Fandom: Sherlock (BBC)
Title: Undue Sentiment
Author: tj_teejay (AO3 – Tumblr – Instagram – Reddit – E-Mail)
Genre: Gen
Characters/Pairings: John, Sherlock
Rating: PG-13
Warning: Contains spoilers for all of season 3, especially "His Last Vow"
Summary: Sherlock isn't feeling well, so John receives a call from Mrs Hudson. Dr Watson to the rescue, which gives Sherlock and John a chance to talk about things previously left unsaid. Set a few months after "His Last Vow".
Author's Note: Dear Sherlock Holmes, I'm sorry I put you through this. Because this is pretty much gratuitous Sherlock whump with a tad of h/c mixed in. It was unavoidable that whump queen me would eventually have to go there, seeing how I've practiced plenty on Neal Caffrey. However, it was fun, and I have no regrets.
Thanks go out to sj4iy for the invaluable comments and corrections. Please do not share or upload this fic anywhere without the author's permission.

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"John, is that you?"

John pressed his mobile phone to his ear, recognizing the voice. "Mrs Hudson?"

"Oh, it *is* you, is it?"

He put down the turkey sandwich he'd been enjoying on his lunch break. "Yes, it's me. What can I do for you?"

"I don't know if I can ask this of you, because I'm sure you're very busy… but could you come over?"

John was immediately alert. "Has something happened? Is Sherlock all right?"

"I don't think he's feeling well. He keeps saying he's fine, but you know how he is. I'm a bit worried."

"Is he ill?"

"I'm not certain, but I think he's… well, there is no delicate way to put it. I heard him being sick a few times, and he doesn't look very good."

"Is he running a fever?"

"I don't know, dear, he's in a bit of a mood. He threw me out when I was trying to bring him tea."

John nodded, although obviously Mrs Hudson wouldn't be able to see it. "All right, I'll be there in half an hour."

"Thank you, John."

He hung up with, "Any time, Mrs Hudson. Bye."

John pocketed his smartphone, his mind already in remote diagnosis mode. Could be a simple stomach flu. Antiemetics? Antibiotics? Couldn't be sure without seeing the patient first. What about a saline drip? Probably overkill, but better safe than sorry. Infusion line, cannula, sterile wipes, plastic gloves, clinical thermometer.

Another thought entered his mind. Drugs? Could it be that Sherlock was on drugs again? A slight pang of guilt twinged in the vicinity of his stomach for not having paid much attention to his best friend in the last few weeks.

Weeks? Months even? His daughter was growing so fast, and there just didn't seem to be enough time to balance both a healthy family life and crime solving with London's only consulting detective.

He took a quick look at his computer to check his patient schedule for the day. Wednesday afternoons were usually reserved for house calls—mostly the local nursing home and some of his less mobile elderly patients. There was certainly room to squeeze in one more patient.

He added a few supplies to his doctor's bag before he left, making a mental note to pop into the Boots on the corner for some rehydration sachets and Lucozade.

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His key to Baker Street 221B still got stuck about halfway in, the way it always had, and John had to apply just the right amount of pressure for the lock to open. The black wooden door revealed the familiar hallway, and as he stepped in, he involuntarily listened to noises from upstairs—none of which he could discern.

A soft rap on Mrs Hudson's door announced his presence, and she gave him a quick, welcoming smile. "Ah, John."

He gestured upwards with one finger. "I take it our patient is upstairs."

"I haven't heard anything for a while. Maybe he went to bed."

"I'll go check on him."

Mrs Hudson nodded benevolently and John made his way up the stairs.

A knock on Sherlock's door was met by silence, as was John calling out his name. This in and of itself wasn't usually all that worrying, but John couldn't quite suppress a feeling of apprehension creeping into his stomach.

What greeted him when he opened the door was the same unruly flat he was used to seeing, but there were unmistakable retching sounds from the bathroom that didn't quite belong.

He was by the bathroom door in a few, quick steps, finding Sherlock on his knees, hunched over the toilet, clutching the rim of the seat while he expelled bile into the porcelain bowl in agonizing heaves.

"Jesus, Sherlock," John muttered, taking in his friend's sickly pale complexion and lifeless brown curls that were sticking to his forehead. The burgundy bathrobe over dark blue pyjamas stood out in stark contrast to Sherlock's pallor.

Before John could step closer, Sherlock fended off any assistance with one hand, his voice barely a croak. "Stay away."

