

Second wind

by mazaher

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John has been busy.

Sherlock is absolutely certain that John would never hold a secret without a good reason. Even if he has never expressly accepted Sherlock's apologies for dying, John would never...

Or would he?

Once or twice a week during weeks 9 to 17, 19 to 24 and 26 to 30 after The Return, John has left 221B for an average of 4 hours and seventeen minutes each round. Always in daylight, always wearing his trainers.

His undisclosed business has regularly included travel by Tube and by train, short minicab rides, and moderately strenuous outdoor activities in a grassy, windy place west of London. From the occasional mud splash, it must be somewhere between Reading and Oxford; probably Wallingford, but the pattern he detects in John's disheveled hair when he returns doesn't fit the prevailing winds in the area.

Then John catches him staring, and since then he comes home with his hair carefully combed. It's maddening.

It is a Sunday morning in April. Sherlock has napped on the sofa after packing an easy case the night before. John joins him for an early breakfast.

"Want to know what I've been up to?"

"...Yes." Curiosity beats pride.

"Your apology for making me watch while you jumped. Jeans, trainers, and a thin sweater. No questions asked until we get there. You can consider yourself forgiven, after." When John uses his officer's voice, even Sherlock shuts up.

Tube. Train. Minicab. Wallingford. Chiltern Park Aerodrome.

The signboard says "London Parachute School". Sherlock glances at John, wondering.

"I can't live with the thought that you jumped alone," John says with a half smile. "This time we're going together."

Half an hour later, Sherlock is wearing overalls and a pair of goggles around his neck. The pressure of the harness is tight and surprisingly sensual around his shoulders and thighs as he follows John out of the hangar, in the sudden sunlight between two cloudbanks. They walk in silence toward the Cessna waiting on the grass runway. John seems distant, thoughtful. Very much in command. Sherlock saw Capt. John H. Watson in action only once, at Baskerville. This is something different, not for show. This is John as he was on the battlefield. For the first time in his adult life, Sherlock is content to follow.

They take off. Sun-and-clouds. 14.000 feet.

"So, as I said: come and sit on my lap, legs hanging down from the door, then off we go. Belly forward, chin up, hands on the harness at your shoulders. After the parachute opens, we can talk. You will have to curl your legs well up for landing, I'm shorter than you. All right?"

Sherlock's mind is empty, his brow fresh with the chilly air of the heights. He feels John's compact warm body linked closely to his own by the double harness. He feels John's half-gloved hand slip over his. He's not afraid.

"All right," he answers.

"Let's go."

It is the second time that Sherlock leaves the natural element of mankind and embraces the void. There are no words for what it feels like: it is unthinkable, and therefore unspeakable, and therefore it can't be remembered. This is the inhuman space of the gods, spitting him out and back down to earth where he belongs. But this time John is with him, they're jumping together, speeding together, and after the first mad tumble off the side of the Cessna, it is John's hands and feet that set him into position, cutting their way down like a blade through an uneven, silky weave of air.

The parachute is pulled open, and suddenly there is silence, broken only by the faint song of the wind among the strings. He hangs on John, from John, legs open and stretched, helpless, unharmed, and safe.

"Like it better this time?"

"Amazing."

"Thank you. I needed it."

"Forgive me?"

"We're even. But don't go alone ever again."

"Next time, together."

"As late as possible."

"We're settled."

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They land on their feet, then roll on their backs when Sherlock overbalances.

John unhooks the harness.

Sherlock turns to face him.

He bows.

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On "catching one's second wind", see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_wind.

With regard to the psychological explanation, however, it should be considered that the phenomenon is known to also take place in performance horses.

Photo by Jamie Lackey, 2010, at http://tripwow.tripadvisor.com/slideshow-photo/cullman-united-states.html?sid=10585142&fid=upload_12838303521-tpfil02aw-7567