This will be fourteen chapters by the time we're done (or really, a prologue, twelve chapters, and an epilogue). This carries us through a year in the life of John and Sherlock, as they struggle with their feelings for each other, what it means--and in John's case--causes a reexamination of self/sexual identity. Not too much angst, mostly introspection and some mild panic. I mostly want them to be happy. Series Four has a lot of explaining to do.
***Edited 6/1/2017: There is now a bonus chapter, so the total will be 15 chapters.
***Edited 6/11/2017: There is now a second bonus chapter, so the total will be 16 chapters.
***Edited 7/27/2017: Since I have no self-control and apparently cannot count, there will now be 17 chapters. But that's it! Really.

Notes

This starts out Mature but will probably get to Explicit later, I'll try to remember to raise the rating accordingly, or leave a note for that chapter.
I love Gatiss, and I love Sherlock BBC but Series Four made me want to tear my hair out.
This is my way of dealing with that.
Prologue

Christmas, 2020

Morning…

Sherlock grumbled, stumbling out of his bedroom and flopping on the sofa, pulling his old dressing gown around him. His dark hair was a mess of wild curls and his pale eyes were barely open; John couldn’t help but grin in sympathy as he wasn’t exactly feeling wide awake himself. Unfortunately, as a doctor, former soldier, companion to his consulting detective best mate/flatmate, and definitely as the single father to a high-energy, curious and strong-willed three-nearly four-year old, he was used to getting by on little sleep. So, for that matter, was Sherlock. However, as they were not in the midst of a case, and as it was barely dawn and he had heard his friend up until nearly two he imagined the other man was feeling the effects of too-little rest.

“Tea?”

“Hrnh,” Sherlock grunted, swollen eyes slitted. Not that he would admit it, but the older he got the less he was able to bounce back from late nights and days without proper rest. Since John and Rosie had moved into 221B with him a few years before, he had grown accustomed to napping more and taking somewhat better care of himself. Toddlers do not respect the need for hours of quiet, and they don’t stint themselves from throwing screaming temper tantrums at any time of day or night; Sherlock had made it a point to sleep more, so he wasn’t in agony when Rosie suddenly had a nightmare just as he went to bed for the first time in days. John had warned him that Rosie was going to be up early today, since all she had been able to talk about for weeks was Father Christmas. Still, he had wanted to put the last minute touches on his gifts and had ended up late to bed.

“Unca Sherl’ck!” Rosie, the harbinger of this early morning venture from his warm and cozy bed, bounced into his lap, nearly squashing his testicles. He grunted and shifted her so her bony knee wasn’t threatening to castrate him. “Happy Chwistmas!” She kissed him enthusiastically if somewhat inaccurately, on the corner of his mouth; he wasn’t quite sure when it had happened, but somehow he missed this on the days when he did not get to see her and receive a moist—and sometimes sticky—buss from his god-daughter. Much like her father, young Watson had slipped into his life as if she had always been there, and he knew he would be lost without her.

“Happy Christmas to you too, Rosie,” he returned her greeting, stressing slightly the hard R in Christmas. Rosie occasionally had minor issues with pronunciation, but his testing had determined that she was bright, curious and creative. He and John didn’t worry overly about her pronunciation, a speech therapist having confirmed that it was a minor issue and one she would likely outgrow, but they both tried to emphasize proper sounds when she made errors. “Has Father Christmas been?” He put his arm around her and listened to her excited prattle. Daddy was making her wait until the tea was ready before she could begin opening her gifts, but she was very eager to see them.

She scrambled out of his lap and threw herself on her knees in front of the tree, picking up and shaking the packages with her name on them. “I think this one is pro’bly cwose,” Rosie judged, wrinkling her tiny nose. She had been less than thrilled the year prior to receive pyjamas, socks and undies. Sherlock could empathize, remembering his own disappointment as a child. She shook a small box covered in bright red foiled paper, with a matte finish design of holly leaves and a gorgeously sculpted gold bow, “Is this for me?” She asked hopefully, holding it aloft.
“Does it have your name on it?"

She inspected it carefully, fumbling to open the folded over tag and read the inscription inside. “No, it’s for daddy I think.”

“It is indeed,” Sherlock confirmed, rubbing his face. His eyes felt crusty from sleep and he wished he had stopped to wash his face and brush his teeth.

“Is it from Father Chwistmas?” Rosie asked excitedly.

“No, it’s from me,” Sherlock answered, and hoped once again that John would like it. He had spent hours and hours on it, not getting it wrapped until late the night previous.

“Here we are,” John said, shuffling in from the kitchen, looking rather rumpled and unkempt himself. He was carrying two mugs of tea and a mug of cocoa for Rosie and walked slowly. The tie of his dressing gown had come loose and Sherlock smiled at the pyjamas he was wearing; Mrs. Hudson had helped Rosie choose them last Christmas, and they were a bright red fleece, with cartoon Father Christmasses on them, and a red thermal shirt to match. Sherlock had on his own pair, also a gift from Rosie, dark green with cartoon reindeer gamboling on them. “We match,” he said foolishly, and felt ridiculous for pointing out the obvious—especially given that John had reminded him the night before to wear his Christmas pyjamas or risk Rosie’s hurt feelings.

John handed him his tea and sat Rosie’s cocoa down to cool, lowering himself next to Sherlock, who was mostly in the middle of the couch. “Christ I feel like it’s the middle of the night,” John muttered to Sherlock.

“It is,” Sherlock muttered back, and they shared a rueful smile. “Close enough, anyway.”

“Look at her,” John smiled, watching his daughter crawl around on the floor, trying to deduce the contents of the boxes. “She’s getting so big, and she can practically read.”

“She can read, John, for all intents and purposes,” Sherlock reminded him, “Watson is ahead of the curve for her age, she’s incredibly smart and aware of her surroundings for a child not yet four.”

“You’ve been enriching her since birth,” John chuckled, nudging him with a gentle elbow.

“Ah but she had as head start with parents as intelligent and perceptive as yourself and Mary,” Sherlock pointed out.

They clinked their mugs to Mary’s memory, and Sherlock buried his face thankfully in his drink; lovely, strong and just the perfect amount of sugar and milk. “Ahh,”

“Sorry it’s so early,” John apologized, “I made her go back to bed three times before I gave in. You can sneak off after she starts opening her gifts; she probably won’t notice at that point.”

“John, you monster,” Sherlock gestured at Rosie, who was sorting and stacking the gifts, addressing comments to her elephant. “Look at that face…how could I disappoint her?”

John grinned at him, “I know I was just giving you an out.”

They sipped their tea and sat in comfortably silence until Rosie had sorted all the gifts. “Can we open them now, daddy, pleeeeeease?”

“Don’t you want breakfast first?” John teased, his face serious, “I can go make us
something to eat and then we can dress and open our gifts.”

“Or better still,” Sherlock chipped in, “We could take them with us to Uncle Mycroft’s and open them after lunch.”

Rosie was aghast, “No! I want ‘em now.” Her face puckered and they hastened to assure her that they were just teasing. Happily she reached for the biggest box, tearing at the paper as John pulled out his video camera and started filming, while Sherlock took pictures on his mobile. With prompting and assistance Rosie was able to decipher most of the tags to see who had given her what. When she was surrounded by a pile of opened gifts, she looked up, “Now daddy and Unca Sher’ck!”

“We can wait until after breakfast,” John began, to be cut off by Sherlock, who insisted indignantly that he didn’t want to wait.

“You’re as bad as Rosie,” John teased, putting down the video camera and going to help Rosie bring their gifts closer to the couch. She clambered up on John’s lap and “helped” him open his first gift. Sherlock took a picture of the two of them as John opened her gift to him, a rather gaudy Christmas jumper. He enthused over it while Sherlock hid a wince. He sincerely hoped his gift would not match. It did.

“Ohh…thank you, Rosie.” He put on a smile and then smiled genuinely when she hugged him and babbled excitedly about taking pictures. For their next Christmas, as it turned out. She wanted them to send out holiday cards with pictures of the three of them on the front.

“But Rosie, love—” John began, only to be cut off by his daughter who insisted that they had to do it because “that’s what families do.”

“She’s right, John,” Sherlock found himself agreeing, even as he wondered if he had gone mad. It would mean other people seeing him in this eyesore of a jumper. He didn’t wear jumpers. Of course, before Watson he hadn’t worn Christmas themed sleepwear either.

“We’ll talk about it more later,” John said diplomatically, and Sherlock looked away, wondering if his friend didn’t want him included on the family card. Of course he didn’t, Sherlock wasn’t family…he was just a friend. A flatmate. Partners, that’s what they were and—

“I mean, do you really want to risk having Anderson or Donovan getting their hands on a copy of you in that sweater?”

He looked back at John. There was that look on John’s face, the one he sometimes wore that Sherlock couldn’t for the life of him quite deduce. It was a layered look, and it left him hopeful and melancholy at the same time. “I don’t care what they think.”

“We’ll talk about it,” John smiled again, and took the next box from his daughter. She wanted less talk and more opening.

Soon they were surrounded by the clutter of torn paper, trailing ribbons and uneven piles of gifts. “I love it, Sherlock,” John flashed him a smile, holding the vintage David Bowie concert t-shirt up against his pyjamas. “This is great, thanks.”

“It’s nothing,” Sherlock dismissed; it wasn’t, hard though it had been to find one in decent condition in John’s size, it was nothing compared to the gift he had yet to open. He smiled at the box Rosie was scooting across the rug. “Is this for me?”

“Yes!” she panted and he reached out a long arm to help her. It was a large box, heavy, and
he purposefully did not allow his mind to start trying to determine the contents. “Hmm, what have we here?”

“It’s heavy,” Rosie said unnecessarily, leaning on his knee. “Is it books?”

“Let’s see, shall we?” Sherlock pretended to have difficulty opening it. Rosie obliged him by sticking her small fingers under the flap and tearing the paper. “Thank you, that was taped really well! Your daddy must have been afraid we’d peek.”

“If anyone would, it’d be you two,” John grumbled good-naturedly, snapping a picture of the matching pair of indignant expressions they turned on him. He smiled over his camera, eyes on Sherlock, “Go on, tear into it, I know you want to.”

On top was a lovely first edition of *The Life of the Bee* by Maurice Maeterlinck; Sherlock pulled it out, aware it was old, and prepared to thank John, but before he could get the words out his friend reached out and flipped it open, so he could see the publishing information. The words died on Sherlock’s lips and he looked at him in some shock.

“I hope you don’t already have this one,” John said a bit nervously, “I don’t think you do.”

“I—I don’t,” Sherlock affirmed. “John, this is too much—“

“It’s Christmas,” John said, “I wanted to get you something you would like, and I thought this—“

“I love it,” Sherlock said slowly, keeping his face down. This book went for nearly a thousand pounds in good condition for a first edition, and this particular one was in excellent condition considering it’s age; why on earth had John spent so much on him?

“You don’t have a copy then?” John looked so hopeful that Sherlock assured him he did not; it was not entirely a lie. He had somewhere, possibly at his parent’s home, a reprint. It was not so old, nor as nice as this one. “There’s more,” John said, holding the box back out to Sherlock. There were several older copies of books on bees, not, John hastened to assure him, first editions, but he hoped he didn’t have them either. Sherlock shook his head mutely, thumbing through the books.

“What’s ‘at?” Rosie piped up, a ring of chocolate on her mouth, nearly empty mug of cocoa in her hands. She put it down—nearly spilling—and picked up a piece of paper that had fluttered to the floor.

“Oh,” John said, handing it to Sherlock, “It’s—it’s nothing, just a little something—I thought—“

“Honey of the Month club,” Sherlock read the slip of paper.

“Yeah,” John looked slightly embarrassed. “Sounds like something you’d get your gran…but I thought that I could cover the label when they come in and you could do a taste test…see if you can determine all the flavours that went into it, the region…it’s a dumb idea, huh?”

“No,” Sherlock said hastily, snatching the paper back as if John had threatened to take it from him. “I—it’s a fine idea, John. I look forward to the challenge.”

“Now daddy’s turn!” Rosie interrupted, holding out the red box with the gold bow. John exclaimed over how beautifully it was wrapped and Rosie bounced on the sofa next to him, “Unca Sherl’ck is givin’ it to you.” She said, before John could read the tag. “He always has the prettiest
“He’s very good at crafts,” John said, sending a teasing look over her head, “I’ve shown you pictures of the serviettes he made for mommy and daddy’s wedding, remember?”

Sherlock averted his face behind his cooled tea. John exercised far more care in opening this box than the others, setting the bow aside for his daughter, who demanded it for “a pretty.” Inside the box was a thumb drive, and he raised an eyebrow quizzically at Sherlock.

“I made a you a file,” he explained, “You can upload it to your cloud. It’s songs I know you love.”

“Thank you, Sherlock,” John smiled at him. “I’ll listen to it later, yeah?”

“There are some original compositions on there too,” Sherlock said casually.

“Can’t wait,” John turned his attention to Rosie, “Yes, Miss Fidget?”

“Breakfast, please.”

“What do you want? We’re going to have a big lunch later, how about soft boiled eggs and toast soldiers?”

Rosie hopped down from the couch and made to follow him into the kitchen, “Yeah! I love soldiers!”

Me too, Sherlock thought, watching them go.

*****

Afternoon…

“Merry Christmas, all!” Greg followed Mycroft into the drawing room of Mycroft’s spacious house, “Everyone having a good Christmas?”

They all—the elder Holmes, Sherlock, John, and Rosie—greeted him in like manner, and he circled the room, shaking hands and dispensing hugs and slaps on the back. Rosie beamed at him, her favorite copper, and he swooped down to snatch her up and press kisses to her cheeks. She giggled madly, squirming and blushing. She had told John and Sherlock that she was going to marry “Gweg” when she grew up.

Not if Mycroft gets him first, Sherlock thought in amusement, watching his brother carefully not paying too much attention to the Detective Inspector. It had been almost three years since Sherrinford, when Sherlock had asked Greg to look after Mycroft; in all that time his brother had not managed to act on his attraction, despite the deepening comradeship between the two.

Mycroft saw him looking and they had a silent argument. John nudged him, “Not here, it's Christmas. Tease him about Greg some other time.”

“How did you know—?” Sherlock was a bit startled, but quite proud of John.

“I know that look on your brother’s face, he can’t bring himself to look at Greg, and when he does he stares like a lovesick teenager. Plus, I’ve lived with you for ten years,” John grinned up
at him, eyes bright, “I’ve picked up a thing or two.”

“And all that on two cups of eggnog,” Sherlock mocked gently. John bumped his arm with his shoulder and Sherlock avoided Mycroft’s eyes.

“Thanks for welcoming me to your family lunch,” Greg said, sitting in Mycroft’s favourite chair; no one was allowed in Mycroft’s chair—aside from Rosie—but his brother didn’t say a word, merely paused briefly then offered a variety of beverages. “Not really an eggnog person,” Greg laughed, and turned down sherry, too.

“Coffee? Tea? I have some artisanal water, a selection of beers…”

“Coffee, ta. You don’t need to wait on me—“

“Nonsense,” said Mycroft, who had never waited on another human being in his life, “I’m the host.”

“I’ll come with,” Greg said, rising and following him from the room. Mummy giggled.

Lunch was pleasant—aside from watching the nauseating spectacle of Mycroft mooning over Lestrade, and being bothered by Mummy with an endless series of questions about his personal life. If she gave him any more significant, pop-eyed looks whilst nodding her head in John’s direction, even Lestrade was liable to realize what she was oh-so-subtly trying to convey. Sherlock kept topping her wineglass, hoping to intoxicate her enough that she needed a nap.

“Presents!” Mummy trilled after the pudding course was at last finished. They trundled into the drawing room, everyone except Sherlock and Mycroft groaning that they had eaten too much.

“Problem, John?” Sherlock asked with exquisite politeness when he caught his friend unbuttoning his trousers.

John smirked and called him an unnaturally fit bastard and flopped onto the couch next to him. “We can’t all live on cigarettes and black coffee, ya know.”

“I’ll help,” Greg offered, when Siger went to assist Rosie in handing out gifts. He gave her the lighter packages and bags and helped her sound out names when she wasn’t sure. Soon they were all sitting with piles in front of them. “These are from me,” Greg said, handing out bundles he pulled from the large carrier bag he had stashed behind the door. “Just a little thanks for including me.”

John laughed when Sherlock and Rosie both scowled at opening boxes from Mummy and Father, only to hold up packages of socks. Sherlock smirked when Mycroft unwrapped the bottle of whiskey that Lestrade had given him and managed—within two minutes—to extract a promise from the Detective Inspector to join him for drinks one evening. Mummy cooed over Rosie’s hugs and kisses and she and Siger exclaimed over the little girl’s gifts, even the ones they themselves had purchased. “It’s a good day,” John sighed, rubbing his full stomach and settling into the depths of the cushion. “Are you screamingly bored yet?”

“I’m capable of behaving in company,” Sherlock sighed. John raised an eyebrow. “Well, mostly,” he amended and they smiled at one another before tuning into the family’s conversation.
"Evening…"

“No guns, no tantrums, no one got stabbed with a fork,” John sighed gratefully hours later, coming down the stairs from tucking Rosie in. “It was a frighteningly peaceful day.”

“We’re grown up, John,” Sherlock said smugly, handing him a cup of tea, “We’ve matured.”

“Is that so?” John leaned over in his chair and eyed Sherlock’s purple fuzzy socks. They had lime green stripes and bright orange anti-slip dots on the soles. They looked incongruous with his navy pyjama bottoms, white t-shirt and ancient royal blue dressing gown.

“They were a gift from my god-daughter,” Sherlock said, swinging his legs over the arm of his chair and sprawling sideways in it. He regarded his feet. “While I’m not a fan of the bright colors I must say they are warm. And grippy.”

“Grippy?” John queried, eyes on his own blue and yellow fuzzy socks. “That sounds very mature.”

“Mmm.”

It was quiet and serene in the flat; at one time Sherlock would have hated it. But he had matured, mellowed even (well, possibly not) and he could appreciate a quiet night at home. The years had taught him more patience and shown him what could be taken away from him. They drank their tea in silence, watching the blinking fairy lights on the tree, the mesmerizing flames of the fire. “It’s snowing,” John exclaimed, and went to peer out the slightly flogged window at the white world beyond. “I feel like I should wake Rosie up.”

“She’ll be awake for hours if you do,” Sherlock pointed out. He joined him at the window and they enjoyed the sight of the street slowly being muffled in flawless robes of white. “How clean and untouched the city looks, as if nothing bad could ever happen.”

“Maybe for just one night we’ll have peace on earth,” John mused. He snorted at his own sentimentality and optimism, “Or at least in our corner of the world.” He drained his teacup, “I’m headed to bed, it’s been a long day,” He clapped Sherlock on the back, let his warm hand linger for a minute. “Thanks for helping make this such a good day for Rosie…I know sometimes she’s a bit —enthusiastic.”

Sherlock smiled, “She’s honest about her loves and hates, that will alter soon enough as she grows. Let’s not stifle her now.” He turned slightly, “Goodnight John, and merry Christmas.”

“Happy Christmas, Sherlock,” John murmured, and gave him a hug. Sherlock returned it, closing his eyes briefly as he embraced the other man.

“Goodnight,” John said again, drawing away. “Don’t stay up too late.”

“Goodnight, John.” Sherlock watched the reflection in the window as John walked away from him.
January

Chapter Summary

John succumbs to yet another masturbatory fantasy that somehow ends up being all about Sherlock. Sherlock puts his deductive skills to work on the first month’s honey. John deals with depression about his age, his bad shoulder, his usefulness to Sherlock. The boys enjoy a night in to celebrate Sherlock’s fortieth birthday, and all goes well...mostly. Despite some uncomfortable moments, they are enjoying themselves, until a text message brings everything to a halt.

January

Lying in bed on a cold Sunday morning, John stretched lazily. Rosie had spent the night with a friend from her nursery school and wasn’t going to be home until the afternoon; he hadn’t had a lie in on a Sunday morning in ages. The room was warm, his bed even warmer, and he didn’t have anywhere he needed to be. Stretching again, he enjoyed the feeling of moving, vaguely aware that he had a morning erection. Normally he had to ignore them and move on with his day. But today there was no demanding little girl needing his help, no bright eyed Rosie bouncing onto his bed and insisting he get up, get up and start the day!

Instead there was quiet and time. Time to enjoy it, fantasize even.

Palming himself lightly through his sweats, John hummed. Time for an actual wank then. A proper one, not super hurried. It had been a while. This was sad, considering that he hadn’t been on a date in over two years.

Before he slid his sweats down, John reached for his .mp3 player and pulled up the file Sherlock had made him for Christmas. Putting in his earbuds he queued the song Sherlock had recorded, an original composition he had written and recorded. Actually a duet: he had played both pieces, painstakingly bringing them together digitally. There was something about that piece in particular, which was simply titled January, that appealed to him. He tended to listen to it over and over.

As the piece started, slow and almost halting, John warmed a bit of lube in his hand and then wrapped his hand around himself, spreading the slickness from his base to the head, gasping a bit when his warm, wet palm tugged at the sensitive foreskin. The music picked up tempo, almost seeming to laugh, and then it accelerated, the music darting and driving. John hummed in pleasure and fisted himself, bringing his free hand up to press his right nipple, increasing his arousal.

Images began appearing, women he’d shagged, women he’d like to have shagged. Passing faces, shadowed cleavage, a plush arse in perfectly tailored trousers. “Get out,” John growled softly, and ran his lube-wet hand down to handle his balls, the sensitive skin of his perineum. It was no use; dark curls were blowing in the strong winds of the Dartmoor countryside, those mesmerizing eyes holding him in place. “Fuck,” John groaned, feeling his dick leaking pre-cum. Determinedly, he focused on Mary—no, no, that hurt too much…someone else…
That cute barista at the coffee stall outside Bart’s… Molly Hooper…bit weird but he’d done it before…the bubbly young blonde at Rosie’s nursery—nope, no women that might make him think of his daughter.

Mmm, tits, lovely soft and glorious tits. Big ones, small ones. None at all…

Guilt and shame had his desire flagging slightly; John pumped faster, wishing Sherlock would stay out of his spank bank. It had happened briefly once or twice in the early days, but he had always been able to shove him out and bring to mind one woman or another. But since he hadn’t been having regular (or at least semi-regular) sex, he had masturbated more.

And the more it happened, the more Sherlock seemed to find his way into every fantasy John had. His creamy skin, his actually quite beautiful mouth…those pink lips that could sneer but also smile quite sweetly. John cursed and felt the bolt of desire shoot through his balls and straight up his dick. Giving in (as he did more and more every time), John thought of Sherlock, sleepy, warm and tousled. He thought of him sliding into bed with him, those large, graceful hands making his clothes melt away like magic.

“Sherlock,” John whispered, eyes tightly closed, hips rising. He could feel his orgasm approaching and he moved faster, twisting his wrist. He thought of Sherlock in his arms, their rare hugs; the warm solid surety of his embrace, the hard planes of his chest under his crisp shirts, his long pale legs on one memorable occasion when a case required Sherlock to cross-dress. Fuck, fuck, the thought of him in that dress…

With a prolonged and muffled groan, and a thrashing of his legs, John came, hot spurts of his ejaculate released with each jerk of his body. Coming down from his orgasm, the ever-present sense of shame for using his friend’s body like that, if only in his imagination, threatened to outweigh the incredible fucking blissful lassitude of his post-orgasmic state. John wondered just why it was so fucking incredibly powerful when he imagined the other man. He wondered when it had become normal for him to get off imagining his friend in bed with him.

*****

Halfway out of bed, on his way to the loo, Sherlock paused when he heard the telltale creak of John’s bed. Dropping back onto his bed, he clutched the edge of his mattress with tight fingers and listened to the faint sounds of John pleasuring himself.

Ignoring his own eager erection, he waited until he heard silence, followed a few minutes later by the sounds of John moving around his room. As expected, he tiptoed downstairs and into the shared bathroom, and a brief time later—just the amount of time it would take for him to undress—the shower started. Sherlock refused to touch himself, but couldn’t stop the images of John’s body, short, but powerful despite a little middle-aged spread, streaming with water and soap. The pipes screeched as the water was turned off, and Sherlock pictured John, dripping water and toweling himself roughly.

_I’d do it slowly_, Sherlock thought, imagining that he had the freedom to join John, to see his naked body. _I would blot every inch of him, follow the trails of water down his torso, his legs. Drop to my knees at his feet and dry his legs._ His excellent imagination, coupled with glimpses of John he had had over nearly ten years of living together—not to mention his overeager libido—presented Sherlock with a vivid tableau of him looking up at John. John’s hands would settle in his
curls and he’d lock his eyes on Sherlock, silently allowing him to bring his lips to John’s flesh, to taste him, swallow him; John wouldn’t want to acknowledge what was happening, but he would throw back his head as his climax approached, thrusting almost too hard into Sherlock’s mouth, fucking his face.

He swallowed a needy whimper and stood, shaking with the urge to throw open the bathroom door and take John in his arms. It wouldn’t happen though. It had never and would never happen. John had made it very clear over the years that he was most emphatically not gay. He would be understanding, no doubt; they were, after all, good enough friends for him to forgive an impulse. But things would change. John would draw away from him. Perhaps he would even invent a reason to move.

No, it was better this way. Sherlock could live without physical release. He could forsake expressing the aching longing and love he felt for John Watson. He couldn’t endure the thought of losing John’s friendship, his loyalty, yes, his love.

That it was not the love he wanted was beside the point.

%%%%

“Hey!” John greeted him, smiling. He had just run up the stairs, and he blew into the flat, snow on his coat, a package under his arm. “Look what came today!”

Sherlock and Rosie looked up from the puzzle they were working on. “Is it for me?” She asked eagerly, running to John. He scooped her up and gave her a tickly kiss on her neck.

“No, miss, it’s not for you. This is for Sherlock.”

“Ah, my mystery honey,” Sherlock said, leaning back and smiling. He was sitting on the floor in front of the sofa, the unfinished puzzle spread out on the coffee table. He rubbed his hands together, “Shall we begin right away? We waited tea for you, I think some honey would go excellently.”

“Let me change out of my work clothes,” John said, putting Rosie down and taking the package with him as he headed for the stairs. “I assume I’ll need to make the actual tea?”

“I’ll do it!” Rosie shouted, darting for the kitchen.

“I’ll supervise,” Sherlock chuckled, rising. “We picked up some of those veggie sausage rolls you like on our walk today. And Mrs. Hudson made crumpets. Scrambled eggs do?”

“Please,” John said gratefully, starting up the stairs, “I won’t be a tick.”

Sherlock caught up with Rosie, who was standing on her step stool, filling the kettle with water. He helped her dry up the mess and plugged in the kettle, letting her turn it on. Turning the oven on to heat, Sherlock and Rosie washed their hands, and he let her arrange the sausage rolls on the baking sheet. Then he began whisking eggs and cream together while Rosie pulled out butter, jam, HP sauce and then set about setting the table.

Sherlock put the sausage rolls in the oven and supervised her loading freshly baked crumpets in the toaster oven. Rosie stood on her stool and folded her arms on the counter, peering intently
through the glass to watch them turn brown. While Sherlock grated cheese and then began cooking the eggs, they discussed the alchemy of cookery.

“So cavemens—“

“So cavemen,” Sherlock inserted.

“So cavemen,” Rosie persevered, “Before they disc—disco—“

“Discovered.”

“Discovered fire they ate food waw? Like sushi?”

“Raw,” Sherlock corrected, “And yes. Although not as sophisticated as sushi.” He smiled at the thought of early man enjoying a little freshwater eel and yellow fin tuna.

“Smells great,” John commented, joining them in the kitchen. He brandished a jar, which he had wrapped mummy-style in bandages, “I’ve got the honey in a fine state of anonymity.”

“Very professionally done, John,” Sherlock twinkled, noting the medical tape the other man had used to cover any distinguishing marks on the lid. “Almost done here…” He portioned the eggs out onto the plates John held out, and pulled the rolls from the oven.

Rosie was impatiently waiting for one of them to help her remove the crumpets, and John obliged. In short order the three of them were around the table, tea steeping, and a spill-proof mug of milk at Rosie’s place. She blew noisily on her food to cool it, while Sherlock opened the jar of honey and smelled the contents. John leaned on his elbows, grinning, and watched as the other man dipped a clean spoon into the jar and held it up, observing the color, the clarity, the viscosity as the honey drizzled from the spoon.

Sherlock, who had been nearly certain from the moment he opened the jar, that it was Leatherwood honey from New Zealand, nearly opened his mouth and triumphantly announced it. But three years of living with the Watsons had taught him to implement a filter—at least at home. He took in John’s bright eyed look of expectation, Rosie’s thrilled face—complete with hands clasped under her chin—and stalled.

“Hmm, very fragrant and unusual.” He let some of the honey spin off the spoon onto his finger, put it in his mouth and hummed thoughtfully. “Complex flavour…floral and aromatic.” He sampled some more honey and just started talking nonsense, “I can taste the ancient rainforest, and smell a hint of wild animals, the suggestion of a beautiful landscape.”

Rosie was captivated, but John’s eyes were crinkled and Sherlock shared a smile with him. “Leatherwood, from New Zealand.”

“You’re right.” John shook his head, “Should have known I couldn’t stump you.”

“This is but one of twelve,” Sherlock reminded him, spooning honey on the crumpet Rosie had liberally buttered while the two of them had been occupied, “I haven’t tasted all the honey in the world, John.” He held out the spoon and John obligingly thrust his plate under it and watched as Sherlock drizzled honey on his crumpets.

“What do you think?” Sherlock asked Rosie, amused at her butter and honey smeared face.

“Urmgrd.” John groaned, chewing a bite. His dark sapphire eyes drifted closed, and then opened, “This is amazing,” he said thickly, around a mouthful. He swallowed, “Bl—“ he glanced
at Rosie, “Blimey, that is the best honey I’ve ever had.”

“Wonderful, isn’t it? An excellent first offering.” Sherlock enjoyed his own crumpet, and the three of them smiled happily at one another. “I’ve had it before, but it’s been some time.”

“Don’t be greedy,” John said when Rosie stood in her chair and leaned across the table, reaching for the honey spoon. “That’s Sherlock’s.”

“She can have some more, you both can.” Sherlock grinned at him, “We’re going to be swimming in honey if we don’t finish a jar each month.”

John’s eyes were on his mouth, he gestured at his own, “You have some, uh—on your mouth. No, your bottom lip.”

Sherlock wiped his mouth with his serviette, “Thank you, John.”

*****

It had been a bloody long day at the clinic; Wednesdays were always the longest day, as they stayed open later than any other week day. John had no urge to do anything other than take an unbearably hot and lengthy shower and lounge around the flat. But it was Sherlock’s fortieth birthday and he was instead going to take a fast but still hot shower, then shave, dress and take his friend out for dinner. Angelo’s, probably, given Sherlock’s surprisingly predictable pattern.

He mounted the stairs slowly, absent-mindedly rubbing his left shoulder with his right hand; his old injury from Afghanistan was flaring up from the cold, damp weather. And age, his mind whispered; as if he needed additional reminders that he was middle-aged at forty-six, nearly forty-seven, and feeling every bit of it today. Perhaps a Panadol and a quick shot of whiskey would help.

“Hello? John?” Mrs. Hudson, still brisk despite being nearly eighty, popped her head out of her flat. “Hello, dear boy, how was work?”

“Long,” John groaned, and stopped on the fifth stair, too tired to step down and walk towards her. “How are you?”

“Oh I’m just fine, thank you, John. Rosie and I have been making biscuits and she’s eating her dinner now.”

“Oh?” John said in surprise. “I thought she was going with me and Sherlock?”

“She was hungry, so I went ahead and fed her.” The elderly landlady peered at him, “Do you mind if she stays the night? I thought she and I could watch Beauty and the Beast—you know how she loves it—and she could sleep here. That way you boys can have as much fun as you want. No need to come home early—go out and live it up! You lads never go out just the two of you anymore. Date nights are important, you know. Keep the romance alive.”

“Ta, Mrs. Hudson,” John thanked her, not bothering to correct her on the status of his and Sherlock’s relationship. He’d given up on it years ago. “Call me if she’s any trouble.”

“Nonsense, John, she’s a dear. You boys have fun.”
“Will do,” John climbed the stairs, trying to put some enthusiasm in his step, to take the grumpy expression off his face. It wasn’t Sherlock’s fault John was feeling old and tired and vaguely depressed. He took a deep breath and squared his shoulders, opening the door and calling out a cheerful hello.

“What’s wrong?”

“What?” John turned around, finding Sherlock, in dressing gown and fuzzy socks, leaning against the window, toying with an unlit cigarette. “Nothing’s wrong, why would you ask? Happy birthday, by the way.”

“I saw you coming up the street,” his friend said, “You looked weary. Shoulder bothering you?”

“It’s fine,” John dismissed. He hated admitting to a weakness, and a physical weakness particularly. He still remembered how insane it had made him when he was invalided home from Afghanistan, the lack of mobility, the fucking futility of trying to find a job as a surgeon with a limp, arrested motion in his dominant arm, and a goddamned tremor in his hands. That first night, meeting Sherlock, who was all graceful movement, perfectly timed stride, fluid motion and kinetic energy…he’d felt like an old man, doomed to living in the shadows, slowly going mad from boredom.

During the course of that mad first night, he had abandoned his cane, forgotten his psychosomatic limp, discovered that his tremor vanished when he was no longer bored, and made friends with the most brilliant, infuriating, astounding man in London. Living with Sherlock, especially in the early days, had presented more than a few challenges, but it had lifted him bodily out of the morass of self-pity and suicidal impulses he had dwelt in upon returning to England. It had been ages since he felt so dispirited; you’d think it was his own birthday, not Sherlock’s.

“And now you’re smiling,” Sherlock observed, sounding slightly confused.

“Just remembering that first night,” John told him, smiling as he thought of it. Sherlock echoed his smile.

“Seems like a long time ago,” Sherlock observed, moving away from the window. “And yet as if it were just yesterday that we were dashing around London after cabs.” He narrowed his eyes, “Your shoulder is bothering you. Did something happen?”

Unaware that he had begun rubbing at his shoulder again, John flinched and dropped his hand. “It’s nothing, just the cold.”

“It’s clearly bothering you, John. Have you taken something for the pain?”

“I’m going to have a shower,” John said, “Give me fifteen minutes and I’ll be ready,” he started for the stairs, “Oh, by the way, Mrs. Hudson is minding Rosie—they’re having a sleepover, it’ll be just you and me tonight at Angelo’s.” He grinned back at his friend, “Unless you want me to call Greg and Mycroft and invite them.”

“Perish the thought. I refuse to spend my birthday dinner watching those two idiots pine for one another.”

The hot shower helped, and John left it reluctantly; drying off, he pulled out a tube of odorless pain relieving ointment and rubbed it in, stifling a groan at how good-awful-not-enough it felt. Dry-swallowing a few Panadol he briskly shaved, and then brushed his hair, wondering if he
should dye it. He’d always thought men that dyed their hair were twats, but every year his pale blond-brown hair had more gray in it. How much longer would Sherlock want to keep associating with an old man?

Feeling his depression creep back, John tied his dressing gown and stepped out of the bathroom. “Let me dress and we can go.”

“No need,” Sherlock looked up from his laptop; he was still in his dressing gown, comfortably situated on the sofa. “I’ve ordered from that Asian fusion place we like. I got you the mango rice and a double order of crispy veggie spring rolls.” He glanced at his laptop, “No need to go anywhere, I’m not much of one for birthday celebrations anyway, as you know.”

“But it’s the big 4-0,” John protested weakly, loving the idea of staying in, but feeling mildly guilty that his friend was only doing it for him. “You should celebrate.”

“And we shall, here. Dinner in with no distractions from idiot diners, a Bond marathon, and to keep you from feeling as if I’m missing out—” Sherlock closed his laptop, and stood, “I’ve got a bottle of champagne chilling in the freezer.”

“Champagne? You?”

“It was from that client we helped a few months ago,” Sherlock reminded him, “I thought tonight we could enjoy it.”

“Sounds good. But there’s no birthday cake!” John scrunched his nose, “Maybe Mrs. Hudson has some biscuits in.”

“No need, John.” Sherlock grinned slyly, “I liberated a plate of cakes from the Diogenes this afternoon. Mycroft didn’t need them anyway.” He walked into the kitchen and rummaged about, the microwave beeping.

“Takeaway, Bond and bubbly,” John called with conscious lightheartedness, “Sounds perfect.” He was reminded of an episode of Doctor Who, the one with James Cordon, who had made plans for a night in with his best friend, whom he was crushing on. Silly, why would he think of that?

“Food should be here in a half hour,” Sherlock said, coming from the kitchen with an athletic sock in his hand; it was full of something, as it was rounded into a tube shape, the open end knotted. He motioned for John to sit in his chair, and when he did he laid the sock across his bad shoulder. John hissed from the sudden steamy heat.

“Christ, what is that?”

“It’s filled with rice—uncooked of course,” He could hear the smile in his friend’s voice, “I heated it in the microwave. The internet suggested an anti-inflammatory—I heard the pill bottle rattling in the restroom, so you’ve taken care of that—and heat, followed by a cold pack. I’ve got another of these in the freezer.”

“It feels great, thanks,” John said, relaxing as the heat moved through his shoulder and arm. “I appreciate this.”

Sherlock returned to the kitchen and came out bearing mugs of tea. “Here, I know how you like your tea, this should help relax you.”

John squinted at it suspiciously, “You didn’t put anything in there besides tea and sugar, did
He rolled his eyes with a huff, but didn’t bother to hide the smile, “Of course not. Don’t be paranoid, John. I haven’t drugged you in years.”

“Paranoid, he says,” John muttered. He heard Sherlock chuckle and felt the corners of his mouth tip up.

The improvised heating pad began to cool as they discussed which film to start with first. John was a classic Bond fan, and voted for his favorite, You Only Live Twice. Sherlock wanted to start with Skyfall. “That’s bollocks,” John argued, “At least mine comes earlier in the series.”

“It’s my birthday,” Sherlock said, and won the argument, as he had known he would.

Sherlock turned from setting up the DVD and spied the makeshift hot pack on John’s side table. “Would you like me to warm it up again?”

“I’m fine,” John dismissed, not wanting to be a bother, or appear too weak and needy.

“Why don’t you let me massage it for you?” For all his skill at reading people, Sherlock couldn’t interpret the look John gave him. “It would help. The medical sights recommended it,” He added for good measure. “I’m familiar with anatomy, and I reviewed several methods with which to alleviate your discomfort.”


“You’d best sit here on the sofa,” Sherlock said briskly, moving cushions about. “No—sideways, then I can sit here on the arm and, ah, perfect height to reach you.” He perched behind John, who seemed stiff and possibly nervous. He was nervous himself. This was ridiculous. He was Sherlock Holmes; he had faced down numerous villains in his time. Giving a medically-legitimate massage to his friend was nothing to be nervous over.

After a few awkward minutes, Sherlock stopped; John immediately made to rise. Sherlock’s hand on his shoulder stopped him, “I’m not done. However…your dressing gown is too thick.” Sherlock looked at the thick terrycloth over John’s shoulders. “I can’t really get a good grip, and I imagine it is muffling the effects of my efforts. You should take it off.”

John stilled, and Sherlock watched with interest as his ears went red. “Ah, you’re not wearing any pants, are you?”

“Erm, no. I intended on going upstairs and dressing—“

“No matter, John, go change into something appropriate and I’ll wait.”

John left the room, still not looking at him, and Sherlock glanced in the mirror over the mantel, to make sure his face didn’t reflect his roiling emotions. John returned a few minutes later, wearing thick jogging bottoms, his fuzzy socks, and the David Bowie shirt that Sherlock had given him for Christmas. His damp hair was a bit ruffled and his ears had faded to a hot pink. Sherlock thought he looked delicious.

He resumed the massage, finding it easier to grip and apply the appropriate pressure without the bulky terrycloth in the way. John must have approved, because a muffled groan escaped, followed a minute later by a sigh. Sherlock began reciting complicated chemical formulas in his head, trying to ignore the somewhat perverted noises his friend was making. Focus, he thought...
sternly, *this is pain-relief, not titillation.*

“Aw, fuck,” John whispered, head lolling forward, “Shhherlock, that feels…ahhh.”

Focus!

Moriarity, Magnusson, Smith…evil, disgusting, manipulative bastards one and all. Yes, let him think of them, and if John’s vocalization of his pleasure should cause…problematic…then Sherlock was fully prepared to relive every horrible atrocity they had caused, and things should…settle down.

“Jesus,” John moaned, limp against the front of Sherlock’s shins—and just when had he all but melted against him?—“That feels bloody amazing. I’m about to drool.”

Sherlock laughed, both amused and also grateful that there was something to distract him. “I’m only glad to help. *Is* this helping?”

“Yeah, God, absolutely. Your hands are so strong,” John said breathlessly, as Sherlock dug deep with his thumbs into his scarred shoulder.

“Too much?” Sherlock asked, hands stilling.

“No, God, no! They’re great, really.” John reached up and put his hand over Sherlock’s as if to keep him from moving them, and a lightning fast current of electricity seemed to hum between them. John snatched his hand away and sat up straight. “I think that’s good though. Ta, mate.”

*Mate again,* Sherlock thought with an inner sinking feeling. *John only calls me that when he’s trying to put some distance between us.* He removed his hands and slid down on the couch as John stood up. As if perfectly timed by a stage manager, the doorbell rang, and John hurried to answer. The few minutes it took him to descend the stairs, sign for the food and mount the stairs gave Sherlock time to compose himself, and when the other man returned he was coming out of the kitchen, silverware and serviettes in hand.

Things settled back down to normal, and if there was a tad more room between them on the sofa than usual…well, neither of them was going to bring it up. They watched *Skyfall,* then *You Only Live Twice,* followed by *Casino Royale.* As the birthday boy, Sherlock was given first pick and right to veto, and he picked yet another film with Daniel Craig as Bond. John was an ardent fan of Connery, but Sherlock didn’t tell him that part of the reason he favoured Craig is that he reminded him of John. Blonde, rugged, a lived-in face that hovered between ordinary and handsome, with deadly skills and a dark past.

They were halfway through *Goldfinger* when Sherlock opened the champagne and brought the bottle, two tea mugs and the liberated cakes to the living room. John paused the DVD so they could toast properly, and they clinked their mugs together, eyes catching for just a moment before John’s gaze slid away from his.

The DVD had just started rolling the final credits when John stood up to stretch. Before he could ask if Sherlock wanted to watch another, a familiar and very distinctive moan filled the room. Sherlock closed his eyes. Damn his luck. He had changed phones, changed the passcode, hadn’t even seen The Woman in years…yet she always managed to get that orgasmic ringtone on his phone. And while her attempts to contact him were fewer every year, still she texted him on his birthday without fail. This year he had hoped—but there it was.

John stood frozen for a moment, then he moved, tossing the remote on the sofa. “I know it’s
your birthday, mate, but I’m knackered. I’ve got a half-day tomorrow, and then I’m taking Rosie to Harry and Clara’s to see the new baby.” He didn’t avoid Sherlock’s eyes, but somehow his look was shuttered, as if he had managed to look at Sherlock through someone else’s eyes.

“Of course, John. I hope your shoulder doesn’t trouble you again.”

He watched his friend walk out of the room and resisted the overpowering desire to pitch his goddamned phone out the window.

*****

Halfway up the stairs to his bedroom, John thought he might throw up. He hated that ringtone, and he was starting to hate Irene Adler.
Sherlock is out of town on a case, and John and Rosie are stuck at home while she nurses a cold. Mycroft and Sherlock have a surprisingly emotional meeting at his homecoming, and Sherlock urges his older brother to do something about his feelings for Greg. Greg gets a surprising delivery at work and an even more surprising visit after hours. Sherlock and John take Rosie out for an awkward dinner at Angelo's.

February...

His daughter coughed vigorously, but John was heartened to hear that the rattle was gone, and she didn’t wheeze too badly when the spell ended. Rosie had developed a rather nasty cold last week, not helped by the severely unpleasant weather. Either John, Mrs. Hudson or Molly had managed between the three of them to be with her at all times; she had gotten fractious and irritable with the forced confinement, her unpleasant tasting medicine and the fact that Sherlock was out of town.

He had been called away to a case in Wales, involving an old mansion, mysterious lights and a family legend of a sapphire necklace which had been hidden and then lost. John would have loved to accompany him, but Rosie had to come first. Sherlock, who had always preferred texting to talking over the phone, still managed to call once a day and talk to her. John was grateful he made the time, but was almost as anxious as Rosie to have him back.

“Here you are, love,” John said, sitting down next to his blanket wrapped child, and handing her a mug of warm milk. “Get that in you. I put a bit of Uncle Sherlock’s honey in there for you.”

Rosie’s protest died on her lips and she obediently drank her milk. “When’s he comin’ home, daddy?”

John sighed, and ran his hand over her curls, which were sweat-matted and tangled. Molly and Mrs. H would now doubt scold him for letting her look like a Dickensian orphan, but John was choosing to pick his battles. A quiescent Rosie who wouldn’t fight him over drinking her milk and would be more likely to go down to bed early was preferable to one who was liable to throw a screaming fit if he tried to coax her into a bath. “Soon, I hope.”

“He hasn’t called today,” Rosie reminded him unnecessarily, sounding fretful. “The big hand and the wittle hand are about to meet on the seven.” She looked anxiously at the old mantel clock, “I don’t wanna go to bed witout tellin’ him goodnight.”

“I’m sure he’ll call soon,” John assured her, tugging his mobile out of his hip pocket and firing off a text. Rosie had nearly finished her milk when his phone chimed and he smiled, moving to pick up his laptop. A few minutes later the Skype call came through.

“Good evening,” Sherlock greeted them in his rumbling baritone, sounding slightly tinny on the laptop speakers.
“Unca Sher’lk’c!” Rosie wiggled to get out of the cocoon of blankets she was wrapped in. John helped her, and pulled her into his lap so she could lean toward the screen. “I missed you, I knew you would call.”

“Of course I called,” Sherlock said, smiling slightly. His eyes tracked her appearance, and then flicked to John’s eyes; the doctor nodded and Sherlock looked relieved. “I can see you’re getting better. Have you been listening to daddy and taking your medicine?”

“Um, yes…” Rosie plucked at her lips, and looked away from the screen.

“Rosie…” Sherlock sounded firm, but not angry. She looked back at him, blinking innocently. “What did we talk about before I left?”

John’s eyebrows rose, he hadn’t known they had a discussion of any sort.

“You said if I was good you’d bring me back somethink special.” Rosie widened her eyes and clasped her small hands below her chin, “I have been vewy, vewy good, haven’t I, daddy?”

“Most of the time,” John allowed. He leaned around and looked at her sternly, “You were very rude to Aunt Molly the other day when she tried to put you down for a nap. Was that being very, very good?”

Rosie ducked her head and mumbled. Sherlock clicked his tongue and she darted a look at him. “I’m disappointed. I know you can do better than that. If you’re good the whole rest of the time I’m gone—no tantrums, no refusing your medicine, no screaming in the bath—I’ll bring you back a surprise. Deal?”

She brightened, “Deal!”

The three of them chatted a bit longer, Sherlock only mentioning a few details about the case. He assured John he would explain everything in detail when he returned. “You can write your usual lurid account,” he teased, deadpan.

“It’s not the same as being there,” John said, hating how wistful he sounded. He knew he wasn’t strictly necessary to help Sherlock solve every case, but for so long he had been there for almost all of them. Fatherhood—especially single fatherhood—meant a big restructuring of his life. He didn’t begrudge it, exactly, but he missed the old days keenly.

Sherlock’s tone might almost have softened, “As always, you would provide a much needed element to the case, John, but this is all fairly straightforward—interesting, but not dangerous or particularly exciting.” He looked at Rosie, who was leaning drowsily into John’s chest, blinking in an effort to stay awake. “I think it’s time for someone to go to bed.”

Rosie protested, but they said their goodnights; John thought it was probably his goodnights; John thought it was probably his imagination, but it almost seemed as if Sherlock was looking at him when he said, “I miss you, too,” in response to Rosie. Shutting down his laptop, John dismissed it. Sherlock was altogether a softer man since the events of a few years ago, but he was hardly likely to express sentiment for himself. Rosie was the only one who brought a tender side out in him.

Once Rosie was down, John stood in the upper hallway, debating with himself. He could—should, really—go to bed, it had been a long day and he had child minding ahead of him the following day, as well as a half shift at the clinic. Instead he descended the stairs softly, and poured himself another cup of tea, adding a dollop of honey. Making himself comfortable on the sofa, he thought about updating his blog entries, which had suffered the last few weeks; he had plenty of
comments to respond to, if nothing else. Or he could call Harry and see how her little family was getting along. The bathroom needed a clean too.

He fiddled with his phone, tempted to text Sherlock, but finally put it back down, not wanting to look needy.

Things had been…off lately. Between the two of them. Not quite enough so that he could just say to Sherlock, hey, what’s bothering you? But enough to notice that something had shifted slightly; much as he would like to pretend he didn’t know what it could be attributed to, John was aware that it was at his door.

Not only was he harbouring inappropriate thoughts about his best friend, but he was…well, sort of…jealous. Jealous of his continued communication with Irene Adler. He had never entirely understood what fascination she held for Sherlock. In the early days John had thought it was sexual, despite the other man’s claims to be celibate. And perhaps a part of it was sexual, but more than that there was a faintly disturbing fascination there. Maybe just because she had nearly bested Sherlock. Only a few years back, fresh in the wake of Mary’s loss, John had urged his friend to reach out to Irene; he’d told him not to let those moments slip by, because they could be gone in a fucking heartbeat.

He meant it, too. William Sherlock Scott Holmes might not be quite like other people, but he had needs and feelings too. He deserved happiness, even if it was only fleeting. In the end, one person was always left behind, and all they would have to sustain them were memories. Sherlock was forty years old and as far as John knew, he had no memories of that sort to look back on. Well, at least he wasn’t alone. He would always have John, and Rosie too, as long as he wanted them. No woman in John’s life to distract him from being a good friend. Not likely to be one either, at least not until Rosie was older.

John had tried, eventually, about a year after Mary’s death, to get back to dating. Aware that if nothing else he needed to release a little sexual tension and get out of the flat, he had attempted to get back out there. It hadn’t really been much of a success. He couldn’t even blame it on Sherlock, who had ruined nearly every date he’d had in the old days, and who had managed to spectacularly derail his first attempt at proposing to Mary. Sherlock had been…supportive. He’d said nothing derogatory about John’s choice of date wear, resisted deducing his dates, and even offered to watch Rosie a time or two.

No, the fault didn’t lie there. And John didn’t really feel guilt over being interested in other woman when his wife was dead so much as…he couldn’t seem to find anyone interesting. Both Greg and Mike Stamford had scoffed at that, pointing out that he lived in London and even he hadn’t managed to date every single woman yet.

Depressing as it was to accept that your sexual history was apparently just that—history—John had been slightly relieved to give up trying. There had been compensations; he was there for his daughter, focusing on her and raising her to be smart and strong and respectful. He was able to balance his home and work life better when he wasn’t trying to squeeze dates into his busy schedule. John and Sherlock grew closer, resuming their old way—albeit with the addition of a tiny sidekick. All in all, his life was pretty satisfying. John missed sex, God, he missed it. But maybe it was foolish for a man his age to still be lusting anyway.

******
“Brother mine,” Mycroft greeted him, as Sherlock tucked his Belstaff around him and tucked into the back of Mycroft’s chauffeured Jaguar. “How was Wales?”

“Passably interesting. Found the necklace. Arrested the brother-in-law.” Sherlock raised a brow as Mycroft extended a packet of cigarettes. “No thank you.”

“Oh yes,” Mycroft mused, returning the package to his coat pocket and removing an engraved gold lighter. “You gave up smoking for young Rosamunde.” He tucked his own Dunhill between his lips and flicked his lighter, bringing the flame to the cigarette. Sherlock resisted the urge to take a deep breath. He hadn’t had a cigarette in nearly three months and he wasn’t going to succumb now, especially not and give Mycroft ammunition with which to taunt him for his weakness.

“As if you’d forgotten that point,” Sherlock pulled a face. His relationship with his brother was greatly improved; following the events at Sherrinford they had found a tentative new ground upon which to approach one another. However, neither of them was particularly interested in a sentimental relationship, and thus they still tended to fire off barbs at will. “To what do I owe the unanticipated pleasure of your company today?”

“It’s come to my attention that Ms. Adler continues to contact you.”

Sherlock narrowed his eyes against the smoke his brother deliberately blew in his direction. “As I have not heard from her in over a month, I fail to see how this has just now come to your attention. We both know that whatever their failings, your surveillance team would have collected that bit of intelligence the moment it happened.”

“How sweet…she texts you on your natal day.” Mycroft took a drag on his cigarette and regarded the ember burning on the end. “And it seems that her message curtailed your…evening with Doctor Watson.”

Resisting the urge to curl his hands into fists, or fidget with his phone, Sherlock raised a bored eyebrow and then looked out the window. Damn Mycroft for his nosy ways.

“Despite the relative peace of the last several years,” Mycroft continued, as if addressing a point Sherlock had raised, “your life continues to be something which I regard it as my duty to protect.” He lowered the window slightly and flicked his cigarette. The brothers watched the ember fly away in a tiny shower of sparks. “It was merely audio surveillance, and of course the usual tap on your phone. No one witnessed any…celebratory events.”

“Curry and DVDs hardly constitute an event,” Sherlock said, deliberately ignoring the subtext. “I fear your agents will perish for lack of anything salacious taking place at 221B, if that is what keeps them motivated.”

“It’s not too late,” Mycroft mused, following a slow drag on his fag, “Saint Valentine’s Day approaches. Perhaps this is the perfect time to declare your undying love for the good doctor.”