John stayed where he was, trying not to wince as Sherlock dry-heaved again, his grip on the toilet seat so firm that his knuckles were white.

John felt utterly helplessly for a moment, then went over to the sink to wet a washcloth. Wringing it out, he watched vigilantly as he waited for a moment of reprieve.

That moment came when he saw Sherlock finally relax just a little. He leaned back with his eyes closed and panted like he'd just jogged up the stairs. John crouched down at a safe distance, holding out the washcloth. "Here."

He could see the exhaustion in Sherlock's eyes when he finally opened them. Accepting the proffered towel and wiping it across his mouth, he commented dryly, "Not my most graceful moment."

"Not my most revolting experience. By a long shot," John countered. "Feeling better?"

Sherlock let out a subdued groan. "*Better* is a relative term that needs a baseline to be measured by. If you mean better than yesterday, then the answer would have to be no. If you mean better than two and a half minutes ago, then yes, but only marginally."

A small smile found its way onto John's lips. This was the Sherlock he knew and loved.

Sherlock drew in an audible breath and flushed the toilet, pushing himself upward. John wordlessly got out of the way so Sherlock could reach the sink. His hovering two feet away earned him a look of reproach from Sherlock, followed by a cynical, "John. I am very capable of making my own way back to the living room, thank you."

John gave a curt nod, knowing full well that he was being dismissed. “Well, you’ll know where to find me, then.”

John busied himself with looking for a suitable bucket or plastic bowl in the recesses of the kitchen cupboards, finding things along the way which he would have rather never set eyes on.

It took a few minutes for Sherlock to scuffle into the room, looking very much the worse for wear. John watched warily from the kitchen entrance, light green plastic bucket in hand, as Sherlock eased himself onto the sofa, drawing up the blanket that had lain rumpled from previous use. He realized Sherlock must have been at this for a while.

“So, how long as this been going on?” John asked him.

“Did Mrs Hudson call you?”

“Of course she called me. She was worried.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes. “Undue sentiment. You haven’t called my brother, have you?”

“Not so far, no. Should I?”

“No!” Sherlock shot back a little too quickly.

John chuckled lightly. “You haven’t answered my question.”

“Yes, I have. I told you not to call my brother.”

“You know that’s not what I meant.”

Sherlock sighed. “This morning. Approximately 5 o’clock. I apologize that I can’t nail it down to the exact minute.”

John stepped closer, setting the bucket within easy reach for Sherlock. “This’ll make it a bit easier.”

He sat down on the edge of the couch table, studying his friend’s face. “So we have frequent spells of vomiting. Stomach cramps. Fever. Have I missed anything?”

“Hardly brilliant deductions there, John.”

“Sherlock…” John said warningly.

“Okay, fine,” he said in resigned tone. “Raging headache. Chills.”

“That’s it?”

“I’d say that’s more than enough.”

“Abdominal tenderness?”

“Not really.”

“That’s not good enough to rule out appendicitis.”

“Are you my bloody doctor now?” Sherlock retorted impatiently.

“I am today,” John just said.

“It’s a simple case of food poisoning. Most likely the sushi I had last night, seeing how raw fish is known to contain *V. parahaemolyticus*. Causes symptoms that include diarrhoea, abdominal cramps, nausea, vomiting, headache, fever, and chills. Could also be the Egg Benedict from yesterday, possible infection sources in the egg yolk, sauce hollandaise and— Ugh.” Sherlock squeezed his eyes shut. “Can’t think about food right now. Suffice to say, there are several likely scenarios that could have brought this on. Appendicitis, given my symptoms, or absence thereof, is not one of them.”

John nodded once. It did seem like a reasonable explanation. He went over to his bag and got out the thermometer. He held it up for Sherlock to see.

“I know you’re not going to like this, but please just let me take your temperature.”

Sherlock closed his eyes, maybe a bit too theatrically. “Only if you’re out of my hair after that.”

“I’m not going to make any promises,” John said, sticking the infrared thermometer into Sherlock’s ear. It beeped once, and John read aloud, “38.6. I’d like to think you’ll live.”

“Thank you for the vote of confidence,” Sherlock said, which was followed by his face forming into a pained grimace, his left arm clutching his stomach.

John reached for the bucket, drawing it closer, but Sherlock shook his head, his facial muscles relaxing after a few seconds. “I don’t suppose you have any drugs on you that could make this experience just a little less unbearable?”

