

Soothing Skills

Author: CK

Rating: PG / K+

Summary: John wakes to a terrible pain in both his leg and shoulder - and is introduced to a special skill of Sherlock's.

Disclaimer: Leave it all to the BBC, Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat. I'm actually quite happy with them having it - even if the BBC could be a bit quicker with passing it on to us.

Author's Notes: Fill for prompt in LJ Kink Meme. It was asked for "a short little fic with Sherlock comforting a hurting John. Maybe massaging him to help with the seized muscles or something."

Sorry it's not as fluffy as it maybe could have been (and I intended it to be ^^), but I hope it will do nevertheless.

John Watson had often expected to get hurt in his line of work. Not his doctor's work, no; his job at the clinic he had taken up earlier this month was normal everyday business. But there was his *other* work, the one that was more a hobby than anything else, and yet just as important: Being a freelance detective at the side of Sherlock Holmes. And that certainly was dangerous pastime; or so he had thought.

Contrary to his work with Sherlock that often brought him in danger, but had never seriously hurt him so far, his regular job had proven to be quite unsafe just a day ago.

It had been a drug first-timer. Completely overwhelmed by the effects of the substance, the young man, brought to the ER by a friend who luckily had realized that the fun part had ended, had refused every offer and attempt of help from John, and struggled hard enough against the hold of two strong male nurses to hit John with his foot - or more precise, hit his left shoulder.

When the doctor woke up this morning, it was from sharp pain. *In his leg*. Of course. He didn't know why he had expected to feel the effect of the accidental assault where he'd been hit; where his old injury was. Pain that was supposed to be in his shoulder had ever since manifested itself in his leg. Lucky for him meeting Sherlock had improved this condition; having a purpose in life sure helped to distract his mind from its psychosomatic detours.

Now, however, the pain was back, and he wasn't sure it was just in his head this time. The soreness in his shoulder - not as bad, but still there - had probably caused him to hold his body in an unnatural position during the night, and now his muscles made him pay the price for it. He should have listened to his colleagues and taken the meds they offered, but he had believed that it would be all right, and he had relied on pain medication for too long anyways.

Groaning, he got up, dragged himself to the door and then out of the room, step by step, nasty shots of hot needles hitting his leg with each forward movement, each weight that rested on the limp for too long. Somehow he managed to make his way downstairs and into the living room; he aimed for the small drawer in the kitchen where they stored any legal drugs they had.

To his surprise, he found his flatmate lying on the couch, reading the morning newspaper. It was too early for him; Sherlock was never up at eight in the morning, unless they had a case - and then he didn't just lie on the sofa, still in his pajamas and dressing gown. Not that John cared, really. There were a few other things on his mind - little, round things, mostly. And as usual, Sherlock ignored him anyways, mumbled a good morning, but never made any effort to lower the paper and look at his friend.

The moaned response Sherlock got caught the detective's attention, though. Before John knew what was happening the younger man stood before him, regarding him with a thoughtful expression that was followed by a deep frown.

"You are not well," he stated matter-of-factly, and John rolled his eyes.

"Brilliant deduction," he snapped, "no, I am not. Would you please let me-

"Pain in your shoulder and leg. Very strong, judging by your posture; you're trying to favor both parts of your body that hurt, but the fear of discomfort leads to unnecessary tension in your muscles that only worsens the pain. Something must have happened during your shift yesterday - what was it?" They hadn't talked when John came home late in the evening; Sherlock hadn't been in his most talkative moods, and the doctor had simply wanted to take a hot shower and then go to bed.

"Patient kicked me in the shoulder. Can I please get the pain meds now?" John tried to walk past Sherlock, but the detective wouldn't let him.

"Medication won't fight the cause, only the effect."

"No, really?" Sarcasm dripped from his words. "I'm a doctor, remember? But before I can take care of the cause, I need to get rid of the pain. I can barely stand or walk, Sherlock, I--"

"Follow me."

"What?" Halfway through the kitchen, Sherlock stopped and whirled around.

"Is the pain affecting your ears? I said follow me." Then he was gone through the door that led into his hallway.

"Why?" John demanded, the meds forgotten for the moment.

"Because you are in no condition to work, and neither you will be with medication. Consequently you are also of no use to me and our cases, which is not acceptable. I can, however, change that," he heard his flatmate's bodiless voice coming from the general direction of his bedroom. Not sure what kind of idea Sherlock had, he remained rooted to the spot, the lack of movement allowing him a few seconds of more or less bearable pain.