“I don’t—“ Sherlock began to grit out between clenched teeth, despite knowing that he should just ignore Mycroft.

“Little brother,” Mycroft said suddenly, sounding surprisingly kind. “You may fool everyone else, including John, but pray cease your theatricals with me. I’m aware of just how long you have harboured feelings for him.” Mycroft lowered his cigarette and looked at Sherlock, eyes looking very nearly affectionate, “Don’t you think it is time you told him?”
“John is heterosexual.”

Sherlock found he was unable to dissemble, to spin a tissue of lies and half-truths, to fling insults to distract his brother. It wouldn’t have worked anyway, he knew that. Mycroft could read him like no other. All he could manage was that pathetic statement.

“Hmm,” Mycroft crushed out his cigarette and rolled up the window, cutting off the thin stream of icy air, “Perhaps. Yes, perhaps he is. Have you noticed, however, that he has not been with a woman for several years?”

“He’s raising a child on his own—” Sherlock scoffed.

“His work as a doctor and his adventures never stopped him from attempting a social life in the past. And as I recall, he did pursue one or two entanglements a few years back. Furthermore, he is hardly alone given how often Mrs. Hudson, and his sister, and Molly Hooper are around. And then of course there is you; I must confess, I never looked to you to be a nanny.” Mycroft smiled thinly, “You continue to surprise, little brother.”

“I’d do anything for John,” Sherlock said stiffly, “I owe him more than—I have caused…taken so much—”

Mycroft’s gloved hand lighted on his own, stilling the hand which was curling into a shaking fist quite without his volition. “Mary Watson’s death was not your fault. If anyone is to blame it is I.”

Sherlock looked at him quickly, and his eyes were snared by the honest look of pain in his elder brother’s eyes. “You did not pull that trigger,” he started to protest, but Mycroft pulled his hand back and crossed his hands on his lap.

“Nor did you, Sherlock. It was an agent under my purview which was to blame. And thus I am to blame.”

“John does not blame you.” He took a deep breath, dare he say it? They were veering from their usual stinging repartee. “I do not blame you.”

“I blame myself.”

“Well then stop.”

They looked at one another in surprise. Sherlock struggled for a moment with old impulses and then consciously softened his voice, feeling like an idiot for being so…sentimental. “Seriously, Mycroft, stop.” He refused to look away, despite his discomfort, “You’re not to blame for Mary’s death. You’re not to blame for Eurus’ actions either. I know you hold yourself accountable…but you aren’t the only one who had a say in how she was handled, in the “treats” you provided. Despite our sister’s…emotional defects…she alone is ultimately responsible for the damage she inflicted.”

Mycroft swallowed, looked away and Sherlock saw him blinking rapidly. He stopped speaking and gazed out the other window, giving his brother the opportunity to compose himself. They paused at a traffic light and Sherlock rather blankly stared at the gaudy display in a florist’s window. Wishing to get back on their familiar, and comfortable, grounds, he let a smirk enter his voice, “And have you any plans for a romantic tête-à-tête with the Inspector? There’s still time to run out for some roses and to book a table at La Grenouille. Although Lestrade is probably more used to wilted filler flowers from the petrol station and a two for one special at an Italian chain
There was a slightly strangled in-drawn breath and Sherlock glanced at him. The moment of raw emotion he glimpsed in his brother’s face hit him like a punch to the stomach, and Sherlock struggled with a feeling of shame. “Or are you too afraid of outing yourself to make an effort for a man who clearly enjoys spending time in your company and who we both know is bisexual?”

The silence crawled on, and just as he considered apologizing, Mycroft spoke. He sounded very nearly his old self, but incredibly tired. “Brother mine, there are more things to consider than “outing myself.” The Detective Inspector is a good friend, and a good man. He does not need… me.” Mycroft cleared his throat, aware of how pathetic he had sounded. “Gregory is a man of integrity and great heart. I am too cynical and too soiled to taint his life with unnecessary declarations which would not, in any case, be welcome.” He adjusted his cuffs, ears burning red at having spoken so openly. “He is but a friend.”

The car pulled up before 221 and Sherlock slid across the seat, reaching for the handle. “That may all be true, Mycroft, but did you ever consider that maybe he knows exactly who you are and still wants you?” Pleased with himself for making it through an entire conversation about sentiment with Mycroft of all people, Sherlock had hopped out and was about to slam the door when—

“Have you considered the same about Doctor Watson?”

“Happy Valentine’s!” Rosie screeched excitedly, when Sherlock came through the door. She was kneeling in front of the coffee table, which was covered in coloured paper, safety scissors, glue sticks, glitter and stickers. She scrambled to her feet and went to throw herself into his arms. Sherlock dropped his duffle bag and caught her in mid-leap, smiling unstoppably as Rosie wound her skinny arms around his neck and gave him a strangling hug. John came out of the kitchen, spoon in hand, a big smile on his face. Sherlock wanted to pull him to him as well; if only it were acceptable for him to hug John with as much open, honest pleasure as John’s daughter displayed in embracing him.

“Don’t strangle Sherlock,” John laughed, and Rosie let up her grip a little.

“Did you miss me?” Rosie beamed at him, “Cause I missed you—a whole lot!” She held her arms out to show him just how much, trusting that he would hold her.

“I did miss you,” Sherlock assured her, “Very much.”

“Did you bring my special present?” She asked him, eyes wide with anticipation. John reprimanded her for being rude; reminding her that gifts weren’t something one demanded. Sherlock grinned at him and sat in his chair, pulling a wrapped box out of his pocket. “Just for you,” He handed her the box and the two men watched as she unwrapped it, flinging paper around.

“A book!” Rosie held up the book, excitedly pointing out the cover art. “Is it about faeries?”

“Faeries and all sorts of myths and legends,” Sherlock assured her. “We can start reading it at bedtime, okay?”
“Do I have to wait until then?” There was a suggestion of a whine in her voice, and John sternly assured her she did. “Besides, you haven’t finished your Valentine’s cards, and tea’s almost ready. After that you’ll have your bath and then you may read a little.”

“How’d everything go?” John asked as he returned to the kitchen. He dropped some gnocci in a pot of boiling water and checked the sauce and chicken simmering in a pot. “One for the blog?”

“Satisfactory,” Sherlock said, leaning against the table and watching as John leaned against the counter and crossed his muscled arms over his chest. Sherlock wasn’t entirely certain how someone wearing such an objectionable jumper under a sauce splattered apron could look quite as toothsome as John, but the proof was right in front of his eyes. “I’ll give you all the details later and you can judge for yourself.” He filched a piece of bread from the basket on the table, shoved a bite in his mouth and mumbled, “I missed you—er, your presence.”

“Wish I could have been there,” John said, glancing at his shoes, then back up, “But, you know, Rosie.”

“Of course. She comes first, John. I’m pleased to see her doing so well.”

“Yeah, me too,” John smiled, “She’s definitely on the mend. She’s been impossible all day. I shouldn’t have told her you were coming home today; she didn’t want to take her nap in case she missed you.”

“I looked forward to seeing her as well,” Sherlock said. Silently, he added, and you. “Is there time for me to shower before we eat?”

“Yeah, go on. Loads of time.” John turned back to the stove.

******

The collected whistles and oooooooooohs should have tipped him off. Greg registered them, but figured his sergeants were just being their usual sophomoric selves. It had been a rather quiet spell around the Yard these last few days, and more than a little larking about had occurred. He turned a blind eye to most of it. His team was good, and they were caught up on their case files, mostly. They deserved a wee break.

Glancing up absently, he saw a floral arrangement being delivered. No doubt that was the reason for the smirks and the joking, which he hadn’t really been paying attention to. His stomach sank and then took flight when he realized that Donovan was bringing that arrangement toward his office. It had to be a mistake. He had never received flowers in his life. He couldn’t even remember the last time he had sent anyone flowers. God, I’m a pathetic fucker.

“Got a suitor we don’t know about, boss?” Sally Donovan grinned in a slightly too amused way for his tastes. As if the idea of him having someone be interested in him romantically was bollocks. Although, in the five years since his divorce he’d had fewer dates than a skinny slice of fruit cake, so really it was a fair judgement.

Hoping he didn’t look ridiculous, Greg took the vase from her hands, and endured a bit of good-natured ribbing before he sat it on his desk and commanded everyone to get back to work. He could feel them all watching him through the open blinds of his office, but Greg refused to take the bait. Head down, he went back to work. He snuck glances at the flowers: white, pink and red, no idea what type they were, he recognized roses and daisies and that was about it. The bowl they were in was clearly heavy and expensive, a beautiful china bowl, if you liked that sort of thing. It
wasn’t until nearly twenty minutes later that he raised his head, took a sneaky look about and plucked the envelope from the arrangement. Plain white envelope, his name on the front; generic florist card inside. The message was typed, which was no bloody help at all, and there was no signature, not even a measly little set of initials. ‘I am the love that dare not speak its name.’

The card dropped from his hand and he stared at it in shock. He was pretty sure that was part of a poem written by the young chap who had been involved with Oscar Wilde, or maybe Wilde had written it himself, he wasn’t sure, since he knew fuckall about poetry. It wasn’t that he was inexperienced with men; in his younger days, Greg had slept with pretty much everyone who expressed interest, female or male. Then he got married, and he was strictly faithful to his wife—her infidelities didn’t give him a free pass, as far as he was concerned—and since his divorce, well, he’d had chances and options. There had been a few women, passing interest from a fellow or two, in that way that let you know they were gay but not going to act on it other than give you a glance. But no one this…florid. Who in the hell was sending him flowers and poetry?

*****

“I’m glad she felt well enough to come today,” Melody, the young woman who worked the front desk at Rosie’s nursery school smiled at Sherlock as Rosie ran out from the back and flung herself into his arms, babbling excitedly about all her cards. “The children had such fun exchanging cards. And of course they all had too many sweets and didn’t want to take their naps.”

“Oh dear,” Sherlock pretended to look sad as he fastened her coat and helped her pull on her bobble hat and mittens, “I guess that means Rosie will be too tired to go to dinner with her daddy and I tonight. We’ll have to leave her at home while we go to Angelo’s without her.”

“Nooooo,” Rosie’s face crinkled immediately into despair, “Unca Sherl’ck, pleease let me go?”

“Well,” he said thoughtfully, helping her into her tiny Captain Britain rucksack—a rather surprising gift from Mycroft—and taking her hand. “Perhaps if you take a nap as soon as we get home—“

“I wiw, I wiw!” She promised excitedly, bouncing at his side. As promised, she laid down for a nap upon arriving home. Sherlock had his doubts that she would actually sleep, judging by the wiggling about she was doing as he shut the door. He descended the stairs and pulled out his laptop, intent on updating his Science of Deduction blog, but was surprised when he heard the distinctive sound of John’s feet on the stairs. “You’re home early.”

His friend seemed in good spirits, “Yeah, no idea why, but Kathy pulled me into her office, said I was being given the rest of the day off and to enjoy myself.” He shed his coat and hat, and toed off his shoes. “Weird too, because we were fairly busy with flu and cold cases, and I was supposed to work until six.”

Mycroft, Sherlock thought. He didn’t know what his brother was up to, but he wasn’t going to look a gift horse in the mouth. “Well now that you’re home, perhaps we can work on the Wales case.”

“Tea first,” John said, rubbing his hands together. “I’m freezing. Plus I skipped lunch and my
stomach sounds like a bunch of velociraptors. You eaten? Where’s Rosie?"

He explained about the nap, and John nodded, disappearing into the kitchen and returning ten minutes later with a pot of tea, toast, butter and honey. “I could get used to this,” John sighed, licking honey off his fingers. “Half days at work, quiet and obedient daughter, spending a nice afternoon with my best friend, having tea and working on the blog.”

As could I, thought Sherlock, even though he knew that it was pure romanticism. Both he and John required more stimulation than that, and a good deal of the appeal of cozy days at home, for him, lay in the idea of spending them with John. But instead of jumpers and socked feet and blogs and toast, he was thinking naked bodies on clean sheets, honey used in entirely inappropriate ways and an extremely satisfying afterglow.

Dragging himself away from his uselessly vivid thoughts of what John would sound like with Sherlock licking honey off of him, he steered them to work. Several hours passed and a sleep-tousled Rosie came downstairs, delighted to find her father home. “Perhaps we should go out to eat now,” John suggested, glancing at his watch, “We can beat the worst of the crowds this way.”

“I’ll see if Mrs. Hudson is prepared to go early.” Sherlock stood and stretched, and ambled downstairs, knocking on the landlady’s door. It took several minutes before she answered, and when she did, the door was barely cracked, all he could see was her flushed face, a rather disordered head of hair and the sleeve of her dressing gown. Oh.

“Other plans for the evening?” Sherlock guessed.

“Well…” Mrs. Hudson took a firmer grip on the neck of her flowered dressing gown and lowered her voice, “Mr. Chatterjee was feeling lonely, poor love, with his wife so far away. I invited him in for some sherry and biscuits and the sherry must be stronger than I thought, or he’s got a weak head for alcohol, because the next thing you know—“

“Enjoy yourself,” Sherlock said hurriedly, backing away from the door.

“—there he was, nibbling his way up neck—“

“Got it,” Sherlock assured her, hands out as if to stop her flow of words. “Really, no need—“

“—and I’ve always been helpless when a man gives me a good love bite—they are the best, I mean, the _sensation alone_, Sherlock, and then there’s the idea of being marked by your lover—“

“Please stop talking now!” He took the stairs three at a time, afraid she might follow him and give further details. “Mrs. Hudson is erm, indisposed,” he said vaguely, entering the flat.

John appeared concerned, “Oh no. Maybe I should pop down and check on her.”

“I—no need, John.” Sherlock looked helplessly at Rosie, who was regarding him steadfastly while John brushed her hair into two pigtails. “Mr. Chatterjee has things, erm, _well in hand_, if you know what I mean.”

John’s face quivered, and he hurried to assure him he knew what he meant. “What’s that mean?” Rosie demanded, scenting a secret.

“He’s helping Mrs. Hudson hang some pictures,” John said smoothly, and Sherlock snorted.
They exchanged goofy expressions behind Rosie’s back, and Sherlock went to change, determined not to look at this as anything besides two friends taking a child out to eat. It was not a date. Which wasn’t to say that he didn’t put on his best trousers and jacket, and wear the dark burgundy shirt that he had noticed John seemed to favour. No cologne, however, lest it be construed as… something else.

John, he was pleased to note, had made an effort as well, changing out of his work clothes into a pair of camel coloured trousers, a deep blue button down that complimented his eyes, and a corduroy and leather coat in a dark chocolate brown. His pale gilt hair was neatly brushed, although a strand was insisting on hanging over his forehead in a charmingly rakish way. John was also, he noted with interest as they descended the stairs, wearing cologne. Nothing unusual in that. John often wore cologne.

On dates.

*This is not a date!*

But they were going out on Valentine’s day, a day traditionally given to celebration between couples…

*We are not a couple. And Rosie is accompanying us. Not a date.*

Of course…they could hardly leave her at home alone…

Sherlock closed his eyes as he held open the door to Angelo’s, and wondered if he were going mad. No one else put him in such a dither as his unassuming best friend.

The restaurant was somehow even darker and more candlelit than usual, and there was a bud vase and a red rose on each table. Romantic instrumental music was playing, and he saw John’s shoulders draw up to his ears, and actually witnessed the moment his friend sighed and consciously relaxed. John too, found this difficult then.

“Sherlock! John!” Angelo spotted them and swooped across the room, his arms held out expansively, “Ahh, you brought the precious Miss Watson with you!” He regarded her solemnly, “You are looking most beautiful and grown up, Miss Rosie.”

“Thank you,” she said, with a bit of prompting, hanging back between them, her arms wound around their legs. She had known Angelo since she was an infant, however his flourishing moustache frightened her, and she tended to avoid him.

“I saved you boys the window seat,” Angelo said, showing them to the table, tossing a wink over his shoulder. “Just like the first time you came in, you remember?” He handed them menus, ignoring, or not heeding, John’s red face and Sherlock’s swift kick to his ankle.

*Stop it,* Sherlock glared at him, threatening murder with his eyes.

Angelo rolled his eyes toward John and grinned like a maniac. He handed Rosie a child's menu and the special box of crayons he kept just for her use. “Your daddy and Sherlock, they come here together and sit in this very booth, what was it, boys? Ten years ago?”

“Uh, yeah, just about that,” John agreed.

“It was the first night they met,” Angelo told her, as he always did. Rosie knelt on her knees in her chair—she scorned using booster seats—and looked up with slight apprehension at his face as he stood by the table, “The first night in a very special relationship, eh boys?”
Before anyone could answer, he clapped his hands, “Now, we have specials for this evening, a four course meal for two—a little antipasti to start, then my Nonna’s homemade turkey and orzo soup or a winter greens salad, followed by chicken Milanese or sole Dominique for mains, and your choice of pudding—although personally I recommend the dark chocolate gateau with raspberries. And of course the kitchen is prepared to make Miss Rosie’s favorite white pizza, which I make only for her.”

“How about some drinks first,” John said after an awkward silence had fallen. “Rosie, you want milk or juice? I’ll have a pint please, something seasonal. Sherlock?” He felt grateful for the normalcy, although he still wished to murder Angelo. “San Pellegrino, with a twist.”

Angelo looked as if he would weep, surely a far-fetched notion, “It’s a special occasion…you can’t drink sparkling water. How about a glass of pomegranate sangria?”

John busied himself with helping Rosie choose her dinner, and Sherlock buried himself in the menu he had memorized long ago. Perhaps coming to Angelo’s had been a mistake…”

A discreet tap on his office door had Greg raising his head from the file he had been staring at for the last godforsaken hour. It was after seven and most of his team had gone home for the day, intent on going out—or staying in—with their loved ones. Not him though. Nope. Not sad-pants Lestrade. Lonely, slightly bitter (but still stupidly hopeful), die-hard-romantic-despite-all-the-damn-drama-of-his-failed marriage-and-lack-of-dates-sex-or-flirting Greg Lestrade. He was stuck here at the office, staring at a case that had ground to a halt for lack of leads or evidence, rather than going home to face his cold, dark, lonely bachelor flat. Thank God someone was here to distract him from his craptastic life.

“—Hey, Mycroft!” He felt a genuine smile replace the automatic polite one he had glanced up with. Despite all of Sherlock’s whining—and the berk was capable of a lot of that—he had really come to regard the elder Holmes as a good guy. Scarily powerful and dangerous, sure. But surprisingly good company once you weathered the façade of an arrogant, toffy nosed cologne on your coat when you’d been riding in his car on a cold, gray day when the sun suddenly seemed to come out from behind the clouds because you’d surprised a laugh out of him…Help me now, Greg thought, looking at all six feet of magnificently tailored lean gorgeousness currently standing in his doorway, I’ve got a crush on Sherlock’s brother.

“Detective Inspector,” Mycroft tipped his head, looking—as usual—serious and slightly forbidding. Greg was fully aware that Mycroft Holmes was the last person on earth to be interested in him, but he had a brief fantasy that his mysterious flowers had come from the younger man. “I see you are hard at work, as usual. I commend your work ethic. Most people seem unable to concentrate on their employment when the promise of love and sex are in the air.”

He said sex, Greg thought, repressing a shiver. Surprisingly sexy, that. Wait, what was he saying? “Uh, yeah, well, you know, I don’t have a-a significant other. Just me and my case files.” Way to sound pathetic you sad old bastard.

Mycroft made a minute adjustment to his perfectly even cuffs. The man wore heavy silver and
onyx cufflinks, his shirt perfectly white and crisp despite a no doubt lethally long day. One of his usual beautifully bespoke suits, charcoal gray wool with a pin-striped charcoal gray waistcoat, a ruby red silk tie and matching pocket square made him look like something out of a glossy magazine. Greg’s tie, which probably cost less than Mycroft’s pocket square, had a coffee stain on it. “I too, find myself at the end of a long work day, without congenial company for the evening. Even my PA was eager to get out the door and start her—festivities.”

“I’d like to start some festivities with you, Greg thought, shifting in his chair. I wonder if your pants are red silk too? I bet they are, you sexy bastard. Cor, picture him in silk…a nice tight pair to hug what I bet is a fantastic arse. Wait, don’t think about his arse, he’s a Holmes, he’ll be able to deduce it in five seconds flat. Quick, say something clever! Distract him. “That’s a shame, a nice bloke like you, with no plans for the evening. Why don’t we go get a bite to eat, seeing as we’re both at loose ends for the night?”

Not that, you blithering dunderhead!

A lesser man might have betrayed surprise; as it was, Mycroft’s right eyelid flickered slightly. A pause—during which Greg mentally set fire to himself—and then, “I…see no reason why not. Shall I return for you once you have finished? Or perhaps I may pick you up from your home, which would allow you to change from your work attire.”

Greg looked at himself and summoned a smile, “I’m afraid all my clothes look like this. I’m not covered in crime scene bits though, it wasn’t that kind of day. And I’m pretty much done here, just got to wrap things up.”

“I meant no disparagement of your sartorial choices,” Mycroft assured him, but Greg knew he must be comparing their appearances. No matter, he couldn’t afford something like what the other man wore, not on a DI’s pay. “As long as you are comfortable, that is all that matters.” He pulled out his pocket watch with long, elegant fingers that would look amazing against Greg’s darker skin —stop it, you fiend, you sex-oozing fiend, how dare you seduce me with your fingers—and consulted it. “It is now just after seven. Shall I return to my car and do a little telephoning, and allow you to complete your tasks? We could meet downstairs in a half hour and retire to a delightful little restaurant I know, for dinner and drinks. They have a twelve-year old Aberfeldy which I believe will appeal to you.”

“Sure, that sounds great.” Greg waited until the lift doors had closed before he jerked open his bottom drawer and dug around for the shaving kit he kept there. An experienced DI knows sometimes you can be at work for what seems like a week; he kept shaving things, a fresh shirt and tie, a toothbrush…Twenty-seven minutes later, teeth freshly brushed, hair combed into submission, Greg rode the lift down to the ground floor. He had changed into the white shirt and blue tie he kept for when he was called to court, and his face was shaved baby smooth. Too bad there was nothing he could do about his gray hair and wrinkles, but at least he didn’t look too shabby now. This is ridiculous, he lectured himself as the lift doors opened and he walked out into the cold night, winding his scarf around his neck and plunging his gloveless hands into his pockets, you’re fifty-three for God’s sake, this isn’t your first date—hell, this isn’t even a date—stop acting like Prince Charming has arrived in his white carriage.

It was no use though; his heart was thundering along at a fine clip when he opened the door and slid in next to Mycroft.
March

Chapter Summary

Domestic doings for the delightful duo and their darling daughter. Sorry, couldn't resist! Sherlock and Rosie add a new element to their time spent together. Sherlock reflects on how he's changed in the past few years. John has his own moments of introspection, particularly regarding a certain adorable consulting detective. We get a peek into Mycroft and Greg's burgeoning relationship.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Sherlock Holmes was not a kind man. He wasn’t a soft or a tender man.

But he could make an effort to be kind. He had learned to express softness, occasionally even dabbled in tenderness. If he were pressed—as he had been by his therapist—he might even have said that the events at Sherrinford had cracked him wide open, leaving behind this new, adaptable Sherlock. Only if pressed and only if assured his words wouldn’t be repeated.

However, if he really dug deep, the cracks had started before that…meeting John’s eyes in the back of that cab the first night, seeing his pure admiration and that affable smile that seemed to accept his…eccentricities…almost without pause. They had widened imperceptibly, essentially without his notice, over the course of their friendship, with each insult directed at Sherlock that John had deflected, with his shouting and silences, their shared laughter, late nights on cases, early mornings walking the city when Sherlock was liable to go mad from boredom and John’s nightmares chased him from his bed.

Sherlock’s faked death should have ended that friendship, but (oh God, it sounded so cringe-worth even in his own head) even death had not separated them, not really. His return had been less seamless than he had arrogantly predicted, but was actually smoother than he had deserved. Mary hadn’t served as a wedge between John and Sherlock, rather as glue that bonded them back together; she adhered the three of them into a tight triangle, all the stronger for a third. Her death very nearly shattered his friendship with John, but once again Mary had succeeded in bringing them back together.

Being faced with so much just a short time later, not the least of which had been the sister he had purposefully deleted, the events of his youth which he had twisted and altered, as well as each and every devastating “choice” Eurus had forced upon him…it had broken him down in ways which had taken months and months to overcome. The therapy he had dallied with after Mary’s death had become a necessity after all that.

In many ways, having John move back into 221B had helped, making it seem more like old times; inescapably, however, things had been different. Rosie Watson, the most noticeable of those differences, wasn’t one to stay quietly in the background and be ignored except when it was convenient, not even as an infant. She was like a small tornado, churning up the flat, their lives, even the darkness in his heart. Sherlock was quite certain that if she hadn’t come to live there, he would have been a different man. Without John and Rosie—yes, alright, and his therapist too—he
might possibly have walled himself off even more than the cold man John first met. Rosie was, in many ways, therapeutic to him.

He loved her. He protected her and helped raise her. But sometimes, he…muted her. A bit. A very little bit. There was only so much babble about animated programs he could stomach. And if he heard her singing “Let It Go” one more time…!

So, he muted her. More of a muffling, really. A minor, minor thing. Nothing to share with anyone else (John would be annoyed, Mrs. Hudson shocked, and Rosie herself would be hurt).

When they were the only two at home he paid more attention, having learned his lesson the previous summer when she had wandered out the open door of the flat, down the stairs, out the front door and was found a frantic fifteen minutes later. Sherlock discovered her just down the road, in the basement door well of a flat, animatedly talking through the basement window at a stoic cat. He gave her a stern and logical lecture on the dangers of wandering off, panicked slightly when she started crying at leaving the cat and ended up buying her an ice lolly and swearing her to secrecy about her little adventure.

Now he remained much more vigilant; flat door locked, at least half an ear turned toward her chatter, frequent peeks into her room if she was upstairs playing alone. It did not pay to underestimate your opponent, even if said opponent was a four year old.

It made life…interesting. Trying to balance his meetings with clients while fetching Rosie a juice box; studying the effects of different corrosives on fingerprints when she wanted to play tea party. Now that she was older Rosie was well aware that she must stay away from his lab equipment, his experiments and that she was not allowed to listen in on client meetings (John hadn’t yet copped to the fact that she eavesdropped, although Sherlock was aware). John had insisted on a mini fridge for Sherlock’s body parts and lab-related supplies, which had a lock on it, and Sherlock was allowed to work in the kitchen as long as no food or drink was present, no kitchen dish wares were used, the table was protected by a rubber cover and absolutely no experimenting of any kind was done to their food or drink. It was tiresome, but it meant that the people he…valued… were here rather than across town.

Rosie had been instructed from a young age on proper respect for science and when Sherlock was working on something she usually kept out of the room. Except, apparently, for today; aware of a tugging on his trouser leg, Sherlock put down his tongs and turned off the flame under the Bunsen burner. “Yes?” He inquired a trifle impatiently, turning to look at Rosie, who was waiting equally impatiently for him to notice her.

“Can I please do science with you?”

“I thought you were watching The Wiggles or The Deedly Doos or whatever inane program the so-called child experts have crafted to lull you into a state of mental decay and quietude.”

“They’re boring and dumb.” Rosie rocked back on her heels, hands behind her back, looking remarkably like a mini-Mycroft—thankfully minus his brother’s hideous proboscis and cake-fueled pot belly. “Wiw—will you let me help? I can be a lab assistant like Aunt Molly when she helps you.”

Best not let Aunt Molly hear about her demotion or there would be hell to pay. Sherlock nodded, and stood to wash his gloves and then his hands. “It’s pronounced ass-ist-ant, and you may be mine, if you promise to follow proper lab procedure and obey me instantly at all times.” An emphatic nod and a very loud promise were his answer, so he set to work instructing her on lab safety and went to find some items to help properly protect her.
Great day, absolutely smooth and easy. Got up on time, not so groggy that he wanted to destroy his alarm clock; had Rosie up and ready without fuss—well, minimal fuss, she was still a child when all was said and done—nice breakfast in his tum and then out the door to start his day. His shift at the clinic had flown by, interesting cases, a bit of down time to chat with the staff, quick lunch and a pot of tea and then back to work and off at four. Even a ride on the crowded Tube hadn’t dimmed his good mood.

John was actually whistling when he unlocked the front door and entered the hall, crossing to check the pile of mail on the side table. Mrs. Hudson, who did love to leave her flat door open and see who was coming and going, came out of the back of the house, wiping her hands on her apron, “Good afternoon, John. Goodness, you seem cheerful!”

Full of good cheer and aware of a wave of affection for their elderly landlady, neighbor and friend—as well as his daughter’s honourary grandmother—John kissed her cheek. “I’m in a great mood, yeah. You look very nice, Mrs. Hudson, is that a new dress?”

She fluttered, pleased, “It is, John, how sweet of you to notice. I’ve a date with Mr. Chatterjee this evening, and I just couldn’t resist this when I saw it.”

“Nor should you; he’ll be blown away when he sees you.” John extracted their mail from the pile and nodded at her apron. “Baking again?”

“Mm, yes. Rosie requested cinnamon scones, and I’ve made three batches, one for me, one for you lot, and a batch for Mr. C. They’ll taste a treat with Sherlock’s latest honey.”

“Delicious! You’re a jewel, one of my top favourite people, did I ever tell you?”

She laughed and swatted at his arm, “I’d say I’m at least number three on that list, after a certain curly-haired duo waiting for you upstairs as we speak.” Mrs. Hudson giggled when he went red, and patted his back, “No use being embarrassed, dear, it’s lovely that you love your little family.”

“…” John sort of gurgled, aware he was red as a traffic light, but unable to find any words of deflection. Rosie and Sherlock were his family, and he did love them. Finally he coughed and mumbled a polite nothing and excused himself to mount the stairs. The flat door was locked, and he let himself in, taking a moment to will his blush to fade, “I’m home!”

Silence; though not the kind of silence that indicated an empty flat. Following his instinct, John shed his outer things and peeked in the kitchen. Ah ha.

“Busy?”

Rosie looked back at him, her face lighting up in that way that filled him up with happiness. Sherlock turned slightly, his expression was more controlled, but from time to time—such as today—John caught a glimpse of a similar look in his friend’s eyes that caused his chest to tighten. He was a lucky man.

“Daddy! We’re doing science!”
“So I see. Sherlock, you’ve decided to make my daughter a lab tech without discussing it with me?”

Rosie had a button down shirt—one of his shirts, the arse wouldn’t risk damage to one of his fashionable designer creations—over her clothes, and a kitchen apron pinned over that, with a too-big pair of safety goggles cinched around her head, and a pair of rubber gloves in which her tiny hands swam. Her curly hair stuck out in all directions around the strap of the goggles, and a huge smile hung from ear to ear. She was possibly the most adorable thing he had ever seen.

“John,” Sherlock blinked, as if waking up from a dream, as he often did when he had been fully engaged in a pleasurable activity. His dark curls were leaping like flames around his own goggles, and his smile was smaller but just as genuine. Second most adorable thing in the kitchen, and that was a fact.

“I’m a ass-ist-ant,” Rosie informed him grandly. “I’ve been helpin’ all day.”

“She’s been extremely helpful,” Sherlock assured John, “We’ve had a thorough discussion of safety protocols, never fear.”

“Safety first!”

John smothered a smile, “I’m glad to hear that. No eyeballs in the coffee mugs, please.”

“Ewww!” Rosie scrunched her face, “That would be gross.”

“You don’t drink coffee,” Sherlock teased.

“Still gross.”

“She’s right,” John chimed in, “Still gross! You two about done? I was going to have a shower and then get started on dinner.”

“I believe we are at a good stopping place,” Sherlock judged, “We shall clean up and the kitchen will be clear by the time you have showered.”

“I don’t wanna clean,” Rosie whined, sticking her lip out dangerously.

“We’ve made the mess, now we must turn the lab into the kitchen once again.”

“That’s a new tune,” John murmured.

“You made the rule, I’m just enforcing it,” Sherlock smirked.

“Who knew I had so much power over you?”

A flicker of a look in Sherlock’s eyes and John felt his face heat. One of those times when, well, he…felt things. And so did Sherlock, maybe, judging by his faintly coloured cheeks. Officially now the top contender for second most adorable person in this kitchen.

Showering, lab conversion to kitchen complete, dinner prep under way and the dynamic between them was back to normal. John cleaned up the kitchen, post dinner, while Sherlock oversaw Rosie splashing in the bath like a baby whale. John smiled over his sink full of dishes, listening to her giggles and shrieks. Once all the clean-up was done the three of them retired to Rosie’s cozy little room and once she was tucked in bed John relaxed next to her, so they could both enjoy Sherlock’s reading—and acting—of the book of myths and legends from Wales that he
had been reading to her.

The performance was captivating, but she showed signs of flagging, so Sherlock brought it to a close and John read her a much tamer story about puppies that had her eyelids drooping before he was quite at the end. The two of them kissed her and tiptoed out, then eased down the stairs, which creaked rather noisily. “Really need to see about fixing that the next free day I have,” John sighed, dropping into his chair. “I’m always afraid I’ll wake the house if I come down for a drink or a piss in the middle of the night.”

“We can get someone in to take care of it,” Sherlock reminded him.

“That would cost more than if I just do it myself.”

“Neither of us is hurting for money,” Sherlock pointed out delicately.

John was aware his friend was watching him to see if he would anger. The subject of money had always been a touchy one for John. He had grown up in a middle-class family—dad working, mum stay at home, two active kids, as well as his gran and granddad living with them— with not much money to spare once the basics were seen to, and had spent most of his life skint. Sherlock’s clearly more well-to-do upbringing, as well as his casual disregard for money pointed in the opposite direction. There had been times John really resented him over the matter, which in hindsight seemed silly, as things often do.

With his more settled life, keeping to a more rigorous work schedule, as well as the much-fatter-than-his-own savings account Mary had left behind, John was actually in a better position financially than he had been in a long time. Factor into that the money from Mary’s life insurance policy and he was, well, almost well to do. Mary, it turned out, had purchased a substantial life insurance policy on herself shortly after John proposed, with another added when she found out she was pregnant, and they had only recently been paid out. There had been significant delays due to the fact that she wasn’t actually Mary Morstan Watson, but Mycroft’s invaluable, but discreet, interference had finally settled the matter.

John had a hard time contemplating using the money, helpful though it would be. It felt like blood money to him, but as Sherlock had pointed out, Mary had named him beneficiary, clearly wanting to make sure he was provided for if something happened to her; and since Rosie would benefit from the money, which is what Mary would most emphatically have wanted, and since if nothing else it would provide a sense of security to John, it should be accepted with grace.

He was still working on that last part.

Having made his peace with Mary’s duplicity, and his own sense of guilt over her death, John was mostly able to think of his wife with fondness, love, and gratitude for their brief marriage and for giving him Rosie. Occasionally, however, the negative swell of memories would threaten to swamp him in tired grief and dwindling bitterness. Stupid as it was, he still hated that she had lied to him. John was decidedly tired of being lied to. When the subject of his moving back to 221B was first broached he had informed Sherlock in no uncertain terms that his absolute non-negotiable requirement, aside from safety measures for his daughter, was complete honesty.

Ironically, he was stewing in lies.

Or, maybe not lies, per se. But shielded truths. Like his increasing attraction to Sherlock. The growing tenderness he experienced whenever they spent time together. Hell, just thinking about him (unless he had done something tantrum worthy) flooded John with a giddy happiness.
He very much was struggling with what felt like a crush. Or more. God, could it be more?

Did he want it to be more?

******

While he could never be accused of resembling a typical adult and his work and passions did not follow a 9-5 routine, Sherlock had come to appreciate a certain amount of expected repetition to his days. Despite continued struggles with insomnia, and occasional bouts of restlessness, he felt in some degrees a calmer, saner person these days.

Perhaps it was merely that John and Rosie both thrived in a measureable amount by keeping to a pattern, or it could be the settling effects of his self-exploration in his sessions with Dr. Fassbinder, or simply that he was getting older. But Sherlock couldn’t deny that he was happy. Life was good. Sweet. He didn’t have everything he thought of in his quiet baths or in the middle of the night when he was unable to sleep and he haunted the living room, daring to hope that his present domestic happiness with John and Rosie could not only continue, but, perhaps, if he were immeasurably lucky, to one day be even more.

No, he didn’t have that, but what he had was more than he deserved, more than he might have been left with just a few short years ago when everything was being pulled apart at the seams.

While he—and to an extent John—were still involved in consultation work for NSY, it did not take up a great deal of their time. He had taken to operating his private consulting practice on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, or by appointment. The rest of his time was filled with his own experiments, the research work he participated in at Bart’s and a host of duties and pleasures associated with cohabitation with a child.

Four mornings a week, Rosie attended her school—a most private, secure and select establishment, the green-lighting of Rosie’s admission which may or may not have been facilitated by a bit of select blackmail on his brother’s part. She was often to be found at play dates with school mates, or spending time with her Aunt Molly, Aunt Harry or Aunt Clara, as well as Mrs. Hudson, but she also loved to follow Sherlock on adventures.

They explored the city together, walking through neighborhoods, parks and museums; the two of them visited the library frequently, as Rosie was a voracious consumer of books; they snuck into Mycroft’s neglected back garden in good weather, to plant things that would amaze him when he found them blooming in formerly barren plots. It was all much more interesting and enjoyable than Sherlock might have imagined.

Today was a woefully slow Friday which somehow nevertheless managed to be rather perfect. John had the day off, Rosie was not obligated either by school hours or social activities, and the three of them had spent a thus far very lazy day at home. John was just suggesting that perhaps it would be a good time to take Rosie’s bike to the park and let her get some practice in when a very familiar tap was heard at the door.

John opened the door and stepped back to let Mycroft in.

“Good morning, all,” his brother greeted them in something less than his usual stuffy manner, a manner punctuated by a lack of his usual umbrella. He almost looked…human…and
was that? Ye Gods, it was. A pink paisley ascot at the open neck of his checked shirt. Surely the end of days was nigh if Mycroft was to be seen in such louche lounge wear. Clearly he was not haunting the halls of government dressed like a latter day dandy; he must be enjoying a free day, an event so rare as to be unprecedented.

“Brother mine,” a nod in his direction. “John,” said with a tilt of his chin and a slightly less frozen expression than usual.

He nodded at Rosie, who had been lying on her belly attempting to fish a lost toy out from under the sofa, and who was now kneeling on the rug looking up at him, transfixed by his neckwear, “Rosamunde.”

She nodded just as seriously, “Mycroft.”

Sherlock snorted and John shook with suppressed giggles. Mycroft sighed soundlessly and indicated the sofa, “May I sit?”

“You might crease your trousers,” Sherlock snickered, “And you look so band-box fresh. Are those polka dots on your socks?”

“The 1930s called, they want their clothes back,” John tittered, sitting on the arm of Sherlock’s chair.

Mycroft would have rolled his eyes if he had been anyone else. As it was, he huffed in annoyance and made minor adjustments to his costume. “Truly well-made and classic clothing never goes out of style. It is timeless.”

“I like your pink scarf,” Rosie informed him, leaning on the couch next to him and petting the arm of his camel coloured suit as if it were a living thing. “I have one like that.”

John laughed outright, and Sherlock slitted his eyes in pleasure. Oh, this day really had improved three-fold. “Is there a reason you’re dressed like Bertie Wooster and inflicting yourself on us?”

“Never fear,” Mycroft said lightly, removing his silk handkerchief and allowing Rosie to investigate the little tan and yellow umbrellas on the pink background, “This is but a pit stop on my way to other plans. And I do mean pit stop.”

“Hey,” John protested mildly, “We clean. Sometimes.”

“And yet my niece is covered in dust from grubbing about on your floor. At least one can presume she won’t be wearing those pyjamas all day. Are those flying pigs?”

“My favorite ones is the Hulk,” she told him excitedly, “They have a Hulk arm! Hulk smash!” She roared this last in her deepest voice, and Mycroft actually smiled at her.

“They sound charming. You clearly have a unique sense of style. I’ve been pleased to note that you don’t wear jumpers of questionable origin, such as your father is pleased to unleash upon the unsuspecting public.”

John narrowed his eyes and mouthed *piss off* at Mycroft behind Rosie’s back. “Nothing wrong with my jumpers,” he grumbled. “Are there?” He looked for support to Sherlock, who hadn’t had time to assume a polite expression, “Oh great, thanks. Both of you can—“

Rosie looked up with interest and he smiled sweetly, “Go hang some pictures by yourself.”
Mycroft raised a puzzled brow but Sherlock laughed. 

“Ah, I see that once again outsiders to this merry abode are left in the dark. You do have a lot of inside jokes, don’t you? Comes of close…association.”

Sherlock glared at him, ready to commit murder if Mycroft became any more indiscreet.

“We are in close association,” John replied easily, resting his hand on Sherlock’s upper back and causing the younger man to go completely still except for his rapid eye movement. “And yeah, we have a lot of inside jokes. Was there an actual purpose for your visit, Mycroft? Or did you just come to insult our floors and show us your togs?”

“It was such a fine day that I awoke in something of a zestful mood, I suppose I can be forgiven for momentarily forgetting that you remain pugnacious in your views of my company.” Mycroft spoke lightly, for despite the barbs he and Sherlock liked to exchange, and John’s twitting of him, there was a lighter feeling of, not quite camaraderie, but at least civility, between the three men than would have been absent a few years prior.

“Oh my God,” Sherlock said suddenly, brain clicking back into gear once John removed his hand from his back. “You’ve got a date. With Lestrade.”

“A date, is that why he’s dre—“ John strangled on his own words and looked between them with widened eyes, “With Greg? Seriously?”

Rosie clutched at Mycroft’s sleeve, and he looked at her, blinking at her tragic face. “Yes, my dear?”

“You’re dating Gweg?”

“Er, well, that is to say…somewhat.”

“For God’s sake,” John sighed under his breath. He plucked Rosie from the sofa and sat down, plopping her on his lap and kissing her cheek noisily. “Uncle Mycroft is going on a date with Greg. That’s something that adults do. I’m afraid it will be a while before you’re old enough to date anyone. You don’t want Greg to be lonely, do you?”

She shook her head and sniffled, and Mycroft took her hand. “Rosamunde, I see that I have encroached upon your preserves, for which I am heartily sorry. I had no idea that Gregory held a special place in your heart.”

“I love him,” Rosie answered in a small voice, wiping her wet face on Mycroft’s silk handkerchief. He winced but smiled bravely. “I’m going to marry him.”

“He is indeed very special, is he not?” This earned him a decided nod. “I agree. Would it, perhaps, be permissible for me to spend time with him socially until you are of age to date?”

Rosie steepled her hands under her chin in a reflection of Sherlock’s thinking pose. “Hmm. Well…I don’t want him to be lonely.”

“I suppose, that if your father allowed it, he and I could even include you on an outing or two.”

Gasping excitedly, she sat up, his handkerchief falling to the floor. “I can go on dates?”

“Don’t call them that or your father won’t allow it,” Mycroft whispered, winking
conspiratorially. Rosie nodded and whispered—a sound that carried to the street—“Okay. But you can only hold his hand. No kissing.”

Sherlock stood up abruptly and left the room. John tipped his head back and looked at the ceiling, swallowing laughter. Mycroft’s face…!

“Not even goodnight?”

“Well...” Rosie was reluctant, clearly not wanting to give too much ground.

“He might think me uninterested otherwise,” Mycroft mused, rubbing his chin. “Maybe he would look for someone else to date. Someone unknown to you…”

Rosie narrowed her eyes suspiciously, “Are you threatening me?”

John meeped, and stumbled from the room, mumbling “tea” to excuse himself. He found Sherlock in the hallway, red faced from suppressed hilarity. He caught sight of John and broke into laughter. “Shut up,” John hissed helplessly, overcome by laughter, “They’ll hear us.”

“Sheshe,” Greg said when he opened the door to find Mycroft—resplendent in his outfit of choice, though sans carefully chosen handkerchief—“I’m bringing shame to the side. I’m afraid I look like a wino compared to you.”

“Nonsense,” Mycroft assured him, stepping through the door into the as-yet virgin territory of Greg’s new flat. “You….” his words trailed off as he caught sight of his…social companion… who was wearing a faded long sleeved black t-shirt and jeans. His sleeves were pushed up slightly, revealing muscular and entirely too gloriously tan and lightly-furred with hair forearms. A complicated looking wrist watch with a thick leather band was on one wrist, somehow making him look even more rugged and masculine and edible than usual.

“See?” Greg shook his head, closing the door and gesturing Mycroft into the room. “It’s so bad you can’t even find words.” The collar of his shirt was open, showing the kissable hollow of his throat and a virile and manly bit of chest hair. He ruffled his beautiful, thick, pewter-hued hair, “Must be worse than I thought.” There was a silver ring on his right hand, showcasing just how thick his fingers were. Mycroft wanted to slide it off with his lips and make love to that hand with his mouth.

No! Courage. Fortitude. Those were the watchwords of the day.

“I cannot find words to describe how charmingly casual and yet effortlessly stylish you are,” he managed to say.

“Not quite in your league,” the other man said, openly admiring Mycroft’s painstakingly chosen outfit; it was not just imagination that his eyes lingered on the in truth very dashing waistcoat he had dared to don. He gestured around the room, “I finally got everything settled and I’m not ashamed to give you a tour if you want.”
“Please, I’d be delighted.” Oh yes, do walk away from me, you utterly winsome man. What a delightful sight is a finely sculpted posterior in a pair of ever so softly worn denims. Mmm, yes. My, my, my, yes.

“It’s nothing like your place, but I think I did an okay job,” Greg smiled almost bashfully over his shoulder, “Borrowed a few ideas from your decorating scheme, but on a budget. Think it looks alright.”

Mycroft assured him—and truthfully—that it was quite homey and yet tastefully appointed, but his attention was distracted from décor by the sight of Greg’s toes curling in purple socks with turquoise contrast stitching over the toes. How whimsical! They shared a delight in novelty socks.

Dare he wonder if the Detective Inspector also indulged in matching underpants? Would they be briefs? Boxers? …g-strings? The idea was tawdry but titillating.

“…second-hand, but it makes it look heirloom, dontcha think? Not that anyone’s liable to confuse me with someone whose ancestors invested in carpets.” Mycroft became aware that his thoughts had strayed, and focused his attention on his companion.

What on earth was wrong with him? He had never once been as overcome with emotion as when in the presence of this man. It was particularly difficult since their dynamic had changed from friendship to the tantalizing possibility of more. The evening they had spent in one another’s company on Valentine’s Day had been near to perfect, and it had been clear that if they had the desire and courage, each wanted more.

It had been Mycroft who had braved the awkward divide between comfortable friendship and breathless romance. A caress of his fingertips over Gregory’s hand, a step too near and pitching his voice low…he still had it, even if he had not utilized it in some time. There had been an almost kiss, a fraught meeting of eyes, and Gregory Lestrade had tumbled into his lap. Metaphorically speaking.

They had yet to kiss. There had been two subsequent meetings, verging on possibly date-like activities, and a delicious frisson of awareness between them. Mycroft wasn’t afraid. He wasn’t hesitant. He was just…savoring. Gregory truly was delicious. Tonight, however, he was prepared to move matters forward, as it had become clear that his Detective Inspector was enjoying being pursued.

Luckily he was excellent at pursuit. World class, actually.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay in posting. My dear bf was unexpectedly home for two weeks and I didn’t have a minute to myself, he clung like a particularly fond limpet. I was finally able to get some writing done yesterday and if I am lucky, I can finish the next chapter and have it posted tomorrow.
April

Chapter Summary

Sherlock has an interesting conversation with Rosie while at Sainsburys, and may or may not have promised her they can get a dog. John is not best pleased, but he gets a chance to vent his frustration whilst participating in a new adventure with Sherlock, who finds it equally exhilarating for a number of reasons. There may also be peeps at John's naked arse.

Greg finally gets the answer to something he has long suspected, when he and John spend a few hours at the pub.

Molly reveals more of herself than she had intended, and John get to have a very awkward conversation with her as a result. He's more than a little surprised by what he learns.

Mycroft has to restrain himself from throttling Greg--or possibly kissing him within an inch of his life--when some juicy gossip is dangled enticingly in front of him.

Chapter Notes

Aren't you lovelies lucky...I was able to write this chapter and get it posted the day after the last. I wasn't going to make anyone wait, since it took me so long to get March posted. I hope you enjoy...please feel free to comment! I love to know how my work is being received.

“…even when they’re full, red foxes keep huntin’ and since red foxes is the most common, that’s a lot of huntin’!” Rosie skipped to keep up with Sherlock’s long legs. “Nana was complaining about the mice in the basement. We should get a fox and it can hunt the mice and Nana will be happy. Lady foxes are called vixens…can we get a girl and call her Vivian?”

“Why Vivian?” Sherlock asked, slightly overcome by the unsolicited flood of information on foxes. He really shouldn’t have let her have sweets for lunch; she was quite hectic when she had too much sugar. If this was, as John had previously pointed out, something approaching how he himself acted when he was having one of his manic phases, he owed his friend an apology.

“Vivian the Vixen!” Rosie exclaimed, her tone making it clear he was a bit slow on the uptake. Possibly because he hadn’t consumed pure sugar and wasn’t four years old. Creaky old man that was him.

“Ah, yes, of course. Silly of me not to have realized.”

“You can’t think of everything,” she consoled.

“Do you have the list?”

“Yes!” She stepped onto the trolley and clutched the handle, the mangled piece of paper held up to him. “We need milk. Daddy said to remind you ‘specially, cuz you have a-a-a mental
Sherlock muttered to himself, but accepted the list and perused it, plotting the most efficient route through the shop. “Vivian wouldn’t be able to drink milk,” Rosie informed him, “Only the kits do—that’s the babies. Did you know a pack of foxes is called a skulk?” She giggled, “Daddy said you skulk when you don’t get your way. Are you a fox?”

“Your father is awfully mouthy for such a short-arse,” Sherlock grumbled.

Rosie pursed her lips, looking a good deal like her father, “That’s a bad word.”

“I’m a bad man.”

“You are not!” She sighed heavily, as if she bore the weight of the world on her tiny shoulders, “Gweg says you’re a good man, even if you are an annoying tosser. And Daddy likes you, particularly when you bring home the milk.”

“What friends I am blessed to have,” he said sarcastically. She smiled at him, totally missing his tone.

“We could give Vivian dog biscuits even if she can’t have milk.”

“I have severe doubts that your father would allow us—you to have a fox.”

Although if he saw that disappointed face he might reconsider. It was operatically—ah. “Are you, perhaps, hoping to badger him with pleas for a fox and when you are rebuffed ask for something a little more domestic? Hmm? Such as, oh, I don’t know... a dog?”

“…maybe.”

He put three boxes of the disgustingly sugary and fake fruit flavoured cereal she consumed in such quantities in the trolley and—ooh, Honey Loops. No doubt they contained absolutely no real honey whatsoever, were devoid of flavour and lacked even the basic requirements for daily fiber intake...but the cartoon bee was not unappealing and he should try them in case Rosie could be coaxed away from her death-before-dishonour fealty to the marshmallow laden muck she normally spooned up. And one box of Coco Shreddies for John, who had no appreciable taste buds and ate them with peanut butter late at night when he thought the household asleep.

Hastily stowing the box, he entered the next aisle for boxes of pasta and jars of sauce. It would be far simpler if they ate takeaway for all their meals, but John insisted they were nutritionally deficient for a child. Of course, John also let her eat her body weight in Lucky Charms so he was not perhaps as objective on the subject as he would like to think.

“Milk!” Rosie shrieked as they swooped past, and Sherlock skidded to a halt and loaded the trolley. “And some of the strawberry flavour, pleeeeeease?”

“Your primary teeth have luckily not come in as yet. If you continue to consume as much sugar when you have obtained your permanent teeth then I fear they will not be long for this world. Your graduation photos will show naught but an empty black smile, like a blonde jack o’lantern.”

“Strawberry,” Rosie burbled happily as he added it to the cart.

“You’re as micro-focused on the physical pleasures as your father.”

“He likes strawberry milk too.”
“Precisely.”

“...”

“A dog?” John grunted, twisting to avoid most of the blow. “You promised her a dog? Are you—” He ducked to swing in with an uppercut, “—mad!”

“Not promised,” Sherlock rejoined, barely avoiding John’s fist. “I merely told her that I would speak to you on the matter.”

“Which means she thinks she’s getting a dog because she knows you’re a soft touch,” John growled, swinging straight from the shoulder, aiming for Sherlock’s nose.

“I am not!” Sherlock squawked, distracted by the insult and just managing to turn his head in time. He took the blow on his cheek and jaw instead, and sweat flew from his curls.

“Had enough?” John demanded.

“I could go for hours!” Sherlock snorted, trying to disguise his panting, “Are you tired already, old man?” As soon as the words left his mouth he was sorry. It hadn’t escaped his notice that John seemed depressed about his age lately.

He had no need to be self-conscious, really he cut a very fine figure in the track bottoms which hung loosely from his hips, and his thin old t-shirt which clung to his sweaty chest. If he looked any better, Sherlock was going to regret wearing the slightly too thin gi which were doing absolutely nothing to hide the stirrings that the sight of John all gloriously sweaty and animalistic were inspiring. In recent years his transport had run positively amok, particularly when it came to John.

His taunting words unleashed a veritable flurry of blows, and they descended into slapping at one another, until John managed to get Sherlock into a headlock. “Say uncle!”

“Nhmp,” he protested, not as disgusted by his face’s proximity to John’s sweaty armpit as he should have been. Pheromones and all that. Or possibly lightheadedness from suffocation. “Un!”

“What’s that?” John asked sternly, loosening his hold enough for Sherlock to poke his face out a bit.

Oh that commanding tone, what it did to him…apparently he had a bit of a kink for domination. How unexpectedly delightful and appallingly inappropriate.