“Actually, I did bring antiemetics, but they’re not indicated for food poisoning.”

Sherlock gave him a disdainful expression. “A mere formality.”

“What you need is bed rest and fluids. Speaking of which, have you been able to keep anything down?”

Sherlock grunted. “You found me spitting out bile not fifteen minutes ago. What do you think?”

“I *did* bring saline.”

“The only way I am going to let you stick me with a needle is to administer drugs that will make this go away.”

John just shrugged. “Suit yourself. Listen, I need to make a few other house calls. Will you be okay for a while?”

Sherlock draped an arm over his eyes. “Draw the curtains on your way out. There’s too much light in here.”

“I brought some Lucozade and there’s these rehydration sachets on the kitchen table that you need to dissolve in water. Try to drink some of those, yeah?”

The response was barely more than a grunt, although John thought he might’ve made out a, “Not likely,” somewhere in there.

“Yeah, I didn’t think so,” he muttered under his breath.

“Goodbye, John,” Sherlock mumbled.

John just smiled and carefully closed the door behind him to make as little noise as possible.

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An emergency at the nursing home had kept John longer than anticipated. It was going on 6 pm when he finally got the chance to catch a breath and call Mary. She was very sweet about it, and assured John that she and Louisa would be just fine—he should go and mother-hen Sherlock for the night.

John sighed, because he had a feeling it wasn’t going to be a very pleasant evening. Sherlock could be irritable at the best of times. An ill Sherlock could quickly turn into nightmare material, and he tried to mentally prepare for the acerbic verbal abuse Sherlock was undoubtedly going to hit him with.

Back at Baker Street, the living room was empty, the Lucozade and the sachets in the kitchen untouched. Tip-toeing into the bedroom, he found Sherlock curled up in bed, unmoving, with the bucket sitting on the floor nearby. It was mercifully empty.

He quietly closed the door and busied himself with making a cup of tea and hunting for biscuits that weren’t weeks past the Best Before date. In the end he contented himself with dry oatcakes for lack of anything more edible.

A pile of dishes by the sink smelled of crusted scraps and remnants of stale coffee, so John rolled up his sleeves and got to work. Somehow it didn’t quite stop there, and before he knew it, he was

wiping down the kitchen counter, scrubbing at the chemical burns on the kitchen table and throwing away ungodly indefinables from the fridge.

He was crouching down by the rubbish bin when a familiar voice from behind him inquired, "*What* are you doing?"

He drew himself up and faced Sherlock. "Oh, you're up."

"Evidently. And you're…" he let the question hang in the air.

"Cleaning."

"Cleaning?"

"I know, the concept is entirely alien to you, but, really, Sherlock, this place is just one step up from a rubbish dump."

He took a moment to size up his friend, who looked a little less pallid than the last time he saw him. "Feeling better, I take it?"

Sherlock sat down at the now immaculate table. "As you so aptly put it, I'd like to think I'll live."

"No more throwing up?"

"Not since, oh, I don't know, four hours ago."

John indicated the Lucozade and salt sachets on the counter. "Think you can tackle any of those?"

Sherlock drew a face. "A better question would be 'Why would I want to?'"

"You need to get rehydrated."

"You sound like my mother."

"Could she do a better job of convincing you to drink those?"

"No."

John sighed. There it was—nightmare material. "You always do this against better judgment," he mumbled.

"A cross I bear gladly."

Sherlock eyed the opened pack of oatcakes on the table. He took one out and nibbled on it. John watched this with a certain sense of relief.

He retrieved a freshly cleaned glass from the overhead cupboard and poured some of the bright orange soft drink into it. Then, clanking the drink down on the table harder than he had intended, he sat down across from Sherlock and said, “See it as a favour to me.”

Sherlock looked at him, drawing in an exasperated breath. “You know I don’t do favours, but I’ll make an exception.”

John shook his head, because he knew that wasn’t exactly true. He’d seen Sherlock do plenty of favours—to Lestrade, to Molly, even to Mycroft. Always the drama queen.

He kept studying his friend, trying to find causes for concern other than sudden stomach trouble. The subdued guilt kept nagging at the back of his mind, because he really hadn’t paid much attention to Sherlock’s life as of late.

Sherlock’s sleeves were down, so he couldn’t nonchalantly check for track marks. He tried to discern if Sherlock’s pupils reacted normally but didn’t get very far there, either. Nicotine had a tendency to constrict pupils, and it was hard to tell if Sherlock had been at the cigarettes or nicotine patches recently.

