Title: Eight Minutes
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Genre: Gen
Characters/Pairings: John, Sherlock, Mary, Mrs Hudson
Rating: PG-13
Summary: A slight AU-ish version of the 221B Baker Street scene that follows the confrontation at Leinster Gardens. See Author's Note for more explanation.
Warning: Spoilers for 3x03 "His Last Vow"
Author's Note: This was written as a result of a discussion that we held on the BBC Sherlock Fan Forum in a thread titled "In defence of Dr Watson" (http://sherlock.boardhost.com/viewtopic.php?id=4709). Some forum members felt that during the 221B Baker Street scene in "His Last Vow" that followed the confrontation at Leinster Gardens, John reacted much too coldly to Sherlock's physically deteriorated state, and should have seen all the signs of Sherlock bleeding internally. Other forum members came to John's defence, saying he was so emotionally charged that it blinded him to the severity of Sherlock's discomfort, who was trying to hide it as best as he could. This was written as a result to prove that perhaps there could have been a better way to integrate both and still make the scene work. I hope I succeeded. ☺ (And just for the record: I'm on John's side on this one. I thought Sherlock was hiding it very well.)
Credits: Large portions of the description and dialogue were taken from Ariane DeVere's excellent episode transcript, which can be found at http://arianedevere.livejournal.com/67234.html. Please do not share or upload this fic anywhere without the author's permission.

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The short taxi ride from Leinster Gardens to Baker Street had been quiet. Too quiet. John didn't dare look at Mary, didn't look at Sherlock, didn't look at anything. The world outside passed him by while his thoughts ran a mile a minute.

He got out of the cab first, followed by Sherlock, Mary hung back to pay the fare. He watched out of the corner of his eye; Sherlock standing near the iron gate, waiting for Mary to enter the building as if he wanted to make sure none of them escaped.

When Mary walked past Sherlock without a word, Sherlock lifted an arm. "You go up, I'll be a minute."

John didn't wait, didn't have the patience to wait. The door opened and he took the familiar stairs up to the flat.

Mrs Hudson was in the kitchen, the rubber gloves a tell-tale sign that she'd been cleaning—or at least attempted to. "John," she said.

Mary followed, and it took Mrs Hudson not two seconds to realize something was terribly amiss. "Mary."

Sherlock struggled to get up the stairs, slowly, sluggishly, bracing himself on the bannister. The surgery had weakened him, the lingering pain obvious, the exhaustion from all the previous physical activity taking its toll on his incapacitated body.

That didn't go by Mrs Hudson either, the shock clearly noticeable on her face. "Oh, Sherlock! Oh, good gracious, you look *terrible*."

Sherlock didn't have the patience to deal with any fussing. He snarled, "Get me some morphine from your kitchen. I've run out."

"I don't have any morphine!" was all Mrs Hudson could respond.

"Then what *exactly* is the point of you?!"

She bristled. "*What* is going on?"

"Bloody good question," John cut in.

Sherlock clung to the edge of the doorframe to keep himself steady. Looking at John, he said, "The Watsons are about to have a domestic, and fairly quickly, I hope, because we've got work to do."

John took a quick look at Mary, then looked back at Sherlock, taking a step closer. "Sherlock, we should not be doing this now."

"Yes, we should be doing this *right* now."

"You need to go back to the hospital."

"I'm fine, John," he answered off-handedly, the way he always did when he was clearly deflecting.

"You are *not* fine. Give me your hand."

"No, we need to sort this out. Right now, right here." He pointed at Mary who stood by the fireplace as if she was wishing she could crawl into it and vanish.

John grabbed Sherlock's outstretched arm, holding his wrist firmly with one hand, squeezing the fingernail of Sherlock's index finger with the other before releasing it. "This is not good. This tells me you're bleeding internally."

Sherlock's voice was flat. "An ambulance is already on its way."

"Ambulance?" John repeated. "You called an ambulance?"

"Yes, downstairs. Erratic pulse, localized pain, tense abdomen, poor capillary refill. I know the signs too, John."

"What—" John started, then stopped and shook his head. He went to Sherlock's side, coaxing him towards the armchair. "You need to sit down."

Sherlock didn't resist and let out a low moan when John lowered him into the leather chair. He looked up at Mary, then at John. "This is important. We don't have much time."