“Uncle,” Sherlock said sulkily, and John released him.

“...old man...” he heard his friend mutter grumpily as he stomped out of the cage.

“Not bad today boys,” Dino congratulated the pair. He handed them tiny cups of sport drink, “I’ve seen good progress these last few weeks. John, you were really aggressive today, good to see you not holding back for once. But Sherlock, mate, what gives? You were really distracted.”

Blame John’s pornographically thin attire and the excessive amounts of mouthwateringly appealing sweat he had shed. Apparently Sherlock also had a thing for filthiness in the right setting.
“Mm.”

And that was all they were getting out of him. Dino, Angelo’s cousin, was just as taken with the idea of the two of them as a couple as Angelo. Sherlock was starting to get a bit paranoid that all of London was conspiring to throw him together with John. Whether John wanted it or not.

“Time for a shower,” John groaned, stretching. Sherlock absolutely did not look at the slice of his belly which was exposed by his shirt riding up. Not for more than five seconds. Possibly ten, as he once again seemed to have gotten somewhat distracted. Damn John Watson!

“Since the third Musketeer is spending the night at Molly and Alex’s, shall we grab some chips on our way home and fight over the remote?” Sherlock spoke casually, as if the air hadn’t suddenly left his lungs. They had been coming here for almost a month but he had yet to get used to John’s casual disrobing and the way he sauntered naked into the shower. Of course, the man had been in the Army, he would of course be used to communal showers and he wasn’t particularly modest but…this was. That is to say… It was supremely difficult to behave as if he barely noticed John’s naked arse as soap bubbles caressed it.

“Sorry, Sherlock, sounds great, but I have plans.”

Plans? Plans! How dare he have plans?!

“I’m meeting Greg at the Black Lion for drinks…you’re welcome to join us if you like.”

There was a distinct lack of enthusiasm to the offer.

“Don’t be ridiculous, John, I have no interest in standing about in a pub watching you and Lestrade become increasingly intoxicated. Besides, I’ve been eager for uninterrupted time to work on my latest experiment.”

“Oh. Well…okay.”

Now John almost sounded disappointed. It was puzzling.

Exercising extreme self-mastery, Sherlock neither glanced further at John, nor did he allow his penis’ slight twitchings to develop into anything further. It was possible to soap up one’s naked body in a purely disinterested fashion and avoid any…slippery hands…on…eager flesh. It helped a good deal to think of something disgusting, like the image of Mycroft kissing Lestrade, which was foul enough to spontaneously render him an eunuch.

*****

John had to admit, he was really enjoying his sparring sessions with Sherlock. Extended hours at the clinic meant less time running around London after his favorite madman, and while his therapy had helped him deal with his affinity for adrenaline based activities, and his rage fueled loss of control, he still needed an outlet.

The two of them were good together; Sherlock had a longer reach, but John had a more powerful upper body. Sherlock was very agile, but John was a seasoned fighter. Sherlock could anticipate his next moves, but John could anticipate his anticipation and pull a fast one.
It was actually a joy to fight. No bitterness or anger to taint the sessions, just an appreciation for the skill, physicality and precision of the action.

Didn’t hurt that Sherlock wasn’t bad to look at either; if John didn’t know better, he would suspect his friend of purposefully fighting shirtless to distract him.

Greg was already belly up to the bar when John showed up, and he waved an arm in greeting. John politely pushed his way through the knot of women crowding the entrance and made his way over to Greg. “Pint of lager, please,” he called to the woman at the tap. “Greg, hey, sorry for making you wait.”

“’s alright,” Greg said easily, “Got my ale, and there was a fine view.” He nodded over John’s shoulder to the women, who were laughing and talking merrily, tossing their hair and making eyes at him.

John glanced back, “Oh, yeah. Thought you and Mycroft were an item now?” He shuddered, “There’s a scary thought.”

“Piss off,” Greg responded, flicking a peanut at him. “There’s no harm looking. Besides, I like the ladies as much as I like the gents.”

“You’re just an indiscriminate slapper, that’s all that is.”

“I’ll remember that when you finally succumb to your lust for Sherlock.”

John strangled on his lager and wheezed, Greg pounding him companionably on the back until he could breathe again. “What…” John wiped his eyes on a cocktail napkin and thankfully accepted the water the waitress brought him. “What the hell are you on about?”

“If I’m wrong, my apologies. But…John, c’mon.”

“What?” He needed to work on that. He didn’t sound puzzled, he sounded defensive.

“You—you and Sherlock are like an old married couple that never had a honeymoon. You haven’t spared more than a glance for any of those very fine, and very obviously on the make, women since you got here. When’s the last time you went on a date? It’s been ten years, mate, don’t you think it’s time you admit you’re more than friends?”

“I’m not gay.” Weak and automatic.

“Neither am I.”

“I’m not bisexual either.”

“Me neither,” Greg said cheerfully, “I’m pansexual.”

“What in the hell is that? Since when did you become a hipster?”

“My son taught me that isn’t it great? Fits too; I’ve always had an eye for someone sexy and good looking, no matter what toilet they use.” He signaled for another round. “There’s lots of ways to be, John.”

“I’m not gay.”

“Alright.”
“…but I do…”

Stupid cop with his stupid grin and his stupid twinkly brown eyes looking stupidly happy and expectant.

“…possibly…have feelings…”

If Greg leaned forward any further he was in danger of sliding into John’s lap. Best get it out then.

“…forsherlockholmesokay?”

Greg’s lips stopped smirking long enough to issue an ear piercing whistle, which grabbed the attention of everyone in the place. Greg gestured broadly to the waitress, “Bring us two whiskies please, and make ‘em good ones!” He swung back around and beamed at John, “There now, that wasn’t so hard, was it?”

Face buried in his pint glass. Possibly not coming out ever again.

“Although I bet something’s hard when pretty boy’s around, eh? Eh?”


“If you’re lucky, he’s as good a kisser as his brother. Phwoar!”

Attempts at drowning unsuccessful. Break the glass, that’s the ticket. Break it right on the bar and cut his wrists. Bleeding out was slow, but once he was gone he wouldn’t have to live with the thought of Mycroft Holmes’ kisses. Better drink the rest of the lager first.

“I mean, seriously John, he makes my toes curl. No mean feat, that, experienced fellow that I am. Can you imagine how powerful and skilled he must be in the sack?”

Better idea: cut Greg’s tongue out with glass.

“Here, have a whiskey—ah, ah! Not so fast, thirsty lad. A toast first! To John and Sherlock, it took a fucking long time but now you can spend a long time fucking!” Greg tapped his glass against John’s and took a swallow. “Here now, this is good stuff—you’re not supposed to drink it all down at once like that!”

*****

“She was lovely, John. She always is,” Molly smiled affectionately at her god-daughter, who was crawling around on her hands and knees gathering up all the Legos scattered on the rug. The little girl was wearing leggings, light-up trainers and her favorite black hoodie, with the silhouette of a girl doing a high kick. In purple letters it read YES, I KICK LIKE A GIRL. John was glad he had also bought her the t-shirt as well, as it was soon going to be too warm for the hoodie. “She and Alex wore each other out after we had pizza last night, they fell asleep watching Peter Pan and all morning they’ve been building a pirate ship out of Legos.”

The petite brunette laughed and pulled her mobile out of the back pocket of her jeans, “I managed to get a few pictures before Alex fell on it and destroyed the ship.” She pulled up her
Rosie beamed at him, “Alex was just like a big cannomball, he fell right on the ship and bursted it into a million pieces.”

Alex sucked on a Lego and stared adoringly at Rosie. Molly’s son was almost two and a half years old, and he was fast becoming Rosie’s fervent admirer and devoted slave. John noticed he was wearing Rosie’s yellow clip on hair bow in his dark hair. “Nice look, there, mate.”

Molly smiled, “He does love to dress up. Rosie brought her old Belle costume in her rucksack and he pitched a fit when I made him exchange it for his pyjamas last night.”

“Alex is very pretty in yellow,” Rosie informed her father, dumping the last of the Legos in the bucket.

“I like pink better,” Alex whispered, dropping his Lego in after them. Rosie struggled to line up the lid and Alex attempted to assist her. Alex was nearly as independent as Rosie, so both parents stood back and let them work it out.

“Did you have a good time last night?” Molly asked, her small fingers cool when she lightly touched his bruised cheekbone.

“You should see the other fellow,” John joked, “I actually managed to smack him a few times. I hope he isn’t too sore this morning. I had a few too many with Greg last but at least it dulled the pain in my face even if my head would disagree.”

“Boys,” Molly laughed in amusement at the folly of men. “Have time for a coffee? Or tea?”

“Oooh, I’d love a cuppa, thanks.” John followed her to the big, sunny kitchen and took a seat at the island while she pottered about plugging in the kettle and searching out the good biscuits.

“How is Greg?” Molly asked casually.

Too casually. John knew that tone. His heart sank for her; Molly had spent years hung up on Sherlock, dangling after the crumbs of praise he dropped for her. Even her short-lived engagement to Tom whatshisface hadn’t been able to stand up to Sherlock’s allure. Shortly after the dissolution of her engagement she had started quietly dating a Chinese biochemist participating in a research project at Bart’s. By the time Li Jie returned to Shenzhen they had amicably parted ways, but Molly was destined not to forget him.

She had discovered she was pregnant the day Eurus forced Sherlock to phone her and force her to admit she loved him. John’s heart had broken a little more for her when he sat down to explain the whole sordid mess, since she refused to see Sherlock. It had been a painful and rocky road, but now they could all call themselves friends once again. Molly didn’t have romantic feelings for Sherlock anymore, but it looked like once again she was going to be pining for someone whose interest lay elsewhere.

And lucky him, he got to be the bearer of bad news. “Entirely too full of himself as usual. I had to hear all about his new relationship.” There, just drop it casually into conversation and pretend to be fascinated by Alex’s scribbles displayed on the refrigerator. Give her time to absorb the blow.

“Oh…” There was a faint waver in Molly’s voice, but then her tone firmed and she asked with a nearly perfect degree of friendly interest, “Is he seeing someone? I didn’t think he had been going on any dates since his divorce.”
“Yeah, early days, but he’s been—they’re sort of dating.”

“Sort of?” John had to credit Molly’s composure. He wished she didn’t have that tiny hopeful note in her voice though. This was like those times when he had to tell his daughter no and witness her emotional meltdown.

“He’s, well, it’s Mycroft, so they don’t exactly broadcast the news on Twitter. But yeah, they’re dating. Been about a month.”

Molly set his tea in front of him and pushed the sugar bowl closer. “Biscuits?” She asked, turning away abruptly to fetch the ceramic jar she kept them in. When she turned back she was smiling genuinely, although her eyes looked slightly shiny. “That’s lovely. Mycroft…well, he deserves someone as open and happy as Greg. And Greg may be one of the few people who could be happy with someone as secretive and,” she laughed suddenly, sounding fond, “well, as difficult as Mycroft. The Holmes brothers aren’t everyone’s cup of tea.”

John set his cup down and stared at her, “Molly, are you—do you know Mycroft as well as it sounds like?”

This time her smile was definitely genuine and her eyes even twinkled a tiny bit. People underestimated Molly; she was sweet, and kind, and considerate, with a very big heart and a slightly naïve and optimistic view of life, but she also had a very eccentric sense of humour, boundless honour and she was much braver and more self-composed than her timid manner might lead one to believe. “He came to see me after, after Sherrinford, to apologize for his part in everything. Silly man, he does love to take on the weight of the world. Hopefully Greg will be able to help keep things light hearted for him. He needs that.”

Silly. There were a lot of words John would use to describe Sherlock’s older brother, some of them even complimentary, but silly wasn’t one of them.

“I ended up crying all over his waistcoat and he was so awkward and panicked but…well, sweet. Even though he was painfully out of his depth with all my messy emotion, he stayed until I was less upset.” Molly shook her head, sipped at her tea. “As messed up as I was during that time, and as much as I pushed away Sherlock, and you, I was lonely and scared and Mycroft…he actually saw that and tried.”

“Molly,” John began, feeling a wave of sadness for how depressed she had been at that time and for how little she had sought their help—for how strenuously she had pushed them away. Reasonable, given that she had been forced by circumstance to completely humiliate herself and reveal her feelings, but it still left him feeling guilty that he hadn’t tried harder.

“John, please, its fine. Well, it’s fine now. And Mycroft, he was part of what helped me get through. So yeah, we sort of became friends. He keeps an eye on me and Alex—not going to lie, I was pissed at first, but it is kind of sweet in a creepy way, and I’ll take any extra measures to keep Alex safe that I can get.”

“He does love to spy on people,” John gave her a half grin and received a mischievous smile in return.

“About once a month he’ll “happen” to be in the neighborhood with some “unexpected free time” and we’ll have tea, and he’ll bring me books for Alex. Maybe it’s not friendship like most people experience it, but I value it…and I think he does too.”

“I’m sure he does,” John surprised himself by saying. “You know how isolated they both
are…it’s good for him to not be so alone. I’m glad he has you.”

“And I’m glad he has Greg,” Molly said forcefully, meeting his eyes, her face turning pink, “I hope they’ll be very happy.”

There wasn’t really anything to say to that, but John clinked his tea cup against hers and stayed another half hour, unwilling to leave her alone.

******

“I don’t feel like a gay man.”

Oh sure, just stare at me. As if I don’t know what you’re doing when you give me that analytical gaze. I’ve been seeing you on and off for ten years, I know all your tricks by now. I dropped a bomb and you’re waiting for me to kick it to see if it will go off. Well you can just wait; I’m not going to speak first.

“Not bisexual either.”

Well, that’s me, no self-control.

“And no, I’ve never been attracted to men before, not even secretly. Just the one.”

There, now I’ll be silent and smile inscrutably and make you say something.

...they must give you intensive training to stamp out your natural curiosity.

“You probably think I’m lying to you, or lying to myself. I’m not. I’ve never been attracted to other men.”

“Why would you think I thought you were lying?”

“It’s ridiculous, right? A forty-six year old man suddenly lusting after another man and claiming he isn’t gay. Well I’m not.”

“We can all of us, all human beings, still be surprised by our own actions, even when we think we know ourselves well. It isn’t unheard of for someone to be so deeply closeted that they even hide it from themselves. But I also believe that attraction doesn’t have to be predicated by the possession of the “appropriate” set of genitals.” Ella smiled at him, “Sexual attraction means different things for different people, and it doesn’t always happen instantly. Sometimes we aren’t even aware that it is attraction at first; fascination, admiration, or a sense of instant connection…it can come as a surprise when we discover we’ve been hiding secrets from ourselves.”

“This feels like a bloody huge secret to keep.”

“Are you keeping it secret?”

“…I’m telling you.”

“Not exactly an answer to my question, John. Have you told the man in question?”

“No. I—I’m not…it’s complicated. I’m not ready for this and he definitely isn’t.”
“Does he identify as heterosexual?”

“More…asexual, I guess probably not that, just celibate. It’s not his area.” John winced. Christ, even if he ever became ready to say something, how in the hell would Sherlock take it?

“Are your feelings primarily sexual in nature?”

“Are you asking if I have romantic feelings for him?”

“The two don’t always go hand in hand, but often they do.”

“I’ve…it’s hard for me to say this without sounding like an idiot, but. I guess I’ve always loved him. Like, as a mate. My best friend. Even when I hated him I loved him. But over the last couple of months…maybe the last year or so…longer? Anyway, I, I just…”

“It’s alright John, you don’t need to become agitated. Take as long as you like to find the words.” Ella’s voice was soothing. “This is a safe and private environment.”

John rubbed his face roughly with his hands, fisted them in his lap and focused on them instead of meeting her eyes. “I can’t stop thinking about holding him, just that, hugging him. Not even sexual…but I want to, cuddle, I guess? I want to wrap myself around him.” His face was hot and if he looked in a mirror John was certain he would be the colour of an aubergine. “Other stuff, too. Find myself daydreaming about what kissing him would be like…his lips…” _Say it, you coward._ “I, I masturbate. To him. Thoughts of him.” His face was going to melt right off it was so hot. “Filthy stuff. But…tender stuff too.”

“Your feelings are not just sexual in nature then?”

A shaky sigh, “No. No, God, they’re not. I want him…all of him.”

“Has he ever—“

“Indicated he wants me?” John interrupted harshly, ready to bolt out of the chair, “No. Not once. The only time I’ve seen him even approach anything like attraction to another person was with The—a woman. So even if he were interested, it wouldn’t be in me.”

“So he doesn’t have sex but you’re positive, from this one time, that he only feels attraction to women? Much the same way you are only attracted to women?”

If it would have been permitted, John was fairly positive Ella would have popped him on the back of the head like his mum used to do when he was being difficult. “Okay, fine…I get what you’re saying.”

“John, it is okay to be scared.” Ella’s voice was soothing, so soothing. “Facing something this dramatically different about your own nature that you thought was a fixed point…that isn’t going to be easy for anyone. But you need to talk about it. To me, to another therapist, to a friend or family member.”

“I, I did talk to my mate, Greg.”

“And was he receptive?”

“He ordered whiskey to celebrate and acted as if I were the last person to figure this out.” John thought Ella might be fighting a smile. He rolled his eyes, “Are you saying I am?”
“If the person you are attracted to is who I suspect it might be—and John, you don’t have to confirm or deny it—then I would say yes, I have gathered in our sessions over the years that you cared for him very deeply. At times I thought I sensed something besides friendship in your feelings for him.”

“Jesus, do you think he knows?”

“Perhaps. But if you yourself didn’t know it until recently, then there is an excellent chance he has no idea.”

*Small chance of that with Mr. Wizard,* John snorted to himself.

“Have you considered telling him?”

Had he? Had he considered it? Only a million times and in a million ways. “It doesn’t seem like a good idea.”

“Why is that, do you think?”

“Look, it could ruin our friendship, right? I’d have to move—and Rosie loves him—and I, I, I couldn’t bear to lose him again.” John’s voice quavered, dropped, and he blinked hard, feeling exposed, vulnerable and miserable. “This way I get to be with him, have his friendship…if I tell him and it doesn’t go well…I could lose all that.”

*****

*John’s home!* Sherlock flung himself hurriedly into his chair and assumed his thinking pose, hoping he looked casually absorbed in his own thoughts. John mustn’t suspect that he had been agitatedly waiting for him. His friend had seemed subdued when he rose that morning, even accounting for a slight hangover, and he spent longer than usual at Molly’s when picking up Rosie. Then he had made himself scarce upon returning to the flat.

A short time later he had come out, dressed in one of the thick jumpers he wore when he went to sessions with Ella—both from a practical standpoint as her offices were cold, and because subconsciously he drew comfort from the warmth as well as the illusion of something to hide behind—and asked Sherlock to watch Rosie.

So. Not his usual day for therapy. Agitated, distant behaviour. Abrupt need for an emergency session. Failure to meet his eyes. It had something to do with him. Was he…had he perhaps deduced something of Sherlock’s feelings for him? Was he even now debating internally whether or not he wished to continue living here?

Unaware of doing it, Sherlock’s hands dropped to his flat stomach and he pressed hard, seeking relief from the uncomfortable swooping of his insides. He could not lose John now.

“Hey…” John greeted him quietly, avoiding his eyes. “Thanks for watching Rosie for me.” He looked around the quiet flat, “Where is she?”

“Currently in her room, either napping, or possibly wrecking havoc on the contents of her toy box.”
John smiled slightly, cutting his eyes at Sherlock. Their gazes glanced off of one another and then returned. Inscrutable, that was what he must remain. His insides might churn and his heart strain towards John—a physical impossibility that he was nonetheless experiencing—but his face would remain a blank as a virgin whiteboard. Ah, it appeared to have worked, as John hadn’t asked him if he was okay, or hastily excused himself from the room to concoct a reason to vacate the premises.

Excellent, now if he could just maintain his façade until the end of time, all would be well.

*****

“Brandy?” Mycroft held aloft a brandy snifter invitingly, but Greg groaned. “Ah, too full from our repast or still flinching from your excesses of last night?”

“If that’s your poncy way of asking if I had too much to drink and am regretting ever touching a drop, spot on.” Greg grinned at Mycroft’s reluctant smile. “And I also ate too much… your chef is amazing. I’m surprised you aren’t as big as a house.”

“I have struggled mightily over the years to avoid gaining back the excess weight I carried in my youth. Vigilance against unnecessary calories, missed meals and strict adherence to my fitness routine assist me.”

“Well you’re lovely, long and lean now,” Greg complimented, giving him an exaggerated eyebrow waggle, accompanied by a leer, “Although I wouldn’t mind if under those perfect suits of yours were some love handles. I do love something soft to hang onto when things get wild.”

If that is your wish, dear Gregory, you have been granted a boon. Assuming I ever let you view me naked.

“I’ve got a bit of softness too,” Greg went on, patting his middle, “Touchably soft, that’s me.” He smiled with intent, “But hard in all the right places.”

Of course, if I ever wish to see you unclothed—and I do—then perhaps I shall have to suck it up and expose my deficiencies to your gaze. Ah yes, that is the one. Quite heated. The fire is not at all necessary at this point.

“I’m confident your form is every bit as delightful as your visage,” Mycroft said smoothly, sitting down next to him on the sofa, a bare six inches between them. Tonight was not the night in which to take the next step—the preparation, the planning that was going to be necessary!—but that didn’t mean he couldn’t bask in his dear Gregory’s body heat, delicious musk and enticing physical proximity.

“Someone been telling tales about me?” Greg asked coyly, leaning slightly into Mycroft’s arm and meeting his eyes. He dropped his lashes and peeked at the other man under them, a most disarming move, as he was no doubt aware, the flirt. “Well, they’re all true.”

“I don’t listen to gossip,” Mycroft retorted a bit hoarsely. The man’s charm should be outlawed.

“No? Then you won’t want to hear the juicy dish about Sherlock that John served up for me last night.” Greg smiled sweetly.
Drat.

“I pride myself on my concern for my brother. It would be as well for you to tell me the worst now.”

“It’s really just pure gossip. One for the hens to cluck over.” Greg stretched out his long legs and crossed them at the ankle, affecting a relaxed pose. “Nothing to bother about if you don’t like gossip.”

Cluck, cluck, cluck. “I know ways to kill a man without leaving a mark.”

Such a brilliant smile, eyes so dazzling…truly, he was either going to be the best thing to ever happen to such an unworthy specimen as himself, or the death of him.

“Bloodthirsty, I like that in a man.”

Gregory! “Gregory…”

“Well,” Greg leaned toward Mycroft, eyes bright, “you won’t believe it, but I heard these very words straight from the source. Right out of John’s mouth and he barely had a pint in him!”

Cease tormenting me and reveal the intelligence, you irksome, beautiful man.

“Your hesitancy at sharing vital information regarding my brother is cruel. Do your superiors know of your penchant for torture?”

“I got top marks on it in school. There’s a little gold star next to it on my last performance review.”

“I confess I am not surprised; you excel at the sport.”

“Thank you. So…John actually admitted this right out loud, although in one jumble of nervy words, poor lad. He—” Greg affected a choked look, but Mycroft could tell he was genuinely pleased, “he actually told me he has feelings for Sherlock!”

At last! “Is that all? Really Gregory, your ascent as a Detective Inspector is puzzling if that is all you obtained.”

“Quit studying your cuticles like you aren’t gagging to hear more.”

There was more! “Oh…is there more?”

“It took a bit of hemming and hawing and more than a few sips of whiskey, but John finally told me he had been having “feelings” for a while. He’s head over heels, the poor chump, and he can barely contain himself.”

“And has he indicated his feelings to Sherlock?” Doubtful, as all of London would have heard the peeling of church bells and witnessed the fireworks if his brother was aware of the good doctor’s regard.

“Naw…the gutless worm is twitching with self-pity. He’s never wanted to shag a man before and he’s all knotted up with conflicted feelings and fear.”

“Not all of us are as emotionally free and sexually adventurous as you.”

“Good for you that I am, otherwise we’d still be having polite dinners and going home
sexually frustrated. Not that I’m not still sexually frustrated, but at least I know there’s more than frantic wanking in my future.”

“Charming.” It was.

“Deny it all you want, I can tell when I’ve flustered you. You love it when I talk like that. You’ve been doing your own frantic wanking. I’ve no doubt.”

Like a demented…well, wanker. “I’m perfectly in control of myself.”

“Mmm, I love a man with control.” There may have been a certain amount of necking, but no one was around to witness it, and thus Mycroft’s reputation as the Ice man was intact.

“As emotionally constipated as Sherlock is, and as knotted up in conflict as John is,” Greg said a long, long time later, “it’ll be a miracle if they manage to get together before the next century.”

Something must be done about that…
May

Chapter Summary

The usual suspects gather at the park to celebrate Rosie’s birthday and Alex's life choices. Molly stands up to a mean mum. During lunch at Mycroft's house a few weeks later, John is served a surprising truth about Sherlock. Sherlock, despite his worry, discovers that John is as accepting of him as ever. A new addition to the household causes some issues for the trio, not the least of whom is Sherlock, who finds himself taking a late night walk where he meets someone new.

“It is my birthday, it is my birthday, hip hip hooray!” Rosie banged her spoon on the table, rattling the crockery, and then shoveled a drippy bite of Lucky Charms into her mouth. Sherlock savoured the brief respite from her loud and tuneless singing. Through a mushy mouthful of cereal she continued, “I am four today, I will sing and play, hey, hey, hey!” This was not the first time they had heard her song. There was not enough coffee in the entirety of the world to comfort him. Breakfast was a laughable idea. How could John calmly sit there shoveling in eggs and toast loaded with a deplorable amount of jam?

“Dear God, make it stop,” he whispered desperately, and John leaned across the table, tapping his daughter on the back of her hand as she waved her spoon in the air like a maniac conductor of a hellish orchestra, “That’s lovely, dear, but hurry up and eat, so we can see what surprise Nana has for you.”

With the speed, but not the precision, of an excavator, she spooned food eagerly into her mouth, still attempting to make garbled conversation.

“Best I could do,” John murmured in Sherlock’s ear as he passed by to put his dishes in the sink. Sherlock most certainly did not shiver at the wash of John’s breath over his skin. Nor did he sneak a peek at John’s posterior, which was nicely presented in a pair of rather stylish jeans that fit more snugly than his usual more fully cut trousers or cords. And was that a hint of cologne? It was. John had not worn cologne in, in, in ages. Not since his last date.

“Feeling alright?” John asked in concern, turning from the sink and catching sight of Sherlock rubbing fretfully at his chest.

“Don’t hover, John!” He snapped, regretting it instantly. John just rolled his eyes in what might almost have been a fond manner. Suddenly he recalled that John had worn cologne on their not-a-date on Valentine’s Day. In which no women were present. Unless one counted Rosie. Which one wouldn’t.

“Done!” Rosie’s spoon clattered into the bowl and she pushed her chair back with a screech.

“Bowl in the sink, go brush your teeth—with toothpaste and for more than two seconds!—and I’ll help you get dressed.”

“I already picked out my outfit!” Rosie ran out of the room and John laughed.

“I’m fairly certain her outfit will involve at least two different patterns and possibly a cape or
other piece of costumery.”

“She has a flare for personal expression,” Sherlock agreed.

“To say the least.”

“Molly!” Greg embraced the petite brunette and kissed her cheek, “Great to see you; I’ve really missed seeing you at the morgue.”

She went faintly pink but smiled brightly, “You too…you look happy.” She looked past him to Mycroft and smiled more widely, “Mycroft, how wonderful that you were able to make time to be here!”

“I had a personal invitation from Rosamunde, followed by a pleading phone call a rock would have been unable to resist.” The politician smiled and pressed her hand, “Gregory is correct, it is good to see you out and about. You look lovely today, my dear.”

“Thanks, I made an effort. I’ve spent the last two years in yoga leggings; it feels weird to be thinking about work clothes and style.”

“You are not entirely thrilled to be returning to work as much as you love your job.” It was not a question.

Molly nodded, “I’ve been incredibly lucky to be able to take such a long leave of absence and I wouldn’t trade it for anything in the world. And I’m really looking forward to going back to work…except when I’m not.”

Greg gave her a one armed squeeze and Molly, looking away, caught Mycroft’s eye; the combination of regret and sympathy in his gaze spoke volumes, and she was grateful when Greg released her and John came up to greet the newest arrivals. Rosie ran up behind him and gasped when Alex stepped from the shadow of Molly’s skirt. He was wearing Rosie’s old Belle dress, and blue Converse trainers and Rosie yelled at the top of her lungs, “Alex, you look beeee-aautiful and amazing! Doesn’t he, Daddy?”

“Fantastic,” John agreed, holding his hand up to Alex for a high five, which the little boy returned with a shyly pleased smile.

“You just need a tiara,” Mrs. Hudson suggested, whipping one out of the enormous handbag she carried. Sherlock gave her a look of amazement and she offered him one.

“Smashing,” Greg chimed in, ruffling Alex’s hair and grinning at him.

“I like your clothes,” Alex said softly and Rosie preened. The little girl was wearing a black version of the red dress from the musical Annie, which had been Mrs. Hudson’s surprise, with patterned tights, and a pair of plastic play high heeled slippers. She had completed her ensemble with a tiara and a black Zorro eye mask, currently pushed up on her sweaty forehead, holding back the tsunami of messy curls that had already slithered out of the fifty hair pins Sherlock had used in a forlorn attempt to contain the Medusa like locks.

“You both certainly have a unique and refreshing personal style. I commend you on your use of accessories and colour.” Mycroft’s compliment surprised the adults but the children accepted it
as their due, and raced off to fling themselves into playing with the two other school mates Rosie had chosen to invite. The small, private walled park was not normally open to the public this early on a Sunday, but due to a certain suited gentleman’s influence, they were being allowed to host a birthday gathering.

The children ran about excitedly while the adults gathered around a picnic table and overflowed onto the loungers which had been kindly provided. “Harry and Clara should be here soon,” John commented, checking his wristwatch, “Hopefully those wild animals will wear themselves out.”

“I didn’t realize it was fancy dress,” the stylishly dressed and slightly snooty looking mother of one of Rosie’s playmates said with a touch of condemnation in her voice. She was watching Alex, who had stopped to wipe his hands on his skirts as he followed Rosie, who had already kicked off her slippers and was running about in rapidly dirtying tights.

The others reacted with varying degrees of shut-the-fuck-up attitude, but allowed Molly to answer, “Alex loves to dress up; he has a very vivid imagination. I don’t want to stifle that wonderful little mind of his. And I believe it’s important to let children express themselves. Sometimes that means he wears dresses.” She spoke pleasantly, but only a fool would have failed to hear the steel behind her words.

“He’ll grow out of it when he goes to school,” the second mum said, her words clearly meant to be comforting. She smiled at her son, who was running around after the others, “Barney used to carry his sister’s doll around everywhere until he started school—my husband didn’t want me to let him take it, but he came home that first day and he didn’t ever carry that doll around again—the kids teased him and that took care of that.” She smiled at the children, “It was hard for a few days, but easier in the long run. For the best if he didn’t play with dolls.”

“Children are arseholes,” Sherlock drawled in his deep voice, freezing her with his pale eyes, “And many of them grow up to be even worse adults.”

“Perfect twats, some of ‘em,” Greg said cheerfully. Mycroft coughed.

There was an awkward little pause, thankfully broken by the welcome arrival of Harry, Clara and their infant son, James. “Sorry we’re late!” Harry called, lugging a crate in one hand and a bulging baby bag in the other. Clara was a few steps behind, James in a sling snuggled up to her chest, and a gift bag in the other.

“Hi, John,” Clara greeted him, kissing his cheek and pulling back the sling so he could see his nephew’s sleeping face which scrunched at the light. Harry set the crate down at the end of the table opposite where the kids were playing and hugged her brother. “Hope we didn’t keep you.”

“Nope, we’ve only been here for a bit, just letting the monkeys work off a little energy.”

“Now?” Sherlock asked. John nodded and Greg let loose a shrill whistle and bellowed at the kids to gather round.

Rosie greeted the new arrivals boisterously, and was busy admiring her cousin when she suddenly whirled around, wide eyed. “A puppy!” She screamed, instantly waking the baby, and startling Alex so bad he dropped his Power Ranger action figure. Flinging herself to her knees, Rosie tried to gather up the little dog which had been licking her fingers. “Is it for me?”

“Happy birthday, sweetheart,” John laughed, watching his daughter roll on the grass with an armful of wriggling fur.
Her shining face almost made up for all the extra trouble this was going to be. Almost. Now he had two toddlers and a dog to pick up after. What had he been thinking? “It’s from Sherlock too.” He glanced at his best friend and got that tender feeling all over again, seeing Sherlock’s eyes.

“Oh thankyouthankyouthankeyou! I love him!”

“She’s a girl,” Clara corrected, jiggling a fretful James, “She’s about two years old, and she knows some tricks and you can change her name if you want.”

Deciding on the perfect name for the dog resulted in lots of whispered consultation between the children which broke out into a rather heated argument, with the adults suggesting names which were scornfully shot down by the birthday girl. “No need to decide right now,” John finally said. “Why don’t you think about it while you open your other gifts?” This distraction served nicely to leave the dog naming disagreement in the dust for the moment.

At the end of a very long and busy day, an overtired and over-stimulated Rosie insisted on letting the dog sleep on the foot of her bed. John wavered over the idea, having intended on setting the dog up in the crate downstairs, but ultimately he remembered the joy of knowing his childhood dog was curled at his feet. The little Yorkshire terrier seemed as well-behaved as Clara had promised, and so far there had been no accidents. “Alright, but first let’s get you cleaned up. I think there’s more dirt on you than in the park.”

This idea was met with resistance and when John put his foot down he was treated to a hysterical meltdown. Rosie screamed angrily when he picked her up and managed to slither bonelessly out of his grasp and fling herself dramatically onto the floor. “I won’t! I don’t want a stupid bath!”

“Stop it,” John said sternly, “You’re filthy and you’re getting a bath and that’s that. You’re not a baby, Rosamunde, stop acting like one.”

She wailed louder, kicking him when he reached for her. Swatting her on the bottom, John held onto his patience. “I’m counting to three and if you aren’t up on your feet by then, you’re getting that bath and going straight to bed. And the dog won’t be sleeping with you.”

“Nooooooo!” Her cry started off deep and woeful but escalated to a shriek thin enough to cut glass.

It only went downhill from there. By the time a damp and frazzled John stomped down the still creaking—damn it!—stairs, a timid dog under his arm and the guilt-inducing sounds of his exhausted daughter’s snuffling sobs cutting into his heart, he wanted to dive into the bottom of a bottle of whichever alcohol was closest to hand. Unfortunately, he had responsibilities; no doubt the dog would cry pitifully at being alone in a new place, and if his daughter didn’t wake up crying in a few hours he would be amazed. Probably she and the dog would wake him before dawn at least once.

Sherlock was folded origami-like into his chair, nice and fresh from a shower, comfortably attired in pyjamas. I hope your knees lock up like that, John thought viciously, just wait until you’re my age and see if you can sit like some kind of fucking swami. “You craven coward, you just abandoned me with a hysterical three year old.”

“Four year old,” Sherlock corrected him automatically. His expression registered that his words had not found fertile ground. “How would I have benefited the situation?”
“At least I wouldn’t have been alone,” John groused, sitting the as-yet unnamed dog down on the rug and hoping it didn’t piss. He forced himself to rummage out a bowl and fill it with water for the dog, and thanked Clara for including a small bag of dog food. He shook some into another bowl and then gave in and snagged a Boddington’s since he was definitely going to need a tiny drop to soothe him. “Now I’m the bad guy. You’re fun uncle Sherlock and I’m bad Daddy.”

*Shut it*, Sherlock told his body, which was having inappropriate ideas at the thought of playing naughty Sherlock and Bad Daddy. “I have said no before.”

“When it suits you,” John grumbled. He sounded less annoyed now, and he was slowly relaxing into his chair, sipping his ale. Sherlock put Bad Daddy out of his mind and then had him put right back in when John licked a bit of head off of his upper lip. *I’ll give him head to lick*, Sherlock’s libido, which was now completely out of control, piped up. Dear God what was wrong with him? He hadn’t felt this urgently libidinous in more than twenty years. Dr. Fassbender had warned him that opening up the doors to the past would flood him with unfamiliar feelings, but he hadn’t expected some of those feelings to be sexual.

******

“Isn’t this pleasant?” Mycroft’s affable smile made Sherlock and John both squint suspiciously at him. “This is, I think, the perfect time of year in England. Perfect for an intimate barbeque.”

“And drinks,” Greg supplied, handing Mycroft a Wembly, “lots of drinks, which is the proper British way. John, your ale. And for party pooper Sherlock, a sparkling water.”

“Superior persons such as myself don’t require alcohol to enjoy themselves.”

“Maybe not, but the rest of us find you a lot easier to stomach with a few down the hatch.”

“Ha. Ha. Brother mine, how do you stand this oaf’s presence?”

“Gregory is not only clever, but refreshingly light-hearted and most splendidly physically titillating. It is a struggle but I manage.”

Sherlock pretended to gag and John wandered away a bit. If Mycroft Holmes was going to start waxing poetic about what Greg had under his Mufti, he was prepared to vault the fence and scarper. “Please,” he heard Sherlock’s pained and dramatic tones behind him, “kindly shut up. I find the mental image of your flaccid and aged bodies intertwined more than my constitution can support.”

“Nothing flaccid about either of us,” Greg announced loudly, digging his elbow into Sherlock’s side. Sherlock scowled at him and held his drink away from his body to avoid having any of it spilled on him.

“You’re a lecherous Neanderthal with a pin sized brain and a sense of humour equally as funny as that of any fungus.”

“Aw, I love you too.”

“Get off of me you sweaty fool!”
“Gregory…Sherlock…”

“Greg, lay off. Sherlock, quit clutching your petticoats and relax.”

“I don’t wear petticoats!”

“Aw, c’mon, fellas—“

“Ah, I believe the victuals are done.” Mycroft’s soft voice cut through the nonsense and Greg hurried to make sure his precious meats were not charred to bits. Sherlock flounced into a chair, sulking mightily, and Mycroft winked at John, who thought for a moment the other man might be having a stroke. But no, he was moving about the garden table, uncovering the salad and making sure the requisite sauces were available. Apparently Sherlock’s brother was just full of bonhomie. And wasn’t that a disturbing thought?

“Good bit of chicken here, Greg.”

“Thanks! I stole the recipe from my ex.”

“The only palatable thing about your ill-fated marriage.”

“My, bung another drumstick in his maw, only way to stop a squalling baby: shove food in their mouths or put them down for a nap.”

“Perhaps his posterior has become damp and he needs a change.”

“I am perfectly dry and continent. Neither of you are the least bit humourous. As soon as I’ve finished eating I intend on leaving.”

“Have some salad, lad.” Greg piled a goodly bit on Sherlock’s plate. “Glad to hear you’re able to keep from having a wee. I’m not cleaning you up. Your bum is John’s concern.”

And didn’t that drop into conversation like a rock into a pond?

“I—what—you—“

“He is a handful.” Three pairs of eyes cut to John, who did his best to look unconcerned. Perhaps he shouldn’t have attempted a bit of a joke crossed with innuendo. A big mouthful of his drink to appear carefree…

“John has never touched my, my—“

“Bum?” Greg supplied. “Seems a bit of a shame that you won’t even let him have a quick grab after all these years. Even Mycroft lets me get in a quick fondle now and then.”

“How did my posterior come to be introduced into this conversation?”

“It’s lovely and firm and should be bragged about,” Greg winked at him, “Don’t try and hide your light under a bushel, Mycroft.”

Sherlock gagged and John looked about for fresh drink.

“Or my bum under my trousers?” Mycroft looked positively roguish, and Greg forgot himself and leaned in for a kiss.

“Enough!” Sherlock yelled, slamming his hands on the table top, rattling the crockery, “I
came here under protest and am now being stimulated to the point of projectile vomiting by the sickening parade of, of—"

“Middle aged debauchery?” John supplied, when his friend failed to find a stinging epithet.

“Yes! Middle aged debauchery…and, and decrepitude…sickening…I am taking my chicken and leaving!”

“Oh do sit down, Sherlock,” Mycroft drawled in the manner of an older brother who was well-versed in the hysterical fits of an overly dramatic younger sibling. “I was forced to witness your puerile gropings with that young chap—what was his name? Peter? Philip?—when you dragged him home with you for Christmas break your first year at Oxford. Compared to that, my mature, fulfilling and thoroughly respectable relationship with Gregory is naught in the way of sickening.”

Wait…what?

Once, when John was small, four or so, he had been racing through their two up-two down, fleeing from a giggling Harry and had missed the first step at the head of the steep flight of stairs. Tumbling down, everything had been a breathless jumble of fear, exhilaration and confusion. Ending up at the foot of the stairs, bruised, shaky and with the breath knocked out of him, John had only been able to grin up at his terrified sister.

Now he just sat in a sort of giddy, motionless shock, feeling that old familiar sensation of missing a step. Sherlock was gay? Sherlock was gay? Sherlock. Was. Gay. He had had relationships, or a relationship. With someone that other people knew about. One, according to Mycroft’s own account, that had involved gropings. Sherlock had gotten sexy with some bloke. So.

Yes.

Fuck. Fuckity fuck fuck fuck. He was so screwed.

*****

“My brother as always has soured my stomach with his fetid breath and slug-like personality. The addition of Lestrade merely serves to add a hellish twist to the torment.” Sherlock raised his arm for a cab, which of course appeared as if by magic and obligingly pulled up in front of the kerb outside Mycroft’s home. “I may need an emetic, John.”

 “…you’re gay.”

Sherlock, in the process of sliding gracefully into the cab, suddenly moved with glacial slowness. By the time he sat down he had collected himself and was facing forward, looking slightly stern. “Do keep up, John.”

“I…what?”

“That was two hours ago. We have since covered numerous topics, none of which involved my sexual orientation. The time to evince surprise has passed.”

“No. No, I don’t think it has,” John huffed in exasperation. “I’m your best friend! Not once
in ten years did you think to share that with me?”

“Technically it was eight years,” Sherlock began, “You thought me dead for two of those years.”

“Do not even try and use that as a valid argument!”

“Regardless, why should I have specifically mentioned to you my homosexuality? I am celibate. Which I did mention.”

“Because—because—“ John floundered, unsure exactly when his very reasonable train of thought had jumped the tracks. Because really, there was no specific reason that Sherlock should have told him. Sure, friends usually knew that much about each other; and okay, if someone was celibate then maybe it wouldn’t come up as frequently as it might with a sexually active person; and undoubtedly Sherlock was subject to his own rules. But… No. Really the only reason he wanted to know so badly was because he found himself deep in the grips of a tenacious attraction to his best friend and this, this is both wonderful and terrible news. “You’re right, no reason.”

Sherlock didn’t look appeased, “Then why were you making something of it?”

John shrugged, looked out the window, realized he was being cowardly and turned to face Sherlock, aware the driver was drinking this all in. No doubt the two of them would be in a scandal rag the following day: SEVEN TIMES A NIGHT SHERLOCK SUFFERS SPLIT WITH SINGLE DAD SIDEKICK or something equally hideous and soul-shriveling.

“I thought we knew just about everything about one another. And, well, all those times I was telling people I wasn’t gay, seems like just once it would have come up.”

“I feel no need to defend my personal life against the whispers of others.”

“I know you don’t. It’s one of the things I love about you even when it causes trouble.” John smiled at Sherlock’s look of surprise. “Look, sorry, this just caught me off guard is all…there are certain things about you that are so off limits and then to just hear like that, at lunch for God’s sake, that you have had a relationship in the past, and that it was with a man…well, it’s causing some rearranging of what I thought I knew about you, that’s all.”

“I hope the rearranging isn’t too uncomfortable.” There was a lightness to Sherlock’s voice, as if he had learned something that relieved his mind. John wondered suddenly if his friend thought that he might have taken issue with learning he was gay.

“Naw, time for a spring clean.” They shared a grin.

*****

Was it a coming out if you had never specifically hidden your sexual preferences? No matter the semantics, Sherlock discovered that he felt a faint but pleasant sense of happiness at John’s knowledge of his past; at John’s acceptance of the fact of his being gay. He hadn’t failed to notice John’s rather stupendous surprise at Mycroft’s clumsy attempt at manipulation—a matter which would end in confrontation with his meddlesome brother—but all seemed to be well. John was, he still sensed, holding back something from him. But it wasn’t disgust or any other negative emotion. In fact he had seemed almost…lighthearted?
That was where he started to get tangled up in messy whirls of his own thoughts. It was hard to sleep when the idea that John might almost have welcomed the news persisted in bedeviling him. Much as this pestiferous dog was bedeviling him. He had been stretched out on the sofa, attempting to think of something besides the way John kept looking at him these last few days. The man was smiling a full sixty percent more than usual.

“Biscuit, down!” He craned his neck off of John’s Union flag pillow and scowled ferociously at the gently whimpering little ball of silken haired lap doggery. What a ridiculous name. Stupid dog. The creature was always begging to be in someone’s lap. Which at this hour of night appeared to be his; usually she could be found on Rosie’s bed as the little girl slept. Why was she downstairs and crying at him? “Why are you downstairs? Why are you crying?”

Biscuit’s whining increased slightly in volume, and if possible, her soulful brown eyes became even more pleading. He sat up on one elbow, “Go back upstairs to your mistress.”

Another urgent whimper and the dog whirled in a circle much as it did when—oh. “Do you need to void your bladder?” Another whirl was his only answer, “You should have attended to that when John took you for your walkies before bed. I do not wish to go out.” Tactical error! At the words “walkies” and “go” the canine gyrations increased and he now looked to be witnessing the first ever dog hula. “I loathe your tiny preciousness. You’re not a proper dog at all. I told John we needed a bloodhound.”

Unwilling to be faced with cleaning up puppy piddle from the rug, in short order Sherlock found himself taking Biscuit for walkies at four in the morning. There was blessedly light foot traffic about, as he was most unwilling to be seen promenading with this disgrace to the genus Canis. Despite Biscuit’s urgent need to toilet, the dog seemed to be taking great joy in sniffing everything in their path. Sherlock tried giving the leash a firm tug but it resulted in the dog making such a sound of strangled distress that he feared PETA would descend on him immediately.

At long last they reached the bit of grassy ground where those in the neighborhood who had chosen to inflict furry beasts on their households were wont to take their pets to void. Watching where he stepped, Sherlock eased onto the grass and looked down at Biscuit, who was sniffing assiduously but not in any way, shape or form using the ground for its intended purpose. “Toilet,” Sherlock said sternly, pointing at the grass a few feet away.

A wet nose to his shoe seemed to be the only response the beast seemed capable of giving. Clearly its ribbon-bedecked topknot was too snug and it was addled. “Toilet. Void. Piddle. Pee. Wee. Poo. Poo, damn you!”

A low snorting chuckle froze him nicely in place and Sherlock debated abandoning the dog and fleeing to save his reputation. The thought of John’s displeasure and Rosie’s broken hearted wails fixed him in place. Turning, he found a man dressed in trainers, pyjama bottoms and a windbreaker holding the lead of a puffball even smaller than Biscuit. He was attempting to light a cigarette and Sherlock was instantly jealous. He wanted a cigarette. Oh, glorious tars and resins!

“Sorry,” the other man offered, sounding amused, “Trust me, I understand. This damned—this dog never fails to want to go out in the middle of the night, and half the time we get here and she just sits and stares up at me adoringly.” He succeeded in lighting his smoke and took a greedy lungful, sighing in the delight only a true smoker experiences when taking that first wonderful inhale when the slings and arrows of life were landing with frequency, vigor and accuracy. “The wife just had to have her, and yet it’s always me out here searching in the dark for a pile of poo the size of a walnut.”

Poo! Bags! Ye Gods, John had been going on about being forced to pick up the waste
product of the hell hound in tiny, colourful bags that were, since Rosie had been instrumental in their purchase, patterned with flowers and scented vanilla. And he had come out without them.

Seeing Sherlock frantically patting down his person, the man laughed again, which would have been supremely annoying, excepting it was a friendly sound, and he was, the good fellow, holding out a spare bag. “I know that look…here. You don’t want to get a reputation for being one of those knobs who leaves booby traps for the unsuspecting.”

“Thank you,” Sherlock said gratefully, turning in circles to try and spy if Biscuit had done anything that warranted collecting. Alas, she seemed content to make tentative friends with her new playmate. “I’m afraid I found myself unprepared.”

“Your wife usually do this?”

“…no, my…husband.” Hello mouth, meet brain. One of you is in charge and it’s the wrong one. “Too, the hell beast does not usually require walkies at this early hour.”

“The little fuckers take no prisoners—now that you’ve taken her out once she’ll expect it every night at this time.”

“What? No!” Sherlock glared at Biscuit fiercely, “This was a one-time occurrence and should not be in any way construed as the beginning of a routine.” Biscuit sat on her tiny bottom and gave him a doggy grin.

“Yup, you’re screwed,” his new companion said cheerfully. He held out his pack, “Smoke?”

Great though the temptation was, Sherlock managed to shake his head mutely. “You sure? You look like you could use some relaxation.”

“I promised my daughter I’d quit.” Brain! Brain, are you there? “It has now been more than five months and I know myself…if I give in now, I’m but a moment away from huddling in an alley shooting up.” Perhaps more than a moment, but he needed to deny all his addictions to avoid them.

“You’re funny,” the man stuck out his hand, “I’m David. And this is Sugar.”

“…Scott. And Biscuit, for my sins.”

“Kids name her?”

“She was a gift for our daughter and after a rather staggering amount of debate and list making, she settled on Biscuit. Because she loves biscuits.”

“Yup. That’s how I ended up greeting the dawn walking a four pound yap named Sugar. Kids are the best, you know? But life is a lot less hectic and messy without them.”

“Lonelier though.”

“Yeah. How old’s your girl?”

“Rosie is a twenty-four-year old in a four year old’s body.” That earned him another laugh. This was quite…pleasant. Usually, the only person who laughed at his jokes was John.

“I know just what you mean, my youngest, Gemma, is like that. Full of sass but the funniest, spunkiest girl you can imagine.”
No one was as funny, spunky and sassy as Rosie. But this was one of those times John would caution politeness. “She sounds a handful.”

“Nothing compared to her brothers—every horrible thing I ever put my parents through is now being revisited on me. Mum just laughs and laughs.”

“Your family sounds quite active.”

“It can be. The boys, Niall and Gavin, are seven and nine, ripe for one disaster after another—we spend so much time in Casualty I’m surprised they haven’t had us up for child endangerment. But the boys are tough. Gemma is five and tries to keep up with them, gets a bit lonely though. Mostly singles and elderlies around here. Not a lot of small kids for her to play with.”

“Perhaps…perhaps one day we can bring them together.” Apparently his brain had gone on holiday and left only his mouth to mind the grounds. What was he thinking? He was not actually Scott, father of Rosie, husband of John. And even if he were, he didn’t do Happy Families. He wasn’t going to sit through some insipid play date.

Rosie would love a playmate her age in the neighborhood though…

*****

“Shh, Sherlock was up late last night, let’s be quiet as mice and not wake him.” John put Rosie on his hip and she wound her skinny arms and legs around him, clinging like a monkey as he descended the stairs. Of course they squeaked like hell when he hit the loose boards; he really needed to fix that.

“Where’s Biscuit?” Rosie asked in her wall-rattling whisper.

“Shh! Probably downstairs on the sofa, or having her breakfast.”

Or…nowhere in sight. Before Rosie could set up a wail, John popped her in front of the telly with a juice box and went on a quick search. The damned dog was nowhere to be found. The front door was locked. For God’s sake, there was no place for Biscuit to be except—

No. Or yes. Yes, apparently she was happily cuddled up in the curve of Sherlock’s knees, the both of them fast asleep on Sherlock’s bed. Aware of a desire to crawl in with them, John softly closed the door and smiled to himself. It looked like Sherlock had made a new friend.
June

Chapter Summary

The boys muddle through further attraction, confusion and longing. John spends some solitary time at the gym, Sherlock has a narrow escape, and Greg utterly fails as a child minder. Mycroft has really terrible timing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There wasn’t any messing about now, waiting for Sherlock to steal into his fantasies. John braced his arm against the wall of the shower and invited Sherlock in, muscled him into an embrace and stroked hard and fast. Wet curls, pale skin, it was all there in front of him in vivid detail—John kept his eyes open, pinning this naked and aroused vision of Sherlock in place with his own hot gaze. This was, Christ, this was really, really good. Better than before, hotter. Now he was admitting what he wanted, that he wanted it, and it felt fantastic.

It was getting increasingly difficult not to just tell Sherlock he wanted something physical; that the very sight of him was enticing, his presence in the room drew John to him.

Now that he knew the younger man had, at least in the past, indulged in a physical relationship...just knowing that he had had a relationship, physical or not...John had to fight the urge to press, cajole, seduce. Time and patience were the watchwords; he wasn’t going to ruin their truly excellent relationship, the best and truest friendship he had ever known, their deep and abiding affection for one another, by letting his libido take control.

But it was very, very hard. And that wasn’t just an innuendo.

Shaking, John turned his head and bit his bicep as he came.

*****

The slamming of his fists into the punching bag was releasing some of the tension, but John was aware that he was still pissed. All out-of-proportion angry with Sherlock. But damn it, this was their thing, their ritual, their time, just the two of them and apparently it was so unimportant to Sherlock that he had forgotten that it was Thursday and here John was, alone.

No answer to his texts—punch. Called and went straight to voicemail—two rapid blows that sent a shock through his left shoulder. Waited twenty fucking minutes and that bastard didn’t show up, didn’t text, didn’t call—a flurry of blows. John was grunting with effort, with pent up anger, with frustrated sexual tension and he was taking it all out on the punching bag. At least he had a leash on his anger, a suitable target for his temper. All that therapy and finally he had control over his rage issues. Mostly.

