."

Sherlock stares at John's flushed face, five inches below his nose.

"We. Quite. We. I... Thank you, John."

"You're welcome."

John's eyes are dark and blue, and the pink tip of his tongue appears for a moment between his lips. He's still panting a bit, moist heat coming up from his body, wrapping around Sherlock like an invisible hug. Then John pushes up on his elbows, a minute grimace of pain when his bad shoulder takes the weight, and his lips catch Sherlock's in a kiss.

He pulls back before the next deep breath, and speaks in a low voice, clear but fast, before his courage fails:

"I want so much to have you. In every possible way. And never lose you."

Sherlock feels a sudden blade of ice run up along his spine, the chilly finger of death. Caught on the edge between destruction and life, he leaps toward life. He lowers his mouth on John's and quickly, almost chastely, kisses him back.

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They are taking a bath.

After they've kissed on the rooftop, John has taken the lead, pushing Sherlock back and up, taking him by the hand and not leaving it until they've been on the street, through the police

line, then in a cab, then out of it on the pavement, and finally through their doorstep and into the bathroom.

Both still high on the wine of each other, they've laughed their clothes away, as oblivious to death and bloodshed as soldiers after a battle they have survived. But the embrace of hot water on their bodies has sobered them into silence.

John has stepped into the tub behind Sherlock, taking care to leave room enough for his long legs to fold comfortably, and has set himself to work with the soap and shampoo. Gently, reverently, he has taken care of his lean tight body, washing his hair, massaging his scalp, lathering him all over in long strokes down to the tips of his toes and rinsing him with the sponge.

Then,

"Allow me now," Sherlock whispers, and John half-closes his eyes as Sherlock turns around in the tub, crouches in front of him, and those hands of flesh and music finally --finally-- touch him. An exploration, a discovery, small noises of interest and satisfaction as Sherlock fingers each mole, each scar (the deep one on his left shoulder, the older, smaller ones on his upper right arm, the thin white line of the cut behind his knee from falling off his mountain bike at ten) and smooths the crease between his eyebrows with his thumb.

Lower now, both hands gliding down along his sides to the waist, carefully measuring pressure so as not to tickle.

John leans back his head on the edge of the tub, opens his eyes and looks. Sherlock has his most solemn expression, the one he wears when he is completely fascinated by something new, important and devoid of human absurdities, like flammability of beech leaves (dried) or growth rate of maggots on calf lungs at room temperature.

John finds his own mind drifting, floating on a wave of warm contentment. It would be so easy to let go, let Sherlock be in charge of this as he always is in charge of everything...

But the probing hands are slowing down, fingers hitching at the crease of the groin, pushing and stopping, pushing and stopping. Sherlock's breath gets fractionally faster just as John's arousal stirs. John shakes himself awake. This is his responsibility. It is he who led Sherlock on this unfamiliar territory, he who owes it to him to bring things through safely. He takes both Sherlock's hands, raises them out of the water, kisses each in turn.

"The water's getting cool. Let's rinse and get out."

The hot spray brings them both back into their own skin. John quickly steps out of the tub, mumbling to himself as he hurriedly searches for a large towel for Sherlock.

"John."

"Hmmm...?"

"John, please."

John stops, turns.

"You should... you may slow down. This is important. I won't chill to death. And we have all night."

John takes a breath.

"Right. Sorry, I..."

"Not now. I don't want you to be sorry just now."

He leans forward, touches his lips briefly to John's. The contact, more than the words, seems to ground them both.

"Here, let me get you dry."

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The towel is draped around Sherlock's waist as he pads barefoot into John's bedroom. John is following, his right hand lightly set on Sherlock's right hip. Sherlock's shoulders are resolutely straight, his head held high, his stride smooth, but John feels tension in the muscles under his palm.

"Slip under," John says as they reach the bed, and he flips the corner of the duvet back for Sherlock to settle in the bed, curled tight on his right side. He follows, spooning behind him and sliding his left arm around Sherlock's waist.

"Hey. Turn around," he asks after a minute, and tugs gently at Sherlock's hip.

Sherlock rolls to face John. His eyes are very round, pulse racing in his throat. John threads his fingers through his curls at the side of his head.

"It's all right. You will be good at this. You will be perfect. You are always perfect," he whispers.

Sherlock swallows, nods, and closes his eyes on a deep breath.

"What should I do?" he asks in a low voice.

"Just let me take care of it. You can stop me anytime, just say the word. And if you like what I'm doing, then you do the same, or we'll take turns."

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It was the first time, like planting the first few trees in an orchard. The earth around them carefully prepared, but still bare; some leaves and small branches soon shriveling and drying up. It takes a while, it takes a silent process developing in secret, before the roots take hold in foreign soil and fresh sap pushes out into new growth. Flowers kissed by bees. Ripe fruit warm with sunlight.

First times are unique and unforgettable, but --unless the whole business was doomed from the start-- when the first time comes around, you can be sure the best is yet to come.

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*When friends say
My, you have a beautiful garden
I look at you
and smile.*

-- LEONARD NIMOY, *My love is a garden*
(*A lifetime of love*, 2002)