John took a few steps back to stand near the desk, turning his head slowly to look at Mary. His eyes went dark, and the anger flooded back at full force. "You."

His face was suddenly full of barely controlled rage, his breaths heavy. "What have I ever done … hmm? My whole life… to deserve you?"

It was Sherlock who answered. "*Everything.*"

"Sherlock, just… shut up."

"Oh, I mean it, seriously. *Everything*. Everything you've ever done is what you did."

John's voice now had a dangerously soft undertone. "Sherlock, one more word—"

"You were a doctor who went to war. You're a man who couldn't stay in the suburbs for more than a month without storming a crack den and beating up a junkie. Your best friend is a sociopath who solves crimes as an alternative to getting high. That's me, by the way." He raised his left hand and waved at John. "Hello. Even the landlady used to run a drug cartel."

"It was my *husband's* cartel. I was just typing," Mrs Hudson protested.

"And exotic dancing."

“Sherlock Holmes, if you’ve been YouTube-ing…”

Sherlock ignored her. “John, you are addicted to a certain lifestyle. You’re abnormally attracted to dangerous situations and people, so is it *truly* such a surprise that the woman you’ve fallen in love with conforms to that pattern?”

John grimaced briefly and then, with his eyes still fixed on Sherlock, he pointed towards his wife. His voice was heart-breaking, full of suppressed tears. “But she wasn’t supposed to *be* like that.”

Mrs Hudson looked across to Mary in shock. Mary lowered her head.

John met Sherlock’s gaze, pointing again across the room, his voice a little stronger. “Why is *she* like that?”

Sherlock looked John straight in the eye, never wavering. “Because you *chose* her.”

John stared back at him, his face unreadable. Sherlock still held his gaze. Finally John turned away. “Why is everything always *my fault*?!”

He furiously kicked the wooden stool next to Sherlock’s chair so that it toppled over with a loud clang. Sherlock jumped a little in his chair, but Mary remained perfectly still.

Mrs Hudson winced and flailed. “Oh, the neighbours!” She hurried away.

John turned to face Mary, breathing heavily. Sherlock spoke again. “John, listen. Be calm and answer me. What *is* she?”

John fixed his gaze on Mary, blinking repeatedly. “My lying wife?”

“No. What is she?”

“And the woman who’s carrying my child who has lied to me since the day I met her?”

“No. Not in this flat, not in this room. Right here, right now, what *is* she?”

A small, humourless smile was fixed on John’s face, his eyes remaining locked on his wife. His head was low on his neck and he looked positively murderous. Silence hung for a long moment, then he sniffed deeply and harshly. “Okay. *Your* way. *Always* your way.”

Sherlock lowered his head and looked away. John turned, clearing his throat, then picked up one of the chairs by the desk and put it down facing the two armchairs and the fireplace. He looked at Mary. “Sit.”

“Why?” she asked.

“Because that’s where they sit, the people who come in here with their stories. The clients—that’s all *you* are now, Mary. You’re a client. This is where you sit and talk and this is where we sit and listen, then we decide if we want you or not.”

Mary watched John slumping into his armchair, not meeting her eyes, then she slowly walked in between him and Sherlock and turned round to sit down on the chair. She roamed around briefly in her shoulder bag before she placed it onto the floor beside her.

There was a silver flash drive in her hand that she put on the table next to John’s chair. It had the letters A.G.R.A. written on the side with black sharpie.

“A.G.R.A. What’s that?” Sherlock asked, his face briefly contorting in a pained grimace that didn’t go by John.

Mary looked from him to John and cleared her throat. “Er… my initials. Everything about who I was is on there.” She looked at John. “If you love me, don’t read it in front of me.”

“Why?”

“Because you won’t love me when you’ve finished, and I don’t want to see that happen.”

With a loud sigh John snatched the drive from the table, looked briefly across to Sherlock and shoved the drive into his left trouser pocket. Sniffing, he pulled himself into a higher sitting position on his chair.

Mary looked across to Sherlock. “How much do you know already?”

Sherlock spoke quietly, his gaze fixed on Mary. “By your skill set, you are or *were* an intelligence agent. Your accent is currently English, but I suspect you are not. You’re on the run from something; you’ve used your skills to disappear. Magnussen knows your secret, which is why you were going to kill him, and I assume you befriended Janine in order to get close to him.”