His friend was as insistent as ever - seconds later he reappeared in the door, inquiring, "What are you waiting for?!", and John realized that it wasn't as if he had many alternatives. If Sherlock really had a way of helping him - well, he was desperate enough to gladly take whatever he was offered. And he could still say no, after all, as soon as he knew what the other man had in mind.

He started for the door, more limping than walking as tried to suppress the pain. It was piercing, worse than ever before, and weakened his muscles so that he had to hold on to the wall, fearing his leg would give out under him. That he entered Sherlock's bedroom - where he'd been only two or three times before, and never felt to have any business being in either - a little while and a few torturous meters later should have irritated him, but he couldn't be bothered to care in that moment when he was trying his best not to lose his footing. That was until Sherlock pointed at his bed.

"Lie down," he ordered, and John gave him a funny look.

"I'm not going--"

"Don't be ridiculous, John, I'm trying to help you. Lie down." This was a joke. Had to be. Only that Sherlock not in the slightest looked like he was not serious. And then, when wasn't the detective ever? Still suspicious and unsure of what to expect, John resigned to his fate and stretched on Sherlock's bed. It took him a lot not to protest when his flatmate climbed onto it as well and settled down next to John's legs, pushing one of his own between them, so that his left thigh was between the consulting detective's knees.

"Are you going to tell me what you are plan-- Oh good God-- *Jesus!*" Sherlock didn't lose any time. He pressed the thumbs of his hands right into the areas that hurt most; one at his leg and one, and that was the surprising part since there hadn't been much notable pain before, at his shoulder. Hadn't it been for Sherlock's weight on him, John would have fled bed - pain or not.

While Sherlock's fingers that were wrapped around his thigh only applied moderate pressure, the one at his shoulder dug in deep; thumb just above his clavicle, fingers at his back at the edge of his shoulder blade. He barely had a second to get used to the pressure before all five digits started to move in slow, small circles. Pain shot through John's whole body, searing in the first few seconds, but then lessening considerably until it was almost... pleasant?

Breathing heavily, John opened his eyes he hadn't realized he had closed, and looked up at Sherlock leaning over him. His friend stared in concentration at his own hand on John's shoulder, and for a moment the doctor thought that this was probably the strangest of positions he had ever found himself in with his friend; or any friend, for that matter.

The thumb at his shoulder never refrained from its movement, skillfully massaging the pain away, while the hand at his thigh shifted slightly, changing pressure points. It gave him a sensation he felt right down to his toes; a good kind of pain that promised relief, promised to go away soon and not eat itself into his muscles and nerves. And indeed after another few minutes his leg felt better than it had in a long time.

Both the thigh and the shoulder received continued attention for yet more minutes, and John's eyes slipped closed again as he savored the feeling of his pain slowly subsiding. When Sherlock stopped and took his hands away, he had a hard time not to object.

"John?" The deep, soothing voice washed over his relaxed body and mind, eliciting merely a hum in return. "John!" Sherlock said again, this time louder, and man in question frowned, finally opening his eyes. He noticed that his friend had left the bed, something that had been lost on him, and looked down at him, waiting. "Turn around."

"Huh?"

"Turn around, I'm not finished. And take off your shirt." Hadn't he seen the determination on Sherlock's face, he sure would have heard it in his voice. Obviously his friend had no idea what effect his skillful touch had - it took John some effort to pull himself out of the idleness that had befallen him, heave his body up to pull his pajama jacket over his head and put it aside, before turning around until he lay on his belly. Only then he realized that he hadn't even argued about the shirt part; not that there were more important matters on his mind right now than the fact that he was lying on Sherlock's bed, half naked.

Or that his friend climbed back onto same bed and sat down astride his backside. It occurred to him that there was a number of people who'd love to see that, for different reasons - starting with a certain lady downstairs. He would have to thoroughly consider this later. Much later.

Sherlock's fingers, now coated in an oily substance it seemed, - God only knew where *that* came from - smoothed over his left shoulder, almost caressing, before he began to gently knead and soften the scar tissue there; then his fingers worked deeper into the skin and muscles. It was as if he sorted the strings one by one, untangling them, loosening them. It wasn't the most comfortable feeling, it even hurt; but John felt immediate improvement nonetheless.

The attention his ribcage and armpits got definitely fell into the category unpleasant. Even though he by now trusted Sherlock to know what he was doing, John for the first time since this massage session had started considered stopping his friend.

"Oh...ow... Sher--ow! That really hurts!" he protested when a thumb pressed into a point between his armpit and chest, and was accompanied by a piercing pain echoing through him.