He wasn’t quite sure on how to broach the matter, knowing that Sherlock always became defensive when the particular subject of drugs came up. John tried advancing slowly. “So, how has life been treating you?”

Sherlock gave him a frown. “Small talk, John? Really?”

“Yes, well, we haven’t seen each other for a while.”

“Is this where you start inquiring about whether I’m eating healthy or sleeping enough?” There was a provocative edge in Sherlock’s tone. “Or is this the part where you wrap a carefully crafted accusation in a seemingly harmless remark that I’m not showing any interest in the developmental progress of your offspring?”

“No. God, no. But I hope you know that you’re always welcome to come round to our place.”

Sherlock's face drew up. “Salivating infants, the eternal malodour of dirty nappies, and the inability to finish a conversation due to a baby's incessant crying. You see my point, don’t you?”

John would have been lying if he'd said that this didn’t hurt just a little bit, but then he reminded himself who the statement was coming from. “Yes, I see your point,” he said, perhaps a little too huffily.

Awkward silence dominated the room for a moment, which Sherlock broke by taking another sip of Lucozade and snarling, “I wish you weren’t making me drink this.”

John narrowed his eyes, and he wasn't quite sure how exactly it happened that he said the question out loud, but suddenly it was there, tainting the air between them. "Sherlock, have you been taking drugs?"

Sherlock's eyes seemed to darken. "You definitely need to work on your careful crafting of accusations."

John shook his head. "Please don't laugh it off, Sherlock. There's a reason why this was one of my first thoughts when Mrs Hudson rang me up today."

"Oh, so you just assume that since you're not here anymore to watch my every move, I'd fall into despair and resort to instantaneous substance abuse? Thank you for the confidence you've placed in me."

"Come on, Sherlock, you know it's not quite that black and white. A lot has happened in the last six months. I mean, for God's sake, you shot a man in cold blood, and then just carried on like it wasn't a big deal."

"Well, it *wasn't*."

"And your insisting on that is what really worries me. Because I know what it's like. There's a reason they make law enforcement officers and soldiers go to counselling sessions after events like that. Not to mention the Moriarty thing on top of all that."

"You have no idea how my mind works," Sherlock said in an emotionless voice, his expression stony.

"You store it away in your Mind Palace, or whatever it is you do. I won't even pretend to imagine how that works, because, yes, you keep insisting that a simple mind like mine couldn't even begin to understand the vastness of your intellect. But can you look me in the eye and say honestly that you haven't considered using?"

Sherlock raised his hands in exasperation, his tone icy. "I will sign you a written statement that I haven't been using drugs. Would that make you happy?"

"What would make me happy is if I didn't have to worry that it was a possibility every time you go off the rails!"

That silenced Sherlock, and John wasn't sure how to interpret the look on his friend's face. Suddenly the room felt much too quiet—neither man speaking, avoiding each other's glances.

John finally looked up. His voice was genuine when he said, "I'm sorry, that was uncalled for."

For a moment, it looked as if Sherlock were studying his fingers as they gripped the glass on the table. Then, in a quiet but assertive voice, he said, "I'm not using drugs. Unless you count the occasional cigarette."

“And you’ll just keep avoiding the topic of having shot Magnussen?”

“I’ve dealt with it. It’s a closed chapter. And yes, I shot a man… but doing so has saved many lives, including your wife’s and possibly your own. It will take a lot more than a power-hungry psychopath to drive me to opiate use.”

John let out a sarcastic chuckle. “Let me remind you that the last time I dragged you out of a crack house, it was *that very same* power-hungry psychopath that drove you to opiate use.”

“Well, yes, but that was different.”

“How is it different when you throw away all moral and ethical principle and get high just to get the attention of a Danish megalomaniac?!”

Sherlock sighed in exasperation. “You don’t understand.”

“No,” John said sharply, “I guess I don’t.”

“Why?” Sherlock asked, “Why is this so important to you?”

“*Why*? Jesus, Sherlock, why am I still surprised that you don’t know that? Drugs do terrible things to people. God knows, I’ve seen it happen one too many times.”

“But you fail to see the difference between them and me. I’m not some random junkie who’ll end up dead with a needle up his arm.”

John let out a sardonic breath through his nose. “Yeah, and I’m sure that every dead junkie has said the same thing about themselves at some point or another.”