Fuck, his left arm was starting to ache, to weaken, and John rested for a minute, panting,
head down, sweat dripping off of his soaked hair, his clothes. He was pushing it too hard, pushing himself past the smart threshold for what he could withstand and not feel it tomorrow. The intelligent move, the adult thing to do, would be to cool off, shower and go home. Call Bill and see if he was in town, if he wanted a drink—no, he was too out of control right now to introduce alcohol. But maybe Bill would meet him for a coffee and listen to him bitch and moan. They’d made it through fucking Kandahar together, he’d listened to Bill’s whinging about missing his fiancée, he could bloody well listen to him verbally tear apart that selfish, thoughtless prick—

No. Focus, redirect. Switching to high kicks, John gave his arms a rest—his goddamned shoulder was on fire right now, he was such an idiot—and tried to clear his mind. Sherlock could be thoughtless, and in the past he had been monumentally selfish, but over the last four or five years he had changed so much, he’d been there, truly been there for John, and for Rosie, and the days when he lied, obfuscated the truth, manipulated situations—manipulated John—were long gone. He didn’t disappear. He kept appointments, met obligations…maybe with a little arm-twisting now and then, but he did.

John had thought that this wasn’t even an obligation, that it was more than an appointment. These nights when it was the two of them, he had felt closer to Sherlock, enjoyed the physicality, the lack of talking aside from the occasional friendly taunt, the camaraderie. It was like therapy and physical therapy and a night at the pub with your best mate without all the talking and the hangover. He thought these nights meant as much to his friend. So either Sherlock was being a complete dick, or he was in a situation that didn’t allow him to contact John. Neither of which concept made him happy.

So, he kept punching, kept kicking, long after his muscles had started to tremble from fatigue. John took a break, trying to wipe sweat off of his forehead, but his arm was equally slippery, and he cast about for a towel. Dino was standing a few paces away, massive arms crossed over his chest. Without a word he offered John a clean towel, and then a tiny paper cup of sport drink, watched him dry off, breathing a little heavily, “You trying to kill yourself, doc?”

“No,” John said tersely, burying his face in the towel.

“Glad I don’t have your life if that’s the case,” Dino said sarcastically, “You’re overdoing it.”

“I was in the zone,” John retorted, “But don’t worry, mum, I’m going to cool off now and then hit the showers.”

“Where’s Sherlock?”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” John avoided Dino’s knowing look and wandered off to cool down, watching some of the others training or sparring. Finally, aware that it was getting late and probably past Rosie’s bedtime, John walked back to the locker room and checked his phone for messages. Mrs. Hudson had called twice, shit.

“John, dear, are you alright?”

He squeezed his eyes closed and slumped onto the bench, glad he had the locker room to himself for the moment, “Yeah, yeah…sorry. I got caught up and didn’t notice the time. I’m sorry I guess Rosie’s asleep already, huh?”

The landlady sounded kind, as if she heard the exhaustion and dejection in his voice, “She is, I tucked her into my spare room and she’s fast asleep with Biscuit curled up at her feet. You can just leave her here for the night, dear; no use disturbing her now.”
“Are you sure?”

“Of course…John, are you alright? You don’t sound like yourself.”

“…just overdid it. I’m going to be paying for it tomorrow.” He injected a little levity in his voice, “Not a young bloke anymore.”

She tutted, “Oh nonsense, you’re in your prime, dear. Talk to me when you’re eighty.” She giggled, “And even then life’s not over!”

He smiled, and stood up, “Mrs. Hudson, you’re wonderful, you know that?”

“I do know that.” He could hear her smile, “Why don’t you have a nice shower and then go out and paint the town a bit. You’re still young.”

Heeding her words, John took a longer than normal and very hot shower, and rummaged in his locker for a bottle of Panadol. He dialed Bill and put the phone on speaker as he dressed. His call went unanswered, but he left an upbeat message and tried Greg. The detective inspector answered almost immediately, sounding breathless, “John? Where are you? Things alright?”

A cold finger of worry trailed up his spine, “What do you mean?”

“Aren’t you with Sherlock and Mycroft?” And there it was, trouble nipping at their heels. Please let this be some secret spy, government shadow ops, big brother/little brother pissing contest/challenge and not another megalomaniacal mastermind.

“No,” throwing his things haphazardly in the locker, John stuffed his feet into his shoes and jogged out of the locker room. “Why? What’s going on?”

“Fuck if I know! Myc and I were—busy—and he got a phone call, one that went through his usual privacy settings, so it was something big. And the next thing you know he’s throwing on his clothes and running out the door phoning Sherlock.” Greg’s frustration and worry coloured his voice, and John cursed that Sherlock was doing something that had the normally level headed Lestrade this worried. “I didn’t get a call out to a scene and I figured it was something mysterious to do with Myc, thought maybe they looped you in on it.”

“No, I have no bloody idea what’s going on!” John looked around for a cab but the street was busy, and he decided the Tube would probably be faster. He broke into a run, dodging through pedestrians, “I haven’t been able to get a hold of Sherlock for the last few hours; he hasn’t answered any of my calls or texts.” Fishing out his Oyster card as he ran, John nearly bowled over a slow moving granny pushing a pram. Shouting an apology over his shoulder, he hurried through the turnstile and juggled his wallet and mobile. “I’m about to lose you, Greg. Call me if you hear anything, yeah?”

Trying not to wake anyone, Sherlock limped as he let himself into the building and slowly mounted the stairs. Softly, he unlocked the flat door and entered the flat, swaying a little with exhaustion as he attempted to step out of his muddy shoes.

“Sherlock? Christ, what time is it?” John’s voice made him jump, and he was embarrassed
that he hadn’t even seen the other man, who appeared to have fallen asleep in his chair.

“Almost four, I think,” he realized his voice was slurred, and it struck him that he was more
tired than he had recognized. “I hope you weren’t waiting up for me.”

“Of course I was! You didn’t answer my calls or texts, you missed our sparring session and
Greg told me Mycroft raced out like the house was on fire. Jesus,” John shoved a hand through his
disheveled hair and leveled a hard glare on Sherlock, “I thought maybe Moriarity’s evil twin had
surfaced or something.” He stepped closer, face softening despite his worry and anger, “You look
done in—here, let me help you.”

John knelt and unlaced his shoes, and offered his shoulder for support; Sherlock leaned on
his friend and let him ease off his shoes. “Thanks, I can’t bend over easily, I bruised my ribs.”

“Are they broken?” John looked up at him, alarm written clearly on his haggard features,
“Have you had a doctor check you out?”

“Yes, Mycroft’s physician examined me, just bruising.”

“I want to examine you,” John told him sternly, standing and lending an arm that Sherlock
was ashamed to realize he needed. “Let’s get you out of these filthy clothes—what the hell, did you
roll around on the banks of the Thames?—and I’ll check you over.”

Yes, he had rolled on the banks, struggling with a surprisingly fit Member of Parliament who
had nearly succeeded in holding his head underwater. Luckily Mycroft’s team had shown up in
time. Sadly, he could smell himself and it was quite pungent; he had probably left an indelible
smell in Mycroft’s Jaguar. “I can undress myself, John.”

“Oh? Like you took off your own shoes?” John snorted forcefully, and Sherlock smiled
slightly. “Even if they’re just bruised and not cracked or broken, you need to take it easy on your
ribs. I’m a doctor, I’ve seen patients naked before. Besides, I was at Buckingham when you were
swanning about in a sheet, remember?”

“Ah, my salad days, when I could get away with anything.”

“Idiot,” John sounded fondly amused, and Sherlock smiled again.

In the bathroom, under the harsh fluorescent light, John eased him out of his shirt and gave
him a thorough examination. “I’d say you are just bruised, but tomorrow we’ll swing by the clinic
and do an x-ray…and don’t even open your mouth to object, you don’t get a say-so in this.”

“Yes, John, of course, as you say,” he said meekly, earning him a suspicious look. He tried to
laugh but ended up groaning instead. Perhaps he did need some assistance disrobing; his side was
beginning to ache fiercely, and he was feeling quite stiff.

“Mind saying that again? I’m going to record it for the next time you’re arguing with me.”

“You’re a very mean doctor, has anyone ever told you?”

“Frequently,” John stepped over to the shower and turned on the hot water, adjusting it until
it was comfortable, “There, that should do it—now, let’s get those trousers off you and get you
clean. You stink.”

“I’m more than capable—“
“Shut it, you.” John unbuckled his belt and Sherlock swatted at him, feeling like a virgin in a silent film, helpless before the onslaught of a mustachioed man intent on seizing his virtue. Only John had shaved his mustache several years ago, and he had no virtue to be stolen.

“John! I do not need you to undress me like a child.”

“Then stop acting like one, you cock.”

“Leave my pants on!”

“Why? Then you’ll just have mud up your bum and wet pants, which will have to come off at some point.”

Sherlock swatted at him again, but John was all hands, and rather than face an undignified tussle that would end up with him naked regardless, Sherlock stood still and let John remove the rest of his clothing. Well, wasn’t this cozy? Here he stood, completely naked under the bright light, while John was—oh. “What are you doing?”

“Stripping,” John’s voice was matter-of-fact but Sherlock could feel his discomfort as a palpable thing. “You’re not going to be able to clean your legs or feet, and there’s no need to deal with sopping wet clothes.”

Oh glorious, now they were both going to be naked and slippery and wet and if ever there were a time he needed complete mastery of his body, it was now. Again, however, his brain had gone walkabout, “You—now, now, John, if I’m to be bare-arsed I think it only fair that you remove your pants.”

John raised an eyebrow, “I don’t have mud up my bum. And I was trying to preserve modesty.”

“Mine or yours?” Sherlock teased. And was he giving John a look from under lowered lashes? Yes, it seemed he was. There went his brain, just ceding control to his body once more.

“I have nothing to be ashamed of,” John said coolly, and took off his snug red pants which were entirely too inflammatory for a widowed father to be sporting, especially when he was in the room and trying not to speculate on what lay beneath those—oh. No speculation needed now; and definitely no shame.

“Er…” Sherlock literally had no idea what to say. What was appropriate in this situation? “The shower? Only, I’m feeling rather grubby—“

“Yeah! Yes, sure. Here, hold onto my arm and step in carefully…last thing we need is you falling and compounding your injuries.” John waited until he had his footing and stepped in after him, pulling the shower curtain closed and the space available shrank to approximately naught.

“Right. Can you get your upper body?”

“I’m sure I can do it all—“

“Just soap up and don’t fight me.” John crossed his arms over his chest and frowned at Sherlock, who hurriedly began running the soapy flannel over his chest and arms. Despite his exhaustion—he had already been up for three days when Mycroft’s call came in—and his physical pains, it was going to take self-control and luck not to be sporting a most inconvenient erection very shortly. John was damnably sexy when he got bossy and controlling; and the sight of him wet and nude was not helping matters in the slightest.
When an involuntary grimace gave him away, John confiscated the flannel and efficiently began to wash his back. Rather than have Sherlock try and turn around and possibly slip, he just stepped close and reached around him. John looked up, avoiding a bit of spray that shot over Sherlock’s shoulder, his lashes dark and spiky, his grin just this side of naughty, “You do know this is what people think we do all the time, right?”

“People have very sordid imaginations,” Sherlock said more primly than he had intended.

Laughing, John switched hands and reached around to the other side of his back, practically chest to chest now. “This isn’t sordid. I can think of loads of sordid things we could be doing.”

Was, was John…flirting with him?

“Alright, let me get your legs and feet.” John dropped down and began lathering Sherlock’s legs and he tried not to move, hyperaware of just how close John’s face was to his—everything. Still kneeling, John reached behind and washed his thighs, his calves. “Here, hold onto my head and lift one foot at a time.” This was now dangerously close to being the beginnings of a pornographic film; they were but a heartbeat away from fellatio.

John’s chuckle bounced around the bathroom, echoing in the small space, “This is how pornos start.” Oh good, now he apparently read minds.

“Is it?” Sherlock asked hoarsely.

“I thought you’d sampled my stash,” John reminded him, tipping back his head and looking up at Sherlock, who felt a wave of dizziness assail him at the sight. “For research purposes, of course.”

“I—I’ve deleted most of it.”

“Yeah, of course. Should have remembered.” The corner of John’s mouth tipped up and he stood, grimacing slightly at having knelt on the hard shower floor, and trying to hide it. Sherlock wanted to tell him it was okay, they were neither of them kids, he wasn’t made of rubber, he didn’t expect John to be super human. Instead he stared blankly at the flannel John was extending toward him. “You able to reach your, er—and your—” John nodded at Sherlock’s crotch, tipped his head.

“Oh! Yes, thank you John, I am able…” Sherlock felt absurdly shy when faced with the thought of John witnessing him washing his privates.

“I’ll wash your hair while you do that,” John said briskly. He poured a goodly amount of Sherlock’s shampoo in his hands and cursed when it foamed ridiculously into snowy mounds in his hands. “May have overestimated how much I needed. Can you…thanks, not quite tall enough to reach the top of your head.” Not without them being belly to belly. Not that either man was going to speak that idea out loud. Sherlock made haste to quickly but thoroughly wash his nethers and then bit back a moan at the pleasure of having John’s fingers in his hair, on his scalp.

When all was said and done, he was a sensualist; he would deny it, but in his way he was as much a dandy as Mycroft. Going regularly to the exclusive salon he used was one of his harmless indulgences; he loved having his hair shampooed, conditioned and massaged. Gripping the towel bar with one hand and casually holding the flannel in front of his penis with the other, Sherlock closed his eyes and enjoyed the experience completely.

“Rinse,” John commanded a trifle breathily, and Sherlock’s eyes snapped open and he realized that John had been lathering his hair for an extremely long time and that the shampoo was
all gone and John had been for some time just massaging his scalp. Sherlock tipped his head back and let the water flow over his face, wishing desperately for composure.

“Here, can’t forget your la-di-dah conditioner,” John teased gently, and smiled as he sleeked it through Sherlock’s curls, tugging lightly on the ends. “Smells great, much better than the stuff Rosie and I use.”

“Pears and, and white tea,” Sherlock said a bit roughly, and cleared his throat, “You’re welcome to use—“

“Naw,” John said, directing his head back and rinsing the conditioner out of his hair, “I like that it’s a smell unique to you.”

*That* definitely seemed like flirting.

With gratitude, Sherlock turned off the water and politely averted his eyes as John exited the shower—a fact which might seem ridiculous given that they had just spent fifteen minutes in wet, naked proximity and he had effectively seen everything John had to offer. He took the towel John handed him and would have whipped it around his hips but his hair was soaked and water was running down his body. “Use that for your hair,” John directed, “Can you reach up okay? I’ll dry the rest of you.”

He was in his own personal hell. The devil was alive and well and trying to kill him. “I’ve got it, John,” he said roughly, wanting to turn away but unwilling to draw any more attention to the fact that he was half-erect. “I don’t need any more mollycoddling.”

“There’s no point in me bathing you if you’re just going to try and be a tough guy and dry your legs.” John gave his own hair a rough toweling, swiped the towel down his limbs and tucked it around his waist. But not before Sherlock saw—and he really, really wasn’t trying to look—that John was not exactly flaccid himself; John was, in fact, harder than he was. And while he hadn’t drawn attention to it, he also wasn’t hiding it.

Enduring a thorough drying, Sherlock stared grimly at the towel bar and recited the addresses of known criminals, followed by the lists of their crimes and was finally reprieved when John gave a final, playful, flourish of the towel around his rear and stepped back. “Squeaky clean and dry as a bone. Let’s get you into some pyjamas—don’t bother arguing.”

Clad briefly in a towel, Sherlock meekly followed him down the hall into his room and selected a pair of loose, drawstring pyjama bottoms and a button down pyjama top from his dresser. With John’s help he was once more clothed, which leant him a measure of control. John rearranged his pillows and helped ease him down on the bed, “You’re going to be sore in the morning, so don’t try and get up on your own. In fact, if you need to use the loo, call me. I’ll keep my phone next to the bed; just call me if you need anything, alright?”

He agreed, but mostly just to obtain privacy. This was the closest and most intimate Sherlock had been with another person in longer than he could recall, and frankly he was started to feel overwhelmed. John finally left him with a squeeze on the shoulder and turned out the light. There was no way he was going to be able to sleep right away. Sherlock stared up at the dark ceiling, letting his eyes adjust to the dark, watching the mysterious shapes of shadows slowly emerge from former blackness.

******
There it was again. A faint sound had penetrated his light slumber and Sherlock lay still, waiting for it to repeat. A muffled cry of distress. From upstairs. Rosie was at Mrs. Hudson’s, he knew, so that meant it was John. With a good deal of effort, some hissing and a few muttered curses, he gained his feet and made for the stairs. His legs felt like tree trunks, stiff and unwieldy, and all of him was sore. Forcing his legs to limber up, Sherlock mounted the stairs as swiftly as possible.

John’s room lay in darkness, the small nightlight he didn’t think Sherlock knew about was not on…it must have burned out. Sherlock cursed silently, stumbling through the room in the dark. Finding the edge of the bed he half leaned, half knelt over the bed. “John?”

Slightly louder, he tried again, and this time he heard John stir, but his dreams—nightmares—hadn’t left him yet. Aware that he might get a face full of fist, Sherlock spoke again, as soothing as he knew how, “John—it’s Sherlock.”

“Sherlock?” John sounded drunk, scared, and Sherlock wondered if he was awake. “No, no…please. Oh, please…”

“John?” Daring to reach out, he patted John’s body, finally found his arm, followed it down and held his hand, “John, it’s alright, it’s just a dream.”

John mumbled something unintelligible, and began thrashing, “…no, you don’t understand—he’s my friend! He’s my friend!” His agitation was rising, and Sherlock’s stomach dropped as realization swamped him. John was dreaming of his suicide.

“John, please, please wake up. It’s me, it’s Sherlock. I’m alive John, it’s alright—”

A harsh sob cut the blackness and John shoved him away, shouting something Sherlock didn’t catch. “Fuck…no! Fuck—fuck off!”

Despite knowing his friend was dreaming, Sherlock’s stomach plummeted further at the very real despair and terror in John’s voice. “John…”

Another sob, his voice strangled with fear and grief, “…Sherlock…”

“John,” Sherlock was on his knees now, leaning over the bed, running his hands up and down John’s arms, hoping to wake him without scaring him. “John, please wake up. I promise it’s alright.”

“Sherlock.” John was suddenly still, and Sherlock knew he was awake.

“You, you were having a nightmare. I heard you and—here, let me turn on the light.”

“No!” John snatched at his arm, his voice strident. He softened it, still sounding uneven, “No, sorry…I’m fine. I’m awake now. Sorry I woke you. I—I was dreaming of Afghanistan.”


“No, thanks. I’m sorry I woke you. Do you need help downstairs?”

Despite himself, Sherlock smiled. Dear John, always looking out for him, even when he was an emotional wreck from a nightmare. “No thank you, John. I can manage…are you sure you don’t
need me to stay?”

“Nope. Just…just gonna go back to sleep.” John’s voice sounded thick, choked, and Sherlock realized he must be crying and ashamed of it. Squeezing his hand, he stood a little slowly, holding back a groan.

“I’m just downstairs if you need anything.”

“Thanks.”

“Goodnight, John.”

“Goodnight, Sherlock…thanks…”

*****

Following an uncertain, and frankly uncomfortable, few days, things around 221B were once more normal. Or as normal as they ever were. Sherlock was healing nicely, John hadn’t had another nightmare, and they were settling back into their routine, although Sherlock was spending more time than usual at Bart’s.

Molly had stopped by to show off her new haircut, as she was going back to work the upcoming Monday. “It looks great,” John complimented, admiring the blunt bob, combed into a side part with side-swept bangs. Molly had bought new work clothes too, and was bubbling with excitement at returning to work, although she was also looking at Alex sadly. “So does Alex’s hair.”

The little boy had demanded a new hairstyle, and Molly had let him get it cut in a faux-hawk. Alex and Rosie kept running their hands over his hair and giggling.

“He’ll look like the toughest toddler at the nursery school,” John teased, and Molly laughed.

“My bad boy. I sent mum a picture and she flipped out—she said the dress-up was bad enough but that now I was making him look like a delinquent.” Molly sighed, “I love my mum, but she’s so old-fashioned, and she almost seems to take pleasure in telling me everything I’m doing wrong with Alex.”

John patted her arm and handed her a fresh cup of tea, “Different generations; different values.”

“Ugh, I know…I just wish she wouldn’t say stuff like that around Alex…he’s so sensitive to slights, and she doesn’t seem to think there’s anything wrong with making him cry.”

John clucked sympathetically, but didn’t know what to tell her. His own parents probably wouldn’t have been best pleased that he was living with another man, raising his daughter as he was. Rosie wasn’t particularly girly, which he thought was fine, and he imagined Mary would have felt the same. His mum, however…well, no doubt she would have despaired that Rosie’s favourite colour was black, that she had tea parties with Billy the skull, knew how to take fingerprints and prepare a slide, and that her current wish was to grow up to be a consulting detective.

Speaking of consulting detectives…Sherlock hadn’t been around all day. He’d been
spending more time out of the flat lately; ever since their shared shower, as a matter of fact. John wondered if he was embarrassed or if maybe he was just being too sensitive. Strangely, the thing that had bothered him hadn’t been the nudity, or even his blatant and visible reaction to Sherlock’s naked body, but the other man coming into his room while he was in the grips of one of his nightmares. When he was particularly tired or stressed, or when he’d experienced emotional turmoil, John tended to have nightmares…sometimes of getting shot, sometimes of watching Mary get shot and having her die in his arms…Sherrinford had been a frequent contributor for a while, but thankfully had not made an appearance for a while.

But sometimes, sometimes…it was Sherlock. His stilted phone call, trying to convince John he was a fraud…watching him jump. Christ, that was almost worse than when the dream played out and he stumbled to Sherlock’s side, watched the curls paint the pavement with blood, bits of bone and brain matter floating in the dark, oily swirls of blood. Sherlock’s still, lifeless body, his staring eyes.

Consciously, John focused on the room around him, Molly’s cheerful chatter, the kids playing on the rug…he was here, now, in this room. It was years later, Sherlock was alive, alive and well and not dead.

Fuck, he hated that Sherlock had been there for the dream. Mary told him—had told him—that he talked, cried, sometimes screamed. He feared what he might have said. Feared looking weak.

He had also wanted to pull Sherlock into the bed and wrap around him like an octopus and soak up his heat, his smell, his life force, until his heart stopped thundering and the sweat cooled and dried, until his breathing returned to normal and the tears stopped. Instead he had sent him away. Now he wondered if perhaps Sherlock had taken him too literally and was giving him space he didn’t want.

******

“…what the hell?” John put his hands on his hips and watched as his daughter—his daughter with newly shorn hair—dashed around the sitting room shouting at the top of her lungs, “Fanny, fanny, fanny, fanny!”

Greg smiled uneasily, “Well, I guess I…I must have fallen asleep. She wore me out, John! I haven’t watched one that little in years and when I put her down for her nap I stretched out on the sofa and…well…”

John’s lips twitched. Rosie was wearing her too-small Christmas pyjamas with her old baby blanket as a cape; her face was liberally smeared with chocolate and she was on a sugar high. Biscuit was barking excitedly, running at her heels, gleeful at this new game. At least she hadn’t cut the dog’s ears off; both his daughter and the terrier sported new hairstyles. It was his fault, really; Rosie had demanded a new hair ‘do to match Alex’s and when he refused, considering the matter settled, she had taken matters into her own hands.

Now Biscuit had an uneven look, and Rosie’s curls cut close to her hair line on one side, with a few clumps of curls missing from the right side of her head, and a sort of mullet look going on around to the left.
“You’re a shite babysitter, Greg.”

“I know.”

“You did this on purpose so I’d never ask again, didn’t you?”

“John, I swear—“

He laughed, “Just taking the piss, mate. She’s four, she’s a handful and you’re an old man. I don’t know what I was thinking.”

Greg looked abashed, “I really am sorry.”

“Eh…at least she still has all her fingers.” John had learned not to panic over the small stuff. Bad haircuts grew out, sugar highs wore off. If he was lucky he would even be able to convince her to stop shouting fanny.

Greg made a grateful escape and John managed to wrestle Rosie into sitting down long enough to receive a lecture on why she was not allowed to use the scissors, cut her hair, cut the dog’s hair, steal sweets, or use words like “fanny.” Not entirely certain she was absorbing any of it he made her tidy up all the scattered hair and then sit in time-out. Or time-pout as Sherlock had termed it. It was too late to make her take a nap, so John sent her to bed following an early tea, finding it necessary to look in on her twice before she finally fell asleep.

Then it was just him and his thoughts. Most of which centered around Sherlock and the slightly uneven feeling he experienced whenever they were together. John honestly didn’t know if Sherlock was going through the same thing, but if his newly increased time at Bart’s was any indication, he too felt slightly uneasy now. That was the last thing he wanted. It was what he had feared, should he ever let Sherlock know that he had more than feelings of friendship for him, that they would find a rift developing between them. John honestly didn’t know, however, if this had to do with their shared shower, or John’s nightmare. Or maybe this was all in his head.

******

Sherlock had to get out of his own head. It was infuriating and bewildering that one night—one part of one night—should so completely consume his thoughts.

But then, it had to do with John, and John had ever and always been capable of derailing Sherlock’s normal methods, slipping in and making himself cozy where others didn’t even register. So now here he was, circling around and around the same thoughts: John had, essentially unnecessarily, entered the shower with him; John had, again, not entirely necessarily, undressed fully; John had become erect; John had been aware—had to have been—that Sherlock was also erect. John had been almost flirtatious. John knew he was gay. John knew he had had at least one sexual relationship.

John might, possibly, be testing the waters.

But as soon as he thought that, Sherlock always circled back to the fact that John himself was not gay. He had certainly been at pains multiple times to let Sherlock, let the whole world, know that.
But.

No, no but. No however, or what if, or possibly. No maybe or could be or perhaps. John wasn’t gay. It was all him, his longing, his wanting, made manifest in a way that was trying to fool him into wishing for something that just wasn’t.

But. What if it was something? What if it was exactly what he wanted?

*****

Talk about a full, busy day! John, with absolutely no sense of guilt whatsoever, sank into his chair, threw his daughter the television remote and called in an order for pizza. After a full shift at the clinic, an even more crowded than usual Tube ride home, a hectic few hours getting his daughter’s hair fixed by a professional and the dog groomed so she didn’t look like she had mange and then maneuvering them all back home, John was completely knackered.

He texted Sherlock to let him know they were home and that food was on the way if he was interested, then put his feet up and checked his blog while Rosie killed a few brain cells channel surfing. “Not Prime Suspect,” he vetoed when she landed on a rerun. “No, not Happy Valley either. I’m sure there’s a kid’s program on.”

“I wanna watch something gooder than that baby show,” Rosie whinged, pouting adorably, when he told her to stop on the channel Peppa Pig was playing on. John rolled his eyes and got up to get one of Sherlock’s Poirot DVDs sorted. He was definitely not bucking for father of the year at this rate.

“Yay!” Rosie cheered, and ran to fetch her fake mustache from her “dese guyses” trunk as she called her trunk of play clothes, costumes, capes, masks and false beards. “Poirot!”

The delivery was going to take over an hour, so John opened a packet of Quavers and poured Rosie a glass of the lemonade sweetened with Sherlock’s lavender honey that Mrs. Hudson had made, and fetched an ale to tide him over until the food arrived. They were deep in the episode, and John was responding to some rather snarky and pointed comments on the blog regarding rumours of his and Sherlock having a lover’s tiff in a cab—lovely, he’d known that would come back to haunt them—when he heard the familiar sound of Sherlock at the door. His heart actually leapt and he didn’t realize he was smiling ear to ear until Sherlock was through the door.

The younger man looked up and looked momentarily startled, and then as if he couldn’t help himself he smiled broadly. John felt a flutter in his heart and knew he was doomed; he wasn’t falling, he had already fallen and he didn’t even want to fight his way back. He wanted to move forward, embrace whatever scary and exhilarating future lay ahead of them. Instead of voicing any of that he just tried for casual, “Hey, you’re home in time…pizza hasn’t arrived yet.”

“I nearly didn’t hear your text,” Sherlock answered, standing with his hands in his trouser pockets in an out of character pose of awkwardness. “Molly and I were in the middle of a most interesting PM.”

“Sorry to drag you away—”

“No, it was late, and she needed to get by to pick Alex up. And I missed lunch as well as breakfast, I’m quite hungry.” Sherlock leaned over to hug Rosie, who was gesturing broadly as she
followed along with the drama on-screen. John saw him wince and sat up straight.

“Your ribs still sore?”

“It’s nothing—I was feeling much improved but I think I overdid it the last two days.”

“Come in the bedroom and let me examine you,” John stood up and walked into the loo to wash cheese flavouring off his hands, “No arguments now.”

Sherlock sighed and tried to protest that he was fine, but John just gestured towards Sherlock’s bedroom and waited until he was obeyed, “Just a quick exam to satisfy me.”

Sherlock started unbuttoning his shirt, moving slowly, and John looked up; their gazes snared on one another and his breath became shallow as he realized Sherlock was moving with deliberately slow movements, almost seductively disrobing. “You just going to watch? Or are you going to touch me?”

Okay…that was, that was definitely not just in his head, right? Sherlock had to be speaking deliberately, had to know how his words sounded. Now he was standing there with his shirt parted, hands at his sides. John took a deep breath and stepped into his space, just a little too close, and slowly drew the lapels of Sherlock’s shirt to the sides, looking up into his face all the while. Keeping his eyes on Sherlock’s mesmerizing blue-green gaze, John pushed the shirt off his shoulders but not all the way down his arms and with the tiniest hitch in his own breathing he put his palms against Sherlock’s chest and slowly ran his hands down his torso. There was no mistaking that his touch was not that of a physician, this was clearly a man broadcasting intent for more.

“John…” Sherlock sort of sighed, and John wanted to kiss him, wanted so badly to press his lips to those soft, beautiful lips and he was leaning in, intent on closing the gap, finally taking what he wanted, what he was being offered—

“Unca Mycroft is here!” Rosie barreled into the room and after a moment Mycroft appeared, a pizza box balanced on one hand and an inquiring brow raised at the tableau that greeted him.

“Brother dear, Doctor Watson. So sorry to erm, interrupt, but I’m afraid a rather serious matter has arisen.” A smirk played around his lips, “Unfortunately one that requires the services of the world’s foremost consulting detective and his blogger. Pizza and playtime will have to wait.”
Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the cliffhanger! This was getting more lengthy than usual, and will be picked up almost immediately after in the next chapter.
June (Part Two)

Chapter Summary

Sherlock has flown to the Continent on vital business for Mycroft, leaving John to overthink the moment in Sherlock’s bedroom. Upon Sherlock’s return an unexpected bombshell disrupts their new dynamic. (Sorry for the crap summary, I don't want to give too much away)

Chapter Notes

So...bonus chapter! Sorry for the delay on posting, I was busy and also the boys were being difficult. I rewrote this twice and hugely edited large sections multiple times. I'm still not entirely happy with it, but if I don't post it now you'll never get it.

Edit: I fudged a date toward the end of this chapter. It's fixed now!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Possible treason…suspect on the run…running…more running…narrowly avoided tire iron to skull…separated from Sherlock…half an hour hiding in a tip to avoid police interference since Mycroft Cock-blocking Holmes wanted to keep it hush hush…running…found Sherlock…lost Sherlock…running…picked up by Mycroft’s team…

John was fucking exhausted, reeking of filth and royally pissed. This was fun in its own way —yeah, he knew he was deeply disturbed—but it was most assuredly not the way he had envisioned his night going. “Sherlock?” he panted, throwing himself in the car and looking to Anthea, who was, big surprise, tapping away at her mobile, looking impeccably turned out and thoroughly well rested despite the fact that it was almost dawn. He was starting to suspect that Mycroft had actually had her created in a lab. “Is he—”

“He is on route to Prague as we speak,” Anthea fired off another rapidly-typed text or email, her expressionless face eerily lit by the blue-white glow of her screen. “Mr. Holmes has instructed me to return you to Baker Street and caution you that as always you remain bound by the Official State Secrets Act.”

“Has Sherlock left yet?” John asked, feeling an anxious surge of adrenaline and worry rise as his mind flicked through all the things he would need to get sorted so he could hare off to the Continent after his reckless partner. “I can leave as soon as—”

“No need. If Mr. Holmes wished you to fly to Prague you would be on a jet by now.”

“Sherlock needs me!” John shouted, realizing, as the words left his mouth, that his tone verged on hysteria and that he was acting as if Sherlock were some sort of delicate cream-puff who needed his assistance.

“He spent two years abroad without you,” Anthea drawled in her most annoying, posh,
But I’m worried about him, John thought, he needs me there. I need to be there for him.

*****

Four anxiety filled days passed, with a maddening lack of information aside from one phone call from Mycroft, and a short text from Anthea. The text came through very early Saturday morning; brief, factual and quite the mood lift: Sherlock was returning and would be at Baker Street by tea time.

Unable to fall back asleep or sit still, John crept downstairs—avoiding the creaking step—and started furiously cleaning. He didn’t know why. It wasn’t like either he or Sherlock cared overly for a pristine house, but it seemed the best outlet for his high spirits, keening anticipation and slight nerves at being face to face with his best friend for the first time since their chest groping, sexually fraught, almost kiss.

By the time Rosie came down looking for breakfast, he had scoured the kitchen and bathroom, dusted and swept the common areas, done three loads of laundry (including both his and Sherlock’s bedding, just in case) and it had barely relieved his emotions. “Let’s go out,” John suggested, hoping to burn off tension with a walk. They dressed and ventured out, enjoying a leisurely breakfast and then taking Biscuit for a stroll around the nearest park. It helped slightly; Rosie was a welcome distraction with her high energy, constant prattle, perplexing questions and endearing antics.

Aware that whatever Sherlock’s return entailed, it would probably be best if they didn’t have a small, curious and big eared audience; John called Clara and asked if she and Harry would be willing to have Rosie over for the night. “I’ll watch James for you next weekend if you two want some alone time.”

“Of course we’d love to have her, and I’ll definitely take you up on a baby-free weekend sometime soon…Harry and I want to go stay a week with friends who are renting a cottage in Blackpool this summer…is everything alright though? You sound a bit tense, John.”

He hesitated, but Clara had always been an excellent sister-in-law, during her first marriage to Harry and even more so now in their second union, and in some ways John found her warmer and more understanding than his sister. Watching Rosie throw sticks for Biscuit, John leaned against a tree and sighed, “I’ve got a serious…confrontation…to face with Sherlock and we’re going to need privacy.” There was no use in him blabbing about private business, particularly if the moment had passed and that private business was not destined to be fulfilled.

“Well, we’ll take care of Rosie for you and mind Biscuit and let the two of you work it out. I’m sure whatever it is, it’ll be fine. The two of you have weathered the worst life can throw at you and come out battered but smiling.”

See? Harry would have demanded to know all the details and then bossed him around until he was a nervous wreck. “Clara, I hope my idiot sister tells you every day how brilliant you are.”

“I made a point of putting it in the vows,” she giggled, and they chatted a bit more before he hung up and gathered up Rosie and the dog. His heart was lighter and he was feeling much more
calm and hopeful about the approaching homecoming.

****

Three hours later, both dog and daughter happily ensconced at Harry and Clara’s for the night, John had scrupulously showered, shaved and groomed. Now he sat in his familiar, old broken down armchair and tried to calm himself with tea and distract himself with his laptop. Sherlock should be home in a few more hours and the wait was killing him. He had such a drive to see Sherlock’s face as soon as possible that John had picked up and set down his phone untold times, toying with the idea of calling Mycroft and finding out the details of Sherlock’s flight so he could meet him at the airstrip.

In an attempt to distract himself from the wait—and because forewarned was forearmed—John had visited a bookshop after leaving Rosie with Clara. Hot faced and with a boisterous stomach, John had edged his way casually into the lifestyles section and perused a book dauntingly titled “Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Gay Sex.” He had learned quite a bit just from skimming, and all of what he had learned had amped his anxiety up about one thousand degrees. As much as he physically desired Sherlock, John was also battling a lifetime of viewing himself as straight. While intellectually he didn’t have anything against the idea of two men having sex, when he thought about himself being one of those men…his nerves assaulted him with a barrage of doubt, fear and a tingling, tantalizing tease of the allure of exploring things with Sherlock.

So, here he was, vibrating with suppressed tension, and armed with nothing much at all to keep his mind from circling over and over the same thoughts. Wanting the relaxation of a drink, but wishing to remain clear-headed, John sat down his laptop and paced the sitting room. Bracing himself against the window frame he stared out at the street, almost not registering the familiar sight of a glossy black Jaguar purring up to the kerb.

John straightened like a shot when the door opened and a well-shod foot emerged, followed by a tousled head of curls. Sherlock was back! He was hours early! He was bending over to speak to someone in the car; he was shutting the door; he was walking towards the stoop…oh…no. He was…pausing. A bit of wavering, a step forward; an abrupt about face, hands up to clutch at his curls and then, ah, he was…turning back. A few seconds in which he visibly composed himself: posture straightening, shoulders squaring, and with his head up, Sherlock sailed at last through the front door.

John did his fair share of dithering, unsure of whether he should open the flat door, sit down, pretend to be busy, act casual, hug him…

“John.” Sherlock had opened the door and stood framed by the light from the hall.

“Sherlock…” said on a sigh that pulled Sherlock across the threshold, barely pausing to kick the door closed and they met halfway, eating one another up with the intensity of their gaze. John took a half step forward.

“John,” Sherlock said, holding out a hand to stay him, “I want to say something to you—”

Oh God, oh Jesus. He’s going to say it was all a mistake.
“Before Mycroft interrupted us, I believe we were on the brink of taking our relationship into the physical realm…unfortunately I have had four days—busy days—but four days in which to think on that moment whenever time allowed, to second guess myself. I am not an easy man and I do not interact with anyone normally, as you are well aware. The inescapable conclusion is that taking that irrevocable step would inevitably lead to discord and endanger our friendship. The smart choice would be the one I have made for twenty years…to avoid an intimate relationship, and to maintain our friendship.”

John’s stomach hurt as if he had been punched. He resolutely refused to acknowledge that a worse pain was radiating north of his stomach.

“If you want just my friendship, you have it, always.” Sherlock had been watching him steadily, but he paused and then looked away, “However, if you, if you want more—John I am willing to risk anything for you.”

In his stomach was a sick, apprehensive feeling; it was that which Sherlock dimly recalled declaring he would never expose himself to again, after his overly intense and doomed-from-the-start relationship with Percy had imploded. But he’d also cut himself off from all the wonderful things that went along with it…and John was the most wonderful of all. And if John didn’t speak soon—

“Sherlock…I don’t know what the hell I’m doing, I don’t even know if I can do this…but I do know I want it. I want you, Sherlock.” And then John was in his arms, or he was in John’s, and Sherlock felt like a mountain—solid, sure and strong, something John could cling to and look to for protection—and also like John was his mountain. He said that, “You are my mountain,” which was foolish and nonsensical but John was whispering his name, and he was kissing John and John was kissing him back until his vision went spotty. Through it all Sherlock was aware of a savage satisfaction, a wild giddiness that John wanted him regardless of the consequences.

He hadn’t kissed anyone in years, not since his fake relationship with Janine, and this, this was not just a different world; it was an entirely different universe. John’s kisses were pulling him back together, all the scattered pieces he hadn’t even known he was missing. Being with John didn’t mean a diminishment of self, as he had almost feared in his darker moments. Not a halving of his thoughts, a division of his focus.

“God,” John whispered, breaking their kiss to breathe deeply, his hands, which had been on Sherlock’s side and back were smoothing up his torso and over his chest, “It feels natural, doesn’t it? I didn’t think kissing a man would be all that different from kissing a woman—and it’s not—but I also didn’t imagine kissing you would feel so…right. I was afraid we might be making a terrible mistake.”

“And now?” Sherlock knew John was not considering this a mistake; he could feel his contentment, his arousal, and the other man was still in his arms.

“Now, I’m kicking myself for not doing this sooner. We could have been enjoying this for months.”

“There is something you’re missing, John.” Sherlock smiled smugly at the man in his arms.
John raised an inquiring brow. “I have an addictive personality; when I have denied myself food or sleep for long periods of time, the inevitable indulgence is rather spectacular.”

*****

Spec-fucking-tacular, John reflected hazily, so relaxed his bones felt as if they were melting into the mattress. After the sofa proved inadequate, they had stumbled their way to Sherlock’s bed since it was closest, and the two of them had been rolling and tumbling across the bed as they figured out how they fit together. This turned out to be perfect, in a word, but, since it was the two of them, also involved a fair amount of tussle, cursing and giggling. John had dated women taller than him before, including one luscious blonde built like a lorry, so he wasn’t thrown off by Sherlock’s larger frame, but he kept moving to take the lead and finding Sherlock was already there.

It was actually remarkably like his first time with Mary. Not that he wanted to think of her here and now, and definitely not that he was going to bring the comparison up to Sherlock.

Eventually he let Sherlock finesse him onto his back and welcomed the press of his body against his own. Fully dressed, they were still throwing pitch on the fire; Sherlock’s hot and heavy sex was rutting against his thigh and John had planted one foot on the mattress and shifted to give himself better leverage to return the gesture. He didn’t want their first orgasm to be hidden behind layers of clothing, but John was thoroughly enjoying the build-up; despite spending the last several years celibate, he masturbated often enough to remain in control. Sherlock on the other hand, felt slightly wild in his arms. Which was flattering and wonderful, but John was really savoring the slow burning intensity.

“How long has it been for you?” John panted in Sherlock’s ear, smiling when his hot breath brought on a shiver and a moan.

“Twenty-one, almost twenty-two years,” was Sherlock’s surprising reply.

“Christ, I know you have extreme self-control over your transport, but how could you go that long without? Do you spend all your free time in here squeezing one off?”

Pulling back slightly, Sherlock looked down at John and rolled his eyes, “John, you have an endless fund of euphemisms, do you not?”

“Loads. Wanna hear ‘em?”

“Perhaps some other time. And to answer your question, I have not been overly troubled by libido most of my life—although I was more subject to urges as a young man, and thus my relationship with Percy.” John snorted, but gestured him to go on. “I have not indulged in self-pleasuring in, oh, eight months.”

“Eight months!” John gave him a skeptical look, “I know you’re, well, you, but how can you go that long? I “self-pleasure” at least—”

“Twice a week, yes, I know.”

“How—never mind, it’s you, so I won’t ask how you know that,” John went a bit red, which was stupid considering he was currently urging Sherlock to roll his hips against his body so he
could feel that gorgeous arse under his hands and enjoy the slide of his hard-on against his body. “You can probably read it in the way I part my hair, or tie the laces on my shoes.”

“I can hear you in your bedroom,” Sherlock said, slightly breathless, “Your bedroom is directly above mine and your bed frame gives a telltale squeak. You’ve been most vigorous lately, as well as indulging more frequently.”

“ Been thinking about you,” John fought a blush. Sherlock stilled, and blinked at him. John brought up a hand and stroked his cheek, plunged his fingers into those wild curls, “Didn’t you realize?”

“N-no.”

“You kept creeping in, stealing your way into my fantasies every time I closed my eyes,” John admitted, “It’s, well, it’s happened once or twice over the years, especially when we first met, but over this last year…it’s been unstoppable. And then I stopped trying to stop it. I invited you in.”

Sherlock looked almost…captivated? His lips were parted and he suddenly sucked in a breath and bent his head and took John in a kiss. John parted his lips and drank him in, tipping his head back with a moan when Sherlock hesitantly trailed his lips over John’s cheek to his jaw. “Yeah, right there,” John whispered, when the younger man kissed the sensitive juncture of his jaw as it rose behind his ear. “Ahh…Sherlock, love, God. Yeah, suck hard, oh yeah, harder…” John directed him in broken moans.

“Fuck, you feel so…do you know how long I’ve wanted this? To feel you like this, you, God, Sherlock…” John shuddered and wound his arms more tightly around him, “This—please, please tell me you want this as much as me—that this feels as amazing to you—”

“Can’t you feel me, John?” Sherlock asked softly, sounding slightly stilted, “Can’t you feel my longing?”

That, more than anything, convinced John. Sherlock was generally rubbish with soft emotions, although Rosie had essentially allowed him an outlet for expressing what he felt, even if he was usually not able or willing to express it otherwise. That he was speaking his feelings aloud meant everything.

“It’s okay if you’re not chatty,” John smiled, taking Sherlock’s right hand in his and kissing the scarred knuckle on his right hand, flicking his tongue lightly over the place where Sherlock had split the skin almost to the bone, when trying to get John out of the well at Musgrave. The other man had thrown down a rope and then crawled down it and helped John keep his head above water until someone came and lowered down bolt cutters and Sherlock freed him. “Hope you don’t mind that I am.”

“I find it…stimulating.” Sherlock watched as John’s lips glided over his skin, “I somehow did not suspect you to be so verbal.”

“Thought I was a grunting caveman when it came to sex?” John kissed the back of his hand, smiled against his skin.

“No, but—” Sherlock sighed softly when John began nuzzling his wrist, and his hands gripped John a bit tighter. They had stopped frottling casually against one another, and Sherlock lay heavily on him, a welcome presence and heat. John, unable to resist any longer, put his fingers on the buttons to Sherlock’s shirt.
“May I?” He asked permission with his eyes as well, and Sherlock nodded, helping John to remove his shirt, leaving him in his vest and trousers. John admired openly his pale musculature, praised him verbally, “You’re very fit, I used to think of you as rather thin, but really you have a,” he swallowed a sudden wash of extra saliva, “a very gorgeous body.” He resumed kissing his way up Sherlock’s arm, his hands stroking him like a big cat. John paused over the old intravenous scars, more felt than seen, and sent up a quick thank you to a deity he wasn’t sure he believed in, that Sherlock had been clean for so long.

“I’ve always known you were…attractive.” Sherlock said, lowering his head and delicately tonguing John’s ear. “Despite all your attempts to disguise it with baggy trousers and a succession of the world’s ugliest jumpers.”

“Oi!” But John was smiling, “Don’t knock my jumpers; it took many years to amass my collection.”

“They are a type of camouflage for you, are they not?” Sherlock moved partially off of John and leaned on one elbow, propping his head on his hand. He ran his fingers through John’s hair, cupped the weight of his skull in his big hand, rubbing his thumb over John’s ear. John leaned into his touch, eyes closing, hands stilling.

“Hm? Oh, I suppose. It started out as an accident, I came back from overseas and Harry had been storing my things…I had lost weight and my clothes were all a little big. And after so many years in the desert, I found England too cold. Now it’s a habit.” John leaned in and nuzzled Sherlock’s chest, rubbed his nose against his sternum, and lightly bit Sherlock’s nipple, pulling a moan from the younger man. “Too much?”

Sherlock moaned a sound of dissent and his hand cupped John’s neck, not urging him, but giving consent for more. John obliged and licked and laved, nibbling delicately, and then more forcefully. Sherlock might not have breasts, but his nipples were the same, sensitive and delightful. John was having a wonderful time.

Before he quite realized it, John was straddling Sherlock, who reclined on his back, propped up by pillows; he raised a brow teasingly and pinned his wrists down on either side of his head and kissed him, relishing Sherlock’s instinctive arch to reach him. He peppered his chest and neck with kisses, licking the hollow of his throat, nuzzling his jaw, his ears, whispering how fucking sexy he was. He could feel Sherlock growing hard beneath him once more, and his own excitement responding. As much as his base nature urged him to hurry, to finish, to consume… the rest of John was enjoying the lazy exploration they had fallen into. He was also aware that his underlying insecurity about proceeding with anything too physical had dulled.

“I know,” John finally said, hesitant to break the spell, but unwilling to not make himself clear, “that given how long we’ve known one another it probably seems stupid, but…I’m not sure it’s wise for us to, erm, go further the first time we get together properly.”

“You’ve more experience than me,” Sherlock said frankly, “and no doubt you’re right.”

“Is there a but?”

“Not really, I think it would be wise of us not to push things too fast.” John believed him, but he also heard something else in Sherlock’s voice. “However, if you wouldn’t find it too much to ask, I am greatly enjoying this.”

John smiled and ducked down to kiss him until they were both breathless, “Of course I don’t find it too much to ask. You’re not alone in the enjoyment,” He smiled and settled in close, “If
we’re going too fast or you’re getting too aroused, just tell me, okay? I don’t have to come to enjoy myself. And I can always take care of it privately, so we can take this at whatever speed we need.”

Sherlock looked relieved, and John’s heart beat faster, aware again of that deep aching tenderness the other man inspired in him. This was what had been missing, he realized, from all those women he had tried to find a spark with in the last few years. Not one of them, even the few he had had sex with, had even come close to touching him in this way.

******

It was late, very late, and John was asleep next to him, faint snores mostly muffled in the pillow he had his face squashed into. Sherlock didn’t want to wake him, but he also couldn’t resist touching him; he lightly let his hand come to rest on John’s back, and when his breathing did not change he stroked his hand up and down John’s spine. Touching him now after so long denying himself was fulfilling a need Sherlock hadn’t even been aware he had. He was used to knowing himself much better than this.

Rolling slowly onto his side, Sherlock dipped his head and pressed his cheek lightly to John’s mussed hair, and rested his arm with featherweight care around him. John didn’t wake, but he mumbled in his sleep and rolled to face Sherlock, and insinuated himself neatly into his embrace. Sherlock relaxed when John continued his rather adorable snuffly breathing with his face pressed against Sherlock’s chest.

This. Even if nothing physical ever happened between them but kisses and embraces, Sherlock was convinced he would be happy with moments like these. He had lived the majority of his life without sex and it would not be a hardship to continue on without it. But to give up this closeness after he had had a taste of it…that would be monumentally difficult. Perhaps impossible.

******

Waking in an unfamiliar bed, the warm limbs of another person tangled with his own, sent a shot of panic through John before he recalled where he was. Even as he realized it was Sherlock who had his arm bent awkwardly under John’s torso, and Sherlock’s big foot that was warming his toes, John felt the other man come awake.

“John?” Sherlock asked groggily, flopping about gracelessly as he tried to sit up and found his right arm was asleep. He rubbed fretfully at his sleep crusted eyes and John, looking back over his shoulder at him, grinned at this homey and domestic vision of his friend.

“Sorry to wake you, forgot where I was and it gave me a moment of panic.”

Sherlock yawned hugely, his hair an uneven nimbus around his head, flattened on the right side of his head and sticking up elsewhere. “Hrnh,” he grunted, flopping back down on the bed and letting his eyes close.

“What’s the matter?” John laughed, “Not in the best mood first thing this morning?”
“I didn’t fall asleep until late,” Sherlock covered his eyes with his arm. “Why are you so chipper?”

“I slept great, plus I got to wake up to you in the bed with me,” John said, and rolled against Sherlock’s side, sliding his bent leg over Sherlock’s legs; a move which not so subtly brought him in full body contact. “I suppose I should be full of doubt and confusion, but mostly I’m just in a great mood.”

Sherlock peered out from under his arm and smiled slightly, “You’re not experiencing any emotional turmoil from last night?”

“I spent months mired in emotional turmoil,” John said ruefully, “Now I’m ready for happiness and obnoxious amounts of schmoop.”

“Schmoop?” Sherlock groaned, “John, I refuse to participate in schmoop.”

“You’ll come around,” John teased, breathing in his ear and then flicking it with his tongue, gloating over Sherlock’s response. “Holding hands…Eskimo kisses—”

“I am not an Inuk, John,” Sherlock said with hauteur, which would have been much more impactful if he hadn’t been palming John’s arse cheek in one big hand and tilting his head to let John kiss his neck.

“Just you wait until you come in from a gray, rainy, freezing cold day and I give you a nice, warm Eskimo kiss and then tell me it isn’t nice.” John tipped him onto his back and let his leg brush over Sherlock’s burgeoning erection. “I have an exceptional nose for warming kisses.”

“You are a ridiculous man.”

“Mm, guilty as charged.” John agreed affably, rocking lightly against Sherlock’s thigh.

“You sound distracted,” Sherlock observed, meeting John for a leisurely kiss involving a lot of tongue; his own breathing accelerated and he seemed less focused when they parted.

“Morning wood,” John groaned, pulling away a little. “Sorry, I got carried away…it’s been a damn long time since I had someone in bed with me in the morning.”

“I can take care of that for you,” Sherlock offered, smoothing the hand on John’s hip down his thigh and hooking it behind John’s knee so he could pull him tighter against his body. His hand went back to John’s arse, and coaxed him to start rocking again, “That is, if you want.”

“This isn’t taking it slow,” John muttered, and rested his hand on Sherlock’s crotch, flexing his fingers even as his eyes checked to make sure Sherlock was okay with his bold move, “But since when have either of us followed the rules?”

Sherlock didn’t answer, instead twisting so he could rub himself against John as their kisses deepen. “Too many clothes!” He burst out a few minutes later, and at John’s hasty nod he yanked John’s pants down and groaned in delight as his cock sprang free. John gasped when Sherlock wrapped his hot hand around his length and he pressed eagerly into his grasp, thinking, God, yes, finally, God...Sherlock. Sherlock...Sherlock...Sherlock.

John was unable to lower Sherlock’s clothing but he managed to slip his hand under the waistband of his pants and palm his erection, which quickly enlarged in his hand. Bit weird holding someone else’s dick, but there was an undeniable hotness to the moment, and John felt rather powerful as he witnessed how his touch affected Sherlock. And there was an inherent thrill to
feeling Sherlock’s cock grow in his grasp, feel it jerk when John played with the foreskin. He
couldn’t see more than the rosy head peeking out of the waist band of Sherlock’s pants, but his
hand was telling him that he was handling one impressive erection.

