Title: The Circle Of Life
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PROMPT: Any, any, 'Alas, essentially, we are all of us only meat.'
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John's voice was low, just barely audible, tinged with a sadness he normally wouldn't allow himself to express. "Sherlock, I don't understand. How… how can you be so cold about this?"

Sherlock gave him a shrug, his face carefully neutral.

John searched for the smallest hint of pain in his friend's expression, but found none.

Sherlock turned his back to him, staring blankly at the dark night sky through the hospital waiting room window. "Alas, essentially, we are all of us only meat, John. An accumulation of cells, bound together by proteins, ions and water. And there comes a point, sooner or later, where that perfectly constructed organism stops working. It's the circle of life. You of all people should know that."

He knew it was Sherlock's coping mechanism. Scientific rationalisation over genuine emotion — always that, never the obvious.

The plastic chair creaked as John got up and hesitantly sidled up to Sherlock. He lifted his arm and let his hand hover for a second before he gently placed it on his friend's shoulder. It was an awkward gesture at best, with the difference in height between them, but John didn't let that deter him.

When his palm touched the fabric of Sherlock's suit jacket, the detective's head lowered ever so slightly and John could feel him sag a fraction of an inch beneath his hand.

He lightly squeezed Sherlock's shoulder, not sure what to say. But maybe there wasn't anything to say. They'd always lived on stimulating conversation as much as semi-comfortable stretches of silence.

He let his hand linger for another few seconds, then removed it and softly said, "I'll be outside. Take your time."

Sherlock didn't respond, and John understood. Maybe it hadn't sunk in yet. Maybe it had sunk in too deep. The storm was yet to come, and one thing John Watson knew with a fierce certainty: He would be there through all of it. Whatever it took.