"You really ought to take more care of yourself, John," Sherlock commented, and the man beneath him snorted in mock laughter.

"Says the right one, he who doesn't eat and sleep nearly enough."

"I'm not the one lying here in need of help because I'm in pain." John opened his mouth at this, but closed it again almost right away, knowing that Sherlock was right. Whatever skills this man possessed beyond what John had already learned about him - putting every strain of their detective work behind him just like that certainly was the most amazing one.

Half an hour passed - though John wasn't sure about that, it could very well have been longer - before Sherlock got up once more. The doctor immediately missed the warm hands on his skin, as well as the relaxing movements that had taken the place of the pain a little while ago. His upper body felt heavy, and a bit sore maybe, but other than that he could have fallen asleep right on the spot. Not that Sherlock let him.

"Turn around again. I'll be right back." For a moment longer John didn't move; when he finally decided that he couldn't stay where he was anyways and thus falling asleep wasn't an option, he sat up and stretched carefully. When Sherlock reentered the bedroom, he was on his back as asked to, but propped up on his elbows; eyeing the tube his friend was holding with a mixture of curiosity and suspicion.

"What is that?"

"Voltarol." John didn't know what he had expected; but somehow, despite the fact that he should have known better, it didn't include Sherlock crawling atop of him again - to *straddle* him. The detective's knees rested on the sides of his torso, hips hovering right over his own. "And I told you to lie down," was what any thoughts John rather didn't have in that moment where interrupted by; as well as by the hand on his chest, pressing him onto the mattress.

Soft, deft fingers spread the cream on his shoulder where the patient's foot had hit him. He assumed the area was well visible; he had only caught a quick glimpse at it, not really able to see it without a mirror, but his shoulder had sported an angry red mark the night before already, so there wasn't much guesswork needed to know how it looked now.

Sherlock took his time massaging the ointment into his skin, carefully though, nothing left of the earlier medically useful kneading of muscles. It was almost like a gentle caress, like...

John bit his lip to stop himself from groaning. It was absurd. They were two friends, one in need of help, and the other giving the same, nothing more. But then, John thought, had a lack of awkwardness been a true reason for worry. This kind of physical contact usually didn't and shouldn't happen between friends. Well. Apparently unless one was taking care the other to ease his pain. He just wondered if this included the tension he felt between them.

This was more messed up than John was ready to contemplate.

"I could do that myself, you know," he finally decided to comment. His voice held no accusation or sarcasm; merely appreciation and a tad insecurity as his head tried to progress the situation. Sherlock didn't answer, didn't even acknowledge the words, seemingly engrossed in his task. But John couldn't let it go. He needed to break the silence, or awkwardness, even if probably only felt by him, was the least of their problems. "Why are you up already, anyways?" This time Sherlock's eyes flickered up to John's and then quickly back to his hands, averting his gaze as he obviously very hard considered an answer. Finally he sighed.

"I heard you. You were very restless, and moaned in your sleep. I knew you were in pain." At first John thought it was a complaint; Sherlock's own sleep had been disturbed by John's restlessness. In return he wanted to inquire why his friend hadn't woken him, done something, brought him pain meds, whatever? Just in time though he remembered who he was with; Sherlock wasn't your regular friend, and he didn't do what friends regularly would.

And then it dawned on him.

"Did you wait for me to come down to... help me?" Hadn't John known better - and really, in that moment he wasn't sure he did - he would have said that his friend blushed. Just the tiniest bit, hardly noticeable, unless you were very close to him - what John was. And with Sherlock and his pale skin color, even the faintest blush made a difference.

Great. So much for making the situation less awkward.

"As I said. You're hardly of any use when you're not entirely healthy and free of any physical displeasures." John couldn't help himself then; he chuckled. Maybe Sherlock's way of saying things was different, but he'd spent enough time with the man to recognize when he declared that he truly cared about someone. And he'd just done the same with John.

Reaching up with his right arm, he placed his hand over Sherlock's on his shoulder, and gave it a light squeeze.

"Thank you," he said and smiled up at his friend who had stilled in his movements, a confused, even worried expression on his face. At John's words, however, a small smile stole itself into his features, and he covered John's hand in return with his second.

"Any time, John."

With that, Sherlock resumed his work. John, on his part, let his hand fall back to his side and relaxed into the mattress. Whatever he had planned to think about later; for now he decided that no worries concerning issues about tension and proximity that perhaps didn't even exist were more important than the fact that he had a friend who cared for him.

A friend who was by his side.

Any time.

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