“God, Sherlock—you’re driving me mad...your hand feels like heaven…”

“John,” Sherlock gasped quietly, hips arching, “I can’t believe you’re here, in my arms.
Touching me...I’m not going to last long at all.”

He found he was panting the other man’s name in time with his thrusts, shuddering when
Sherlock abruptly rolled his palm up and over the head, dragging John’s foreskin deliciously. He
was leaking pre-cum copiously, and Sherlock’s palm was slick, no friction, just bloody
phenomenal sensation. Sherlock leaned in and kissed him, biting his lower lip, soothing the sting
with a swipe of his tongue.

His eyes were so green, glorious starbursts of blue and gold visible this close, and his eyes
were so warm, so goddamned warm and happy and John felt his balls draw up tight, the warning
tingle in his belly.

Too soon, John thought desperately, and managed to gasp, “I’m coming,” before he did just
that, groaning through the orgasm, pulses of ejaculate overflowing Sherlock’s hand and running
down his knuckles. Sherlock gritted out a warning and a second later he was spattering his belly
and John’s hand with his own release.

They held one another for a long time following the aftershocks, until John felt guilty for
squashing Sherlock, but when he tried to move, he was pulled firmly back and he realized that
Sherlock wasn’t smaller, more delicate, liable to have the breath knocked out of him by John’s
weight. He was perfectly content to act as a giant body pillow for John’s pleasure.

Of course, being Sherlock, he would probably get bored in short order and demand to be let
free, but for now, John was blissed out. All his worries and fear had been greater than the reality;
not only did Sherlock return his feelings, but they had spent the night together. Granted, it was an
essentially chaste night, aside from this morning, but not once had John wanted to stop things or
felt overwhelmed. The morning couldn’t get any more perfect than this.

******

Half asleep, the two men lay in one another’s arms, drowsing contentedly. They had the
entire day ahead of them and were in no hurry to leave the bed. Sherlock had sacrificed his already
soiled shirt to clean them up and in the interests of fairness, John had removed his as well. They
were tangled together, shirtless, sweaty and with remarkable cases of bed-head, both unwilling to
meet the world just yet.

“Better check my phone and make sure Rosie hasn’t started a revolution or anything,” John
said, after rising to use the loo.

“Bring me my phone, will you, John?” Sherlock didn’t feel his usual rise of nervous energy,
the desire to leave the bed and start upon a project. It had been a long time indeed since he last
lazed in bed with someone and he was relishing the moment. However, he was aware that he had
promised Mycroft a briefing of his efforts on the Continent, and after nearly a week his email
should have a few cases of interest waiting.

“Shit, I have fourteen missed calls!” John shouted from the sitting room, and Sherlock sat up, brow creasing.

“Is Rosie alright?”

“They’re all from unknown numbers, God—I’ve got loads of texts as well.” John appeared in the doorway and tossed Sherlock his mobile. “Who in the hell is blowing up my phone like this?”

Sherlock didn’t answer, scanning his phone, which had an even longer list of missed calls from unknown numbers; ignoring the voice mails for the moment he opened his messaging app and began flicking through the texts, anger and anxiety rising.

“Fuck!” John swore, and drew Sherlock’s attention to him. His attention was riveted to the screen of his phone, a black scowl wrinkling his forehead, “These are all from reporters, wanting to know if there’s any basis to the rumour that you and I have broken up. Apparently I wasn’t able to satisfy the commenters on my blog; someone started a story that we were having a lover’s spat in a cab a few weeks ago—I knew that cabbie was listening in on our conversation—and now it’s come to the attention of the press that you’re gay and they’re clamoring to know if I am too! These fucking—they’re saying you and I were sleeping together when I was married to Mary!” John’s face was red and Sherlock well knew that dangerous look in his eye.

Sherlock stood up and gripped John’s arm, “I know you’re furious right now John and I’m sorry, extremely sorry, that you’re getting dragged into this. It is inexcusable for them to suggest that there was anything between us when Mary was alive. They have no right to speculate on your orientation or a relationship between you and I, but that has never stopped them.”

John huffed out an impatient breath, “I’m used to people speculating, but the press has never been this aggressive before, they’re always hinting…but this is stomach churning. Some of these texts are direct questions. They want to interview us!”

“We’ll ignore them.”

A snort and a shake of John’s head were all the other man could manage for a moment. Pinching the bridge of his nose, John swore softly, took a deep breath and slowly let it out, still vibrating with rage. “You know that’s not liable to work. Especially not if Kitty Riley gets wind of this.”

Sherlock felt a savage flare of anger at the thought of her vicious face, “She is disgraced since Moriarity was exposed and I was exonerated, and she is reduced to freelance writing for online gossip mags. I’m not worried about her.” He softened his voice, “I am worried about you, however…I’m sorry, John, association with me has brought you far too much heartache already—”

“No,” John said forcefully, stepping close and looking Sherlock square in the eyes, “No, you just stop apologizing, alright? This isn’t your fault. What’s past is past and we have to deal with the here and now.” He squeezed his hand and touched Sherlock’s cheek with the other, “I’m not sorry for our association, alright?”

Sherlock let out the breath he had been unaware of holding, “Nor am I. Now, if we are not going to ignore this, what exactly do you wish to do?”

John sighed and dropped down onto the bed, looking tired. Sherlock sat next to him, feeling
helpless and hating it. They had been so happy just a short time before and now once again the media was shit over all over everything. He hated his notoriety as never before.

“Maybe we should issue a statement? Post it on the blog and text it to all those newshounds?”

“Gay and loving it?” Sherlock asked, wondering if it was too soon to joke.

John snorted and then laughed, finding a half smile, “Not gay, remember?”

“Methinks the gentleman doth protest too much,” Sherlock murmured, and bent his head to kiss John. They pressed against one another, losing themselves in the moment. All too soon they parted, and had to face reality.

“Let’s come up with something and then release it. I’m surprised they aren’t downstairs bothering Mrs. Hudson.”

“I disconnected the doorbell when I got up in the early morning hours to use the lavatory,” Sherlock smirked.

“Pop down and warn Mrs. Hudson not to venture outside unawares,” John suggested. “I need to called Harry and Clara and make sure they don’t bring Rosie home and encounter a pack of vultures.”

Sherlock shrugged into a dressing gown and padded downstairs to Mrs. Hudson’s flat; she answered quickly, and immediately began wringing her hands in the hem of her cardigan. “Oh dear, Sherlock, I’m glad you’re awake! I opened the door to fetch the morning papers and had a microphone shoved under my nose—and me without my face on! They were shouting something about you and John suffering a split…I hope you boys haven’t had a domestic. It’s alright to fight and then have make up sex, but don’t let things get so bad you end up in the papers, dear!”

“I’m afraid that as usual, the papers have it wrong. John and I are not fighting; but they have their teeth in a juicy bit of gossip now and they’re going to worry it until they’re satisfied. Don’t go outside for now.”

“I’ll bring up brekkie, shall I?” She called up the stairs after him.

Half an hour later she pushed open the unlatched door with her foot, “Hoo hoo!” And entered bearing a loaded tray, “I made a full English, only I my last tomato didn’t bear looking at. Need to pop to the shops, don’t I? Only heaven knows when those silly reporters will stop camping on my doorstep. Move those papers, Sherlock! Goodness, it’s a bit messy in here, isn’t it? Why are all those cushions on the floor? Hello, John, dear, Sherlock tells me you two haven’t fought, which put my mind at ease. Neither of you have had it easy and it’s only natural with your temper and his mischief if occasionally you two have a spat; and of course it’s healthy for a couple to let off steam. Fun, too—some of the best sex the mister and I ever had was following—don’t push, Sherlock!”

“Sorry, Mrs. Hudson, but John and I have a press release to finish writing and we need to concentrate.”

“Well, that’s—”

“Thank you for breakfast, Mrs. Hudson,” John piped up, “When things quiet down I’ll do the shopping and get you tomatoes and whatever else you need.”
“Aren’t you lovely—” Sherlock unceremoniously chivvied her out the door and her last words were cut off.

“Rude,” John reproved, but there was no real heat. Mrs. Hudson was used to him. Besides, they were both feeling harried with the constant phone calls and texts from the media, and the concerned calls from family and friends.

“No time,” Sherlock waved away his behaviour. “Now, where were we…”

*****

PRESS RELEASE DATED 27th JUNE 2021

Much speculation and interest has risen regarding the possible change in relationship between Mr. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson. While both parties feel that their personal lives are no business of either the press or the public, they wish to issue the following statement. No further comments will be made in regards to this matter and any further harassment will be dealt with using the full strength of the law.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press:

It is to be hoped that the news outlets will be satisfied with the courtesy we are extending them and turn once more to covering the worthy events of the day. Despite a lack of interest on either of our parts in being considered in any light as celebrities, both Dr. Watson and myself continue to be subjected to the imprecations of members of both print, online and television media to divulge private details of our personal affairs.

Our fans and followers, while wishing us well, have become somewhat florid in their delight and we ask that they restrain their questions and tweets to subjects pertaining to our work.

Our work may occasionally come into the public eye, but our personal lives should remain just that. Any implications that we were in the past a couple are incorrect, as is the idea that Mary Watson was not a dear friend to me and a beloved wife to Dr. Watson. Anyone who suggests otherwise had best think twice before so doing.

As of earlier this week, Dr. Watson and I have moved our relationship beyond the platonic.

We will not answer any questions on the subject and it is to be hoped that the world offers more stimulating topics to fill the news segments and bird cage liners than titterings about our personal lives. Further contact will be viewed as harassment and will be treated accordingly.

Sherlock Holmes & John Watson

*****
“You just had to put that last part in there, didn’t you?” John asked with exasperated amusement, not looking away from his laptop. “I’m sure referring to newspapers as bird cage liners will really put them on our side.”

“They’re on one side, John—their own.” Sherlock had his eyes closed, hands steepled under his chin. It had been a tiresome day after starting with such promise.

“Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson. Sherlock Holmes and John Watson. I notice that you always come first.”

Sherlock cracked an eye open at that, “Not this morning, if you will recall.”

That surprised a laugh out of John, and he cackled, “Ooh, look at Mr. Public School and the double entendre!”

“I’ve been spending too much time with you, clearly,” Sherlock smirked, watching as John set his laptop aside and rose to his feet.

“So,” John said, crossing the space between their chairs and standing in front of Sherlock, “are you saying that I’m rubbing off on you?” He planted one knee on the cushion between Sherlock’s spread legs and leaned over to kiss him.

“I devoutly desire you to rub off on me,” Sherlock assured him, and pulled his hips toward him, relishing the sound of John’s laughter.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the anxiety-inducing behavior of the media in this one, Rini2012!
Sherlock puzzles through the past week.

Consider this another bonus chapter. Between work, life and writer's block, I've struggled to move this forward. Then this started writing itself. I'm not entirely sure how "in character" this is for Sherlock, but since I believe that Sherlock is ready for romantic entanglements and would have some natural self-doubt and concerns, for me this is in character as far as his post-Reichenbach, post-Appledore, post-Mary and post-Sherrinford self might feel. Also, comments are life ;)

After Percy, I thought that the hurt and the loss and the vulnerability were too much; that they cost too much and that they left one too empty and alone. I recognized in myself that capacity to become addicted to sex and physical pleasure and lust-soaked pheromones, to finding release, comfort, succor in someone else. It seemed wisest for me to compartmentalize sexuality and desire the way I am capable of doing with the rest of my life.

I lived that way for twenty-one years and if “happy” was not the word to describe my life without those things, then perhaps “content” “productive” “meaningful” and “engaged” will do just as well. For, despite my aversion to boredom, and my issues with drugs, those years have been in one way or another good. They were unbalanced, however, something I didn’t realize at the time, and not until several years after I first met John did I recognize that something had been missing. I only recognized that there had been a lack when it occurred to me that he had filled that void in my existence with his loyalty and friendship, his humour, his acceptance, his ability to cut straight through my nonsense and his stalwart heart.

I told him once; I don’t have friends, just one. Just him. And it was true—now, I find that I can call several people friends, a fact which seems strange at times, but oddly fulfilling none the less. John has always been my friend, even when I discovered that my feelings ran deeper than friendship. I still fail to understand completely how I could have spent so long unaware of just what he meant to me. Means to me.

There was no heart-wrenching longing, no tearful pining or foolish what ifs. John was my friend and that was enough. It was always enough. Having him become more than a friend has been exhilarating and yes, somewhat terrifying, but it is not what I need to be happy. I am not “complete” now with him in my bed, as if I were only half myself without someone else. It is just John, in any incarnation, whom I need, because he helps me become the best version of myself which I know how, not because I lack anything without him.

Perhaps this is a weakness to feel as if I am my best with John. Perhaps I should be capable
of that all on my own.

    John is not a crutch, he is a light in the darkness and with him at my side I have been capable
of so much more than I accomplished without him.

    So yes, I suppose in some ways that means I need him. But I refuse to believe that I am less
than fully myself without him. Nor is John only now realizing his full potential because of me—
not only do I not believe this, but if he ever suspected that I DID, no doubt he'd attempt to pummel
me into the floor. John is nothing if not self-reliant, and he has always refused to act in any way my
inferior. Although he will no doubt be enriched and soothed by our carnal activities, as he is a very
physical and sexual man, and has denied himself these last few years. I find that I too, am more
physical and sexual in my nature than I previously believed. Even in my youth I did not feel the
level of desire that I experience with John.

    However, I am no puling moonstruck youth tumbling headlong into folly because of the
lusty glances of a buxom milkmaid (or in my case a strapping stable lad). John would no doubt
retrieve his gun and shoot me if he suspected I had just envisioned him as a busty milkmaid. It was
a surprisingly surprisingly fetching vision.

    I digress.

    It has been one week since our initial step towards a physical relationship. Despite the furor
the following day, and the disgusting presence of nosy media types on our doorstep, it was and has
been good. Not entirely different, so far. Just this morning, John yelled at me for leaving the empty
milk container in the refrigerator—nor was he soothed by my very reasonable argument that I put it
there as the bins were full. In fact he threw the milk at me and stormed out of the room.

    He continues to go to work. I have not paused in my own activities, and we carry on much as
we usually do. Except that now I can look at him and not veil my interest; now I can stand behind
him as he butters his toast and kiss his neck where I know he likes it best; now he can stop me
before I leave the flat and kiss me at length and with considerable skill, until I am breathless and he
is no longer annoyed with me over the milk and the bins.

    Not one of our acquaintances has mentioned our press release, aside from an embarrassed
grumble from Lestrade to let him know if any reporters give us trouble, followed by a hearty clap
of his hand on my shoulder and a look of such knowing that I wanted to squirm in embarrassment.
And of course, Mrs. Hudson, who has always believed us to be involved in a relationship from day
one was overcome with happiness that we had “formally announced” our relationship. It is clear
she thinks an engagement is but a short time away.

    Mycroft was aware of my feelings for John of course, and although I have texted him in
regards to the Paxton case, he has not dropped by to offer congratulations. I am thankful something
in the Middle East popped up and has kept him out of my orbit, although I suppose I am the only
one to be pleased by this. Mummy and Father will no doubt be ecstatic when they return from their
trip to South America and discover that there is now a relationship acknowledged between John
and myself. Mummy will be insufferable.

    John mentioned that his sister and Clara congratulated us in the same breath that they
excoriaded the press for becoming involved. They offered to keep Watson another night, but John
was anxious to have her home, and so was I. As of yet she has not seemed to notice any change in
our behaviour, although of course, neither John nor I would expose her to our intimate life. She
entered the kitchen this morning mere moments after I had John backed up against the cabinets;
thankfully we heard her upon the stairs and were able to pull ourselves apart and greet her quite
normally.
I have not asked John why he has yet to explain to his daughter that our dynamic has changed. I could deduce that he is uncomfortable explaining to a four year old that we are now more than friends, and he worries that she will be confused, or upset, or demand answers to questions we cannot yet address. I have avoided deducing his reasons. I have avoided asking him. I have avoided thinking about how John happily embraced a physical relationship with me, and yet no words of anything more were spoken. In the press release I said we had moved beyond the platonic. In truth I was unsure how to phrase it.

We have not spoken of love, or feelings, or the future.

I never thought myself a coward.

Perhaps, as in so many things between us, I do not need to say the actual words for John to understand me?

But…I promised I would not lie to him. Not telling him what this means to me feels like a lie. And if I don’t tell him, will he ever say anything to me? John has rarely hesitated to confront, yell, badger or scold me as he saw fit, but this feels different. There is so much in our lives that has gone unsaid, or was left unsaid for too long. Having faced death numerous times, one would not think that I could withdraw so speedily and completely from the possibility of confrontation over mere emotions, but clearly one would be wrong.

And here I thought I was a proper genius. I am an idiot.

I don’t even know why I started writing this private blog entry. No one will ever see it, and I don’t need to write down my own thoughts, surely? I know (oh, how I know) exactly how I feel about John. Now I suppose I simply need to tell him. Eventually. There’s no harm in waiting. Otherwise he might believe I am rushing things. He has made it clear in just this past week that he believes I need time and space since it has been so long since my last relationship.

Yes, I’ll wait.
As summer in London heats up, relations between John and Sherlock get hotter. Will a meeting with a flame haired beauty under a shady tree in the park derail John's commitment to Sherlock? Will Sherlock be comfortable with John's roving eye?

Greg is keeping a secret, his love for Mycroft, to himself...he's just not ready to admit to his lover just how serious his feeling are. His own humble nature blinds him to the fact that Molly Hooper is in love with him; Greg just thinks she's a lovely friend who deserves someone to love her. Lucky for Molly, he has a plan.

John kept waiting for the inevitable “oh my God, I’m dating a man, am I sure this is right for me, this is moving too fast, I’m not sure about this” angst and indecision. Either he was remarkably well-adjusted or his sudden leap into bisexuality and a relationship with a man was so natural that he had skipped all that…or possibly he was in denial. After he realized that he was worrying about something worrisome that hadn’t happened, and was in danger of ruining his present happiness with future fears, John decided sod it. He and Sherlock, well, their dynamic had always been a force of its own. They knew one another too well, had lived together far too long and were just too damn old to bother with it.

He’d far rather be happy.

And he was. Really, truly happy in a non-ironic, completely satisfying and addicting way. Sure, Sherlock was still himself, and of course, they were going to fight sometimes, and nothing was perfect. But at the moment life was good. Aside from a disgusting display of snickering and gloating from Greg, who had made a point of fanning his winnings from the apparently decade old pool at the Yard as to whether John and Sherlock would ever get it on or not; and the well-meant but aggravating interrogation Harry had subjected him to; and the lingering glances from people who recognized him from the news, John didn’t notice much had changed as far as how the world viewed them.

Mrs. Hudson couldn’t stop smiling, but she had finally stopped humming love songs, which was a welcome relief. John’s colleagues at the clinic hadn’t acknowledged it in any way, aside from one or two murmured expressions of sympathy over the nosiness of the media. Although one young, very fit and very out male nurse had passed him in the hall at work and given John an extremely flirtatious wink and smile combo that had made John’s face warm. He wasn’t embarrassed by his involvement with Sherlock but he felt like a fraud. Aside from the fact that he wanted to make love to Sherlock, John didn’t feel like a gay man. No other men had attracted him, and that we’re all friends here wink from Mark had felt like a pass to a club he didn’t belong to.

John shoved his thoughts aside and bounded upstairs, his bag banging into his side; he was in a hurry to get home. He wanted to see his daughter. He wanted to see Sherlock. He wanted to kiss the people he loved, put the kettle on and talk about their days.

Forget torturing himself over whether or not he felt gay; John had decided that regardless of what else he was, he was happy.
John adjusted his hold on the picnic basket in his right hand and looked back to make sure that Sherlock and Rosie were still following. They were on their way to meet Greg, his great-niece and Mycroft at the park for a picnic and play date. John was still trying to picture Mycroft Holmes at the park on a hot summer day, sitting on the grass and eating egg salad sandwiches and warm lemonade. Of course, he had hosted a barbecue, but even then he had been dressed in his usual attire.

His…boyfriend?...and his child were walking hand in hand quite a ways behind him; Sherlock appeared completely absorbed as he listened to Rosie’s tale. She was gesturing with both hands, not at all hampered that one of them was held in Sherlock’s grasp. John’s lips quirked as he watched them; Sherlock wore a loose white button down, khaki trousers and leather trainers, not quite his usual designer togs. Perched on his dark curls was a straw fedora, which was quite similar to the one Rosie wore. Rosie was in yellow Converse trainers, black leggings, a long white t-shirt with flowered sunglasses and her hair in pigtails.

John thought she must get her style from Sherlock, as he personally only cared that he was decently dressed, appropriate to the weather. The two of them looked like something out of a paparazzi shot of celebrities. Thankfully no actual paparazzi were present, at least that he could see; today was just supposed to be a quiet family day and a chance for Greg’s niece and Rosie to see if they liked spending time together.

John fanned himself with his pale aqua Polo shirt and called out good-naturedly, “Hey you two-- hurry it up! I want to stretch out in the shade and drink something cold!”

“Pah, old man!” Sherlock teased, scooping Rosie up and joining John with a few powerful strides of his long legs. “Watson, your father wants to nap under trees instead of climbing them.”

“Daddy, can you climb a tree?” Rosie’s excitement was palpable. “Can we all climb trees?”

“Climb, darling, and maybe. Depends if there are any good ones for climbing.”

She cheered, and urged them onward; John spotted Greg’s distinctive silver hair and headed in the direction of the willow where the others had staked out their claim. As they approached, he could make out the figure of a little girl who was running around with a football, as well as a woman in a flowy summer sundress, and…Mycroft? In casual wear?

It most assuredly was Mycroft, for once not in one of his three piece suits; he wore a pink and white checked button down with the sleeves rolled up, casual navy trousers and a pair of no doubt wildly expensive leather slides. John felt a bit pervy, seeing Mycroft’s bare toes. That and the tuft of ginger chest hair at the open neck of Mycroft’s shirt were offering a disturbing glimpse into the private side of Mycroft Holmes. It didn’t help that Greg kept giving Mycroft heavy-lidded looks of promise. John was glad his mate was happy, but he could do without the visual evidence that the Inspector planned on doing lecherous things to Sherlock’s older brother.

The woman, petite, curvy, with pale, pale red hair and laughing green eyes, turned out to be Greg’s niece Lauren, whom he hadn’t expected to be free to join them. Greetings dispensed, the adults settled around the blankets and shared drinks and nibbles while Rosie and Lauren’s daughter
Paige got to know one another while kicking the ball about.

“I was so glad to trade shifts,” Lauren explained, crossing her legs and adjusting her clothing. John couldn’t help the glance at her legs, they were quite good, and she was just the type he would have been interested in. Had he still been single. He looked up and twitched guiltily when he found Sherlock’s eyes on him. “Baltimore was great, but I’m happy to be back home…I just wish Paige had more playmates. That’s why I was thrilled when Uncle Greg suggested getting together with Rosie.” Lauren smiled at John, “I wanted to be here, but I had just started my new job—I’m a paediatrics nurse—and didn’t want to ask off. There will be plenty of times as a single mum that my schedule will conflict, and I didn’t want to ask off straight off the bat. But then someone offered to trade with me, and here I am.”

John mumbled something non-committal, not wanting to seem rude but also not wanting to appear too interested in case Sherlock thought he was attracted to her. Which he was. But not that he’d do anything. Of course he wouldn’t do anything.

Thankfully Greg was gregarious and covered any awkwardness when John’s stilted and reluctant monosyllabic replies to Lauren’s friendly questions upon learning he was a doctor started to look like rudeness, or at least a level of social awkwardness usually attributable to Sherlock. John finished his lemonade and poured himself another, wishing he had something to spike it with. Although in all honesty, alcohol probably wouldn’t help this situation unless everyone were drinking. Scratch that, Sherlock drunk, in the daytime was a terrifying thought.

Although parts of the stag night had been fun.

Mycroft, smooth as always, fanned himself with his Panama hat and remarked that despite the coolers and ice, the food would be best consumed now before the heat of the day affected it. Within minutes they bustled about, calling the children from their play, setting out food and passing plates. John was grateful for the distraction; he honestly was flustered at feeling that pull of attraction to someone else while in Sherlock’s presence.

Of course it had happened to him before; he had just never been with someone observant enough to cop on. Well, aside from Mary, but she had, if she had noticed, never let on. Although…come to think of it, she might have been aware of his conflicted feelings for Sherlock. It would explain a lot. Including the time she asked if he wanted to try her vibrator, and then went on to offer to peg him with a strap-on. Christ, it explained a lot, actually.

Hoping neither brother could read his thoughts on his face, John concentrated on getting through the picnic. Luckily Rosie was always an excellent distraction, and John happily let himself be drawn into a game of footie with the two girls and Greg. Lauren stretched out on the blanket and took a nap, while Mycroft and Sherlock politely observed the activity. John only hoped they weren’t sharing observations.

*****

John put Rosie down for a nap while Sherlock took Biscuit out of a walk; the younger man was still gone when he came downstairs, and John decided to take a cold shower. He came out, a towel wrapped around his hips, toweling his wet hair, expecting Sherlock to be stretched out on the sofa, or hunched over his microscope, but he wasn’t back. A bit odd, but John thought maybe he just needed some space and quiet after several hours socializing. Tired out from the hot
weather and the play with the kids, John decided on a nap of his own; he closed the blinds and drapes in Sherlock’s room, turned on the oscillating fan and dropped his towel, stretching out naked on top of the duvet. Despite his faintly guilty worry over Sherlock catching him ogling Lauren, and the continued absence of the other man, which was beginning to worry him, John fell asleep.

He woke groggily, aware he was no longer alone, but subconsciously aware that it was Sherlock. John opened his eyes and saw that he was sitting on the side of the bed, still dressed, a faint look of sadness on his features. John blinked away his drowsiness and pulled Sherlock down, wrapping his arms around him, “It didn’t mean anything.”

“Of course not, John.” The words were polite and understanding, but John knew he was more upset than he wanted to let on.

“I mean it, yeah? I can’t help it, I clocked her legs, she’s good looking…but I wasn’t—I wouldn’t do anything.” He felt a slight lessening of tension in Sherlock’s wiry frame and John kissed him, watching those remarkable eyes soften and felt Sherlock’s hand come up and bury itself in his hair. John broke off the kiss to whisper, “I’ve got a shit track record, and I’ve done some stupid, thoughtless, downright dick things in my past, but I like to think I’ve changed since I made those mistakes. Not going to cheat on my boyfriend…but you may have to slap me upside the head every so often when my eye wanders.”

Sherlock stilled in his arms and John wondered what he had said, until suddenly the penny dropped—“Is that okay? That I called you my boyfriend?”

“I—I did not realize—” Sherlock would have been flushed if he had been any other man. “That you thought of us as—”

“We live together, we fool around, we’re raising a kid together, I thought it was a given.” John smiled at him, rubbing a hand up and down his back, loving the play of muscles under his hand, “Were you just wanting something casual then?”

“Honestly I had not given it any thought,” Sherlock said, which was such a blatant lie that John snorted affectionately. “Well, perhaps I thought we might at some point redefine the dynamic between us—” He broke off, “Really, John? Boyfriend? What are we, fifteen?”

He laughed, “Is that your only objection? My choice of vocabulary words?” John wagged his eyebrows and loomed over Sherlock, pressing him into the mattress with his body, sliding one of his unclothed legs between Sherlock’s thighs. He nipped his lips, sipping kisses and stealing nuzzles from an unresisting and faintly pink Sherlock. “You know? You’re right. You’re more than my friend…I don’t want to do this to my friends,” So saying, he took his lips in a scorching kiss, sliding his tongue in between those sinful lips and stroking Sherlock’s tongue with his own, flicking his tongue over his teeth, savouring his sweet saliva, kissing him so deeply that their breath mingled as one. John raised his head, delighted at the loose sprawl of limbs, the unfocused eyes, “And you’re definitely no boy.”

Sherlock gasped and arched his hips when John possessively cupped his genitals in his hand and massaged lightly, sucking on that long, gorgeous neck as Sherlock threw his head back. “Oh yes, my darling, you’re so fucking gorgeous, look at you. God, I love getting to see you like this. Beautiful…” John praised him lavishly, feeling tenderness well in him at how Sherlock lapped it up, the blown wide pupils, the elevated breathing, the rapidity of his pulse leaping under John’s lips with each endearment, each word of delight.

“Mmm, just lay back, love, and let me feast on you, yes? Ah, yes, sweet…” John unbuttoned
the placket of Sherlock’s shirt, kissing each bit of skin he revealed, licking the faint gloss of sweat, nuzzling the few hairs on his sternum with his nose. He wasn’t usually so verbal, so fulsome with praise, but his lingering drowsiness had softened his defenses, and John decided that if he was changing the game by dating a bloke, he might as well throw the entire damned playbook out the window.

“John…” Sherlock sounded relaxed, drugged, and John rose back up over him, kissed him again on his splendid mouth, and caught his distracted gaze with his.

“Are you okay, Sherlock? Hmm, love? May I make love to you? Use my mouth on this fucking beautiful body of yours?”

“Please, John…” Sherlock’s legs moved restlessly, colour mounting on his high cheekbones. He seemed overwhelmed by John’s verbal outpouring of affection, and John vowed to court him with words, remind him how beautiful and desirable and loveable he was. How many years had it been since anyone told this man just how worthy of love he was? Had anyone gotten close enough to breach his defenses and remind him that he was more than just his brain, that his transport deserved pampering?

“You’re so generous to let me …just lay back, Sherlock, and let me explore you.” John eased the shirt off of him, Sherlock languidly raising himself to shrug it off. “Yes, look at that chest…your designer clothes are deceptive, you look very lean in them, hard to tell just how fit you really are.” John kissed his way down Sherlock’s torso, taking his time, “I used to fantasize about this chest—I’d stroke myself slowly, imagining you pressed to me, imagining myself kissing you just like I’m doing now.”

“John,” Sherlock sounded distracted, and his hands were on John’s back, kneading his own muscles, rising up to delve backwards through John’s hair. “I used to listen to you masturbate, listen to the creak of your bed and I’d imagine me doing this to you.”

“All in good time,” John assured him, licking his belly button and pressing his face into the faint softness of his belly, hands going to his hips, curving under to squeeze Sherlock’s arse in his hands, “Sweet Christ, you have a phenomenal arse on you, did you know that? Like a fucking Greek sculpture or something…you in those tight black trousers of yours should be a crime, I swear.”

Sherlock laughed breathlessly, “I hardly think my trousers are a criminal offense.”

“You’ve never followed yourself upstairs,” John gave him a roguish grin and waggled his eyebrows exaggeratedly, “One of these days I’m just going to take you right there on the stairs.”

“Mrs. Hudson would be scandalized.”

“Mrs. Hudson would sell tickets.”

Sherlock laughed again, looking and sounding so lighthearted; John’s heart squeezed in his chest. The reality of being intimate with Sherlock was so much better than the imagining, if only because they laughed and talked and teased and it was real, thank Christ it was all real. John loosened the single button at Sherlock’s waistband, smiled up Sherlock’s lean body, and, holding his gaze with his own, slowly lowered the zipper with his teeth. Thank fuck they were quality trousers and the zipper slid smoothly down or he’d have felt a right arse trying that only to get stuck halfway.

“You definitely have too many clothes on… let’s fix that, shall we?”
After a slight pause, Sherlock lifted his hips and let John tug down his trousers and pants in one move. His half-erect cock twitched under John’s intense gaze, and one of Sherlock’s hands fluttered as if he would cover himself. John worked the clothes down his long legs and tossed them on the floor, turning back to the delights laid out in front of him. Over the past several weeks they had spent a fair amount of time unclothed in one another’s presence, touching, caressing and becoming intimate, but they had yet to go much further than that, and John was suddenly ready to cross that bridge. He was a bit nervous, but the adrenaline surging through him helped carry him along. “God yes, you’re brilliant, love, look at you…fuck, I don’t know how I’ve kept my hands off you this long.”

“Are you sure?” Sherlock asked, fully cognizant of John’s intentions.

“No time like the present…” John paused, face hot, “Um, since I haven’t done this I hope you’ll grade me on a curve.”

“No curves here,” Sherlock ventured, giving his now fully erect prick a stroke. He looked embarrassed and aroused and nervous, and it settled John to know that despite the younger man’s previous experience, he wasn’t totally assured of himself either.

Already familiar with the feel of the other man’s aroused manhood in his grasp, John didn’t hesitate to take him in hand, moving until he was belly down between those long legs. He continued stroking him as he kissed Sherlock’s thighs, moving up until he was in reach; with a moment of hesitancy, John brushed his lips over the silky corona as he expertly rolled Sherlock’s foreskin down. The gasp was welcome.

So this was a dick. Someone else’s dick. In his face and essentially in his mouth. John took hold of that courage and foolhardiness that had allowed him to invade Afghanistan and follow this madman into countless dangerous situations and set about giving his first blow job. Salty, musk, a whiff of detergent, a faint hint of urine; John licked around the head; spurred on by Sherlock’s moan, and closed his lips around it. Without giving himself time to think about it, John lowered his head, intent on taking all of Sherlock in his mouth.

Two things stopped him. One, the droplets of pre-ejaculate that had pearled the head of Sherlock’s cock weren’t enough to lubricate his entire length, and two; it wasn’t exactly a picnic trying to swallow an erect penis. He suddenly felt a bit of an arsehole for all those times he’d thrust into a woman’s mouth, seeking his own selfish pleasure.

“Saliva, John,” he became aware Sherlock was speaking, sounding thin-voiced and shaky, “Use your—there you go. Ah!”

John licked his lips, gathered saliva in his mouth and went back for seconds. His lips stretched and he flattened his tongue and slowly sank down, not trying to go all the way to the root; his reward was a hoarse moan and the rise of Sherlock’s hips. John gagged slightly, involuntarily, and registered Sherlock’s breathy apology. Bobbing his head whilst avoiding the use of teeth and licking with any type of skill all at the same time seemed beyond him and John wondered how women coordinated it all. Fuck, perhaps he should have done some research.

No. This was ridiculous. He was Three Continents Watson, he’d received hundreds of blow jobs in his lifetime and he was a doctor and a fairly avid watcher of porn. He could figure this out.

Easing back up, John concentrated on the head and without Sherlock’s entire length in his mouth, his tongue was free to massage Sherlock’s frenulum, which met with wordless though vocal approval. Proud of himself, John got a bit tricky with his tongue and rolled his lips up and down, dragging the foreskin and coaxing a muttered expletive from Sherlock. That was better.
With occasional forays up and down the length to lick and suck, John put his left hand to work pumping the shaft while he did his best work on the crown. Since that put his right hand free, and he’d always enjoyed being busy, John slid it under his boyfriend and firmly squeezed and massaged one of those spectacular cheeks in his palm.

“God, John…ah, John, yes that is—fuck…” Rarely did Sherlock curse, and he sounded rather desperate and distracted now. John was grateful he wasn’t completely cocking this up.

No pun intended of course. He fought down a giggle and rubbed his palm in broad, flat circles over that arse cheek, moving slowly as his fingertips crept closer to the crevice…Sherlock moaned quite loudly when he drew his fingertips down the meeting of both cheeks. John slurped his tongue up the underside of the shaft and sucked on the sensitive nerves just below the foreskin as an exploratory finger brushed over the tight pucker of Sherlock’s arsehole and he managed to pull back just in time and avoid having his soft palate skewered. So maybe not right to it then.

Dandling the other man’s bollocks in his hand seemed to meet with approval; John contented himself with that, but suddenly remembered something and shrugged. Why the hell not? Opening his mouth wide he rolled one of Sherlock’s balls on his tongue, which was definitely welcome if the hands clutching the duvet, the heel in his back and the groaned imprecations for more were any indication. This was shaping up to be a decent blow job or his name wasn’t John Watson. Emboldened, John went back to licking and sucking, making it as wet and sloppy as his suddenly evaporating saliva would allow. One hand continued to play with Sherlock’s balls as John quickly wet the forefinger of his other hand in his mouth and then slicked it down the seam of his scrotum and on down to press and massage his boyfriend’s perineum.

A tumble of meaningless praise and encouragement poured out of Sherlock, and with a deep suck into his mouth and a rapid circling of his finger, John took his boyfriend apart. A moment’s hesitation and then he wrapped his lips around him and spluttered his way through swallowing a rather copious load of jizz that flooded his mouth with musky, bittersweet flavour. Huh, it really did smell a bit of bleach as it pumped into his mouth. Not terrible but probably an acquired taste.

John licked his lips, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and waited for Sherlock to come down.

It was quite some time before he was coherent. John crawled up the bed and slung an arm and leg over him, patting his heaving chest and watching the emotions and sensations that floated over Sherlock’s expressive face. He was still in possession of his own raging hard-on, but was content for the moment to bask in the knowledge that he had satisfied Sherlock.

“My God, John…” Sherlock’s voice was hollow, and he blinked several time before he seemed to bring him into focus; he rolled his head and regarded John with heavy lidded eyes, “It’s been many, many years since I last experienced that, but I must say you are a remarkably quick learner. That went from adequate to mind-blowing in short order.”

John’s chest puffed out and he couldn’t stop grinning. “Really, love? You’re not just saying that?”

“Not at all,” Sherlock assured him in his sexy deep baritone, rolling so he was on his side facing John. They shared a kiss and Sherlock pulled back with a grimace, “My apologies, John. It appears I need more fruit in my diet.”

John snorted, and covered his face briefly with his hand, and then gave into giggles, “Trust you to notice that.”
“Of course I noticed. Trust me, a few weeks of fruit juice added to my daily breakfast and you’ll thank me.”

“Mmm, so you’re saying I’ve had the control group and now we’re embarking upon a research study?”

“Have I told you, John, how incredibly arousing I find your singular grasp of my nature? You understand me as no other.”

“I think I’ve grasped the key to keeping you happy,” John winked.

Sherlock looked down at John’s cock, which was dark red, glistening with pre-ejaculate and riding high and tight against his belly. “It looks to me as if something else needs to be grasped and kept happy.”

John lay back a bit, more than happy to have Sherlock give him a hand job—or, if the other man felt ready, a blow job.

“How would you like to fuck me, John?”

Remarkable how so few words could so deeply affect him. John gripped the back of Sherlock’s neck in his hand and pulled him in tight for a deep, dizzying kiss. “Christ, I’m not sure I’m ready for that.” A frown creased his brow, “Nor are you.” Not that he didn’t want it, but it would take a bit of time to prepare Sherlock, and John didn’t feel mentally ready for all that it entailed. Also, he was aware that Rosie was only down for a nap, not the night.

“Oxford-style, John,” Sherlock said briskly, and rolled away to reach in the bedside drawer and fetch a new bottle of lube.

“You lost me on that one.”

“Inter-crural,” Sherlock explained, and John’s brows rose. He hadn’t considered it…but the idea of sinking his aching dick between Sherlock’s thighs was surprisingly arousing. “I decided we had best be prepared, even though intercourse seemed some time away, and I took the liberty of purchasing some supplies for our intimate encounters.” He smiled and shook the bottle, “No need for condoms, either.”

John was definitely interested; he watched—increasingly short of breath—as Sherlock liberally coated his thighs, peeking up occasionally through his lashes to judge John’s expression for himself. Sherlock’s increasingly pink cheeks seemed to hint that John’s inner hunger was echoed on his face. John took the bottle and managed to lubricate himself from root to tip without coming in his hand. His breath was coming faster from anticipation and he hoped like hell he lasted more than a minute.

Sherlock lay back on the bed, then sat up and pushed the pillows behind him so he could recline. Parting his legs he held out his arms and shakily John lowered himself to lie belly to belly with his lover; he gasped at the slick warm grip of Sherlock’s muscled thighs as Sherlock brought his legs together and reached between them to guide John between his thighs, John’s fiercely stiff prick leaping in his hands as he snugged him up under Sherlock’s bollocks.

“Fuck,” John exhaled shakily, arms trembling, amazed at how incredible it felt. He held still for a minute, adjusting to the sensation, the position, being face to face with Sherlock, who had both large hands palming his arse. “Jesus this feels...Sherlock, God, I am not going to last any time at all. Please don’t judge my stamina from this.” He laughed huskily, gasping when the other man
leaned forward and kissed him. John lay against his chest and kissed him back, then slowly, slowly moved. Hot, frictionless glide, slick and sleek and amazing. Shuddering, he concentrated on kissing, hoping he could last.

“I’ve dreamed of you here in my arms, John,” Sherlock murmured, sounding still somewhat hesitant to be sharing his private thoughts, his daydreams from a time he thought his feelings were unreciprocated. He kept speaking, gaining courage, hands urging John on. “This feels like a dream come to life, you, here, in my bed with me, making love to me.”

John cried out from a sharply exquisite pain in his chest at Sherlock’s admission, his heart trying to leap free at Sherlock’s words, and his hips stuttered. Sherlock tightened his thighs and John groaned, starting to lose his sense of rhythm as he thrust more wildly. This was—fuck, it was brilliant—he didn’t have to hold back, fear that he might hurt Sherlock, and since Sherlock had already come, John could be selfish, seek his own pleasure. “God, Sherlock, God, you’re so lovely, this is so…oh God, this is so good, fuck, fuck, fuck me this is—”

Unable to vocalize his pleasure, overwhelmed by the feeling, John let go and pounded wildly, his dick frantically pumping between Sherlock’s thighs, rubbing and sliding over his perineum. As his climax approached, he realized Sherlock was hard again, his erection being constantly stimulated by John’s stomach sliding over it. “Touch yourself,” John commanded roughly, unable to stop fucking him, eyes compelling Sherlock. He braced himself on both hand and leaned in, kissing him madly, “Touch yourself for me, come on, that’s it, I want you to come again, Sherlock.”

Sherlock’s hand frantically fisted his erection as John thrust hard and deep, grunting animalistically in the younger man’s ear. “Yes, fuck…come on, sweetheart, yes, oh listen to you, so sweet, so needy, yes…fuck, fuck yes that—that—oh God, Sherlock! Sherlock! Sherlock!” John shouted, forgetting Rosie, forgetting Mrs. Hudson, forgetting the neighbors, and came with blinding fierceness, shuddering and shaking as he spilled between Sherlock’s thighs. Managing not to collapse on his lover or face plant on the mattress, John angled his upper body over Sherlock’s and panted as he watched Sherlock seek his second release. His hand was a blur as he pulled and tugged painfully at his cock, the head almost purple as it disappeared and reappeared in the clasp of his hand; his entire body jerked and then he yelled and pumped out stripes of cum onto his chest and belly.

John folded, barely able to fall to one side, arms no longer able to support him. His breath was sawing in and out of his chest and he was covered in sweat, his belly, arse, groin and thighs slippery with cum and lube. Next to him Sherlock shivered in the grip of aftershocks, and John put a weary hand on his belly, petting him as he would a horse that needed gentling. “Jesus, love…that was fucking insane.”

“Ngh…” Sherlock drooled, and looked disgusted yet too tired to do anything about it, and John cackled wearily. He was about to offer to fetch some wet flannels when he heard the distinctive creak of the loose stairs and nearly levitated in his efforts at getting off the bed.

“Shit!” John stood naked and filthy next to the bed, casting his wild gaze around the room. They could hear Rosie’s quavering voice calling for them. “Shit! I didn’t bring any clothes in with me!”

“John!” Sherlock barked, standing and gripping his arm, “Stay here. I’ll go.” Without waiting for a response he flung on his dressing gown and hurried out of the room, careful to close the door so Rosie couldn’t get a glimpse of her naked father standing witlessly next to the bed, which looked as if wild animals had gotten tangled in the bedding. The duvet was only barely
draped off of one corner and the sheets had come loose and were puddled in the middle of the bed.

John could hear the murmur of voices and stood next to the door, cracking it slightly.

“What was that noise?”

“You know how sometimes your Daddy has nightmares?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Well he was taking a nap and he had a nightmare…I’m sorry he woke you.”

“I was scared, I heard yelling.”

John’s face flamed and he felt shitty, like a selfish animal rutting for his own pleasure while his daughter napped upstairs, waking scared and alone.

“You’re safe here with Daddy and me, I assure you. Now, how about you watch some television while I clean up? Then we can get dinner ready for when Daddy wakes up. Don’t you think he would like that?”

“Why isn’t Daddy awake if he was having bad dweams?”

“You shouldn’t wake people when they’re having nightmares, and he’s quiet now, isn’t he?”

“Mmmhmm,” Rosie didn’t sound entirely convinced, but her voice moved farther away as she followed Sherlock to the living room.

“Why don’t you find a programme and I’ll get us some cereal?”

“Okay!”

John let out his breath and silently thanked Sherlock for being so cool and collected. They would have to be more careful in future. John was assuredly not ready to explain the facts of life to his daughter, and definitely not ready to explain that those facts applied to Daddy and Uncle Sherlock. They’d escaped narrowly this time, but he needed to be more vigilant and also figure out just what exactly he would tell his daughter when the subject inevitably came up.

*****

“Hey, Molly!” Greg swung through the lab doors in search of his favorite pathologist, and smiled at the sight of her bent over a tray of samples, her face serious behind her safety glasses.

She looked up and smiled, dimples flashing, “Hey yourself…you look happy and relaxed. And is that a tan I see?”

“Yup! Had a great weekend off, quite relaxing.” He pulled up a stool and watched as she neatly packed away slides, jotting notes in her loopy handwriting. “Went out for a bang up meal Friday and caught a film at that old cinema palace near Myc’s neighborhood; he loves old detective movies. Then we slept in Saturday, I made brunch, we had a picnic at the park with John and Sherlock and Rosie, and my niece Lauren and her daughter Paige.” He stood up and offered to carry the tray for her, but she smiled and shook her head, capably balancing it all as she walked to
the coolers. Greg hurried ahead to open the door for her, “Then yesterday we spent ages in the
garden at his place, planting flowers.”

“Mycroft spent time in the sun? In the dirt?” Molly wrinkled her nose in disbelief, eyes
dancing, and Greg laughed with her.

“Well, I did most of the digging and planting, he was there strictly in a supervisory position.
And he had that lily white skin covered head to toe, wearing the biggest straw sunhat I’ve ever
seen a man sport.”

Molly broke out in giggles, looking away and then peeking at him. Their eyes met and she
laughed harder, as Greg joined her, both of them guiltily aware that Mycroft would not be amused
to be the butt of their laughter. “Oh Lord,” Molly finally gasped, wiping her eyes, “I’m picturing
something between Scarlett O’Hara and Elton John.”

Greg snickered but managed not to burst out into fresh laughter, “Naw, he was more like Van
Gogh or someone…elegant and old world. All that lovely ginger hair and freckles…” An idea
struck him, “I wonder if I could surprise him? Plant some sunflowers. He’d look lovely out among
the sunflowers in his straw hat.”

“You’re really in love with him, aren’t you?” Molly’s voice was soft, a thread of
something…sadness?...woven through it. Greg wished she could find someone lovely to appreciate
her; it must be hard and lonely raising a child on her own, even though she was very self-sufficient,
and she had more money and freedom than most single mums. Still, it would have been good for
her if Le Jie had stuck around, maybe the two of them could have worked it out, made a go of it.
Not that Greg was going to give relationship advice, considering his track record.

He shrugged, a bit uncomfortable with talking about his feelings for Mycroft, especially
considering that he hadn’t told the man himself how he felt. It was Mycroft, so he probably already
knew, had probably realized it before Greg…but saying it was another matter. “Yeah…I mean…
he’s great.” Unable to find the right words, Greg just smiled, and it must have been enough,
because Molly grabbed his hand in both of hers, squeezing it affectionately.

“I’m so happy for you—for both of you!” Molly dropped his hand, “It couldn’t have
happened to two nicer people.” And funnily enough, even though one of those two people was
Mycroft, the man most people found cold and humourless, if not outright inhuman, Greg knew she
meant it. Holding the lab door open for her, he extended an invitation to an impromptu coffee
break in the canteen. He was thinking maybe he and Myc needed to put their heads together and
comb through their acquaintances to find a boyfriend for Molly. If nothing else, he wanted to invite
her to join them one Sunday; it would be terrible to leave Molly alone when she’d enjoy some
adult company once in a while.

Yes, that was the ticket. They’d invite her ‘round more, and work on finding the perfect man
for Molly Hooper.
August

Chapter Summary

Ever since Rosie nearly walked in on them in bed, John has been subject to dark fears and troublesome guilt. A visit to Ella and a night out with an old friend help ease his mind. Greg drags a reluctant Mycroft along in his scheme to match-make for Molly and gets an unexpected gift.

Chapter Notes

I am NOT a therapist, as I'm sure you can guess. Please don't put any credence in my advice from Ella to John. This is a longer than usual chapter, because I had a lot to say, and also because I was anxious to write since the 4th of July holiday weekend derailed my plans to write and post this chapter. I think I may POSSIBLY have stolen "indecent angel" from another writer on AO3, but I read so much fan-fiction that I'm honestly not sure! My apologies if I did, and thank you for the phrase. If not, I'm awesome and I claim it for me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Jesus, Sherlock!” John gasped, sweat rolling down his face as his head tipped back, loose on his neck. His dick was hard enough to dent steel and he was seconds away from coming. That perfect, lovely mouth of Sherlock’s was wrapped around his shaft and he was receiving the most mind-wrecking blow job of his life. Tears rolled out of Sherlock’s heavy-lidded eyes, saliva coated his lips, his chin; the slurping sound of his mouth was as erotic as the suction of his mouth. He moaned around John’s cock, long fingers digging into John’s arse cheeks. “Fuck…I’m going to come so hard…I’m going to flood that beautiful mouth of yours with my filthy load. Oh yeah…God, yes, suck harder—ohhh, God, yeah, put your fingers inside me!”

“Daddy?” With horror, John realized his daughter was standing in the open doorway to the bedroom, rubbing her eyes and blinking at them in confusion. “What are you doing?”

“Jesus, Sherlock, stop!” John shoved at his boyfriend’s shoulders, tried to get him off of him, looked around frantically for a blanket, a shirt, something to cover them up with, but there was nothing. The bed was bare and their naked, entwined forms were on display. “Goddamn it, stop!”

“John?”

“I said get off me!”

“John!” Sherlock’s voice was loud, firm, which was odd, seeing as how his mouth was currently occupied. “John, wake up!”

Jolting awake, John flew upright, struggling, tangled in the sheets, heart hammering rapidly.
The room was warm, and he was sweaty from his dreams, and he felt stifled, scooting rapidly backward across the bed, away from Sherlock, who looked briefly hurt but then his eyes shuttered and his face assumed a neutral expression. “Were you having a nightmare?”

“…yeah…bad dream…” John muttered, running his hands through his sweat soaked hair then realized his erection was tenting his pants. He dropped his hands to his lap, knowing it was no good; this was Sherlock Holmes they were talking about, he would have noticed already.

Sherlock didn’t call him on it, just regarded him steadily, “Do you wish to talk about it?”

“Naw. No, thanks. Uh, I just need a shower, clear my head.” John swung his legs out of the opposite side of the bed, back to Sherlock. He dropped his head, hands gripping the edge of the mattress, “Sorry…I was over tired and sometimes that triggers nightmares for me. I didn’t mean to fall asleep when I got home from work, but the flat was so quiet.” He glanced back over his shoulder, not quite meeting Sherlock’s eyes, “Is Rosie alright?”

“Yes, I told her to stay downstairs.” Sherlock stood up from where he had been perched on the edge of the bed, “I’ll let her know you’re alright.” There was a faint hint of a question in his voice, and John chuckled humourlessly.

“Course I’m fine. Let me grab that shower and I’ll be right down.”

Sherlock walked to the door, “We thought you might be tired, so we picked up dinner from Angelo’s on our way home. I’ll warm yours.”

“Great.” John waited tensely until Sherlock left and then exhaled, wondering what the hell was wrong with him.

“Thanks for fitting me in, Ella,” John shrugged restlessly, feeling like his shirt was too small, the collar choking him. It had been a long time since he had felt this unsettled in her office, longer still since he had requested an emergency session.

“Of course, John. I’m just pleased you reached out, instead of ignoring whatever is bothering you.” Ella poured him a glass of water and set it on the table next to his chair, “Why don’t you take a moment to compose yourself and then tell me what has you so agitated.”

He took a sip of water, more to buy time than anything else. Breathing through his nose, John dropped his eyes to the carpet between his feet; he was sitting on the edge of his seat, he realized, shoulders hunched. “I uh…” He sighed, closing his eyes, “I keep having these dreams.”

Ella waited patiently, but when he sat silent, she spoke up, “Are these your usual dreams? Of Afghanistan, or Sherlock’s suicide? Or Mary’s death?”

He shook his head, unable to answer, feeling an unaccountable urge to cry. Eyes burning, throat tight, he sat in silent misery, wishing suddenly that Sherlock were there. He wanted the comfort of his presence. Only that was part of the problem, wasn’t it? He was part of the problem, so how could he comfort John?

“John, you know how this works…nothing can get better unless we talk about it. I want to
He had called her; called almost in a panic, having barely slept the night prior, having walked through the morning at the clinic in a haze. But he really didn’t want to talk about this. “These are different.” Haltingly, he told her of the change in status between him and Sherlock, of which she had been aware; how they had become more physical, and how he was okay with it, he was. But how things had changed for him the day Rosie came downstairs while they were naked in Sherlock’s bed.

“And did she see the two of you together?”

“Thank Christ, no. But she could have. She’s four; she doesn’t always remember to knock on doors before she comes in. She could have seen us, both of us. We were naked.”

“Does Rosie know that you and Sherlock have entered a relationship?”

“No. I haven’t told her. Not sure how or what to tell her.”

“Children are much simpler in their outlook than adults, John, even curious and intelligent ones like Rosie. You decide what is best for your child, of course, but I think perhaps you would be happier with transparency, rather than secret keeping. She’s likely to come upon the two of you kissing or hugging at some point, and her confusion and questions will be greater then.”