Sherlock grimaced, shifting uncomfortably in his chair. John’s eyes briefly narrowed in concern, but Sherlock shot him a quick look that pre-empted any action on John’s part.

Mary spoke in a confident voice, “The stuff Magnussen has on me, I would go to prison for the rest of my life.”

John cut in. “So you were just gonna kill him.”

“People like Magnussen *should* be killed. That’s why there are people like me.”

“Perfect. So that’s what you were? An assassin? How could I *not* see that?”

Mary looked at him. “You *did* see that. And you married me. Because he’s right. It’s what you like.”

Sherlock grimaced again, compelling himself to speak through his pain. “So, Mary… any—“

John leaned forward in his chair, interrupting, “Sherlock, when did you call the ambulance? You need—“

Sherlock continued unperturbed, looking at Mary rather than John. “Any documents that Magnussen has concerning yourself, you want extracted and returned.”

“Why would you help me?” she asked.

“Because… you saved my life.”

John’s attention was back on the conversation. “Sor-sorry, what?”

Sherlock took a breath that sounded like he was fighting for oxygen. “When I happened on you and Magnussen, you had a problem. More specifically, you had a witness. The solution, of course, was simple. Kill us both and leave. However, sentiment got the better of you.

“One precisely calculated shot to incapacitate me in the hope that it would buy you more time to negotiate my silence. Of course, you couldn’t shoot Magnussen.” His breathing was becoming more laboured with every word he spoke, but he pressed on. “You calculated that Magnussen would use the fact of your involvement rather than sharing the information with the police as is his M.O., and then you left the way you came. Have I missed anything?”

John sounded incredulous. “*How* did she save your life?”

“She phoned the ambulance.”

"*I* phoned the ambulance."

"She phoned first. You didn't find me for another five minutes. Left to you, I would have died. The average arrival time for a London ambulance is…"

Sherlock lifted his left hand and looked at his watch as the clatter of feet was heard on the stairs. Two paramedics ran into the room.

"Did somebody call an ambulance?" one of them asked.

"Eight minutes," Sherlock finished his sentence. Breathing heavily and with his left hand still raised, he looked towards the paramedics. "Did you bring any morphine? I asked on the phone."

The paramedic looked puzzled. "We were told there was a shooting."

Sherlock answered, "There was. Last week." He held his left wrist with his right hand, his fingers on his pulse point, taking a sharp breath. "But I believe I'm bleeding internally and my pulse is very erratic. You may need to restart my heart on the way."

Sherlock put his hands on the arms of the chair and started to push himself upwards, not quite succeeding as his legs gave out under him. John and Mary hurried forward and each of them took hold of an upper arm to support him.

The paramedics ran towards them.

Concern was etched on John's face. "Come on, Sherlock."

Sherlock intently stared into John's eyes, clinging to his shoulder despite his body failing him. "John? John. Magnussen is all that matters now. You can trust Mary. She saved my life."

John's voice went quiet. "She shot you."

"Mixed messages, I grant you."

Sherlock grimaced, crying out in pain as his knees finally gave way completely. John's grip was still strong on his friend's arm. "Sherlock? Sherlock."

He watched with despair as the paramedics started to tend to Sherlock. "All right, take him. Got him?" He finally released him and let the two men ease him onto the floor.

An oxygen mask was placed over Sherlock's mouth and nose, a saline IV quickly inserted in his arm. John gave them a quick rundown of Sherlock's medical history, ignoring Mary completely who had slinked into the background, witnessing everything without a word.

It took a few minutes to get Sherlock on the backboard one of the paramedics fetched from the ambulance, and then loading him onto the stretcher downstairs. Mary was watching it all with an indeterminate expression from the doorway of 221 Baker Street.

John told the paramedics he would ride with them but that he needed a minute. He walked up to Mary, his voice low and dangerous. "You will go to our flat and stay there. And God help me, if Sherlock doesn't make it through this…" He stopped there, his eyes boring into Mary's.

She just nodded, silently accepting her fate.

John narrowed his eyes, then turned on his heels and climbed into the back of the ambulance. Mary watched it drive away with wailing sirens.

CUT TO:

INT. SHERLOCK'S PARENTS' KITCHEN. DAY