“For God’s sake, John, would you please stop projecting?”

“Projecting?”

“Yes, projecting. This is all about your sister.”

“My sister?”

Sherlock hid behind his familiar mask of aloofness. “That's the call you’re afraid of, isn't it? The one where someone will tell you her blood alcohol level was so high that her organs started failing and she wen—“

“Stop. Just stop,” John interrupted him. “You’re not turning this around on me.”

Sherlock cocked his head to one side. “I’m right though, aren’t I?”

“Maybe you are, but that's not what we are discussing here.”

“A-ha!”

John stood up with such force that he caused the legs of the chair to scrape across the wooden floor. He turned his back to Sherlock with palms on his forehead, his fingers intertwined. His breath clearly audible, he breathed in and out… once, twice, before he faced his friend again.

“I—” he started, his tone of voice matching the sombre intensity of his expression, every word carefully pronounced, “I don’t ever want to receive that call. The one where someone tells me that,” he pointed a finger at Sherlock, “*your* toxicity levels were so high that your organs started failing. Not *ever*.”

Their gazes crossed before Sherlock’s flickered back to the table top. Heavy silence filled the air, eventually broken by Sherlock’s unexpectedly low voice.

“Sometimes I forget that it’s not just me anymore.”

A fleeting trace of incomprehension spread across John’s face before he understood. “Maybe you haven’t noticed it before, but it’s never been just you.”

“Until four years ago, it was.”

“And that’s where you’re wrong. There’s a lovely lady downstairs who was worried enough about you that she rang me. You have loving parents, who I may reiterate, are surprisingly normal. You have a brother who cares about you.”

This elicited a dismissive snort from Sherlock. “Oh, please.”

John didn’t quite manage to hide a small smile. “And even *you* can’t be clueless enough not to notice that Molly Hooper’s had a crush on you since the moment she met you.”

“Next thing you’re going to mention Gabe, aren’t you?”

“Gabe Lestrade?”

“Yes.”

“*Greg*.”

“Right.”

“So you see my point, don’t you?” John said.

“Please stop, because all the affection in the room is robbing me of the oxygen I need to breathe.”

“You are one inveterate pi—“

Sherlock tsk-tsked him. “I’m sickly and fragile, remember? Insulting your patients is hardly considerate bedside manner.”

“You’re not even *in* bed.”

“Being in bed is *so* dull. God, I need a good case to distract me from all of… this.”

“Sickly and fragile,” John repeated, shooting Sherlock a mock chiding look.

“Get me my laptop.”

“Stomach cramps, vomiting, fever. Not four hours ago.”

“Laptop,” Sherlock commanded.

“Well…” John yielded and took his mobile out of his pocket, “…at the very least, it’s a sign that you really *are* feeling better.”

“Yes, yes,” Sherlock said with a dismissive wave of a hand.

John tapped his phone’s touchscreen a few times, then held out the phone to Sherlock. “Here. Three new messages in your inbox.”

Sherlock scanned through them with an inquisitive glint in his eyes that vanished quickly.

“Boring,” he commented, scrolling further, then another, “Boring,” and he finally put the phone down on the table with a disgusted, “All boring.”

“Oh, I should have mentioned this. I think your phone rang earlier.”

That prompted Sherlock to get up and find his mobile. He strode back into the kitchen a minute later, the phone to his ear. When he’d finished listening to his voicemail, he looked at John.

“Lestrade. Has a case of a murdered local landowner out in Herefordshire. Bit of a mystery, apparently. Could be interesting. Are you coming?”

“What—*now*?”

Sherlock was already busy looking something up on his smartphone.

John looked at Sherlock intently. “You’re travelling a hundred miles out to the Welsh border. Tonight?”

“No, not *tonight*,” Sherlock said impatiently. “The 7:45 from Paddington looks promising. Are you coming or not?”

“Sherlock, I have patients, a wife, a daughter.”

“Yeah, yeah, I get it. You have a life now. I have a case. Oh, I *do* hope this will be a good one.”

John pondered this for a moment. “Well, I suppose I could try to reschedule a few things.”

Sherlock gave him a knowing smile, then typed something into his phone.

A hundred and twenty miles away, Lestrade’s mobile phone beeped. When he brought up the text message, it was succinct and to the point as usual.

Currently incapacitated. Will be
arriving around 11 tomorrow.
-SH

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THE END.