“I keep having these nightmares,” John said, still studying the carpet between his feet. “Really vivid, sometimes gratuitous, sexual dreams, about me and Sherlock…and each time I dream that Rosie walks in and finds us.” John chanced a glance at Ella, who didn’t look shocked, “In my dreams, Sherlock keeps on, uh, you know…even when she walks in.”

“And how do you feel?”

“Horrified,” John shot back. “Angry. Out of control, panicked, furious.” He snorted, realizing his breathing had accelerated and he was almost hyperventilating. “I wake up in a panic, with a, with an erection…heart racing…”

“You’re fearful of discovery?”

“Don’t make this into some bullshit about me being in the closet or whatever. Christ, thanks to the fucking media, everyone in Great Britain knows I’m in a relationship with a man.”

“Except Rosie.”

John shot to his feet, feeling rage come thundering upon him like a train, “She’s only four! She wouldn’t understand!”

“What wouldn’t she understand, John?”

“That I’m fucking a man! Her beloved Sherlock.”

“But you aren’t, and Rosie is too young to think that way.”

“She—it—I don’t want to have to explain it to her.”

“Explain what?”

“I don’t see why she needs to know. She’s just a kid—a baby!”
“Even children deserve the respect of the truth, as long as it isn’t a truth to ugly for them to bear. Do you feel that this is ugly, John?”

Fucking therapist babble and their search for hidden meaning in everything.

“What is it you need to explain that Rosie would not understand?”

John wanted to punch something. “That I’m cheating on her mum!” Stunned by the echo of his words, the reverb of his raised voice, John sat down shakily. Ella left her seat, handed him the glass of water and watched as he choked some down. Handing him a tissue from the box he never used, she sat on the edge of the coffee table in front of his chair, folding her hands on her knees.

“John…why do you phrase it like that?”

“Like what?” His tone was sullen, and he knew he was acting ridiculous, but he wanted to be done talking. In fact, he wished he never had to come back here. Christ, he’d been in therapy on and off for ten years…when would he be done? When would he be cured?

“It doesn’t work like that, therapy is a process John, it helps you work through issues…and you are well aware that you’ve had more than your fair share of traumatic events since you’ve first come to see me,” Ella reminded him calmly, and he realized he had voiced his thoughts aloud.

“I’m so tired of this…I want to be normal. I want to leave the past behind and be happy.”

“Our past is part of us, John, we carry it with us. You, a former soldier, you understand that better than most civilians ever will.” Ella’s tone was gentle, but matter-of-fact, “But while we can let it shape us, guide us, we don’t have to let is rule us. You might not realize it, but you have changed, you have grown. You’ve altered and matured and healed yourself.” She smiled, “You fought me so much in the beginning!” Throwing her hands up briefly she shook her head, “You’re a remarkably stubborn minded man, and you were very solitary and suspicious in the beginning. Over the years that has altered somewhat, but it really wasn’t until the last three years or so that you joined me in trying to, as you say, make you better.”

Realizing, with some degree of shame, that he was crying, John used the crumpled tissue in his hand to wipe his face, and plucked a few more out when Ella extended the box. Taking a moment to compose himself, he thought over what she had said.

“It’s Rosie. I wanted—to be better, for her.” His throat went momentarily tight, “I took her mum from her, I’m all she has…I just want to make her happy, keep her safe.”

“You and I have talked, John…your guilt and your grief both cloud your judgement. You’re not responsible for Mary’s death.”

“Yeah. Sure.” His tone was dull, but she remained silent. It was old ground.

“Why do you feel that a relationship with Sherlock is cheating on Mary?”

It would be easier…this whole process would be easier, if John could just verbalize the tangle of emotion and thought that rested inside him like a black ball of self-loathing. “He…Sherlock…he never came between us, exactly, but he was always there. Always larger than life, even when he was dead.” John stared at the sodden, unraveling tissues in his fist, “It was one of the things I liked, loved, about Mary—right from the beginning she loved hearing stories about him. Even when he was back, and I was angry, she liked him. No one—no woman I ever dated—they never liked him. But Mary did.”
Ella was quiet, letting John ramble through his thoughts, “He helped plan our wedding! Endless patience for serviettes and shades of purple…Christ, it was my wedding and I could hardly be arsed to care about that stuff.” He smiled a little, remembering the way Sherlock had bitten his lip when they walked in and found him surrounded by all those replicas of the Sydney Opera House. “Somehow…we worked, the three of us. Shouldn’t have…the two of them, they’re like Alpha dogs, secure in themselves, but territorial. You’d think they might have fought over me, my time…but we made it work.”

“Did Mary never resent Sherlock? The closeness of your friendship?”

“Maybe. She never let on if she did though. Liked to tease me about it. Called him my first wife. Sherlock didn’t much care for that. Mostly because it implied that he was no longer first priority, I think.” John smiled fondly, “Vain git has to be the center of everything.”

“Have you dated much since Mary died?”

“You know I tried, few years back,” John gave her look, refusing to let her pull her therapist bullshit.

“How many women would you say you’ve dated, since Mary died?”

“Half dozen, maybe? Might have been a few more.”

“And out of those women, how many did you have sex with?”

“Four of them,” John said after a few moments reflection.

“More than once?”

“One time with two of them…I dated this woman named Rebecca for a few months, so it was more frequent with her. The other woman, Christine, we were more casual, had sex probably three or four times.”

“Did Rosie ever meet them?”

“No.”

“Sherlock?”

“…Rebecca and Christine, yeah, the others, I don’t think.”

“Did you feel guilty for engaging in sexual acts with them?”

John sat back, putting distance between them. “I…no. Well, I mean, yes, a bit.” But not like this, he didn’t say. Of course, it was Ella, she knew him, she understood more than he verbalized.

“You didn’t feel like sex with them committed a sin against your wife?”

“No. The first time, the first woman, yeah, absolutely. I felt like some prick ruled by lust, getting it off while my wife was dead.” John shrugged, “That feeling mostly went away, when I realized feeling that way was stupid…Mary’s gone, no amount of sex or abstinence on my part is going to change that. It would make as much sense for me to stop breathing or eating.”

“Why Sherlock then?”

How long had he been here? Shouldn’t his hour be up? John stood up, took a half step
toward the door.

“The John Watson I’ve come to know isn’t a coward.”

He turned back, glaring, temper rising, “Stop trying to make me angry so I’ll stay.”

“If you were really angry you’d leave. You’ve done it before.”

His jaw ticked. He stood in silence, unwilling to leave and not willing to admit defeat by sitting down.

“What is it about Sherlock Holmes that is different from those women? Is it because he’s a man? Do you think Mary would understand if it were another woman?”

“Mary wouldn’t care, I don’t think.”

“Do you care?”

“No!”

“Not at all?”

“Maybe a little,” John finally said, he met her gaze defiantly, “I’m not ashamed of loving Sherlock Holmes, but I keep struggling with the idea that I’m gay. Bisexual. Whatever.” And he was a tiny bit embarrassed that people, people he knew and strangers alike would possibly speculate on the intimate things they did. Or didn’t do—hadn’t done. Why should being bisexual be something anyone needed to announce, declare, explain? Before Sherlock, John had never had to defend his heterosexuality to anyone.

Ella spoke quickly, “Is it because you love him that you think you’re cheating on Mary? You didn’t feel that same level of attachment with the women you dated, they didn’t touch your heart, so you felt like you were keeping it as a safe space for Mary’s memory to reside.”

“Yes.” John sat down, lightheaded, “Jesus Christ, I do. Love him. Like, like it’s always been there…not always romantic. Not for most of the time. I don’t think. It’s…it’s all tangled, this feeling I have for him. He’s part of me now. It terrifies me. Same feeling with Rosie. I’d kill anyone who took him away from me.”

“Why would anyone take him from you? Or Rosie for that matter?” Ella had received maximum clearance from Mycroft, to allow her to continue as John’s therapist; she knew all about Moriarity, Magnusson, and Eurus. She knew that John and Sherlock had been emotional pawns in the past. That wasn’t what she was asking, he understood that.

John heard the bleakness in his voice, but it didn’t come anywhere close to matching the feeling inside him. “Because,” he finally admitted in a low voice, “That’s what happens when I love someone.” He felt water splash on his hand and realized he was crying again. John’s voice came out thin and gray, pulled tight by the horrible pressure in his chest. “They get taken from me.”

******
“Isn’t this nice?” Greg asked Mycroft happily, dumping mixed nuts in a bowl. If it were his flat he would have just set the can out, but Mycroft was the sort of person who believed in niceties like presentation. “I like having people over.” As a couple, he thought, but didn’t say. No need to scare the man off with cozy declarations of domesticity. Besides, Greg was fifty-six, he had his own place, his own space and routines, he wasn’t sure he wanted to share a house full-time. But he liked the feeling that they were hosting a gathering as a unit. Overflowing with happiness, he stopped at the kitchen island, where his boyfriend was removing olives one at a time from a narrow jar with a pair of slender tongs. “Why don’t you just dump those on the plate?”

Mycroft didn’t roll his eyes physically, but the act was there in spirit. “These are £30 olives from Spain, Gregory, I’m not going to dump them anywhere.”

Greg did roll his eyes, but affectionately, and threw in a kiss to boot. “Grouchy, grouchy!”

“I don’t like having people in my home,” Mycroft said darkly, fine brows meeting over his admittedly formidable nose.

“This isn’t people,” Greg assured him, pulling out a wedge of some stupidly expensive but really, really tasty cheese and hacking at it with a knife, “It’s just Molly and Dimmock. You like Molly.”

Mycroft watched him and shuddered. Probably there was some overpriced tool that one used to shave this cheese, but Greg just gave him a glowing smile and winked and watched in satisfaction as his boyfriend blushed faintly and subsided. “I do like Molly,” Mycroft grumbled, “but if I wanted her presence in my home, I would have invited her here before.”

“You would not,” Greg scoffed, piling the cheese on the charcuterie tray, then sighing and fanning it out when Mycroft closed his eyes as if enduring physical pain. “You didn’t use to invite anyone here, before me.”

“Hmm, see, I made a tactical error in permitting you access. Now you’ve opened the flood gates of humanity.” But Mycroft was smiling, and he stood up and rounded the island to slide his arms around Greg, leaning in for a truly great kiss. “I suppose I had best get my reward before we’re overrun by guests.”

Greg roughly wiped his hands on his trousers and then cupped Mycroft’s very fine bum in his hands, giving a squeeze which prompted a faint but approving growl. They were so close that he could see the faint golden flecks around Mycroft’s blue-gray irises, glowing in the sunlight coming through the kitchen windows. “God, you’re gorgeous,” he sighed, sliding his hands up Mycroft’s back and pulling him even closer, “I hope your reward continues after the ravening hoards leave…maybe it can involve you, me, whipped cream and those luscious strawberries I saw you hide in the back of the fridge?”

Mycroft moaned faintly, “Unfair! Do not mention salacious activities when we have guests arriving imminently. Now I shall be imagining you performing said salacious activities.”

Greg gave his best evil villain laugh and pinched Mycroft’s bum, kissed him on his nose and let him go to fetch the jar of fancy pickled peppers. “Just a few hours and I’ll salivate all over you.”

*****
Following a pretty shattering emergency session with Ella, John would have preferred to finish out his shift at work and go home and somehow glide through the evening without a confrontation with Sherlock. He knew they needed to talk, knew the younger man was aware that John was struggling, but he didn’t feel emotionally ready to get into it. He was pretty fucking exhausted, actually.

So he wasn’t exactly thrilled to arrive home and find the television on, Biscuit barking excitedly, Rosie putting on an impromptu play, with Mrs. Hudson fluttering around serving tea and being nosey, with Bill “Akimbo” Murray comfortably ensconced in John’s chair and laughing delightedly at it all. Whilst Sherlock lurked quietly in the kitchen, silently observing. Nor did John feel like going out to tie one on.

But, he hadn’t seen Bill in years, and he wanted to celebrate. Besides, he knew that an unspoken reason for Bill’s visit was to check out John’s new relationship. For such an easy going young man he was remarkably intractable; he easily got his way. Mrs. Hudson was delighted to have Rosie to hers for dinner and yet another viewing of Beauty and the Beast, and for some unknown reason Sherlock came along with nary a word of protest.

Walking down the street between the loquacious Bill and the taciturn Sherlock, John felt uneven, bidden to laugh and talk as if his spirits and energy were high, all the while feeling raw and unsettled from his weeping and emotional exposure. Although Sherlock had never once indicated that he was disinterested in public displays, John felt a bit trepidatious as he reached out for the comfort of his presence and curled his fingers around Sherlock’s palm.

He felt his boyfriend look at him and a moment later a gentle pressure squeezed his fingers and John smiled. With an answering squeeze he let their hands part, and walked the rest of the way to the less up-market pub he had in mind, heart lighter than he would have believed just an hour prior. It was quiet for a Tuesday, and the three of them settled in the back snug, Sherlock close enough to John for him to feel the comforting heat of his body. John relaxed, sipping his ale, as Bill caught him up on his doings, answering readily enough any questions asked of him.

Sherlock was fairly quiet, but not aloof, a faint smile on his face, posture relaxed. John was grateful he was making an effort; normally when he went to the pub for a pint he called on Mike or Greg or one of his casual acquaintances at the clinic. This was the first time Sherlock and Bill had met, and so far Sherlock was making an attempt to be pleasant. Although his eyes catalogued Bill automatically, he hadn’t voiced any observations aloud. “How did you come by your nickname?” He asked suddenly, when Bill had returned with another round.

Bill groaned and John laughed, resting his arm on the back of the booth behind Sherlock, turned slightly to face his boyfriend. “Oh, young Bill here was green as grass when he joined up… one day in the barracks he’s bragging and posturing—” John ignored Bill’s indignant “Oi!” and talked over him, “—and he claims he knows all kinds of martial arts, including—”

“Akimbo?” Sherlock guessed, smirking, and then laughing out loud as Bill pretended to pout.

“Yeah,” John snorted, “Little shit insisted it was a real thing, even with everyone hooting him down.”

Bill tossed a handful of nuts at him, “I was twenty, gimme a break, Captain.”

John brushed at his shirt and fished a nut out of his glass. He took a sip and nearly spluttered
inelegantly when Sherlock asked Bill how John had come by his nickname.

Eyes bright with glee, Bill leaned across the table conspiratorially, and Sherlock obligingly leaned in. John covered his face with his hands and giggled. “Everyone, we all knew the Captain was a bit of a lad. Soldiers are worse gossips than old women, let me tell you. And he used to get about—even in a desert, no woman to be found, somehow he found ‘em.” Bill shook his head, “Now me? I wasn’t there, but story is, bunch of the officers were sitting about, drinking and bullshitting, and the Captain is bragging about how he’s going around the world with all the different women he’s bagged.”

“Jesus…” John sighed, remembering what an arsehole he used to be.

“Hush, John,” Sherlock waved him to be quiet.

“One of the other fellas asks him if he’s been to the dark continent…” Bill giggled, overcome for a moment, and John wonders just how much they’ve had to drink. He’s lost count somewhere after the fourth pint. “And the Captain, he thought he meant had he slept with an African or something. T’other man says naw, have you visited the dark continent? Course, he was talking about anal. So the Captain finally cops to it and stands up on the table and says, ‘Lads, I’ve explored all three continents.’”

John is surprised to hear his boyfriend giggle, and it’s so cute he pulls him to him and kisses him, forgetting Bill, the public setting, just wanting to swallow that happy sound. After a surprised moment, Sherlock’s lips soften against his, and John sighed into his mouth, lightly stroking his tongue over the other man’s, drinking in his moan. As they part his heart swells at the sight of Sherlock’s bright eyes, his flushed face, swollen lips and relaxed smile. “Aww,” John hears Bill say drunkenly. They are still staring into one another’s eyes when someone approaches the table, and John tears his eyes away, turning a slightly unsteady gaze onto the young man standing next to the table.

“I’m sorry to interrupt—but…are you? God, it is you, isn’t it?”

John’s used to this, the public recognition, gushing fans, nosy Twitter followers, people looking for a story, an autograph, a moment in Sherlock’s sun. He hopes the younger man didn’t see John sucking Sherlock’s face, hopes no one caught a picture of them or it will be all over social media before he can go have a slash. Deciding a bit drunkenly that he would worry about it if it happened, John sat back and drained the dregs of his pint. It took a moment to realize the man wasn’t staring at Sherlock, but rather at John.

“I know you won’t remember me, sir, but I was in Kandahar in ’09, in the big melee.” The young man, about Bill’s age, not quite thirty, is clean cut, handsome, and fit, and John looks at him properly, searching him for clues. He realized that he didn’t recognize him just as he saw the left arm, the burns, the prosthetic. Unthinkingly his hand went to his left shoulder, rubbing at the scar tissue. He managed to focus just in time to catch the tail end of his introduction, his former rank. “I was wounded badly—” He held up his arm, mouth twisted ruefully, “—lost part of my arm, suffered burns over ten percent of my body, but it would have been worse, I would have died, if it hadn’t been for you.” His hazel eyes were sincere, grateful, “You saved my life and I never got to thank you. I managed to find out your name when I was in hospital, but I was depressed for a long time, couldn’t bear to write. Then when I did, I guess you had moved on. Not sure if you ever got my letters.” He looked down, smiled a bit, “I rambled a lot, but really, what I wanted to say was thank you. Thank you for my life.”

It took a few tries for John to gather enough moisture into his mouth to speak, “No…no, I never did. I—thank you. I mean, you’re welcome.” He shook his head, “Sorry, few pints in.”
“Why don’t you join us?” Sherlock asked, surprising the hell out of John, who gave him an open-mouthed look of shock. Sherlock closed his mouth lightly with his finger under John’s jaw. He held out his hand, shook Tony’s warmly, “My boyfriend is too modest to express it properly, but he’s touched by your thanks.” John was equal parts grateful for Sherlock’s kindness to the young man and flushed with pride and happiness that he was publically calling him his boyfriend.

After a few protests the young man—his name was Tony, Sherlock murmured in John’s ear—sat down at the end of the snug on a chair he pulled up. “Really didn’t mean to interrupt your night,” he said again, but Bill assured him he was welcome, “Bit of a third wheel with the lovebirds here!”

John blushed when they looked at him, and he realized that once again he had his arm around Sherlock, who most decidedly did not seem to mind. He was leaning slightly into John, one arm propped on the table, finger circling the rim of his empty pint glass. He saw John watching him and smiled, tongue lightly flicking out to slowly drag along his bottom lip. Catching the plump lip in his teeth he winked, and under the table his large hand squeezed John’s leg, slid up slightly towards his groin and held his eyes.

“Right,” Bill laughed, “That’s our cue. Tony, mate, what say you help me fetch the next round?”

“It’s on me,” John heard Tony say distantly as they moved away toward the bar.

“You’re…you need to stop doing that,” John said unsteadily, capturing Sherlock’s wandering hand in his, “I can’t concentrate. And much more of that kind of behaviour and they’ll kick us out for shagging in the loo.”

Sherlock wrinkled his nose, “John, even deeply inebriated, I assure you I would never engage in sex acts in a public toilet.” He leaned in and nibbled John’s ear, which sent wonderful shivers down his spine. “Now, our facilities at home are a different matter…I have plans for that shower head.”

“Oh yeah?” John asked brilliantly, turning his head so Sherlock could kiss his neck. Vague concern as to the public setting of their increasingly amorous activities flitted through him, but didn’t take root. He would have been reassured to know that Bill and Tony were casually standing in the path of anyone who might have tried to walk by and see more than they ought. “Fuck,” he moaned, following a deep kiss, “That mouth…that gorgeous, wicked mouth of yours…I want to crawl inside it.”

“Would you like to fuck my mouth, John?” Sherlock purred in his deepest, darkest baritone, his hand finally sliding to the fly of John’s modestly cut trousers, “I judge you have not consumed so much alcohol that you will be incapacitated. I’d like to take you home and take you in my mouth, John.”

“We’re, uh, we have to go,” John said to Bill, towing Sherlock behind him. “You’re in town for a few more days, yeah? We’ll catch up. I’ll call you. Tony, mate, great to see you…I’m glad you’re doing so well. Give Bill your particulars and we can meet up for a drink or a meal sometime, alright?”

Tony was circumspect in his farewells, but Bill laughed at them outright which earned him a rude gesture from John and a flirtatious wink from Sherlock. “Stop flirting, you,” John growled, and dragged him out the door. “Flag down a cab with your bloody magic wand and take me home, Shag-a-lot.”
“Well,” Greg said, striving to sound upbeat, “That went okay, didn’t it?”

Occupied with putting away food into neatly labeled containers, Mycroft didn’t bother looking up. “No.”

“Oh…come on, it wasn’t that bad!”

“I’ve been in peace treaty negotiations with rebel warlords that were less fraught with tension.”

“You’re such a drama queen.”

“You’re confusing me with my brother.”

“I assure you, I’m not,” Greg said, coming up behind him and crowding the younger man against the counter while he nipped playfully at his earlobe, “Mmm…never wanted to give your brother a nice slow screw over the kitchen table. I’ve got ideas for those strawberries that can only be fulfilled by one Alexander Mycroft Jeremy Holmes.”

Mycroft hissed in annoyance, “Who was it? Sherlock? Mummy?”

“Anthea,” Greg said, laughing, and pulling his lover around so they were face to face. “I won it as a concession when she said I’d never get you in sandals.”

Mycroft screwed up his face in annoyance, the big tit. Greg grinned at him, “She was quite gleeful. I sent her snaps on my phone and she included the name of your favorite super-top-secret patisserie.”

“Treason,” Mycroft said sadly, thinking of his waistline.

“Now when you’re gone all shirty and ice cold I can buy my way back into your good graces.”

“You’re openly admitting your plan to bribe my love with baked goods?”

Greg held his breath, “Love?”

Wary gray eyes met hopeful brown ones, and softened, a smile slipping onto Mycroft’s mouth, bringing warmth to his usually austere expression. “I hadn’t meant for it to be like this, a slip of the tongue in the kitchen.”

“Astronomically pricy restaurant, one of a kind two hundred year old bottle of wine, snooty maître d, candlelight, sweaty palms…that what you had in mind?”

“How do you always make me laugh in serious moments?” Mycroft wondered, doing just that. He held Greg close, “I’m not—this isn’t a fairy tale, Gregory, nor a romantic movie…I’m cold and hard and difficult, private to the point of paranoia, set firmly in my ways. I am going to infuriate and disappoint you untold times.”

“Why don’t you let me be the judge of that?”
“I have not your warmth, your easy expression. Don’t expect hand holding and social media updates of our relationship and romantic getaways. I will have to balance my personal life against my career, and I will put my career first, as I have always done. It will mean missed dinners, cancelled plans, days and sometimes weeks of silence when I am out of the country. I won’t be able to share details of my days, to reciprocate when you grumble about your coworkers.”

“I know all that Myc.” Greg brushed his lips with his, “We’ve been acquaintances for almost fifteen years, friends for four of those, involved now...I know what being part of your life entails. Hasn’t scared me off yet.”

“One day apologies and sweet words won’t be enough,” Mycroft predicted darkly, sounding sad.

“Still haven’t heard ‘em.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Those sweet words. You haven’t actually said them.”

“Er.”

“Hmm, not sweet. Try again.”

“Gregory!”

“My name is sweet when you say it, but still not what I’m looking for.”

“Why must you torment me?” Mycroft whined, trying to look pathetic, “You know I am not comfortable with feelings.”

“You’ve done alright so far. Got to be brave. Here, I’ll go first.” Greg took a shaky breath, a smile bursting out on his face, “I love you, Mycroft.”

The wash of emotion over the face of his Ice Man left Greg breathless and with a heart swollen with emotion; Mycroft’s eyes flicked away and then back toward him and he smiled a lopsided smile, suddenly looking sly, “I do believe I won.”

“Myc…not a contest.”

“Nevertheless,” he observed primly, “I did win.”

“Insufferable prick.”

“Is that any way to talk about the man you love?”

“It is if he’s being an insufferable prick.”

“Is there anything I can do to soften your attitude toward me?”

“Hmmm...a few sweet words would go down a treat.”

Mycroft kissed him softly on the corner of his mouth, a tiny peck. Greg smiled and turned his head to kiss him properly, loving this impossible man so much. So he told him again, and Mycroft responded in kind, straight forward and simply, the words filling Greg with a joy and peace he hadn’t expected. “Say it again?” He asked in a whisper, feeling a bit shy for some reason.
“I love you. Gregory Victor Lestrade, you have done the impossible and thawed the Ice Man’s heart.” Mycroft smiled at him, “Although, if you tell anyone, I’ll have to have you killed.”

*****

“We should—Rosie—” John gestured vaguely at Mrs. Hudson’s flat door as Sherlock pushed him up the stairs.

“I texted her, Watson will be staying with her this evening.”

“We ask her to mind Rosie too much,” John fretted.

“She loves it. Proper granny. Likes to be of use. Do get your arse upstairs, John, I’m quite eager to have you debauch my mouth.”

There’s a time and a place for worrying if you’re abusing the good nature of your daughter’s de facto granny and this was neither. “Yes sir!”

“Ooh, I quite like that, John, very snappy.” Sherlock stroked his buttocks, admiring the flex of the muscle under his fingers. “Double time, soldier.”

John put on speed and tumbled into the flat, Sherlock crowding him through the door, breathless with laughter, kissing him wildly over John’s shoulder, John’s face turned back toward his, their mouths frantically sucking and pressing. “Remind me to wear my old fatigues for you sometime,” John suggested, kicking off his shoes and trying to pull off his shirt whilst sucking on Sherlock’s tongue.

Impossibly, Sherlock felt shafts of desire shoot out from his groin, sending full body tingles throughout his limbs. He was achingly hard and randy, impatient to be pressed skin to skin with John. His mouth watered at the thought of wrapping his lips around John’s cock. His desire had burned off any lingering effect from the alcohol. “Will you wear them and ah, reprimand me?”

John’s almost pop-eyed look of amazement dissipated in the heat that replaced it. “Hmm, has someone been insubordinate? In need of a little discipline, soldier?”

Stiffening his weak knees, Sherlock nearly lifted John off his feet when he swept him into his arms, forcing his head back in a bruising kiss. “God, yes, John please.” He pulled back a bit. “Not tonight, mind. But yes, one night I would very much like to receive a little discipline from Captain Watson.”

John fisted his hands in Sherlock’s shirt, trying to tear it, but finding the expensive fabric and quality tailoring didn’t lend itself to spontaneous rending. “Fuck yes, anything you like. Mm, you do like that, don’t you? Did it get you hot, when I’d assert myself, pull rank?”

Sherlock slithered out of his shirt, peeled off his undershirt, whimpered when John licked his nipples, kissed them, bit lightly. “Yes, John. Oh, God, you were magnificent at Baskerville.”

“Definitely playing Captain Watson and Private Holmes,” John promised, flinging his shirt away and stumbling out of his trousers, dragging his pants with them. Sherlock pushed him against the flat door when he would have headed for the bedroom, hands on his hipbones, licking a trail down his chest to his navel, mouth grazing the crease of his groin as he knelt in front of him. He
sniffed out John’s scent, musky and masculine beneath the lighter, more chemical odours of soap, detergent, cologne.

John’s cock was engorged, flushed with blood; Sherlock licked his fingers, worked the foreskin delicately, spreading John’s natural lubricant, drawing little whimpering moans from him. Unable to resist any longer, Sherlock licked his lips and took all of him in his mouth, pulling back slightly when the head filled the back of his throat. He surged forward again, swallowing, and heard John’s broken sighs and curses; despite the decades since he had last done this, Sherlock found it quite easy to perform.

His mouth was overflowing, his chin wet with saliva, and the juicy squelch of his mouth engulfing John’s dick was arousing him. Aware that John’s hands had tightened into fists in his hair, Sherlock slurped and nibbled, darting from balls to tip, keeping the former soldier on his toes. Reaching up one long arm, Sherlock traced John’s soft, thin lips, tapped his finger lightly against his teeth and when granted entry softly fucked his mouth. John mimicked Sherlock’s motions, and Sherlock squirmed, pressing his thighs together, wanting to be filled, to plunge, to fuck, to write in glory.

When he couldn’t stand it anymore, Sherlock removed his soaked fingers from John’s mouth and cupped that hand around the flat, hard plane of his buttock, waiting until John relaxed before he breached the cleft with his spit-wet fingers. John jerked, then relaxed again, moaning softly when Sherlock’s damp fingers traced him lightly, pressed and fluttered and retreated, teasingly circling the pucker of John’s arsehole. John’s cock swelled harder, jumped, jumped in Sherlock’s mouth, and his hands pulled hard enough to bring tears to Sherlock’s eyes.

“Uhng,” John groaned, thumping his head against the door. “Sherlock…fuck…”

“Do you like that, John?” Sherlock asked, pulling off his dick with a wet pop. “Tell me you like it.”

“God, yes…your mouth is incredible and it’s so hard not to fuck your face.” John looked down at him, eyes almost black, face tight, “Fuck, look at you on your knees, lips glistening. You’re so beautiful. You indecent angel.” His hand left Sherlock’s hair, cupped his face tenderly, “God, love, what you do to me.”

“John…” Sherlock whispered, kissing the inside of his thigh, smiling when John’s knees bent and he bore down against Sherlock’s fingers, seeking penetration. “I want to feel the tight, wet heat of your body around my fingers and make you spill in my mouth. Will you let me?”

“Yes…yes, please…” John kept his eyes on Sherlock’s, so open, so trusting it broke Sherlock’s heart; “I’m ready.”

Sherlock pulled his hand back, hesitated, spat on his fingers, blushing a little, and resumed stroking John. “Has anyone ever done this to you before?”

“Long, long time ago. I was off my face, barely remember the woman, girl, but I’m not completely unfamiliar.” Despite his words, John looked faintly apprehensive.

“Stop me if this is too much.” Sherlock teased him lightly, and then let his fingertip slip in, and when John relaxed he pressed forward, lightly kissing the head of his dick as his finger sank into the indescribable, welcoming warmth of John’s body.

Spurred on by the open mouthed panting and the hand mindlessly urging his head toward the waiting erection, Sherlock slowly fucked John with one finger, curling and pressing, passing over
his prostate lightly as he sucked and kissed his hot length. His own neglected erection ached, and Sherlock took his free hand from John’s hip, gratefully grasping his needy flesh, tugging in time with his thrusts into John’s willing body. He was grateful for all the mutual pleasuring of the last month, as he otherwise might not have lasted very long at all, as excited as he was.

“Not going to…last…long…” John gasped, red faced, “You…keep doing…that…Jesus, Sherlock…”

Swallowing his length, Sherlock put all his abilities to play, brushing his prostate again and again, avoiding it and then coming back, until John’s broken grunts were wordless and pleading. “I love you! Oh, Sherlock, I love you!” John’s voice rose, thin and needy, as his hips bucked against Sherlock’s face.

He felt the weight of the words settle in his soul, felt the tidal wave of happiness that preceded the fear, felt the rationalization begin even as part of him wanted to throw his head back and respond.

He felt the thin saltiness of pre-cum overwhelmed by the flood of hot, thick ejaculate in his mouth. John’s hips were moving, his hands holding Sherlock’s head steady as he fucked his mouth with barely restrained courtesy. Sherlock licked and sucked him through a sustained orgasm, choking a little as he tried to keep up with the amount of cum overflowing his mouth. Finally he pulled away and let the excess run out of his mouth, feeling the weak splatter on his face and chest as the last of it pumped out of John’s body, his buttocks clenching fiercely around Sherlock’s finger.

Shaking, John started to slide down the door, and Sherlock removed his finger, helped him land on his knees. His hand was still stroking his stiff prick, and Sherlock groaned deeply when one of John’s hands replaced his, as John kissed him, licking the cum from his face, whispering what a gorgeous, filthy, beautiful degenerate he was and wasn’t that lovely for lucky John? Sherlock kissed him back, the taste of John’s release mingled in their mouths. His own orgasm slammed into him, and he opened his mouth, crying out soundlessly, face contorting. John ducked his head, sucked hard on Sherlock’s clavicle, the fingers of his left hand raking down Sherlock’s naked back, as his right hand ruthlessly milked Sherlock dry.

John shushed his hoarse cries and helped him lay on the rug, their sweaty legs tangled together. Kisses soft as feathers landed on his face, his chest, and John licked him clean, as delicate and fastidious as a cat. Warmth, love, an all-encompassing sense of well-being was carrying him away. Sherlock wanted to tell John he loved him. He wanted to ask him if he had meant it. He wanted to curl himself around the man who had owned his heart for years and just live in this moment, but doubt left him dumb.

“My sweet love,” he heard dimly, the affection clear in John’s voice, “That took a lot out of you, didn’t it? Let’s just lie here for a bit, and then we’ll go to bed, hmm? I don’t think I can carry you, long as you are.”

“John…”

“Yes love, I’m here.”

I love you, Sherlock thought.

*****
They were both a bit shy in the morning, the light of day making the abandon of the night before seem all the more debauched. John padded into the loo, peed and brushed his teeth, crawling back into Sherlock’s bed naked, and watched as the younger man rolled swiftly out of bed and flung on his dressing gown. Bit embarrassed, John imagined, but probably also panicking that John was going to press the *I love you* bit.

He hadn’t meant to say, scream it, like that. Too early, wasn’t it? Well, not in some ways, but in the perspective of how short a time they had been dating. Maybe Sherlock would never feel comfortable saying it, but he surely was feeling cornered now, with John blurting out his feelings like that. Not a mention of it had been made last night once the afterglow dissipated and they had stumbled to bed.

“Are you staying in bed?” Sherlock asked a bit diffidently, lingering in the doorway upon exiting the lav.

“It’s early still. Fancy a lie in with your boyfriend?” John held out his arms invitingly, and was gratified when Sherlock crawled into bed and into his arms. “Mmm, this is nice,” he whispered, pressing a kiss to the messy curls foaming under his nose.

“Nice is an insipid word, John.”

“What would you call it then?”

Sherlock was thoughtful, silent, and John caressed his arm, his back, kissed his hair again. He smiled when the younger man snuggled into his arms, rubbing his cheek against John’s chest. “Sublime,” he finally responded.

“Sublime, eh? I like it, and I agree.” John smoothed the unruly hair, leaned his head so he could kiss Sherlock’s forehead, relaxed back into the mattress. They rested in comfort, John stroking Sherlock, and Sherlock burrowing into John. Who needed words, John reflected, playing with Sherlock’s hair, when you had moments like this?

*****

John was making a slapdash breakfast while Sherlock was buttering toast when he cursed under his breath and dropped the knife.

“You alright?” John asked, moving the pan off the hob. “Let me see.”

“Just brushed it against the coil,” Sherlock muttered, trying to pull his hand away. “It’s fine.”

“Hoohoo!” Mrs. Hudson tapped on the door and called out, “Are you boys at home?”

“Come in, Mrs. Hudson,” John called, keeping hold of Sherlock’s wrist. “You’re a terrible patient,” John teased, as he looked at it, “It’s fine, just needs a little attention from the doctor.” Softly, he kissed Sherlock’s finger, lipped the skin gently, and then drew him into his arms. Ignoring Sherlock’s mumbled, “John,” he wrapped his arms around him and kissed him on the lips.
“Good morning boys—oh my! Aww, so sweet.” Mrs. Hudson tittered happily.

“I want a kiss!” Rosie barreled into their legs, trying to climb up John’s jeans. “Pick me up!”

John bent over, scooped her up and planted a smacking kiss on her cheek, then a barrage of kisses on her forehead, nose, eyelids…she was giggling and squirming and shrieking to Sherlock to help. John met his eyes, letting his amusement show, and saw with relief the answering smile on his face. His boyfriend attacked John, tickling him and shouting for Rosie to join in. The two of them soon had John begging for mercy.

Red faced with laughter, he dropped into a chair. Mrs. Hudson had moved the pan back on the hob and was briskly scrambling eggs. Rosie perched on Sherlock’s hip, telling him all about the plot of Beauty and the Beast—a film with which they were all intimately familiar at this point—and chattering on in her usual fashion. John picked up the abandoned toast and finished buttering it, pouring out tea all around. Sherlock plopped Rosie in John’s lap and fetched the milk, jam and honey. Soon all four of them were sitting around the table, enjoying the simple breakfast.

“Are you and Uncle Sherlock boyfwiend and gullfwiend now?” Rosie asked curiously, taking a ferocious bite of her toast and leaving smears of butter and jam on her face.

“Boyfriend and boyfriend,” John said, wiping her face.

“Are you going to get married?”

“My, you’re in a hurry!” Mrs. Hudson tsked and took her toast, cutting it into strips. “They only just started dating.”

“If you get married can I be the flower girl?” Rosie’s eyes shown, “I want a Belle dress! And Alex can be the ring boy.”

“But he already has a Belle dress,” Sherlock pointed out, “Maybe you should be the ring girl and he can be the flower boy?”

John laughed, “You’re getting a bit ahead of yourself, aren’t you?”

Sherlock winked at him.

“Can I still wear a dress if I’m the ring girl?”

“I promise you, if we get married, you can be anything you want and wear whatever you want.”

“Yay!” Rosie gulped her milk, “May I be ‘scused? I hafta go look through my dese guyses and plan my outfit.”

John and Sherlock’s eyes met across the table and the two of them started giggling.

*****

“Well good morning Toodles,” Molly greeted her son, who trailed sleepily into the sitting room, rubbing his eyes. “Did you have good dreams?”
“Good dreams, mama,” he agreed, crawling into her welcoming lap. He snuggled against her, curling his toes into her leg, “You was gone when I wented to bed.”

“Yes, I was. I had plans with Mr. Mycroft and Mr. Greg, remember?”

He nodded, “Uh huh. Did you have fun?”

Molly hid a grimace. “It was very nice. Did you have fun with Mrs. Peters?”

“Mmhmm…we watched telly.”

Molly rolled her eyes. Mrs. Peters was a willing child minder but she turned on the telly and considered her job done. The previous evening had certainly not been worth leaving Alex to turn into a cartoon fueled zombie. “Well, since you watched so much telly last night, how about today we go for a nice walk before it gets too hot? We can go by the bookstore and maybe stop for sandwiches and feed the crusts to the ducks in the park…eh? What do you say?”

Their day planned out, Molly fed him breakfast, her mind constantly drifting to the night before. Despite the pang of what-might-have-been she experienced when in Greg’s presence, Molly enjoyed spending time with Greg and Mycroft. She would have happily eaten too much and laughed and chatted and watched an old movie with them, but for some reason, Greg had gotten it into his head that she needed to be fixed up. So instead there had been a very awkward set up with DI Dimmock, a nice—but to her mind boring—man who paled in comparison to Greg and Mycroft.

She hoped her murmured words to Mycroft upon his escorting her to her taxi would be enough for him to find a way to dissuade Greg from further matchmaking attempts. She knew there was no future with Greg, her yearnings and dreams needed to be shelved; it didn’t mean she had given up on love. Molly feared she was too much of an optimistic dreamer, a helpless romantic to give up on love. But she was weary, ready for a break. Maybe the perfect man would never come, not even a little-better-than-good-enough man, since perfect was probably too much to ask for.

But in the meantime there was hope. In the meantime, she wanted peace, dignity, friendship.

So she would cherish her son, appreciate her friends, pursue her career with enthusiasm and avoid all attempts at set-ups.

******

The day had been a busy one, and John had to ignore his personal messages until he finally had a bit of time to sit and thumb through his phone. Bill had texted him.

MURRAY: So. You’re into blokes now. He’s a looker. Seems alright, bit quiet like.

JOHN: Thanks for the ringing endorsement you berk.

JOHN: Must have been a bit of a surprise, thanks for being so accepting.

MURRAY: Not really, I mean, there was Sholto.

JOHN: What?
JOHN: What do you mean? There wasn’t Sholto. Nothing ever…he and I weren’t a thing or anything.

MURRAY: Maybe not, he was your commanding. But I always figured, well, the way you sort of idolized him, the way he looked at you. Thought after you returned to civilian life the two of you would finally get it off.

John dropped his phone, a bit stunned. Mary had joked about Sholto, teasing him for sounding like an adolescent girl when he talked about him. Sherlock had been the closest thing to jealous John had ever witnessed. John himself…well, he admitted it, maybe he did always look up to James; the Major was a good man, a great soldier, a very good friend. When he had been around, John didn’t need anyone else.

Kind of like how he was with Sherlock. Their own orbit, ceaselessly turning, basking in the reflection of their mutual affection.

He remembered one night, in Dubai, on R&R, drinking in a flash bar with Sholto, the two of them elbow to elbow, laughing, raising toasts to the stupidest things. A really gorgeous woman, a young American, attracted by their dog tags, their accents, had approached them; they bought her drinks, teasing and flirting and jockeying lightly for her attention. At one point it had become clear that she was willing, eager, to go to bed with them both.

John had been flying high, invincible, ready to rut, to fuck, to go all night. He’d looked over her head at James, half apprehensive, half willing, wondering if they could do it. If they would do it. Nothing to it, right? Didn’t make a man gay to have sex with another man in the room as long as there was a woman.

Never mind that John’s thoughts had been on James, not the pretty young thing whose name he kept forgetting.

Jesus Christ. How in the hell had he not seen his own inclinations for what they were?

Aware that his phone had buzzed several times, John finally picked up his mobile.

MURRAY: Didn’t mean to offend. Thought it was just one of those things.

MURRAY: Captain?

MURRAY: Sorry, mate, I just thought…shite, dunno what I thought. Obviously I was wrong.

JOHN: Sorry, got busy there for a tick. Naw, you’re fine. Nothing between me and Sholto but friendship.

JOHN: Sherlock’s not the most sociable so that was probably the one time I can get him to the pub with us, but you and I should go again, definitely. When my liver recovers.

MURRAY: Sounds good. Dinner before I go?

JOHN: How about tonight? Sherlock only cooks when the muse takes him, and I have zero desire to stop by the shops for anything. Takeaway alright?

MURRAY: Curry?

JOHN: Done. See you at 7.
Dropping his mobile back down on his desk, John stretched, glad there was only a few more days until his next scheduled appointment with Ella. He had a lot he wanted to talk about.

Chapter End Notes

So, hopefully this wasn't too angsty, I really wanted there to be mostly happiness in this story, but honestly, it just doesn't ring true for me that a complicated man like John Watson wouldn't have some emotional fallout from entering into an intense, gay relationship with a man as all consuming as Sherlock. Also, I hope that Mycroft wasn't TOO schmoopy with Greg...I consider that while he would still be very much himself, he would have undergone a sea-change following Sherrinford, and of course, Greg is a delightful man who could seduce anyone into loving him.
September

Chapter Summary

Rosie has some demands for what she'd like out of John and Sherlock's new relationship. Sherlock has plans for John but things go farther than they had first anticipated. Molly endures another flop of a blind date, but the evening ends with an unexpected offer. John and Sherlock mark their claims.

Chapter Notes

There's a whole lotta sex in this chapter. Just hard wangs and jizz everywhere. Since it's fiction there is a certain laxity in protection during sex acts. As always, act responsibly when you're rubbing body parts on other body parts. You know the drill.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The bedroom door creaked faintly, and Sherlock, half asleep, cocked his head toward the sound of scrabbling dog toenails and the loud shushing of a four year old. “Be quiet, Biscuit! You're goin’ to wake Daddy and Uncle Sherlock.”

Loathe to wake John, who slumbered happily in his arms, Sherlock spoke quietly, “Rosie, what are you doing awake?”

Her tousled head popped up at the end of the bed and she smiled guiltily, “Um…we was awake and wanted to come snuggle.”

His heart absolutely was not melting.

“Come here,” Sherlock invited, patting the bed next to him. John grumbled a bit, squirming his face into Sherlock’s armpit. Sherlock ghosted a laugh, “Quietly now, Daddy’s still sleeping.”

“Biscuit too?” Rosie asked plaintively, employing her best pleading eyes.

“Allright, lift him up.” She managed to scrabble the wiggling dog into bed before clambering up herself. Grateful they hadn’t been intimate the night prior, and that he was thus still wearing pyjama bottoms, if not a shirt, Sherlock kept the sheet pulled up and held up the duvet for her to crawl under. Rosie bounced onto the mattress next to him, curling herself up under his free arm as Biscuit busily rooted under the covers, seeking the warmth of their feet. Rosie snuggled into his side and demanded a kiss.

Sherlock obliged and sighed soundlessly as the dog began licking his toes. He wasn’t entirely certain how his life had come to this, but it wasn’t all bad. Looking down at the little girl hugging him with her skinny arms, he amended his thoughts: it was actually quite all good. Very good.

“You don’t have chest hair like Daddy,” Rosie observed, patting his chest.
“No. People are different.”

“Daddy has a bad scawr on his chest.”

“Yes he does.”

“That’s because Daddy was bwave and went to war.”

“Very brave. The bravest man I know.”

Rosie sighed happily and settled down for a moment. Sherlock let his eyes close but the peace didn’t last.

“Can I lay between you?”

“You’re fine where you are.”

A pout entered her voice, “But I want to lie next to Daddy.”

“You can climb over and lie on his other side.”

“But I want to lie next to you, too.”

“But I want to lie next to him, as well.”

“The two of you are of an age, you know that?”

They started guiltily when John spoke, without opening his eyes. A moment later he did open them and grinned a little. “The two of you are like a flock of magpies outside the window, chatter, chatter, chatter. Can’t let a man sleep.”

“I’m sorry John—”

“Sorry, Daddy!”

“Eh, hard to complain when people are fighting over you,” John twinkled, and kissed Rosie on the nose and then stretched up and gave Sherlock a chaste but lovely kiss. “Good morning, my loves. How about we let Rosie between us, Sherlock? Since you had me at your side all night.”

Sherlock pouted a bit but acquiesced, hiding his smile. Happily, Rosie slipped in between them, turning to face John. He wrapped an arm around her and kissed the top of her curly head with the same tenderness he showed Sherlock. Over her head he smiled at his boyfriend, and mouthed sorry. Sherlock shook his head and returned the smile, strangely content to lie in bed with a fidgety four year old chattering between them. It wasn’t quite the morning of lazy lechery he had hoped for, but it was oddly fulfilling. This was what family was, he supposed; not always what you had planned for, but something worth cherishing. Sherlock wrapped his arm around the two people he loved most in the world and resigned himself to kicked shins and dog-spittle wet toes.

******

“Mmm,” Sherlock said absently when Molly set a paper cup of coffee down next to him, with a murmured, “Two sugars, as you like it.” He was sprawled in her desk chair, mentally
running through chemical compounds with one part of his mind while a half-formed idea about the origin of the soil on the witness’s shoes percolated in the back of his thoughts.

Molly sat in the visitor’s chair and sipped her own coffee, glad to be off her feet. It had been a rushed morning and between the salty breakfast she had consumed in a hurry and the bloating from her period, her feet were uncomfortable. It would be divine to take off her shoes and put her feet up, but that was sadly not going to happen. But a coffee break in the quiet of her office was welcome; even if Sherlock had co-opted her chair and made himself at home.

Absently, Sherlock drank his coffee, barely setting it down on the edge of the desk, hands already flitting through the air, mind intent on something only he could see. Molly heaved herself up and moved the cup farther away from the edge of the desk and straightened his collar while she was at it. Glancing at the clock she suppressed a sigh; time to get back to it. Gathering her half-drunk coffee, Molly had reached the door when Sherlock spoke, “Thank you, Molly.”

Reversing direction, Molly went back and brushed his hair off of his surprised forehead and deposited a kiss between his arched eyebrows. “You’re welcome, dear.”

They shared a smile and she left her office, feeling more energized. Befriending Sherlock Holmes was like raising a toddler; at first you despaired of him ever learning his manners, and then you tried to control the damage when he had a temper tantrum, all the while feeling your heart break a little for how vulnerable and beloved he was. And suddenly, one day, he was no longer that awkward, petulant, sometimes infuriating little boy, but a man grown, still singular, often times annoying, but altogether more charming and courteous than you might have hoped for at first.

*****

“This is the second time today I’ve had a silent drink with a Holmes boy,” Molly observed, bare feet curled beneath her on the sofa in her sitting room. Alex had finished his juice and was sitting on the rug, playing a game of his own devising, which consisted of all his Legos, most of his plastic play cars and his stuffed dinosaur. He sang softly under his breath, forehead crinkled slightly as he constructed a wobbly tower of Legos.

Molly smiled at him, seeing Le Jie in that crinkle. It was lovely to have her boy back; every summer he spent a month in Shenzhen with his father and that side of the family, and every summer Molly wavered between enjoying the freedom and missing her baby so fiercely she longed to get on a plane and fly to China.

Mycroft finally spoke, jarred out of his uneasy silence; Molly didn’t know what was bothering him, often times he wouldn’t be able to tell her, but she knew from experience that her cheerful presence could help lighten his burdens. “I object to the term “boy” when applied to myself, although one must admit that it still suits Sherlock admirably.”

She laughed, “Oh, he’s much more mature, nowadays. I was just reflecting on it this morning, as a matter of fact!”

“He may have improved—slightly—but he is and shall always be my incorrigible baby brother.”

“And you love it,” Molly scoffed, “Admit it, you thrive on overseeing everyone’s lives;
you’d be lost without us all to police.”

“I’m sure I don’t know what you mean,” Mycroft said primly, unnecessarily straightening his waistcoat.

“Don’t think I don’t know about the security detail, or the background checks you did on the staff at Alex’s crèche.” Molly nudged him with her toe, “You’re about as subtle as a ton of bricks.”

“I am the definition of subtle,” Mycroft retorted, stung. “Who betrayed me? Was it Anthea?” He frowned darkly, “She’s become terribly lax in who she shares information with.”

“Anthea and I are hardly bosom companions,” Molly said dryly, thinking of Mycroft’s PA, whom she was fairly certain was a really advanced form of AI. “No, I just know you.”

He frowned at her, trying and failing to hide the flash of pleasure her words had brought him, “I suppose you do.”

“Try not to sound so pained, Mycroft. It is what happens when you become friends. And I’m not going to go sharing tidbits about you.”

“Naturally not, as I’d have to have you killed.” He tried for a bit of levity, “I do have a license to kill.”

Alex dropped his dinosaur and gave Mycroft a wide eyed look over the coffee table. He switched his excited gaze to his mother, who shook her head, “I told you, Toodles, Mr. Mycroft isn’t James Bond.”

“Your mother is correct, lad, I do not have that dubious pleasure.”

Alex didn’t look convinced. “Holmes, Mycroft Holmes,” Mycroft intoned. He shook his head, “No, I’m afraid it just doesn’t have the same ring. I’m not gun-toting super-agent material.”

Molly giggled, and topped up his tea, “Greg’s been making you watch the Bond films, has he?”

“I have seen some of them before,” Mycroft said, “I didn’t live under a rock before Gregory.”

“Hmm, near enough.”

“He, like you, seems to think I need exposure to popular culture and people.” Mycroft’s tone made it clear that people was synonymous with drug-resistant staph infection, “Which is why he is hosting dinner at his flat next Saturday. I am bid to invite you. We’ll be eating a no doubt carb-laden feast of pasta with jarred sauce. Greg blackmailed me into inviting a colleague as your dinner partner.”

Molly was aghast, “What? Noooo! Mycroft, I told you—I’m fine single! I don’t like set-ups. And no offence to you, but one of your colleagues is going to take one look at me and laugh himself silly. We’re hardly the same sort, are we?”

A look of annoyance shuttered his face, “I only associate with the best sorts, I can assure you—and that includes yourself. I picked the best of a bad bunch, Molly, and even he will not come up to scratch as worthy of you.”

Blinking away a misty feeling, Molly uncurled herself and stretched to kiss his cheek. For the second time that day she found herself kissing a Holmes and sending up a thankful prayer that
at last their defenses were allowing them to experience all of life—no matter how painful they might find it at times. “Alright, just for that lovely comment, I’ll attend. But this is the last time, Mycroft! Honestly, I don’t need pity-dates; I’ll be happy to inflict myself on the two of you for a nice night in, but I don’t need you to find me partners, okay?”

“You hardly inflict yourself, my dear,” Mycroft sniffed, handing her his handkerchief so she could wipe her eyes. “We enjoy your company, as you know. Last month our evening would have been perfectly enjoyable with just us three. It was Greg’s idea to invite Inspector Dimwit.”

“Dimmock,” Molly corrected, laughing at him. “As you well know. And thank you, Mycroft that was lovely. I enjoy spending time with you and Greg so it’s nice to know I’m not too much of a third wheel.”

“Not a third wheel at all,” he assured her with his nicest smile, which was really quite nice.

*****

“Watson’s asleep, the dog is asleep, Mrs. Hudson is asleep…” Sherlock stepped up behind John, who was washing the neglected dinner things. They had gotten side-tracked with finishing a movie, and getting Rosie ready for bed, walking the dog and in general being distracted by domestic life. “Why don’t you leave those and come with me?” He wrapped his arms around John’s waist and nuzzled the back of his neck, peppered the skin with kisses.

“I’m nearly done, you impatient creature.” John moaned and his hands stilled, sponge dropping into the sink full of soapy water. Sherlock’s clever hands ran over his hips, followed the arrow of his groin to his crotch. “Stop that! I can’t concentrate on my very vital chores. Give me five minutes and then I’m yours.”

“I like the sound of that,” Sherlock said approvingly, sliding his hands into John’s front trouser pockets. He leaned his chin on John’s shoulder. “Very well then, proceed.”

“Take your hands out of my pockets and put them to work—then I’ll be yours in half the time.”

“I don’t like doing dishes,” Sherlock whinged.

John snorted, and slapped the tea towel into his hand, “Nor do I, but there you have it. Give it a few years and we can dump all the chores on Rosie, turn her into a real Cinderella.”

“Ridiculous man,” Sherlock grumbled, reluctantly drying the plate John passed him. Despite his reluctance, they finished quickly and John snapped off the light, heading for the bedroom. Sherlock caught John’s wrist in his hand, tugged him toward the other door, “In here, please.”

