

## **Song of innocence and experience**

by mazaher

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*Sherlock Holmes has never shot to kill. Despite his proficiency at self-defence in hand-to-hand combat, the time comes when he does-- to save another.  
Title courtesy of William Blake.*

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The gunshot rings on the walls of the warehouse, bounces off the trussed ceiling, splinters on the concrete pillars, splashes across the crates piled in rows at the far end. The man with the knife gives out an "oh" --half-sigh, half-gurgle-- and sinks to the ground. The knife slips from his hand and clatters on the floor as John rolls away and to his feet in one flowing motion.

"Christ." He kneels beside the fallen body, searching in vain for a pulse.

Sherlock runs toward him, a black figure against the light coming from the open door.

"Are you hurt?"

"I'm fine. He isn't, though." He slowly stands up. "Nice clean shot... and quite timely." He touches his hand to his neck, shows blood. "He meant it."

Sherlock doesn't answer. He's staring at his own hands as though he's never seen them before.

"John... my hands are shaking."

John touches his arm, gently pries the gun from his fingers. The knuckles he grazes through the backstitched holes are chilled.

"It's the first time for you, isn't it?"

Sherlock nods.

"It was never necessary before."

"This time it was."

"I didn't even know him. I can see things *about* him --recently married, no children, no pets, a gambler, early arthritis in left knee, devoted to his father, occasional drug user, worried about getting bald-- but I..."

"You chose my life over his."

"Yes. Innocence over guilt."

"You do know that nobody's innocent. Not me, not you. You accused me of turning you into a hero. Don't turn *me* --or anybody over age two-- into something equally mythical. Nor this man here into ...a prey, for that matter. We're human, Sherlock, every one of us. We choose. You chose me. Thank you, by the way."

"You're welcome."

A small smile between them. A deep breath. Then John blinks.

"Come on, call Lestrade."

Sherlock picks out the phone, and his hands are not shaking anymore.

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*I wander thro' each charter'd street,  
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.*

WILLIAM BLAKE, *London* (1792)