

**Of hearts broken, hearts mended and hearts forgiven.
A springtime dawn chorus**

by mazaher

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It was almost springtime when it happened. A solid week of chilly drizzle on Regent's Park, the bark of the bare horse-chestnuts black as coals under a uniform grey sky. Then, suddenly one early morning, the first thrush calling, and pale green fingers uncurling from the tips of the branches.

I stood at the window, watching sunlight spread like a blessing over the roof and sooty chimneys of the very house on the other side of the road which had seen the end of an endless nightmare, and my friend restored safe and sound to me. So intent I was on remembering, that I didn't hear him come until he almost touched me, and I felt the warmth of his body through his chamber robe and mine.

"Enough to break a heart, isn't it, Watson? Springtime in this great dirty wicked city."

He leaned forward at my side, peering out, and set his right hand on the ledge. I half-turned to look at him. His clean-cut profile, his spare body, his usually nervous hand, now restful next to me.

On a sudden impulse, I took it in mine, turned it, raised it to my lips, and kissed it on the palm.

"Enough to mend a heart, as well," I said. "Mine, for instance. I was thinking about exactly when and how."

I would unfailingly deny witness for Holmes ever blushing in my presence, but if witness were requested about this one time, I would be lying. He looked down thoughtfully at his hand, which I still held between mine.

"Many things have I asked of you, my Watson-- demanded, even, and I never apologised when I should have. But I could never in good conscience ask you to... to love me."

His voice faltered here, and he closed his eyes, lest more could pour out of them than he was willing to allow.

"My dearest Holmes," I said, and it may well be that my words were warmer in tone than it was customary between us. "Your honour as a gentleman and as a friend is faultless, but as an eminently reasonable chap, you will acknowledge the truth of facts above anything else. I am a doctor and I am a soldier. I have seen much; probably more than I should have wanted to. And I can tell you this: one doesn't need to be a woman in order to love a man. The fact is that I do love you. And I really think it is high time something should be done about it."

The thrush kept singing, joined in turn by blackbirds, lapwings and skylarks, finches and warblers and robins.

But we didn't listen.

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I woke up early the next morning. I had slept deeply and without dreams, with the abandon of closure. I returned to full consciousness in one smooth slide, like being reborn. I turned and he was there.

It is a rare occurrence for me to see him sleep. He wakes up early and goes to bed late, if at all, but this time he was so wrapped up in slumber that he didn't feel me awake at his side, watching.

He was half-curved on his right side, facing away, and how little space did he seem to take on the narrow bed. His right hand reposed on his left shoulder, his left half-covered his face. He must have pressed his back against me during the night, while I slept supine next to him. I looked on as the first ray of sunlight, climbing over the roof across the street, crept over the covers and finally reached him. As the gold of morning touched his eyelids, he pushed his face into the pillow, then passed his fingers over his face as though casting a fly. Then he opened his eyes. I saw his hand curling into a fist. Then he rolled over, saw me, and he smiled to shame the sunlight.

"Have you slept well?" I asked, smiling in turn. "How are you this morning?"

"*Monsieur, je suis tout joyeux,*" he answered, and reached his fingertips to touch my mouth. I parted my lips and sucked them in, making him shiver and blink in delight. But neither of us had enough of fingertips. He watched my hands in silence as I undid the buttons on his nightgown, and parted the front to bare his chest. There I began my worship, no less devout for being unholy in the face of the world; then I pushed the garment off his shoulders, sliding it down along his slim strong body, revealing it like a snake is freed of his old skin. Yet I felt that all the while I was being worshipped in my turn with bated breath and quicksilver eyes, and when he could stand it no more,

"May I," he asked in a whisper "may I touch you?"

"I am yours to have and to hold," I surprised myself answering "from this day forward--"

--for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish--"

--till death us do part."

--till death us join closer."

"Kiss me," I said.

He did, and suddenly I knew why he so loves *Tannhäuser*. For so long he had been the prisoner, not of Venus but of Anteros, and now his bonds were released, and the dried-out distaff had bloomed for him in forgiveness.

Outside, the dawn chorus kept singing.

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Various songbirds can be listened to by anyone who fall from their bed early enough in this season. For those who don't:

<http://clip.dj/birds-be-song-thrush-sings-download-mp3-mp4-Tgx4eTGoOuk#v/s2N9BN-mYrw>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=w_xa-JWQjDI

Horse-chestnut buds have a way of unfolding like fingers of alien creatures from a flexed wrist; see a brilliant backlit shot by Martin-James here:

<http://www.flickriver.com/photos/martin-james/2345607919/>

Holmes' French is not mine anymore than CoE marriage vows, which by the way are the last thing I thought would crop up here. Really.

And my deeply felt thanks to athens7, for reasons I shared with her already. As for myself, I'm an idiot... but that's not news.