“Are we taking a shower together?” John asked, pleased, already stripping. Sherlock stopped to admire him, the sight one he would never tire of; he was already reflecting on certain physical traits and lifestyle habits, speculating on what John would look like as an old man. His old man. They would age together, he and John, and forty years from now he would remember John as he was today, and love him as he was at that time and in all times.

“Hello,” John chirped, grinning. He waved a hand in front of Sherlock’s face, “Away with the fairies?”
“I was imagining you naked.”

“I am naked,” John pointed out cheerfully, gesturing at his nude form. Sherlock smiled at him, “I was imagining you naked, at eighty.”

“Jesus, why?”

“You’ll be as lovely then as you are now.” Sherlock assured him, “A bit more portly, and I suspect you’ll need glasses, but as vital and thrilling as ever.”

John’s expression softened and he stretched up to kiss Sherlock, running his fingers into his hair, cradling his head, “You imagine us together when we’re old?”

“Don’t you?” Sherlock asked uncertainly.

“I am now,” John said softly, kissing him with that wonderful, soft, wicked, talented tongue of his that Sherlock had fast become addicted to. “You’ll be a gorgeous old pensioner, a headful of silver curls, bifocals sliding down your nose, stalking through the bee hives like a stork.”

“I won’t need glasses,” Sherlock was indignant.

“If I have to have glasses, you have to have glasses. That or you’re going bald.”

“That’s ridiculous.”

“You’re ridiculous,” John said lovingly.

Things were not going according to the plan Sherlock had come in with in mind, but he couldn’t say he minded. He was still clothed, John naked in his arms; they stood embracing on the bathroom rug, kissing lazily. Finally they parted, and Sherlock shed his clothes, while John turned on the water and adjusted the temperature. “What’s Rosie’s old baby monitor doing down here?” John asked, catching sight of it on the back of the toilet.

“I fetched it,” Sherlock informed him, following him into the shower. “I also closed her bedroom door and the doors at the top and bottom of the stairs.”

“Oh?” John asked, expression growing amorous. “Will we be needing a bit of sound muffling distance tonight, then?”

“It is my devout wish,” Sherlock assured him, rubbing a mound of lather onto the flannel in his hand; he began washing John, kissing him softly, eyes closed against the spray. “The monitor is a safeguard, so we can be sure of hearing her coming if she decides to venture downstairs.”

“Excellent plan,” John sighed, tipping back his head and clutching Sherlock’s biceps. “God, love, that feels wonderful. I love it when you touch me.”

“I love touching you,” Sherlock said softly; he found it easier and easier to express his physical yearning and his emotional enjoyment with John. “You’re a beautiful man, John.”

“That’s you…” John regarded him fondly, gaze flowing over his form, following the water droplets rolling down Sherlock’s naked body. “I could look at you for hours.”

“We have hours,” Sherlock rumbled, shivering as John returned the favor, running a flannel lovingly over his limbs. They took their time, massaging shampoo and conditioner into one another’s hair, detaching the massaging shower head and rinsing each other with different pulses.
and sprays; Sherlock cleverly manoeuvring to be last, and slowed down as he reached John’s groin, his buttocks.

“Mm, what’s this then?” John asked huskily, as Sherlock teasingly turned the dial to a pulsing, intermittent setting and passed the spray over his inner thighs.

“Just being thorough, John.”

“I do admire thoroughness,” John gasped as he widened his stance, allowing Sherlock to direct the water at his scrotum, his perineum and the thin, sensitive skin of his inner groin. “God, yes…mmm…”

Sherlock smiled and kissed John wetly, stroking his mouth with his tongue, nibbling on his lips and then kissing his way down John’s neck to the spot below his jaw where John responded with a thin cry as he sucked a love bite into his skin. He wanted to mark John, to claim him. The mark would be small, almost shadowed by John’s jaw, but there nonetheless. Stroking John’s eager flesh, Sherlock kissed his way down his body, stopping along the way to visit favourite spots; passing the needles of water over John’s nipples, suddenly moving the shower head around to massage his lower back and the sacral dimples which he found so mesmerizing.

John whimpered a bit when Sherlock knelt between his legs and coaxed him to hold onto his shoulders, raise one foot up to the side of the tub. Adjusting the water to a pulse, Sherlock began teasing him, aiming the flow at John’s perineum, continuing up to his buttocks, spreading them further and aiming the spray at his hole as he sucked him off. John’s hands scrabbled to find purchase, finally grabbing onto the shower curtain rod and the little bar where they normally hung their flannels. “Yes, love…bloody hell but that feels phenomenal…”

Sherlock used his fingers to toy with John, the water and his sensitive violinist’s fingertips driving John mad as he tantalized him, slowly opening John’s body to his invasion. Distracted, he grew a little over vigorous in his fellatio and choked, drawing back. Embarrassed at his lack of finesse, Sherlock ducked his head, but John’s fingertips tilted his chin up, he met those dark blue eyes, so loving and amused and tender, “No sweetheart, no embarrassment, I love that you’re so eager. You’re driving me spare, you know that? I’m useless, just a bundle of nerves all screaming for your touch.”

Blushing hotly, Sherlock held John’s gaze, softly wrapping his lips around the head of John’s cock, swallowing him slowly as he added a second finger, stretching John with exquisite slowness. They didn’t look away as Sherlock prepared him; John looked nervous, excited, a bit shy, but he was fully committed. With a good deal of awkward changing of position in the slippery shower, Sherlock moved behind John, admiring the posterior with which he was about to become intimately familiar. Needing both hands, he had passed the shower head to John, who stood with it dangling from one hand, spray rattling against the curtain. “Use it John, titillate yourself…touch yourself for me.”

John fiddled with the settings and settled the head against his crotch, moaning as his free hand wrapped around his dick. Spreading both cheeks with his hands, Sherlock took a quick breath for courage and licked the cleft, flicking his tongue over the soft, loosened ring of muscle he had been playing with. John’s thighs tensed and he let out a guttural groan as Sherlock’s tongue breeched him. The soap and water taste melded into the delicious, faintly salty taste of John, causing Sherlock to hum delightedly; this hum translated itself into John’s body, drawing forth a hoarse groan of approval.

He spread John’s hole with his thumbs, widened him, circling and teasing with his tongue, brushing his lips over his skin. Gentle thrusts of his tongue choked off the whimpers John was
succumbing to, turned them into a repetitive, susurrating yelp. The introduction of a finger to
massage John’s prostate turned the yelp into a deep groan which lasted an absurdly long time.

The wet slap of John’s fisted hand hitting his belly as he stroked himself, the patter, trickle
and plop of the shower head raining down John’s body to the shower floor, the echo and sigh of
John’s vocal pleasure created a symphony in Sherlock’s head as he grew bolder. Squeezing and
molding John’s hard buttocks in his hands, Sherlock spread the cheeks wider, pressed them closer,
buried his face in his lover and used every half-forgotten, recently-recalled, just-this-morning-
researched-online move of his tongue to get John off. His own cock bobbed eagerly between his
thighs, but Sherlock had no time for his own release now.

Bringing John pleasure was enough for him. He’d never performed such an intimate act on
another human being, and any fears of failure or distaste melted in the waves of physical ecstasy he
was causing John to experience. The other man’s words had failed him and all he seemed capable
of was sighing and brokenly moaning Sherlock’s name over and over.

“I want—I want to come so badly,” John finally rasped out, “God, you don’t even know how
unbelievably incredible this feels, but Sherlock, love, darling, please, take me to bed.” He twisted,
looking back at Sherlock, pupils consuming his irises, “I want to come with you inside me.”

Abruptly time paused and Sherlock’s brain ticked, ticked, ticked and then he was back,
blinking rapidly. “I—are you sure, John?” He hadn’t intended this, thought they weren’t there yet;
tonight was meant to be a sort of test run, a halfway point for them both to become accustomed to
anal contact.

“Do you not want to?” He could see John scrambling back, pulling inside himself, doubting
what this was.

Sherlock stood up, momentarily lightheaded at his rush. “I do, John…I’m just surprised…I
didn’t expect you to be ready.”

“Nor did I expect you to be ready,” John gestured at his arse, face red. “But here we are. Do
you—are you not okay with um, giving?”

“I will happily give,” Sherlock smiled, wrapping John close and burying his face in the cay
of his neck, “And just as happily receive. I am only surprised…I thought for your first time you’d
be more comfortable if I bottomed.”

“I trust you,” John tipped his head back and smiled at him, hand stroking Sherlock’s cheek,
“With me, with everything. All that I am.”

“All that I am,” Sherlock whispered in kind, hiding his face in John’s neck, fighting back
tears. His entire adult life he had fought against emotional attachment, pushed people away,
alienated them, denied he needed anyone. And one ordinary day at Bart’s this ordinary man had
limped into his life and into his heart. I love you. I love you, John Hamish Watson.

But he did not say it aloud. Not yet.

******

Roughly toweled off, bedroom door locked, baby monitor on the bureau table to alert them
to any impending interruptions; overhead light off, lamp on, lube and condoms on the bedside. Gone a bit shy, John sat on the edge of the bed, “How, um, how do you want me?”

Sherlock put his hands on his shoulders, leaned over and kissed him, “Every which way, John.”

John smiled against his lips, “Well, since we can’t do them all at once, you’d best pick one.”

“Lie down with me first,” Sherlock urged, pushing John down and crawling in after him. He drew John close and kissed him, combing his hands though his hair, scratching his scalp; once John was relaxed he rolled them both onto their sides and continued kissing him. John was happy enough, content to kiss the man for hours. He was bloody gorgeous and sexy, his boyfriend, his best friend, his partner, as well as fascinating, unbelievably intelligent, arrogant, wonderful, tender, loving and mesmerizing. John was fast coming to recognize that Sherlock was going to consume him, all of him, heart, mind, body and even his soul, what was left of it.

Should have been terrifying. Wasn’t.

“Mm, God, I love kissing you. Those lips, Christ, they’re lethal.”

“These lips?” Sherlock asked, brushing them over John’s jaw and pecking his way down John’s throat to lick the droplets of water that had collected in the hollow of his throat.

“Mm, those very same lips. Bloody hell, Sherlock, stop sucking on me like a vampire. I’m forty-six, I can’t go into work covered in hickies!”

He pulled back, disgusted, “Hickies? What a vulgar word for love bites, John.”

“I didn’t invent it, Sherlock.”

“The German’s call them knutschfleck,” Sherlock informed him.

“Of course they do,” John giggled, “Trust the Germans to make a love bite sound like a sausage.”

“Speaking of sausages,” Sherlock grinned, trailing a finger down the underside of John’s cock. “I do believe I want to try something.”

“Wouldn’t that involve your sausage?” John joked. “Since I’m going to be the bottom bun on this sandwich?”

“John, your food metaphors are getting unwieldy,” Sherlock reproved, rolling over to rummage in the bedside drawer.

“Speaking of food,” John said, propping himself on his arm and running his free hand up and down the expanse of Sherlock’s scarred back, “We haven’t cracked into that newest jar of honey. I’m thinking I can drizzle it all over your long body and lick it off.”

A shiver ran over Sherlock’s pale skin, and he looked back over his shoulder, “I thought I was supposed to do a taste test? Why are you licking it off of me?”

“Because I want to,” John said, sidling closer and wrapping his arm around Sherlock’s torso, pressing kisses to a particularly bad scar on his shoulder blade. “But I can let you kiss me after and see if you can guess.”
“I don’t guess. And the mingled flavours would confuse the matter.”

“Make it harder. All the bigger bragging rights if you get it right.” John petted Sherlock’s belly, wrist brushing his erection, “You like a challenge…but if it makes you feel better, I’ll cover my dick in honey and let you suck it off.” He grinned at the full-body shudder that wracked Sherlock’s frame. “You like that, eh?”

“You are a most adventurous and licentious man, John Watson.”

“Which you like.”

“No I like. Ah ha!” Sherlock found what he was looking for and rolled back toward John. He brandished his find.

“That’s a dildo.” John goggled at it a bit. It looked intimidating. And it was purple. “It’s purple.”

“Yes. I like purple,” Sherlock said, holding it aloft. “It’s roughly the size of my member. I selected it with care, John. I thought we could start with this, get you used to the invasion, before I attempt penetration.” He gestured vaguely behind him, “Although I do have others, of varying sizes, in case we need to work our way up.”

Penetration. John hid a wince, hating the sound of the word, so cold, so clinical. “Invasion of the Purple Penetrators,” he joked. Sherlock rolled his eyes affectionately and rested the billy club against John’s belly, leaning over to kiss him.

“Shall we try it?”

“Can’t you just…?”

“I could,” Sherlock agreed, looking serious, “But it has been a long time since I’ve done this, and it will be your first time. I want to make sure we’re both comfortable, and it will be easier if I stretch you with this first.”

Stretch. Another intimidating word. He wanted this, but he was still a bit edgy. The abandon of the shower was gone, evaporated with the last of the water on his skin. “Alright,” John said, firming his jaw. “Let’s, uh, let’s get to it.”

“Were you this grim when you invaded Afghanistan?” Sherlock asked with interest, “Because I feel distinctly as if you’re raising defenses against me.”

John took a deep breath, let it out, “Feeling a bit intimidated,” he admitted, picking up the dildo and regarding it with a wary eye. “It looks huge.”

“I’ve prepared you,” Sherlock murmured, kissing him and taking his time about it. “I’ll use plenty of lube and I’ll go slowly. You set the pace.” He took the dildo from John. “We don’t have to do this. Tonight or ever.”

He knew he meant it too. Sherlock was prepared to do whatever John was comfortable with. And he trusted him. He knew he would go slowly, make it good. Remembering the heat in his core as Sherlock had abased himself on his knees, eating his arse and making it so good John couldn’t imagine living without it…was that how women felt? The need to press themselves against a willing and skilled tongue? Wanting to be eaten, consumed, filled? To whimper and moan and cry and plead until they shattered? Suddenly John was quite eager to reciprocate, to worship Sherlock with his tongue in a way he hadn’t really considered quite appealing before.
“Tonight I want this,” John said firmly, putting his hand over Sherlock’s, “I want you. I trust you, love. And I’m ready, you saw to that.”

Sherlock got John settled with a pillow under his arse, and knelt on the bed, John’s legs bent at the knee, his feet on either side of Sherlock. He set the dildo aside and leaned over him, braced on his hands, kissing John until he was boneless, their bellies sliding over one another’s erections. Taking advantage of John’s relaxation, Sherlock kissed his way down his belly, taking him briefly in his mouth as his hands fumbled to open the lube. Fingers slicked, he kissed the underside of John’s shaft, and started massaging his thighs, trailing his fingers over his inner legs, brushing his buttocks.

When John’s hips rose and sought the contact of his teasing fingers, Sherlock regretfully pressed a last kiss on John’s prick and leaned back on his heels, hands happily replacing his mouth. One hand circled John’s rock hard dick loosely, lightly teasing, as the other hand slipped between his buttocks, grazing over his arsehole. John moaned, biting his lip, eyes on Sherlock’s face. He hissed at the first glide of one slick finger inside of him, automatically bearing down, seeking more.

“You’re still so wet, so open,” Sherlock approved breathlessly, adding a second finger. He continued to stroke John delicately as his fingers scissored, slowly working him open. John realized he was rutting lightly on Sherlock’s fingers, seeking more. “I’m going to add a third finger, tell me if it’s too much.”

“Not too much!” John gasped, heart race increasing at the fullness, the invasion. It felt wonderful, but strange, a bit unnatural. He didn’t feel violated, but instinctively part of him rebelled at the press and slide of Sherlock’s fingers. It was a very small part though, as the rest of him was most enthusiastic for things to proceed. Bring on the dildo!

Sherlock was so patient, his face intense, his eyes constantly tracking John’s responses, attuning himself to John’s needs, repeating things he liked and altering those that received more lackluster responses. John liked to think of himself as a patient and skilled lover, and he’d certainly never had any complaints, but Sherlock seemed prepared to spend all night opening him like a flower. Okay, weird image for a man’s arsehole, but still.

“You should see yourself, John,” Sherlock panted, sounding far less patient than he looked, “It’s the most sensual thing I’ve ever seen.”

“Take a picture.”

“What?”

“When you’ve put it in me, take a picture.”

“Seriously?”

John covered the hand on his cock with his own, “We can erase it right away, but I want to see. I want to see what you see when you look at me.”

Sherlock shuddered, face taut and hungry, and lunged forward to kiss him with sloppy urgency, skill abandoned, “John Watson, you are a filthy, glorious man.”

“Get the phone before we get started then,” John suggested thinly, “I can’t take any more torment.”

Hopping like an ungainly stork, legs obviously full of pins and needles, Sherlock leapt off
the bed and fetched John’s phone, lying it on the bed next to them. Resuming his position, it was clear he was struggling to retain his control. After coating the dildo liberally in lube, he positioned it at John’s opening, circling it against the ring of flesh, dipping the tip in slowly. Agonizingly slowly he inched it inside of John, who suddenly sucked in a breath when he realized he had been holding it.

“Relax, honey,” Sherlock said sweetly, surprising John with his use of an endearment. “Breathe, John.”

“Sorry, excited and nervous and feeling about a million things here,” John gasped, pushing up onto his elbows so he could watch Sherlock. The feeling of fullness was strange; the sensation of something entering what had always been a rather taboo area of his body was physically pleasurable even whilst his mind rebelled slightly.

Sherlock met his eyes, smiling, “I’m about halfway…are you alright?”

“Halfway?” John’s head thumped back down on the pillow, “I feel like you’re trying to fit a submarine inside me and you’re only halfway.”

He heard the laughter in Sherlock’s voice, “Not quite a submarine, John, but I’m sure it is rather overwhelming for a first time. Shall I stop?”

“I’m no quitter,” John muttered. He dragged over pillows, propping himself up more, waved an imperious hand, “Please, proceed.”

Sherlock apologized and rearranged, sitting down with his legs under John’s on either side of his body and resumed his slow, relentless invasion. “It’s in all the way. Oh John, you look…” Sherlock didn’t finish his thought, face abstracted. His colour was high, his excitement palpable. He removed his hands and ran them rapidly through his hair, excited eyes meeting John’s. “Shall I take the photograph now?”

“Yes please,” John said, concentrating on his breathing. He flexed slightly, feeling his body adjusting minutely to the sensation of fullness, the heavy presence in his arse, the edge of pleasure he had been riding for an hour was keener now. Sherlock took a photo, inspected it, made a face, took another. “Now touch yourself, John. God, yes.” He captured another picture and then looked at John, biting his lip, “Um, may I take one that shows all of you? I just…you have to see yourself, John.”

Nodding jerkily, John met Sherlock’s eyes as he held up the mobile, feeling his face grow warm, hoping he didn’t look too…too submissive, too old, too something he couldn’t define. Sherlock took the picture, and then stared at the camera, mesmerized. “John…” He moved John’s legs, which caused some most interesting sensations inside him as the dildo shifted, and lay on his side next to John so they could both view the pictures.

Christ. He looked. He looked. Fuck if he didn’t look the way he felt. Powerful, apprehensive, incredibly turned on, in love, overwhelmed, excited, scared and so randy he could have punched through the wall with his dick. The sight of his body swallowing the purple dildo was fucking entrancing, John stared at it, curling an arm up to hold Sherlock’s face next to his. “It’s like art. Obscene, beautiful art.”

“You’re beautiful, John. My John.” Overwhelmed, Sherlock pressed his face into John’s hair, shaking slightly.

“Oh my love, come here.” John set the phone down, and pulled Sherlock into his arms.
“Sweet love,” he whispered, kissing his ear, cuddling him close. They lay for a few minutes, both overwhelmed.

After a while Sherlock sniffed and sat up. “Thank you, John.”

“Thank you,” John smiled. He kissed him. “Will you lie beside me and, and fuck me with the toy?”

Murmuring and kissing, they pressed close as Sherlock’s hand grasped the base of the dildo and began a tormentingly slow, deliciously erotic thrust; sliding it almost all the way out, he slowly, so slowly, pressed it back inside. John gasped air greedily, holding Sherlock’s wide-eyed gaze with his own. John was so overcome with the urge to cry that he bit his lip, spreading his legs wider, one hand awkwardly holding Sherlock’s free hand between their close-pressed bodies, the other cupping the back of Sherlock’s head. “Love…” he heard himself moaning over and over, “…oh love…”

Sherlock was watching him greedily, drinking in John’s expression, watching him as he unraveled in increments. Shifting, he changed the angle, brushing over John’s prostate; not relenting even when John cried out and rocked his hips into his thrust. “Fuuuuck…” John’s eyes rolled back a little, sweat breaking out afresh along his hairline, soaking his already wet hair. “That’s… I’m so close, Sherlock.”

He was nearly pushed over the edge when Sherlock, that devious, clever man, suddenly twisted his grip and a motor hummed to life, the dildo apparently a vibrator. The shock of it, the sensation on his already extremely hair-trigger prostate catapulted John into orgasm. “Bear down,” Sherlock told him, “hard, John, like you’re trying to force me out. Tighten your muscles.”

Obediently he bore down, feeling faintly as if he were trying to have a giant poo, only really, really fucking pleasurable, and managed to sustain the tightening of his muscles as sharp spikes of delight flooded him, rolling out in waves from his center. He orgasmed, he knew that, but he wasn’t aware of any ejaculation, and he realized Sherlock had guided him through a dry orgasm, something he had heard about but never experienced. His tingling cock was still hard, his balls drawn tight to his body.

Sherlock kissed him, laughing gently at how loose lipped and dazed John was. “Did you enjoy your first time, John?”

“I…oh God…that was so…Sherlock…”

“Mmm, I see you did.” Sherlock kissed him again, slyly pulling the dildo free, which won him trembles and a stuttered ohhhh from John as the toy was gently dragged from his passage. He tossed the toy aside and lay down, pulling John on top of him, arms tight. John roused himself, kissing his boyfriend back, adjusting his position so he wasn’t just lying limply on the other man.

“Phenomenal,” John finally said, “I thought I knew what great sex felt like before, but that was, holy fuck, that was beyond description.”

“So many nerve endings,” Sherlock hummed, palming John’s bum and frotting him gently. “So much pleasure to be gained and yet straight men avoid it out of some kind of macho fear.”

“I’m a convert,” John said devoutly, “eager for more.” His hole felt stretched, oddly empty, and he was still hard, horny. He wanted Sherlock inside him, wanted more of that bliss, only this time with the added bonus of his lover’s body joined to his.
“Oh yes?”

“Yes, yes, yes please.”

“You want my cock inside you?” Sherlock whispered, voice deep and suggestive, “You’d like to have me fill you up, wouldn’t you, John? Have the delicious drag of my dick inside you, making you come.”

John might possibly have whimpered a bit. “I do.” He would take Sherlock any way he could get him, but he found it incredibly hot to have him tease and titillate and take control. “Make love to me please, Sherlock. I want you to fuck me.”

Sherlock arched under him, his body lifting John’s, and gripped his arms. “I’m going to put the condom on. There…Sit up, on me, yes, straddle me.”

“Don’t you want me on my hands and knees?”

“Accommodating, but no. Not tonight, at least.” Sherlock brushed John’s hair back, skimmed his fingers down his throat, flitted over his nipple. “I want to see your face whilst I’m inside you.”

Sherlock helped brace him as John crouched over him, and John reached behind him, finding Sherlock’s ready flesh, notching him to his swollen arshole. He caught Sherlock’s big hand in one of his own, held his eyes as he inched down on him, breath stuttering from how bloody good it felt. “Breathe,” Sherlock reminded him, sounding short of air himself.

Indescribable. Amazing. World-fucking shattering. John panted a bit, consumed by the press of flesh, the swelling sensation of being claimed. He waited for panic or doubt but all he felt was love and lust and a good deal of admiration for Sherlock’s restraint. The man was a bloody marvel, holding onto his own release so tightly when it had been twenty odd years since last sank inside the embrace of a hot, willing body. John loved that he was the one, he, John Watson, was the man Sherlock Holmes had chosen to break his celibacy for, to abandon himself to hedonism for an ordinary man such as himself.

Now, if he could just keep from coming too soon. So much for his vaunted self-control. Right now he was about two seconds away from spilling all over Sherlock’s belly, an image that made it harder still to control the urge. “You feel…so fucking…fantastic…inside me,” John gritted his teeth, moved a little, sweated copiously and dared to roll his hips. They both groaned, frozen, balls aching.

Sherlock snapped out a terse warning for him not to move, and they remained in trembling stasis for a long moment, both attempting to regain composure. “I’m—my transport is unused to such a flood of sensory information,” Sherlock said in a low tone, wiping sweat from his face, “I could feel myself being overcome. You feel so good John, so very, very good.”

“Good is an insipid word, Sherlock,” John teased, amazed he was able to do anything other than grunt and bounce. “You can do better than that.”

“You broke my mind,” Sherlock grinned tightly, hands gripping John’s hips, his thighs in a fierce grasp. “Okay…try moving now.”

Cautiously John did, legs trembling a bit as he raised and then lowered himself on Sherlock’s cock, a grunting, caveman sound of pleasure escaping. He sank down a little farther, biting his lip; the intensity was almost too much, the sensation centered in his core threatening to swamp him. “Oh
love,” he gasped, rocking a little, then lowering himself until Sherlock was bottomed out inside him, “Oh Sherlock, you fucking gorgeous bastard…goddamn but you feel…” he sobbed, caught unawares, “This is the most incredible thing I’ve ever felt.”

“I know, I know, John, I know,” Sherlock agreed, hips rising a bit. “Oh John, I know…” His hips moved again, and John moaned, head falling back.

“Do that again,” Sherlock obliged, and John rolled his hips, causing both men to cry out. Gazes tangled, mouths fallen open, they gasped and groaned, finding a rhythm as they chased their pleasure.

John shifted and cried out as Sherlock pressed his prostate, “Oh God, yeah, right there love…”

“I want to feel you come around me, John, I want to release while you’re still clenching around me.”

“So close,” John warned him, rocking harder, giving a bounce that made them both groan deeply.

Helpfully, Sherlock wrapped his free hand around John’s cock and stroked him. “Yes!” John’s hips faltered and then picked up the pace, “Fuck, Sherlock, love, oh, oh, oh, oh my angel, yes…”

“God, John! John, oh John…I, I, I,” unable to finish his thought, Sherlock twisted his wrist, fisting John rapidly and sending him over the edge. John was flooded with a sharp, piercing joy as he came, aware he was shooting cum over Sherlock like something out of a porn as he came with fierce delight, his sphincter spasming around Sherlock’s relentless dick. Shaking hard he managed to keep moving until Sherlock let out a hoarse shout, quickly smothered by John’s hand, and bruised his hips with his hands as he held him down, fucking with less finesse and care than he had previously displayed. John loved it.

“I love you, sweetheart, oh my love, yes, come, oh come for me baby.” Sherlock obeyed him, groaning and thrashing, a beautiful sweaty mess as he pounded a few last times and then stuttered to a stop, dick pulsing inside John as he orgasmed. “Fuck me, you are beautiful,” John breathed, watching the long form sprawled out beneath him. “Oh, you look so blissful and happy, love.”

“Mmm…” Sherlock agreed dreamily, chest heaving. John laughed delightedly and went to rise off of Sherlock’s softening dick, wincing when previously unused muscles protested. Fuck, he was going to feel that in the morning. Awkwardly, trying not to knee Sherlock in the groin, he dismounted, and collapsed next to him. He was spent, exhausted, heart racing and so pumped he could have run up and down the street, whilst simultaneously wishing to sleep for two days.

Happily they were in their bed in their home and could just cuddle together, enjoying the afterglow.

“Splendid,” Sherlock said suddenly, deep voice slightly slurred.

“Hmm?”

“You asked for a less insipid word than good. Splendid.”

“So I did,” John grinned and rubbed Sherlock’s chest, grimacing when he encountered sticky pools of cooling cum. “Glorious.” He wiped his hand on the sheet, dabbed at Sherlock’s chest. At
this rate they were going to be doing a lot of laundry.

“Magnificent.”

“Heavenly.”

“Incandescent.”

John threw the soiled sheet away from them and tugged the rumpled duvet up with his toes until he could reach it and pull it over them, rolling over Sherlock’s still slack form to snap off the lamp. “Delightful.”

“Superb…” Sherlock kissed him back and turned his face toward John as he snuggled to his side.

“Astonishing.”

“Beautiful…”

“…lovely…” John said on a yawn.

“…dazzl—” Sherlock yawned hugely, “—ing…”

****

Sherlock limped into the bathroom, closed the toilet lid and sat down with a wince. “I’d foolishly forgotten that those muscles hadn’t been used in years.” He handed John a steaming cup of tea, “Is the bath helping?”

Gratefully sipping his tea, John smiled at his lover, “Yeah, ta. I’m glad Mrs. Hudson had some Epsom salts in.” He splashed a bit in the bath. “Rosie get off to school alright?”

“Mycroft stopped by for her personally.”

“That’s nice.”

“Huh. I shall now have to endure silent criticism of my lack of control for years to come.” Sherlock paused, “Erm, Mummy called. She and Father are back from South America and wild to come visit. I tried to convince her to stay at home and rest and we’d see them at Christmas, but you know Mummy.”

John twinkled at him, “She’s your mother, love, of course she wants to come celebrate the fact that we’re finally together.”

“She has been hoping for this day for years.”

Patting his knee with a wet hand, John sat up, removing the rolled up towel behind him and put down his empty tea cup. “I’m going to pickle if I stay in here any longer.”

Solicitously Sherlock helped him up and pulled the plug. As the water gurgled away he turned on the shower head and rinsed John, who laughed. “This is how it all started.”
“I won’t ever be able to shower again without reflecting on last night,” Sherlock assured him, grinning slyly. He turned off the water and handed John a towel. “I’m glad you don’t have to work today. I thought I could make you breakfast and then give you a massage.”

John frowned, “I’m no delicate flower, Sherlock, I’ll be fine once I’m moving around.”

“I—I didn’t say you were,” Sherlock paused in confusion, not understanding why John sounded so annoyed. “I just—”

“I’ve fucked before,” John interrupted, flinging his towel on the floor instead of hanging it up as was his wont. “I don’t need to be coddled.”

“Have I done something wrong?” Sherlock asked humbly, unable to determine what had gone wrong. Gone was the tender comradeship of a few moments before.

“You don’t need to treat me like a woman just because you fucked me,” John said tersely. His back was to Sherlock, every tensed muscle screaming aggression.

“Oh.” Sherlock shook his head, “No, John…I wasn’t…I… please face me.”

It took a moment, but John reluctantly turned around, face truculent.

“You misunderstand…I don’t think of you as being any less the John I—I know, than before last night.” Sherlock sweated, aware he had almost blurted out the John I love, “But it was your first time and I’m sure your muscles are protesting, I know mine are. I just wanted to…” he trailed off, not sure how to convey his thoughts.

Softening, John put a hand on his arm, “Christ, I’m sorry. I guess I got defensive. I just don’t want you treating me differently because you, er, you know…”

“Plugged your fabulous bum?” Sherlock supplied, smiling hopefully.

John laughed, reddening adorably, “Something like that. Fabulous, eh? Not bad for a man my age.”

“Not bad at all,” Sherlock breathed, stepping in close to cradle said bum in his hands. He gave a little rub of his hands and received a kiss on the lips in return. “I, I just wished to, to cherish you, John.” He hid a wince at how sappy and needy he sounded.

It must have sounded different to John, however, because he sort of melted into Sherlock’s arms and pressed a kiss upon him. “Aw, love, I want to cherish you too.”

“We could…cherish one another,” Sherlock suggested, smiling as he backed John into the hallway and toward his— their—bedroom. “We have all day.”

“We could exchange massages,” John supplied, leaning up on his toes to suckle on Sherlock’s ear.

He shivered, “Mm, yes…and uh, perhaps breakfast could be skipped in favour of holding one another?”

“As long as I get an obscenely large lunch,” John countered, tumbling slowly backward onto the bed, pulling Sherlock with him. They landed with Sherlock on top of John, between his spraddled legs.
“As obscenely large and gratuitously greasy as you wish,” Sherlock agreed, already planning a large order of chips. “John—John, are you hard?”

“Getting there,” John said, flexing his hips against Sherlock’s. “Can’t help it. You’re so goddamned sexy, and we’re here in our bed, where you made me feel so good—sorry, so splendid—and it smells of sex and you’re so sexy.”

“You said I was sexy twice,” Sherlock blushed.

John was the epitome of wickedness and flirty, delicious man, “That’s cuz you’re doubly sexy.”

“Me?” Sherlock’s face was very hot and he wished to hide, “No.”

“Yes.”

“No. I’m…gangly. Pale. Annoying.”

“Yes. Slender, creamy, and yeah, annoying, but also really, really cute and sweet.”

“Cute and sweet?!”

John laughed, bouncing Sherlock, “You can try and deny it, but you are. My cute, sweet, doubly sexy armful of slender, creamy, heavenly-eyed, devilishly handsome, good looking, intelligent and smart-arsed boyfriend.”

“John, I…no.”

“You blush so beautifully,” John said softly, brushing his thumbs over Sherlock’s hot cheekbones, “I know you’re not used to hearing those things, and I guess maybe you don’t see yourself that way. But that’s how I see you. I see you, Sherlock.” He kissed him, “My Sherlock.”

“My John,” Sherlock managed to say past a tight throat. He refused to tear up. “I, I cannot tell you what you mean to me—”

John soothed him, wriggling until they were lying on their sides, “You don’t have to say anything you’re not ready for.” His grave eyes promised that Sherlock could take it at his own pace. He was grateful that John understood. He didn’t need to rush. “Is it okay if I tell you how wonderful you are?”

“I’m hardly going to say no to that,” Sherlock said dryly, striving for his usual tone.

“I didn’t think so. Full of yourself as you are,” John teased.

“John, I—”

“In your own time, eh?” John kissed him. “Now. You said something about a massage?”

“Yes, of course,” Sherlock sat up, “I purchased massage oil along with the toys.”

“Sounds like you were busy,” John commented, laying on his back, legs crossed at the ankle, hands behind his head. Sherlock turned from fetching the oil and caught his breath at the sight of his boyfriend stretched out before him, partially engorged. “Yeah,” John said, following his eyes, “I got a half-chub from hugging you. Good thing these sheets need to be washed anyway, the oil is liable to get everywhere.” He paused, grinned cheekily, “Better take off your kit as well. Wouldn’t want to stain that lovely dressing gown.”
Sherlock disrobed, and straddled John’s legs, shaking the bottle.

“I hope you left a few things at the shops,” John commented, rubbing his leg, “I’d like to go shopping with you, find some things for us to use together.”

“I’d like that,” Sherlock said after his brain came back online. He puddled oil in his palm, capped the bottle and spread the oil on both hands, “Shall I start with your chest, first?”

“If you like,” John agreed, smiling. “Hey, does this massage come with a happy ending?”

“Nothing but happy endings for you, John,” Sherlock promised.

*****

“And this is the last time?” Molly demanded sternly, hands on hips. Mycroft hid a smile in his wine. Greg smiled sweetly, brown eyes so twinkly and hard to resist. Mycroft understood entirely why Molly was in love with Greg. Lovely Greg. He and lovely Molly made quite a nice looking couple with their brown eyes and dimples and sunny personalities.

“Aw, Molls, c’mon! I thought Gerard was nice.”

“He was nice. He was also boring and stiff and snooty.”

“How can he be nice and snooty at the same time?”

“Public school and practice,” Mycroft supplied. Greg glared at him for his insubordination and Mycroft shrugged, buttering another piece of bread and shoving it in his mouth. In for a penny. He’d already eaten so many carbs tonight that he’d need to double his time on the treadmill and skip lunches this week. He loved bread and butter. Mmm.

Mycroft realized he might be slightly tipsy. It had been the only defense against this ghastly evening. To say Gerard was the best of the bunch was a ringing endorsement, but it was true. Out of all the people he associated with in his career, Gerard was the least stuffed-shirty of them all. Anthea was more fun, but she’d eat Molly in one sitting.

That was a bit of a hot image, actually. No, no. Think of other things.

Mycroft sipped a little more social lubricant and studied the happily bickering pair on the opposite side of the table. In many ways, Greg and Molly were admirably suited, much as, to his initial surprise, he had once or twice contemplated the same about himself and Molly.

“I have a solution.” They turned to him. “Yes... Molly, you erm, admire Greg.” Good save, Holmes. “And Greg, I know you find Molly sexually appealing.”

“Mycroft!”

“Good God, Myc, are you drunk?”

“Well you do. When we walked into 221B the other day and found Molly demonstrating that yoga pose for Mrs. Hudson, you said—and I quote—‘unnngh.’”

Greg’s face was aflame and Molly looked like she might sink under the table. “I—she—I’m
helpless in the face of yoga leggings, you know that. And Molly has a lovely bum. God, sorry, Molly! I think maybe I’m drunk too.”

“I think maybe we’ve all had too much to drink,” Molly said kindly, standing up and casting about for her handbag. “Aside from Gerard this was a lovely evening, thank you for having me over. Next time I’ll invite the two of you over for lunch. No booze,” she joked weakly, avoiding their eyes, “Too dangerous, apparently.”

“Oh sit down,” Mycroft sighed, pouring more wine in her glass. “Hear me out. Now, Molly, I realize you are, as you told me, happily single, but perhaps you feel a physical longing which Greg or I or both of us could fulfil?” He smiled at her, fond of the petite woman who had so unexpectedly and easily nestled her way into his life. “Greg is sexually rapacious—oh darling, you are, and it’s wonderful—but the nature of my job means I cannot always spend as much time with him as I would like—and vice versa.”

“I—I’m—you’re lovely,” Molly seemed to be permanently blushing, “both of you. I think the two of you are the loveliest, finest, dearest men I know. But you’re in a relationship! A third person would only throw a spanner in the works.”

“They don’t have to.” Greg and Mycroft both spoke at once, and then looked at each other, grinning. “You first,” Greg gestured, and winked at them both.

“Thank you, Gregory. Now Molly, I have gathered from certain tells that you indulged in a three-way relationship in your younger years. I’ve never mentioned it, as I am not my show-off brother and it’s your business. However, I gather that it did not end well?”

“To say the least,” Molly said quietly. She studied the table top, avoiding their eyes. “It started off alright, lasted for well over a year. But eventually…”

“They turned to one another?”

“Yes. I was, edged out, I guess you could say.” Molly smiled a little, “It hurt at first, I won’t deny it, but I’m fine now. But Mycroft, Greg, I don’t want to have that happen here. I love you both dearly and I wouldn’t want to come between you in any way, and I just couldn’t bear to lose your friendship or feel left out when you move on without me.”

They sat quietly. Greg held Mycroft’s hand, thumb idly bumping over his knuckles. Suddenly he chuckled. The other two looked at him inquiringly. He rubbed his nose, smiled ruefully, “I was just thinking…we’re not liable to do anything hurtful, the three of us, not on purpose. We’re all older, wiser—at least a bit—and we’re looking for fun times, yeah, and great sex, but we’re also happy with our lives. I mean, we have busy careers, families, responsibilities.” He looked at Mycroft, smiled, leaned in for a kiss, then reached out and took Molly’s hand, bring it to rest in between theirs, sandwiched in their larger hands.

“If this was some abrupt, drunken mistake we fell into without thinking…yeah, I could see it ending poorly. But if we’re talking about it, if we make plans and rules and treat each other with respect, I don’t see why it wouldn’t work. Go into it knowing what we want, what we need to be mindful of…”

“It sounds very reasonable,” Molly agreed, staring at their hands, fingers curled, cozy, happy. “Only…God.” She looked up at the ceiling, shook her head, lowered her gaze to Mycroft’s, “I—you know how I feel about Greg.”

“About me?” Greg asked with interest.
“I erm, I’ve got feelings for you.” Molly lowered her head to her outstretched arm. “I’m either too drunk to be talking about this or not drunk enough to obliterate my embarrassment.”

“Sit up straight, Molly,” Mycroft fusssed. “Greg isn’t an ogre.”

“I’m embarrassed!”

“Why?”

“Why? Because—”

“Oh…are you in love with me?” Greg grinned a silly grin, giggled a bit, “That’s…oh, I am chuffed.”

“Gah.”

“I mean it, lovely young thing like you…and to have a lovely young thing like Myc in love with me. Here I was, just last year, thinking I was a sad old fellow on his way to being old and alone. Now I’ve got two lovely lovelies all lovey.”

“You’re so drunk,” Molly laughed. She stood up, “I’m going to go, boys. I—well, it was an evening.”

“I wish you would consider this,” Mycroft said, tugging on her hand until she looked at him. “Despite what you may think, this wasn’t a spur of the moment decision for me. I’ve been ruminating on it for some time. Tonight I had just enough to drink that I blurted it out in a crude fashion, but it is an arrangement that I think could bring us all happiness.”

“Date!” Greg said suddenly. They looked at him. “We should date. I mean, no need to rush right into double-teaming Molly on the first go. Romance, innit? That’s what we need.”

At the word double-teaming Molly’s face had reddened, but Mycroft easily read the tells that meant she was aroused and intrigued by the idea. He caught and held her gaze, letting it speak for him. Ah, interesting. Yes, as he had suspected she found him attractive as well. Mycroft stood, rounded the table and bent to kiss Molly lightly on the cheek. “Miss Hooper, as always it has been a delight. I’ve got my car waiting downstairs to see you home. I do hope you will consider our offer. Give it some thought. You know how to reach us.” He opened the door for her, smiling down at her, “And if the answer is no, please be assured that both Gregory and myself will be most happy to continue on as your friends. Nothing need change if you do not wish it to.”

“That’s right,” Greg said easily, and bent to give her a light kiss on the corner of her mouth, humming as he pulled away, “Ah, that’s lovely.” He smiled at them both, “You’re so lovely.”

“You’re so drunk,” Mycroft chuckled, waving Molly off and closing the door. He leaned against it and smiled at his lover. “I admit I had not planned to broach the subject like this…however, I gather that you are enthusiastic?”

Greg tucked his fingers in Mycroft’s belt, pulled at him, “Come on, let’s go to bed.”

“The dishes…”

“Will still be there in the morning. At the moment I want to lay you out on the bed and suck on that long, beautiful cock of yours.”

“I have absolutely no objection to that,” Mycroft said smoothly, glad Greg was holding his
hand, as he was feeling slightly lightheaded. “It is one of my favourite activities.”

“Thought it might be,” Greg winked, and tumbled him onto the bed. He started a slow strip tease, humming and bumping and grinding. Mycroft threw off his own garments with a shameful lack of concern for wrinkles. “Thinking of Molly and me?”

“Mm, yes,” Mycroft allowed, “However, I am quite selfish...in my fantasy I am delving into her body while you prong me.”

“Greedy lad,” Greg chuckled, holding himself over Mycroft’s body, lightly brushing against him, frotting his erection against the crease of Mycroft’s thigh. “I like that. Now me, I was thinking how much I’d like to eat her out while you watch, then I can kiss you nice and slow so you taste her on my tongue.”

“Mmm,” Mycroft hummed appreciatively, hands planted on Greg’s back, urging him faster. “And then?”

“Then I’d like you to sit on my dick while she sits on my face so I can make you both come at the same time.”

“Gregory.”

He slithered down Mycroft’s writhing body, “Fuck, love, look how hard you are. My filthy lad wants his two lovers, doesn’t he?”

“Yes!” Mycroft shamelessly cried out when Greg took him in his mouth, hips bucking. “Ah, God, yes...oh, how I want you both...”

Greg pulled off long enough to say, “Then let’s hope you get what you want...”

*****

“...I told Father, I told you, didn’t I dear? I said, mark my words, Sherlock and John are destined to be together. When you’ve been in a happy marriage like ours, you get to know the signs of love.” Mummy beamed at them, oblivious to Sherlock’s brick red face and John’s muffled giggle. “It does make me happy to see both my boys settled.”

Father smiled his trademark vacant smile, used to playing backing vocals to Mummy’s enthusiasm. It was possibly the reason they had such a happy marriage. Sherlock had no intention of wearing bow ties and smiling at everything John said, so they’d have to find some other way to ensure life-long happiness. “Settled, yes,” Father agreed, rocking back slightly on his heels. He smiled down at Rosie, who was tugging on his trouser leg, “Yes, dear child?”

“Can I call you granddad now?”

“Rosie!” John was embarrassed, he looked between the elder Holmes, “I’m sorry, she’s convinced we’re getting married. Rosie, you will continue to call them Mr. and Mrs. Holmes.”

Her face fell, “But I wanted a granddad. I only have a Nana.” She smiled hopefully at Mummy, “And you could be my other Nana.”
That was all it took. Overriding John’s weak objections Siger and Violet vociferously declared they would be delighted to be Granddad and Gran. Sherlock hoped John wasn’t too upset. Maybe this was moving too fast. But he himself was pleased if only for the look on Rosie’s face. And the happiness on Mummy’s too, of course. But mostly…mostly because it felt like they were being woven ever tighter into a family. John and Rosie were his now.

*****

John was riding him, Sherlock’s cock sliding along the cleft of his buttocks, slippery with lube. He’d already fellated him, pinning him against the bedroom door, then pushed him on the bed and mounted him, too impatient to take the time to stretch himself for penetration. Sherlock had already come in John’s mouth and he was hard and ready again, turned on by the slide of his member between John’s firm cheeks. He caressed him, eyes on John, who was flushed, sweaty, dazzling, as he rocked and rolled and shimmied, turning Sherlock into a molten puddle of lust.

“You liked that, didn’t you?” John asked, moving in tiny increments that brought tears of frustration to Sherlock’s eyes. “Yeah, I saw your face…my love is binding us to him.” He laid on him, chest to chest, gave him a deep, open-mouthed kiss, “You’re so possessive, angel, so hungry for me. Want to own all of me, don’t you?”

“God yes,” Sherlock breathed, trying to hold John’s slippery hips in place so he could thrust hard against his arse and come. He was going to die if he didn’t come. “From the first time I saw you John. Wanted to consume you, make you mine.”

“I’m yours,” John whispered, eyes intense, hips coaxing frissons of pleasure out of Sherlock as he moved in a sinuous wave, “You’re mine, all mine. No one else.”

“No one…I never wanted anyone else,” Sherlock promised. The urge to shout how much he loved John had him dizzy. He despised himself a little for how hard he found it to say the words. He loved how the words spilled from John’s lips when Sherlock made him come, but he wanted to hear them from John when they weren’t high on endorphins and pheromones. He wanted to say them but he was scared.

“Mine,” John said again, in a hard voice that brought a thrill down Sherlock’s spine. He fastened his teeth on Sherlock’s neck, “Say it.”

“Yours,” Sherlock whimpered, arching his neck as John sucked hard. He rubbed more frantically, his dick slipping against John’s flesh. Putting his hand between them he expertly manipulated John’s throbbing cock, “Yours, John, all yours.”

John sucked harder, biting, an edge of pain that made the warning tingle start in Sherlock’s belly, low down. “Mine,” he said again darkly. He pulled back, hard hand grasping Sherlock’s jaw, fingers tight. It was thrilling and slightly frightening. Sherlock arched his neck, inviting another bite. “Oh, you like that do you?”

“Please…”

John suckled hard on the side of his neck and Sherlock groaned long and low as he came, cum geysering, spattering his legs, Johns’ buttocks and inner thighs. “Yours!” He cried again, vision whiting out as John put on a burst of frantic motion and came hard and fast in his hand,
striping Sherlock’s belly with his release.

A long time later John lifted his head from Sherlock’s shoulder, and moved to get off of him. Their bellies were sticky with cum and sweat and Sherlock grimaced, feeling itchy and disgusting. He loved the filthiness of it in the moment, but once the afterglow had faded his fastidiousness regarding personal grooming returned.

“Yuck,” John said succinctly. He left the room, bare arsed naked since Rosie was spending the night with the Holmes at their hotel, and returned with wet flannels and a bath sheet, “Aw, my poor Sherlock. You look cranky…how about a nice cool shower?”

“You’re a disgusting animal, John Watson,” Sherlock complained, as he peeled the sheets off of himself.

John, busy reaching behind him to scrub at the lube and cum on his arse raised an eyebrow. “I hardly think you have room to talk. Besides, you love it.” He tossed the dirty flannel at Sherlock, who squawked and ducked to avoid it; grinning, he swaggered over and bullied Sherlock back a few inches, chest bumping his. “Admit it, Holmes; you’re secretly hot for my filthy load.”

“John.”

John laughed a machine gun laugh and swaggered into the bathroom. Sherlock grinned, and dropped his flannel. It looked like it was time to get clean. However, he had every intention of inducing amorous relations in the morning. Mummy had promised to take Rosie shopping and to the museum. There would be more than enough time for the necessary preparation. He was ready for John to take him. All yours, he thought, following John, always and forever.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think! Comments are life :)
October

Chapter Summary

When John gets a shock, Sherlock responds by taking Rosie on an adventure...with unexpected consequences. He also learns the dirty side of parenting. John struggles with a difficult week but is ultimately comforted by Sherlock's presence in his life. Things in the bedroom heat up for John and Sherlock as they face another first; Sherlock continues to be addicted to loving John.

Molly settles her mind on how her relationship with Greg and Mycroft is going to continue, but finds herself wistful for what might have been.

Alex and Rosie both enjoy their Halloween experiences.

Chapter Notes

Aren't y'all lucky? So many chapters so close together. Let's hope I can keep up the pace. I hope the quality and story are not suffering from my eagerness. As always, I would love to hear your thoughts. Continued thanks for all you lovelies who continue to support me and encourage me with your wonderful comments.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was a chilly, breezy day, pale sunshine gilded the City of London and the boroughs with a delicate gilt glow. Sherlock and Rosie were walking toward the Tate Modern; today Rosie’s class was headed for a trip to the London Aquarium. When the permission slip had come home in Rosie’s Captain Britain rucksack, John had actually gone a shade of gray Sherlock thought only possible in books, and let out a strangled noise caught somewhere between a gasp and a sob.

Recalling John’s stricken face and palpable grief, Sherlock gripped Rosie’s hand tighter, until she protested and he apologized absenty. John had dropped the crumpled paper and simply walked from the room, looking as shocked and grim as he had in the aftermath of Mary’s death. Sherlock wanted nothing more in that moment than to go to him and hold him until he let out his black emotions. But there was a confused and upset Rosie to comfort; unable and unwilling to explain what had her father looking so awful, Sherlock had picked her up and hugged her since he couldn’t hug John. He’d dissuaded her from the idea of the Aquarium by promising to take her to the Tate and recklessly vowing to let her pick out as much chocolate as she wished at the Chocolate Bar.

So here they were, about to inspect the offerings of modern artists and consume unwise quantities of chocolate. Rosie was delighted to be out on an adventure with Sherlock and he was torn between attending to her conversation and worrying about John. He’d been quiet all week. Understandable, but Sherlock hated—hated—the helpless feeling of not being able to comfort John; he would have been willing, but John had waved away his concern and insisted he was fine once the shock of it had passed. “I knew this would happen eventually,” he’d said in a too-calm voice. “School children go on school trips.”
Too, Sherlock was worried that on some level John was holding himself aloof from Sherlock because he was still blaming him. It would only be fair: Sherlock certainly held himself responsible for Mary’s death.

“This is stupid,” Rosie said baldly, staring at the Mark Rothko canvas. “It’s just yellow.”

“Yes it is,” Sherlock agreed. “Chocolate?”

“Chocolate,” Rosie concurred. Hand in hand they sought out the Chocolate Bar and she went wild, darting around demanding nearly everything she set eyes on. Sherlock tossed his Barclay’s card at the surprised barista (or whatever she was called) and sailed behind his god-daughter, obligingly loading his long arms with her selections. Spilling the minor mountain of sweets onto the counter, he ordered two hot chocolates with extra whipped cream and wondered why in the hell the barista (or whatever she was called) was looking at him as if she’d just met the King.

“This is great!” Rosie exclaimed with enthusiasm, mouth ringed in chocolate, whipped cream on her button nose. Sherlock grinned at her avarice, “Better than the art?”

“Oh, yeah,” she drawled, as if he were an absolute idiot, rolling her big eyes. Sherlock was forcibly reminded of Mary, whom he missed with a sudden sharp return of the pain which had dulled over the years. Mary had been almost as dear a friend as John, someone he had trusted implicitly (despite the bullet wound she had inflicted, which he completely understood, being nothing if not practical) and aside from his guilt over her death, he missed his friend. That he would not now be in a romantic relationship with John and raising Rosie was evident to him and the guilt over his pleasure in both of those relationships also visited itself upon him heavily from time to time, this past week especially.

“Scott?”

Sherlock handed Rosie a paper serviette, instructing her to wipe her mouth. She missed most of it, so he took it and cradled her small face in his hand, cleaning her efficiently.

“Scott, hi.”

“I think he’s talking to you,” Rosie said in a stage whisper, eyes fixed over Sherlock’s shoulder. He glanced back and squirmed. It was David, of the poo bags. Over the months since Biscuit had entered their life, Sherlock had indeed taken to enjoying middle of the night walkies with the demanding dog. Although perhaps *enjoying* was a too-generous description. He and David had come to be fairly friendly acquaintances, their paths crossing a fair amount of the time.

“Oh. David.” Sherlock turned around and stared at a very interested Rosie, who was no doubt wondering why he was being addressed as Scott. “Hey.”

David smiled, “I thought that was you, saw you from the hall. I was here having a meeting with some clients and thought I’d pop in to grab a little treat for the missus and the brats,” Moving around so he could greet Rosie, “You must be Rosie. Your daddy talks about you all the time.”

“Daddy is my daddy,” Rosie corrected him. “This is my—this is my other daddy,” her expression was angelic as she looked at Sherlock, “I call him Pop.”

Oh no.

“Pop, got it,” David said with a friendly smile. He gestured at the free chair at their table, “You mind if I wait with you while they box up my order?”
“Er…”

David sat, nodding at the loaded bag next to Sherlock’s chair, “Looks like you loaded up as well…get in bad with the husband?”

Well this was unfortunate. Rosie was eating this up, cocoa abandoned, huge grin on her face. His unlimited card was going to be stretched to the limit purchasing enough bribes for this encounter to be forgotten. “I—”

“Daddy has been sad,” Rosie piped up, spooning the whipped cream from Sherlock’s drink onto her own. “But when he comes home and sees Pop he gets happy.”

“He does?” Sherlock asked, startled. How had he not noticed any alleviation of John’s grief when in his presence?

“Yes, when he comes in the door he’s smiling but his eyes are all squinched,” Rosie explained, demonstrating, “But then he says “Hello, Sherlock” and kisses you and his eyes aren’t squinched anymore.”

A sensation akin to slipping into a warm bath engulfed Sherlock, who barely noticed that Rosie had called him Sherlock in front of David. He had been laboring under the impression that John found his presence a reminder of all he lost; but if Rosie was to be believed—and she was observant, he had trained her himself—then perhaps John wasn’t upset by Sherlock, just processing the feelings revealed by thinking about the day he lost Mary in such a shattering and violent fashion. He drifted through the conversation with David, mind on John’s homecoming.

“I want chips,” Rosie demanded when they left the Tate.

“Alright,” Sherlock agreed. He could do with chips.

“I don’t feel good,” Rosie whined, standing next to the sofa, where he was stretched out, rubbing his overfull stomach.

“Neither do I,” Sherlock informed her.

“I really—” A flow of sick interrupted the rest of her sentence and Sherlock yelped when the vomit splattered the rug. Scrambling to leave the sofa without stepping in the mess he stared at her with dismay. Rosie began crying, face crumpling miserably and Sherlock dithered. “Pop,” Rosie sniveled, holding out her arms.

He wanted to help her, he really did. But she had sick on her shirt and in fact on her legs. And in her hair. There was sick on the rug and the floor and the side of the sofa. Sick everywhere. “Mrs. Hudson!” He yelled desperately, “Mrs. Hudson!”

“She’s not here,” Rosie whimpered, arms still up, snot and tears joining the flecks of vomit on her face. “I don’t feel good.”

Since that statement had preceded a veritable tidal wave of vomitus mere moments before, Sherlock hesitated and then girded his loins, reaching out to lift her into his arms. Immediately she
snuggled her head on his shoulder, whimpering miserably, and he had to breathe through his mouth as the smell of sick invaded his nostrils more strongly. At this moment he would far rather be back on that rooftop with Moriarity than here in the flat.

Eventually he took her to the bath, plopping her into lukewarm water and handing her a basin in case she felt the urge to reject yet more chips and chocolate from her insides. He chivvied Biscuit—he gagged when he found the dog lapping at sick—up the stairs and closed the stairwell door. Running to fling open the windows and air the room, Sherlock slipped in sick and gagged again. He was not equipped for fatherhood.

Once she had a dose of child-safe anti-emetic in her and was clean, Sherlock bundled her in her warmest pyjamas—worried about her shivering—and let her curl up in John’s chair with John’s Union Flag pillow under her head. He’d draped a bath sheet over the chair and placed the basin next to her. “Here,” he instructed, handing her a juice box, “Sip that—slowly!”

Unable to bear the smell, he finally unhooked his blue cashmere scarf from the coat rack and wrapped it around his face, coaxing a weak giggle from Rosie, “You look like a bandit.”

Biscuit was whining and scratching at the door and the flat was getting a bit chilly with the windows open. Sherlock laid a blanket over Rosie and warily began to clean.

“Good evening my loves—oh God,” John’s nose wrinkled, “Was Rosie sick?”

“I pooped,” Rosie croaked from the sofa, where she was curled up with her head on Sherlock’s lap, “In my clothes.”

“She’s thrown up once and had, erm, involuntary diarrhea,” Sherlock informed him, so tired he didn’t want to move. He’d cleaned Rosie and her messes up twice, and then had to clean up after Biscuit, who, in the confusion, had missed his walkies and voided both bladder and bowels on the stairwell. Both Rosie and Biscuit had received baths and Sherlock was itching for a soak of his own. But at the moment he wasn’t budging.

John’s forehead crinkled in concern, “Fever?”

“Hasn’t spiked above 39.1,” Sherlock assured him, gesturing at the thermometer on the table. “I’ve been monitoring her every half hour. She’s kept down her fluids—I gave her juice, watered down lemonade, and she had a bit of chicken broth.”

“Any meds?” John asked briskly, kneeling on the damp—but thankfully clean—rug, and brushing his fingers over Rosie’s limp curls, bending to kiss her forehead gently. Sherlock suddenly recalled Mummy doing the same thing when he was little, comforting him whilst checking his temper. She’d never been off by more than a degree or two.

“A dose of ondansetron,” Sherlock said briskly, rubbing his hand over Rosie’s back, “And then some paracetamol when her fever started.”

“Pop said I could have some mashed ‘anana when you got home and he could weave to go to the shops,” Rosie said, rubbing her eyes, “I want an ice lolly, my fwoat is sore.”
“I know darling,” John soothed, kissing her again. “Why don’t you try and take a nap and Daddy will go to the shops and get ice lollies and soup and all sorts of good things for you.”

“I can go,” Sherlock said despite his weariness.

“You stay put, you look a bit hectic yourself,” John counseled, patting his knee. It was remarkable how comforting it was. “You could be coming down with it too…a stomach ‘flu has been going ‘round, wouldn’t be surprised if you both have it.”

Sherlock thought guiltily of the chocolate and chips but didn’t mention it. “If you’re sure,” he said, settling back into the cushions. “I am a bit tired.”

“Pop cleaned up soooo much sick,” Rosie mumbled, opening her eyes again, and gesturing broadly, “and then Biscuit went wee all over the stairs and he yelled—um, a bad word—and cleaned that up. And then he stepped in a poop and yelled again.”

Sherlock put on his most innocent look when John glared at him. “I slipped,” he said meekly, “It just came out in the heat of the moment.”

“And then I pooped and he made me stand in the baftub while he sprayed me off,” Rosie finished, baring Sherlock’s shame for John to deride. “It was all in my pants and down my leg and on the floor.” She made a face, “It stunk.”

“Yes it did,” Sherlock agreed devoutly, recalling the ghastly sequence of events. He looked at John, “I’m not cut out for parenting.”

“No one is,” John said with a half-smile, leaning in to kiss him on the forehead too, which he found even more comforting than the knee patting. No wonder John was such a fine doctor. “Sounds like you had quite an afternoon…I think you need a treat from the shops as well.”

“All I want is a shower and bed,” Sherlock shuddered.

“And you shall have it when I get back. I’ll take Biscuit with me, shall I?”

John didn’t seem too upset at Sherlock’s mishaps, and his kiss had been very nice. All John’s kisses were nice. Sherlock patted Rosie’s back and leaned his head back, closing his eyes. John would take care of them. He just wanted a little nap.

“****

“So,” John said later that night, the household finally quiet, as they lay in bed, “Pop, eh?” His voice was pitched low, as Rosie was asleep between them. Sherlock couldn’t quite read his tone, but it didn’t sound particularly happy.

“John…” Sherlock didn’t know where to begin.

“You didn’t think you needed to talk to me about this?” John’s tone was neutral, but Sherlock could feel the emotions roiling behind his apparent calm. “Calling you that…that’s a big step, something we should have talked about.” He stared at the ceiling, “It feels like too much right now—on top of all my feelings over Mary.”
An unaccustomed feeling of tight-throated pain gripped him; words built up but wouldn’t pass. Finally he felt able to speak, and he told John about it all, how he’d met David months back, the foolish lies he had told, the meeting at the Tate, Rosie essentially blackmailing him and then blithely giving away his name. The over-indulgence in junk food which he was worried had accounted for both their unsettled stomachs.

“Lord, you really are a child,” John said in amused exasperation. He turned his head and gave Sherlock a half-smile. “I’m still not happy with how—and how fast—this happened, but I get it. I think you’ve been punished for your lies and your unwise food choices. I’m sure all that chocolate and grease didn’t help either of your tummies, but Rosie is definitely sickening with ‘flu. This was just poor timing.”

“I have a newfound respect for childcare workers,” Sherlock assured him. “It was dreadful, John, just one disgusting disaster after another.”

“I find it hard to feel that sorry for a man who made me live with body parts in the flat. Eyeballs in the tea kettle, Sherlock. In the tea kettle.” John was still outraged after nine years.

“Eyeballs are one thing. Copious amounts of vomitus and feces is another. Especially when the dog joined in.” Sherlock gagged.

John rolled over, facing him properly for the first time, and reached out to pat his hand. “She should be alright now that we’ve got her medicated and her fluids stabilized. I am worried about you, however. I suspect your travails will begin soon.”

“I feel fine,” Sherlock dismissed.

Four hours later he wanted to sink through the floor when John had to bring him a basin to be sick in as he hunched miserably on the toilet. He was never going to be able to supplant this image in John’s mind. Their days of intimacy and sexual adventure were surely at an end.

*****

“Thank goodness Alex didn’t get it,” Molly told Greg in relief as he recounted Sherlock’s tale of horror. “Several kiddies at the crèche came down with it. I had him stay home this week, but unfortunately that meant he was with Mrs. Peters.”

“You really need to consider hiring a nanny, Molly,” Mycroft reproved, “You can afford it, and I do believe you and Alex would both be happier.”

“I’m not from the kind of family that has nannies,” Molly shrugged uncomfortably, sharing a look with Greg. Sometimes Mycroft forgot that not everyone came from his rather rarified background of homeschooling, nannies and early entry to public schools and universities.

“There are many sorts of families in the modern world, Molly, and no shame in a working single mother paying for someone to help raise her child. You could hire someone who followed your preferences for his playtime and enrichment, someone to come daily, or to live in…” Mycroft nodded at Alex, who had looked up in interest from his crust-less sandwich, “He’s an active and growing boy, and there are men and women trained to guide and supplement young people.”

“Whass a nanny?” Alex asked.
“Like Mary Poppins,” Molly responded, pouring him more almond milk, “Only without the magic.”

“You can get someone who knows magic, I’m sure,” Mycroft said helpfully. Molly glared at him and Greg snickered. “In fact, I’ll put Anthea on the hunt. She does love a challenge.”

“I haven’t agreed, Mycroft,” Molly objected in exasperation, an edge in her voice. Even Le Jie did not challenge her on decisions she made for Alex, agreeing that since she was the primary caregiver she should make the decisions. It irked her that Mycroft was pushing this. As a friend he was allowed to give her his opinion, but he was, she felt, walking a line that she had firmly drawn in the sand.

Ultimately deciding that she couldn’t risk any damage to their friendship, Molly had invited them over to explain her position a few days after dinner at Greg’s. They had accepted gracefully, but asked if they could continue to meet regularly. Happily, Molly had agreed, and they arranged their schedules with some difficulty, but with eagerness. She liked including Alex when he was home, always worried that he wasn’t spending enough time with male figures. Her son could do far worse for role models than men as fine and honourable as Greg and Mycroft.

Lunch finished, Mycroft had to excuse himself and return to his office, Anthea only having been able to carve out an hour. Greg helped clean up and then suggested they go out in the small, walled back garden, as the sun was shining weakly and the weather was dry, if chilly. Molly began plucking at dead leaves on her semi-neglected potted plants whilst Greg willingly kicked a ball about with Alex, tossing him in the air and cheering lustily when he “scored” a goal. Molly smiled at them, bittersweet regret mingled with gratitude. Thank heavens for dear friends. Thank heavens she hadn’t jeopardized this.

*****

“American Imperialism,” Sherlock called it.

“A children’s holiday,” John corrected him with amusement, “Sweets and pennies and whistles that will break in five minutes. You can abandon your principals for one hour. Two at the most. Besides,” he interjected slyly, flicking through the rack of children’s costumes, while keeping an eye on Rosie, who was on her knees pawing through the jumble of masks that someone had abandoned on the floor, “you can dress up like a pirate.”

Sherlock’s eyes lit up, although he continued to scowl blackly, “Mycroft and his fat mouth. I was a child, John.”

“Good to know you were a child at one time,” John laughed, bumping his arm with his shoulder, “One night out of the year to be a little childish, right? I’ll dress up too.”

A dazzling vision of John in dashing breeches, tall boots and a velveteen coat momentarily arrested Sherlock, who suddenly weakened. “Well, if it’s for Rosie.”

“Find anything, poppet?” John called to his daughter, who was festooned with cartoon character masks. “Pop is going to dress up with us. He wants to be a pirate.”

“Yay, pirates!” Rosie yelled, tugging off the masks and getting the elastics promptly tangled in her hair. John helped her free and looked at the mess on the racks, finally cramming them on an
overflowing hook, with guilty gratitude that it wasn’t his job to sort this mess.

After it was determined—by Sherlock, the prima donna—that the selection available at the shop was insufficient, he hustled them into a cab. Across town they arrived at a small but extremely well-fitted professional costuming outfitters, “Sherlock,” John hissed, finger and thumb firmly pinching the sleeve of his Belstaff, “this place must be exorbitant. It’s one night—we don’t need something out of Masterpiece Theatre!”

Looking about in bewilderment, his boyfriend said simply, “They have the best. The other place had plastic shoe covers instead of proper boots, John. Plastic, John. Plastic.”

“Heaven forbid,” John said nastily under his breath, annoyed at being so thoroughly ignored by his daughter and boyfriend, but a bit amused at how committed Sherlock was to authenticity. No more shoddy costumes for Rosie; he could see it, from here on out she’d want nothing but authenticity. Lord.

“Worth it,” John said an hour later, looking at his child’s glowing face under the child-sized tricorn. She was brandishing a quite real looking but thankfully fake miniature cutlass and grinning fiercely in the trifold mirrors on the platform.

“I’m Anne Bonney, mateys! Drop yer swords and hand over yer jools!”

“Scourge of the seas,” Sherlock remarked behind him, stepping out of his fitting room. John turned, mouth drying. Worth it. Dear God, worth it. Sherlock was every inch a gentleman pirate, swaggering out in a beautifully crafted coat and boots that made his long legs even longer. John was suddenly very, very glad they had these costumes for a week. And that his costume mostly disguised his fly.

“John you—oh.” Sherlock was arrested, pupils swallowing his pale irises, plush mouth falling a little open. “I. Um. That is…Good. Yes.” He swept John’s form with his eyes another time, “Very good.”

John preened just a tad. He had refused a fancy coat or, God forbid, a wig, and was wearing a complicated arrangement of leather belts over the aforementioned trousers and knee-high boots, bristling with weapons. His leather vest thankfully covered most of a puffy sleeved top, which made him feel like a ponce. The sales assistant had tried several hats on him, muttering to himself before he brought in a crimson scarf and knotted it swashbuckling style on his head.

“Blue,” Sherlock breathed after a stunned moment. “Not red. Dark navy.” It was changed and he and the sales assistant regarded John, nodding, “Oh yes,” the young man murmured, “Sir is right. The blue suits.”

It suited very well indeed if Sherlock’s expression was anything to go by.

*****

“Never knew I had a leather fetish,” John groaned late that night, stroking the butter soft leather of Sherlock’s boots as he wrapped his long legs around John, pinning him between his thighs. “You in these boots is a gorgeous sight—you in nothing but these boots is definitely going on my list of top ten favorite things.” He grinned up Sherlock’s long body, “If you hold me too tight I can’t continue doing this.” So saying, he ducked his head and resumed his devastating
assault on Sherlock’s arse.

Supremely devastating, if Sherlock’s moaning was any indicator; he’d seemingly lost his words a good five minutes before. John found it hot how quickly Sherlock had fallen to pieces at John’s first foray into pleasuring him that way. He himself found it surprisingly hot to be performing the act. Although it shouldn’t be that surprising; the man was gorgeous, sexy and held his heart; taking him into such a deeply satisfying space in his own head held layers of meaning for John.

“You like that, angel?” John asked needlessly, before delicately tonguing the loosened ring of muscle. He slowly introduced a third finger and drank in his lover’s abandoned moaning, dipping his tongue back to continue tormenting him. Life having gotten most emphatically in the way, he had not yet gotten the opportunity to make love to Sherlock; finally, finally tonight he was going to have the chance to experience the delight of having his cock swallowed by his ridiculously delicious arse. “Mmm…” John hummed, relishing the shivers he unleashed. He repeated the action, stroking the other man’s prostate with one finger and reaching up to take his dick firmly in his grasp with the other hand.

“Want you inside me,” Sherlock slurred, tossing his head restlessly on the pillow. “Too much.”

“Shall I stop? Or…I can get you off this way and then when you recover I can take you.” John was fully prepared to spend as long as he needed to satisfy Sherlock. He kissed the insides of his thighs, unable to keep from expressing the sweet combination of love and desire that was burning brightly inside him. He knew it was foolish, that sex didn’t equate love, but he felt like by joining their bodies this way they would be sealing a promise between them.

“At my age the refractory period will be too long,” Sherlock complained, stroking John with one leather-clad calf, “And I might actually die if I have to wait.”

“I’ve reduced you to hyperbole,” John chuckled, slithering up Sherlock’s body, leaving behind a trail of wet, open mouthed kisses. “You’re leaving the boots on.” He rolled on a condom and liberally lubed his prick and Sherlock’s arse, dipping his fingers inside him and groaning at the wet and ready feel of him. He lifted Sherlock’s legs, coaxing him to hook them over his shoulders, “In fact, I think you need to buy the boots outright. I’ve got an objection to the idea of anyone else wearing them now that I’ve seen you in them.”

“Gay men and leather, such a cliché, John,” Sherlock snarked, barely managing to look like as if he wasn’t falling completely apart, “I—ohhhh…”

“Nnngh,” John said, eyes closing as the tight wet heat closed around the head of his cock. It had been a very, very long time since the few times he’d been with women adventurous enough to let him in the back door and he’d forgotten that feeling of being so tightly surrounded. Not to mention it was Sherlock, it was his first time with a man...he only barely managed to keep from thrusting in all the way. He had more girth than Sherlock, and despite the ages he’d taken in preparing him, he worried about hurting him.

Squeezing him with deliberate flexing of his sphincter, Sherlock used his core to push up with his pelvis. “Don’t stop, John,” he instructed impatiently, “I want you inside me.”

“I don’t want to tear you,” John warned him, hanging on to his control with tight desperation, “Let me go slowly at first.”

“I’m not going to break.”
“You did it right with me,” John reminded him. “I’m not going to do any less with you. You’re just greedy.” He slapped the side of Sherlock’s flank with the flat of his hand and his eyes rolled back when Sherlock tightened around him.

Taking advantage of his distraction, Sherlock relaxed and then surged up, taking John deeper.

“Stop,” John hissed, trembling with the need to fuck him into the mattress. “I’m in control.”

“Stop dicking about,” Sherlock growled, “Fuck me.”

Pushing Sherlock’s legs off his shoulders, John bore down on him, chest to chest; hooking his arm under Sherlock’s left arm and up around the back of his shoulder, he kissed him hard and obliged, thrusting all the way home. Not waiting, he pulled back and repeated the action, both of them groaning. “Oh yeah, sweetheart,” John said in a heartfelt whisper, “You feel so amazing. Swallow my cock, Sherlock.” He had noticed the other man responded to dirty talk, although he was shy about reciprocating. John was happy to oblige. “Feel me? That’s all of me inside you, filling you up. God, your arse is so tight, sweetheart, and hot as a furnace.”

“John,” Sherlock panted in a thin voice, sucking on his neck as John’s head dropped to his shoulder, forehead pressing against Sherlock’s sweaty skin. “Oh, John…”

“Want me to fuck you, eh? Like this?” John smoothly sped up his thrusts, relishing each whimper and moan. “I’m so far inside you you’ll feel every inch of me tomorrow. Every step you take, you’ll remember this moment. Me buried to my bollocks in your sweet arse.”

“God!” Sherlock burst out when John pulled all the way out of him and circled his hole with a teasing drag of his cock, “Oh John, please don’t tease me!”

“Need me inside you? Like this?” Smoothly, John lined up and sank back inside him, sweat rolling down his back, grunting at the grip of Sherlock’s passage around his cock. He was barely hanging on himself, wanting to selfishly seek his own pleasure. “Yeah, that feels so…God, I can’t believe how good you feel.”

“Now you know why I’m after you all the time like a tomcat in heat,” Sherlock huffed a laugh, licking John’s sweaty cheek, and then whispering in his ear, “wouldn’t you like to fuck me ’til I come all over, John? Why don’t you take your pleasure? You can move harder, I promise I’ll say if it hurts.”

“I want to make this good for you,” John said, pushing up onto his hands, with a brief stop to swipe at his face with the back of his arm, “This is my first time inside you, I want to make sure you never forget it.” He smiled tenderly, “And as much as I want to fuck you ’til we both fall apart, it’s taken me a long time to get here…I want to enjoy every minute.”

“How many minutes are we talking about here?” Sherlock asked an eternity later, sounding decidedly desperate and breathless. “Is there a world record you’re trying to beat?”

“Aw, if you can make jokes I’m clearly not doing this right,” John said with a wicked twinkle. He moved back, leaning on his heels, grabbing both Sherlock’s legs and putting them over his good shoulder. “You asked for it.” Good as his word, he wrapped an arm around Sherlock’s legs and started to snap his hips in earnest, clamping his jaw, grimly determined to finish Sherlock.

A series of ohs cascaded out of Sherlock, rising in tenor as he drew close. John’s free hand found his dick and he stroked him fast and hard, calloused palm rolling over the sensitive head and
dragging the foreskin with each pass. “Uhhhn…” Sherlock moaned, words lost, hands gripping the headboard above his head, fingers desperately slipping on the wood.

As he felt Sherlock’s tremors start, John gripped the base of Sherlock’s dick and denied him his orgasm. Hoarse cries ripped from his throat, Sherlock thrashed on the bed, seeking release. *God, I’m going to come soon*, John thought in desperation, and changed his angle, holding onto the younger man’s legs with both hands, hitting Sherlock just right. Sherlock dropped a hand, flying fast as lightening over his aching erection and coming with a chest-rattling groan; his cock convulsed so hard that at first nothing came out of him, until a sudden spray of cum landed on his chest.

“Fuuuuck,” John growled, feeling him clenching around him; knowing he had gotten him over the finish line he gave up technique and finished himself off with four or five hasty and delicious pounding thrusts. Unable to control himself, he fell forward, caught by Sherlock’s legs, which were still in the air, trapped between their bodies. His sweaty face slid slickly against the body-warmed leather of his boyfriend’s boots and John felt a last, impossible pulse of ejaculate fill the condom.

“Goddamn,” he panted a long while later, trying to untangle himself from the sweaty limbs of a completely limp Sherlock, “I think I saw heaven.”

“Heaven isn’t real, John,” was the typically Sherlock response.

“It was there for just a minute,” John said, lifting his head from Sherlock’s thigh. He smiled at the softened prick in front of him and nuzzled it, then sucked it damply into his mouth.

“Ahh!” Yelped Sherlock, and rewarded John with a sluggish trickle of cum.

“You are full of surprises,” John chuckled, overwhelmingly sleepy. He inch-wormed his way up the mattress and face planted on the sweaty, tangled sheets. “Hope the house doesn’t burn down ‘fore morning. Can’t move.”

“Sweaty Neanderthal,” Sherlock mocked gently.

“I just fucked you for an hour, I deserve leeway.”

“May I take off the boots?”

“If you must. We’re keeping the boots though. Permanent part of our collection. Your arse when you walked around the bedroom in those…dear God.” John smiled, eyes closed, “‘Night, sweetheart.” Without further fanfare he snored, already asleep.

******

“Cutest little pirate there ever was,” John said, smiling at his daughter’s exhausted form, which was sprawled across the sofa. Her tricorn was on the floor, her tousled head in his lap, her booted feet in Sherlock’s. Hammer Films’ *Brides of Dracula* was playing on the telly, sweets wrappers littered the floor, and Biscuit was snoring on the rug. “So. American Imperialism or not, you have to admit that was kinda fun.”

“There are worse ways to pass an evening,” Sherlock allowed, lips faintly blue from all the
sticks of Brighton Rock he had consumed. John grinned at him, heart light; it had been a great evening. He slipped out from under Rosie, who mumbled, and bent to lift her limp form, “I’m going to take this one to bed. You got the dog?”

“I’ll make it fast,” Sherlock sighed, rising somewhat tiredly to his feet. As promised, he returned to the flat after tucking Biscuit under his arm and jogging to the grass patch and then hurrying back. John was in bed, lamp on, one arm behind his head, reading a book on ancient military strategy.

Sherlock tumbled out of his clothes, eyes on the dark brown tuft of hair in John’s armpit. His earlier fatigue was gone, replaced by the ever-present sense of arousal. He hadn’t lied when he told David all those months ago that he had an addictive personality. He couldn’t get enough of John. John, when he had said something the prior week, had kissed him and told him that was why it was called a honeymoon; eventually their ardor would cool from the heady urgency of the early days and they would be less desperate to consume one another. Sherlock was not convinced that he would ever be content not to try to inhale John at every turn.


Sherlock slid under the covers at the end of the bed and slithered up the bed, popping up under the covers with a wicked grin. “Hello.”

“I’m knackered,” John warned, as Sherlock ran his warm palms up John’s lightly furred legs, “Why don’t you give me a little kiss and then get some sleep? No need wasting your time on me, sweetheart.”

“Not a waste,” Sherlock denied, breathing in the smell of his boyfriend’s skin as he nuzzled his belly. He ran light fingertips over the crease of John’s thighs and smiled as he felt a stirring against his belly.

“That’s—ah, that’s lovely,” John sighed, settling into the mattress and tunneling his fingers into Sherlock’s hair as the neglected book slid to the floor. “Mm, you have such a talented mouth, love.”

“You inspire me,” Sherlock assured him, tracing light trails on his ribs as he slipped farther down in the bed. “Relax, John…”

******

Disappointed that Mycroft’s lofty neighbors did not hand out sweets and that no trick or treaters were likely on the street, Greg had insisted they spend the evening at his place. Dressed in a suit, trench coat and fedora, he had handed out treats, growling like Sam Spade and admiring the parade of costumes. Mycroft kept the popcorn bowl filled and paused the DVD player every few minutes as the doorbell pealed.

Molly, footsore from several hours tramping about with Alex, had stopped by. He was still in Rosie’s old bumble bee costume, sans antenna, which he had pressed upon Mycroft out of distress that the man didn’t have a costume, and once the sweets bowl was depleted they turned off the porch light and the lamps and the four of them snuggled under blankets and watched Murder By Death. Alex fell asleep less than fifteen minutes in, and Molly leaned against the arm of the sofa,
her son warm and relaxed in her arms; she had kicked off her shoes, tossed her antenna and tiara on the table and curled up comfortably, legs across Greg’s lap.

Greg, sitting on the sofa between her and Mycroft, picked up one of her socked feet—yellow and black striped like her fuzzy jumper—and dug his fingers in. She stifled a moan when he began massaging her instep. Focusing on the television, she reminded herself that it was just the action of a friend. But what a lovely friend. When Mycroft disappeared into the kitchen to refill their drinks, Greg patted her leg and started on her other foot, “Just showing you some love, Molly. No seduction intended.”

“I’m a very easy woman when it comes to massages,” Molly murmured, blushing in the dark room. Mycroft, coming back, laughed, and set down her wine, leaning over to drop a light, light kiss on her surprised mouth. He smiled down at her, “We just want to pamper you, dear. No ulterior motives.”

It was nice, Molly reflected, relaxing with a sigh, to be cared for…even if it was also very, very tempting and a little confusing. Much more of this and her resistance and good sense would count for naught.

Chapter End Notes

I know Halloween isn't as big a deal in the UK as it is in the US, but my hasty research leads me to believe the popularity is on the rise. So I went ahead and included my favorite holiday in this chapter.
Chapter Summary

More sexy times ensue for the boys. Sherlock sets out to distract John on Bonfire Night and succeeds nicely. A sign of encroaching middle age is NOT greeted gracefully by Sherlock, who annoys John with his grouchiness. Molly and Greg have a lovely, intimate night that just highlights what she is missing out on.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a gift to Kabes, who has been such an enthusiastic reader and has left such encouraging and interesting comments, THANK YOU!

*At rowboatrunaway: I hope the Sherlock-centric sex in this chapter meets with your approval. I devoted quite a lot of words to his pleasure. Hopefully the imbalance is corrected.

Feverish need had invaded his every cell, and his mind trembled on the brink of sliding into total sensation, no reason, no logic. It was a terrifying—and seductive—notion. Aside from his former days of abusing heroin and cocaine, Sherlock was not accustomed to ceding control. Trust John though he might, Sherlock was reluctant to let go of the last tenuous grip of his fingers on the edge. If he let go, anything could happen.

“Stop dicking about,” he growled at John, eyes blinking against the sting of sweat as he stared—hopefully not too witlessly—up at his lover. Too long, he thought anxiously, it had gone on too long. He needed to come, and to do that he needed to relinquish his control and the only way to do that was to lose himself in his release. But he couldn’t let go that tight-fingered grip—he needed John to wrest it from him. His voice dropped to a deeper register, “Fuck me.”

John, obliging creature, complied, pressing their bodies together, his face so close, eyes dark and intense. Sherlock felt full, stretched, pressed. Consumed by John and by his desire for John. Trying to control his breathing, he groaned when John pulled back, and then sank into him again; the older man had spent an almost-too-long time learning his body and preparing him with care, but he felt the delicious ache as John’s thick member delved him. How was it so much more intimate to take John inside his body this way than when he had made love to John? It took courage to love, courage to bare yourself so completely to someone, let them inside your body in so intimate a fashion.

Sherlock bit his lips against the words of love which threatened to spill out. What was the worst that could happen if he spoke? Nothing. But he resisted, stubborn and feeling that the perfect moment still waited. He could no more give up the words than he could give up control.

“Oh yeah, sweetheart,” John whispered, looking as wrecked as Sherlock felt. “You feel so amazing. Swallow my cock, Sherlock.” Not exactly shy, Sherlock as always felt the heat and hunger
inside him build when John talked to him like that. “Feel me? That’s all of me inside you, filling you up. God, your arse is so tight, sweetheart, and hot as a furnace.”

“John,” His voice didn’t even sound like him, pulled thin by the tight grip of control he exercised. He would have liked to have pointed out that John’s dick would have burnt to cinders were that the case, but his ability to pretend that all was normal had faded. John dropped his forehead to Sherlock’s shoulder and he eagerly licked and sucked the salty skin of his neck, “Oh, John…”

“Sherlock?” John’s voice sounded different, cooler, concerned. “Love, are you having a dream?”

Blinking with tremendous slowness, Sherlock scattered sleep with the flick of his lashes, drank in wakefulness as he opened his eyes. He was on his belly, engorged sex trapped between him and the mattress, duvet mounded over him—John had finally gotten tired of fighting him for the covers and brought the blanket from his old bed down—and his cheek was smashed against the pillow. “Mm,” Sherlock agreed, unable to deny himself the sensation of shallowly rutting against the bed. It felt nice but it wasn’t John.

“You aren’t having a relapse, are you?” John asked in concern, leaning on one arm and reaching to feel his forehead. “You were very restless, moaning in your sleep…you look flushed and a bit sweaty.”

“I have a better way you can take my temperature,” Sherlock said, capturing John’s hand and rolling over, dragging him over him. With a surprised “oh!” John settled his delicious, muscled weight on top of him, pinning him to the bed. Sherlock put John’s hand on his cock and moaned in earnest when John immediately circled him in a firm grip. “Yes,” Sherlock hissed, trying to thrust up into John’s hand, “Touch me…fill me.”

“You are burning up for me, angel, aren’t you? “ John asked in awe, as his fingers brushed over Sherlock’s tight bollocks and then explored his entrance. “Still stretched,” he breathed, lowering his head and stealing Sherlock’s shallow breaths with his hungry kiss. “I know I satisfied you last night, so this must be hunger for more. Hmm? Did I give you a taste of something you like?”

“You know you did, John,” Sherlock growled, pressing down on John’s finger tips. He was loose, although not as much as the night prior; still, John was able to easily enter him with first one, and then a second finger. His groan caught in his throat as John swirled a finger in him. He was faintly sore, but the delight of touch overrode that. “Of course I want more. I want all of you.”

John glanced at the bedside clock, cursed, “I literally do not have time to fuck you properly.” He kissed him and slid his fingers from Sherlock, who protested. “Don’t worry, I won’t leave you wanting.” With a bit of stretching he managed to reach their toy drawer and then he was back. “Got to give you a bit of a tease…”

Roughly he scooped Sherlock’s bum in his hands and brought him to his face. Sherlock planted his feet on the mattress and pressed against John’s mouth as he flicked his tongue tantalizingly in and out of his body. Sherlock keened and grabbed his dick, seeking more. John hastily and efficiently edged his pleasure level from sleepy and needy to horny and deeply interested whilst his hands dealt with the items from the drawer. His mouth moved away and was replaced by the chill of lube and the less tactile delight of silicone. Sherlock was disappointed until John carefully settled the plug inside him; the feeling of fullness and stretch was satisfying and annoying at once.
“Not done,” John reproved, swatting Sherlock’s busy hands away from his crotch. “Greedy.” Laughter threaded his voice, lighter than the dark undertone of sexual need. Swallowing Sherlock’s erection in one gulp, John expertly—how quickly he had assumed expert level!—fellated him. It wasn’t the slow, teasing delight of their rare mornings in bed, or the paced, skilled maddening teasing of nights when the house was quiet. No, John made it fast and dirty; Sherlock, mindful of waking Rosie, dragged a pillow over his face and buried his cries in it. John twisted and toyed with the plug, slurping Sherlock’s length into his mouth and letting him thrust his hips, fucking John’s mouth. Less than five minutes and he came hard, a long, low grunting making his face heat with shame over the animalistic sound of his pleasure.

“Christ,” John panted, cupping his aching dick through his trousers, as he stood shakily next to the bed. His hair was standing wildly on end, lips red, “I have to go to work now, for fuck’s sake.” He licked his lips, watching as Sherlock, eyes on John, writhed on the bed, feeling every millimeter of the toy inside him. “I want you to leave that where it is. You can play with it, but leave it in. I’m going to come home tonight and take you and I want you ready.” He leaned over, hand lightly gripping Sherlock’s throat and kissed him hard, “You know what edging is, hmm? No? Well look it up, dear. I want you half-crazy with wanting my thick cock in your arse by the time I get home.”

He was already half hard at the end of John’s little speech, and by the time he heard the front door close after John and Rosie, Sherlock was dragging the toy half out and then pushing it back in with one hand, while with the other he stroked himself. A quick but thorough Google search had told him all he needed to know about edging, and he was determined to keep himself on the verge of coming for as long as possible. Tonight would be spectacular. If he lasted that long.

*****

JOHN: How’s my love doing?

SHERLOCK: It’s not even eleven, John. I’m perfectly in control of myself. SH

JOHN: Well done you. I’ve been half hard all morning, thinking about you. Most inappropriate.

SHERLOCK: It’s all a matter of self-control and breath regulation. SH

JOHN: So you’re sitting in your chair and haven’t moved?

SHERLOCK: I find myself with a quiet day at home.

JOHN: Oh good. Then you can go to the shops. We need milk, loo roll, more cereal, peanut butter, bleach and dog food.

JOHN: Oh and stop by the chemist on your way home, will you? I ordered a few things and they emailed me that they were in.

SHERLOCK: John!

JOHN: Yes love?

…
“Hello love,”
“John…”
“Yes?”
“I…erm…how is your day going?”
“Busy, time’s flying by. You?”
“Yes.”
“Yes what, Sherlock?”
“Time is…flying.”
“Made it to the shops yet?”
“…no.”
“Pity. You sound distracted. Edgy. A nice brisk walk would do you good, get your blood flowing. Take you out of your head.”
“…”
“What’s that?”
“I—I’ll do that.”
“Right then, I’ve got to go. Just wanted to say hello. Oh, by the way—”
“Yes, John?”
“I’ll be late home tonight.”
“What! No!…I—I mean, why?”
“I’ll be picking Rosie up from the Allen’s and taking her to Harry and Clara’s. She’s going to stay the night with them.”
“Is she?”
“Yes. I thought she’d best be out of the house this evening.”
“Oh…?”
“Yes. I have very noisy plans for this evening.”
“John?”

“Yes love?”

“Please hurry home.”

*****

It was only through an extreme exercise of his superior will (and a prolonged sojourn in his Mind Palace) that Sherlock made it to six o’clock. Mrs. Hudson had come calling around mid-afternoon but he’d shouted from the bedroom that he didn’t want to be disturbed. Changing his mind, he’d hollered until she came back up the stairs and he asked her sweetly through the crack in the door to run to the shops, but she’d gotten in a strop and told him to do his own shopping.

A shaky mess, he’d inched home from the shops and put away the groceries before he went to take a long bath. Rather than relaxing him it just reminded him of every steamy encounter he’d shared with John. Giving in, Sherlock turned on his side and reached back, taking hold of the plug. With a shudder he pulled it nearly out and then pushed it back in.

It didn’t help.

Water sloshed as he did it again and then lost himself in thrusting the toy shallowly in and out of his body, dick hardening. He filled the flannel with conditioner and wrapped it around his member, whimpering a little as he thrust into the silky wet warmth of the flannel. God, he wanted to come so badly; it was only the fact that he wanted to prove he was strong enough that kept Sherlock from finishing.

He was starting to feel slightly ill. Hectic and flushed. His balls ached and he could hardly stand to touch himself, his skin was so sensitized. John might have only to look at him to bring him off.

At long last he left the bath and went to bed, trying to sleep. A fitful doze was interrupted by the light flicking on. John stood in the doorway, “You forgot the milk.”

“I…” Sherlock swallowed, mouth dry. He wanted nothing more than to roll over and present himself to John. “I’m sorry.”

“Why can’t you ever remember the milk?” John asked, shedding his jacket and toeing off his shoes. He unbuckled his belt and pulled it smoothly out of the belt loops, running the leather though his hands. Sherlock was a bit shocked at the idea of being strapped—he had always considered the idea of domination and discipline both tawdry and tedious—but his prick had other ideas, actually jerking and then beginning to swell from the half-hard stasis he’d existed in for hours. John paused, eying him and beginning to grin, “Someone definitely wants to be disciplined by Captain Watson…not tonight though. I’ve been thinking about fucking you all day. I don’t have the patience to go slow.”

“You’ve been toying with me all day,” Sherlock growled, already non-existent patience completely evaporating, he rose up and stood next to the bed, dick in hand. “Make good on your promise.”

“Mouthy,” John reproved, flinging his shirt over the chair and giving a little shimmy to work
his trousers down. His cock was clearly outlined by his tight pants—John wore such sexy, sexy tight pants—and he hooked his thumbs in the waist band, lowered them just enough that Sherlock could see the glistening tip of him, and then slowly lowered them all the way, kiting them away and striding the few feet between them.

Standing close, feet between Sherlock’s, John looked up at him, eyes gleaming under heavy lids. He hooked a hand on the back of Sherlock’s neck and pulled him down for a kiss, not letting up until they were both gasping. Sherlock licked greedily at his mouth and took handfuls of John’s arse in his grasp.

“I saw you looking at me, I know you like what you see,” John murmured, running the tip of his tongue over Sherlock’s clavicle in a shivery trail. “You have such hungry eyes, love. You spent all day with my toy inside you, wishing it was my fat cock, didn’t you? Oh yes, I see it in your eyes…you liked having me stretch that virgin arse of yours.”

“No a virgin,” Sherlock objected, trying to hold John still so he could frot against his belly.

“Close enough…your poncy little boyhood crush didn’t treat you like I do, did he?”

“No…” Sherlock had mostly forgotten details regarding Percy, but he knew there was no one like John. Certainly no one had ever made him yearn like John.

“So it was the same for you as it was for me.” John worried Sherlock’s nipple with his teeth, a keen pleasure that rippled outward. He licked it delicately and then sucked so softly and gently, “Breathless anticipation and too-strong delight and mind-fucking intensity. But you were so cool. So arrogant. Was my Sherlock afraid to let me have control over him?”

“No…not exactly afraid,” Sherlock gathered his scattered thoughts, “I trust you as no other, John. But that feeling of wildness was—”


“I don’t know any more,” Sherlock said petulantly, squirming around the by-now irritating intrusion in his hole, “Some of the time.”

“You’re all amped up, ready for me...mmmm, you were stretched all day, but by unfeeling plastic, not by my cock…” John took Sherlock’s hand, placed it over himself, “Feel me, how I yearn toward you? You make me as crazy for you as you are for me.” He rolled his hips lightly against Sherlock’s palm, reaching behind to grab the toy. Sherlock held his breath. “You wanted release all day and it was there, within reach. You could have ignored me. You could have come any time. But you didn’t.” John pulled the plug slowly out, drinking in Sherlock’s sighs. “You trusted me to come home and set you right. You wanted me inside you, didn’t you, sweetheart?”

“Yes John…” Sherlock sighed soundlessly as John pulled the plug free, his hole feeling empty and his body strangely longing. “I wanted to come at your hands, not my own.”

“At my dick,” John joked, just laughing when Sherlock sneered at his terrible joke. “My beautiful dick…” He stepped back, setting the toy down and holding his erection on the palm of his hand. “Look at me, Sherlock…you did that. I’m hard for you. I’m horny and impatient to sink inside you, feel you all around me. I picked a little plug; just enough to keep you open for me, but not so much that you won’t be able to feel every inch as I press inside.” He reached for a condom, rolling it on while keeping his eyes on Sherlock’s. “And Sherlock, you will feel me.”

He drizzled lube in his palm, shuddering as he slicked himself, “You’ll feel me as I slide
inside you, you’ll feel me while I fuck you until you come, and you’ll feel me all day tomorrow. You like how big I am, don’t you? It makes you hard that little John has such a big dick.”

“Oh God…” Sherlock had been kneading John’s body wherever he could reach him, and he dropped his hands to John’s cock, caressing him and pulling him closer, “I do…you filled me up, John. I couldn’t breathe.”

“I’ll take your breath away and give it back. We’ve shared something intimate Sherlock, not just our bodies, but breath…I’ve shared the air from your lungs, you’ve breathed me in…we’re inside one another now, more deeply and more meaningfully than any amount of shagging can accomplish.”

“God, John!” Sherlock threw his head back and groaned, going down easily when John pushed him. He sprawled on the bed, reaching for the smaller man, who kissed him with thrilling force as he slid well-lubricated fingers inside Sherlock, who clenched eagerly around him. Breath passed between them, until they forgot they were breathing and just existed inside the moment. Sherlock moaned through the addition of a third finger, wanting to seek more whilst simultaneously trying to avoid it. His control was paper thin.

The thrill of John’s fingers spreading him kept his heart beating rapidly; Sherlock bore down on John’s intrusion, swallowing his whimpers. He was so close, so goddamned close… “Oh…oh, oh, oh, John…yes…” Sherlock tilted his pelvis, trying to get his prostate in contact with John’s touch, but he avoided it, chuckling. “Not yet,” John said tightly, fingers inexorably opening him, stroking and teasing and sending Sherlock’s senses into a place of hazy bliss. He might have argued against John’s maddening patience except that he was enjoying the tantalizing sensations too much.

“That stretch, that burn,” John growled, “I felt it when you spent so long making sure I was ready to take you inside me. I remembered that feeling last night when I made love to you. I know how it feels for me, but I want to know how it feels for you. How do I make you feel?”

“I…feel frantic, on the surface, and yet strangely calm in one part of my mind,” Sherlock said, wishing his usual lightning fast delivery weren’t so impossible right now. He missed his facile tongue. “My heart feels like the beat takes over my entire body…my thoughts race but I lack clarity…need takes me over.” He purred when John’s fingers twisted inside him, gasped when he did it again, “I—I want you to move faster, take me more ruthlessly, but I also don’t want to let go of one moment.” John kissed his throat and sucked lightly on his pulse, in time with the thrum of Sherlock’s hectic blood. He brushed his prostate, retreated; returned to circle and press.

“Needy, I feel needy,” Sherlock panted as he rocked himself against John’s hand, “I feel empty until you fill me, and then so full I can’t breathe until you kiss me….Oh God! John…I’m going to come!”

“No, I’ve waited long enough…” Sherlock refused to budge, wanting to throw a temper tantrum until John gave in.

“Not yet,” John rapped out tersely, easing his fingers out of Sherlock, “I…please hold on just a little longer.”

Sherlock was ready for John to fold him, move him as needed, and then enter him. He didn’t anticipate John tugging on his hand until he sat up and then leading him out of the room and toward the stairs. “Where are we going?”

“Something upstairs I think will come in handy.”

“No, I’ve waited long enough…” Sherlock refused to budge, wanting to throw a temper tantrum until John gave in.
“You want it that way?” John asked, danger entering his voice. “You’re done with teasing?”
He turned and with more ease and grace than Sherlock would have guessed, he had him up in the
air and up against the wall with dizzying speed. Sherlock’s legs wrapped around John’s waist and
before he could tell him to hurry up, John lined up and entered him in one long thrust. Gravity
ensured that with shocking swiftness he was all the way inside Sherlock, who yelled, actually
yelled, and braced his back against the wall as he dug his fingers tightly into John’s shoulders.

“I’ve got you,” John grunted, readjusting his hold and grinning tightly. He griped
Sherlock’s arse cheeks in both hands and pulled out halfway before rocking back home. They both
groaned. “Yeah, sweetheart, fuck that feels so good. Do you feel me pressing all the way deep
inside you?”

“You’re all I can feel,” Sherlock assured him fervently, flinging his head back, eyes closed.
“John? That control I had?”

“Mmm?” John’s buttocks flexed under Sherlock’s heels.

“It’s gone.”

“Good, love…let go now.” John didn’t waste any more time, he spread Sherlock’s cheeks
with his hands and pistoned inside him, surging forward and dragging back out in a rapid,
tormenting glide. Their grunts filled the stairwell, an obscene chorus to their dance; Sherlock, tired
of walking a tightrope of control all day, let go of the line he’d been holding himself tethered with
and floated free into John’s arms.

The start of the longest and certainly most splendid orgasm he’d ever experienced came
rushing on him, leaving him lightheaded; inhuman noises pushed out of his throat. The culmination
of his release seemed to build to a head, as if he would never come apart, and then he did, with a
suddenness that took away the last of his equilibrium. The tingle encompassed his groin, his arse,
his thighs…Sherlock shivered, spasming hard as his back arched and lights flickered behind his
tightly closed lids; his skin was so feverish that his ejaculate felt cool in comparison as it striped
his abs and torso.

The clenching of his passage seemed to tip John into a frantic state; he continued pounding
into Sherlock as he rode the uplift of his release. John’s name was a plea on his lips, hardly any
breath taken between syllables; his vision blurred with tears, he was unable to catch his breath
properly. He’d stopped pumping out cum but his prick was still hard and twitching, the shocks still
rolling through his core…Sherlock felt as if he’d let go of more than his self-control, part of his
sanity seemed to have skewed sideways as he relinquished the last barrier, trusting in John.

“Fuck!” John swore and jerked hard as he came, grip slipping slightly. He hitched Sherlock
back up in his arms and leaned forward into the wall, teeth catching at Sherlock’s shoulder and
biting him as he spilled into the condom. A brief vision of what it would feel like to have John
come inside him made Sherlock dizzier than he already was. He’d never—without the aid of drugs
—experienced this feeling of disconnect before; his body was flooded with oxytocin, and sensation
trumped thought for the first time in his life.

At last John seemed incapable of holding him up anymore, and with a sense of loss Sherlock
let his legs unlock and he stood shakily as John set him down. Unwilling to part, they stood
wrapped tightly in one another’s embrace, chests heaving. Funny, Sherlock thought at last, how the
fear of giving someone else power over him had been lessened by the last ten minutes; it left him
feeling peaceful and powerful, not powerless.

He pressed his lips to John’s sweaty temple, kissing him gently and said softly, “I love you,
John.” John trembled and then hiccupped out a soft sob, which got strangled mid-way with a laugh, and he drew back enough to smile brilliantly at Sherlock, who could feel that his own smile had taken over his face, John’s hands rose to frame his head in a loving grip, “I love you, Sherlock.”

Sherlock closed his eyes and listened to the echo of their voices. Then, “I wasn’t ready before.”

“I know,” John whispered, kissing him.

“I was scared,” Sherlock confessed.

“I know. I tried not to pressure you. But the words kept slipping out of me when you’d make love to me.” John smiled, looking happy despite the few tears that had rolled down his sweaty cheeks, “We’ve always done things all out of order and too hastily…at least I was keeping with tradition.”

Sherlock thumbed at John’s tears, touched that John would shed tears of happiness because of him. They were in danger of becoming maudlin. He might be in love, but he was not and never would become maudlin.

“Now that I’ve said it, I’ll probably say it quite a lot.” Sherlock declared, taking John’s hand.

“I look forward to it,” John assured him, as they walked back toward their bedroom.

“Not in public.” Sherlock frowned sternly, mouth twitching and betraying him, “I have a reputation as a real dickhead to protect.”

“Dickhead, right, got it.” John crawled happily into his arms as Sherlock flopped down on the bed, holding his arms out for John, “No one knows about your gooey soft marshmallow center except for me. Well, and Rosie…and Mrs. Hudson…”

“John.”

“And Molly, of course, and Mycroft…oh, and Greg…your mum and dad…Anderson…”

“John.”

“Yes love?”

“Shut up.”

*****

Lapsed or not, John had been raised an observant Catholic. Natural disinterest in religious dogma and ceremony, a skeptical nature and too long as a battlefield surgeon had effectively quashed any religious fervor that might have survived childhood. Mary had wanted a church wedding, and, despite her own lack of church-going except for Christmas, she had stubbornly gotten it into her head that Rosie needed to be baptized C of E.

John had only been inside a church three times in the last ten years: at Sherlock’s funeral service, his wedding, and Rosie’s christening. He and religion had a passing acquaintance; a civil nod; not the sneering dismissal of Sherlock, but more that he and religion didn’t move in the same
circles. So while he was decidedly unimpressed by any Catholic motives that the original Gunpowder Plot conspirators might have carried, and as a semi-cynical Royalist he definitely disapproved of the notion of blowing up a member of the Royal Family, November 5th just didn’t have a particularly contemporary meaning for him. Bonfire Night, when he’d been young, had been one of those occasions when it was permissible for him to run wild with his mates, spirits as high as the sparks that showered the cold night sky. As an adult it hadn’t honestly meant much, and by the time he returned from Afghanistan it seemed like one of those empty, foolish things civilians indulged in with such enthusiasm.

Being trapped in a burning pyre by Magnussen’s heavies and nearly smoked alive had been something he’d survived, gone on to joke about in a rakish way and ultimately avoided thinking about whenever possible. By the time the next year rolled around he had bigger problems, not the least of which what to do about his lying wife, and he’d been grateful that Sherlock dragged him along on a case to Spain. A pointless excursion, as it had turned out, and it wasn’t until several years later, when John realized he had spent nearly every November 5th since with Sherlock, away from any celebrations. He’d been quietly touched but convinced that it was unnecessary for him to be treated with kid gloves.

That was, until last year. He’d bundled up Rosie and taken her to the nearest community bonfire, intending on letting her have as normal a childhood as possible. There was so much he couldn’t give her; so much he couldn’t tell her until she was older—if even then—and he wanted a normal English childhood for her.

Sherlock had tailed them, a fact John was unaware of until, nerves already screaming, the first flaming branch was thrown and the dry heap crackled. He’d started sweating in the still, cold air; his grip around Rosie too tight. Trying to focus on her delighted ooohs as the branches succumbed to the flames, John had felt panic and nausea claw at him. When a young girl screamed with delight mixed with fear at the cracking of a branch and the sparks whirled upward, John had doubled-over as if he’d received a blow.

Suddenly Sherlock was there, taking a protesting Rosie from him and keeping a firm arm around John, guiding him away to the waiting cab. “How’d you know?” John had mumbled, still feeling uneven and lightheaded, as he sank to the seat.

“I know you, John,” Sherlock had said, taking his hand for a brief, comforting moment even as he bossily instructed the cab driver to negotiate the distance with care, as Rosie was not in a car seat. John had actually been grateful for the resulting argument that ended in the three of them being dumped unceremoniously on the pavement three block from whence they had started, and his head had steadied as the three of them walked the rest of the way home.

A year later, Sherlock’s presence was still as comforting. Rather than holding John’s hand, however, he was currently trying to pummel him. John was getting a bit tired—they’d been going for nearly an hour now—but his stamina was greatly improved from when they had begun months back. He’d taken lately to coming once a week and lifting weights, started skipping lifts when there were stairs, and, most delightfully, he’d been chasing after Sherlock Holmes for the last few months, swiving him in every quiet moment they could find.

Never mind the lines around his eyes or the gray in his hair, John was fairly certain he was going to live forever at this rate. He was in love with Sherlock Holmes, after all. The man had defied death once before; immortality didn’t seem so farfetched a notion.

“You’ve gotten too fleet of foot,” Sherlock grumbled, “I feel like I’m dancing with Fred Astaire.”
“How do you know who Fred Astaire is?”

“How do you know who Fred Astaire is?”

“Molly made me watch that Downtown Punk video.”

“Molly made me watch that Downtown Punk video.”

“Uptown Funk,” John laughed, dancing past and popping Sherlock lightly on the bum. “And that video is several years old…how long ago did she make you watch it?”

“Watch your hands, sir; my arse belongs to my boyfriend.”

“Watch your hands, sir; my arse belongs to my boyfriend.”

“Lucky man,” John breathed in his ear, wrapping him in a most unsportsmanlike bear hug from behind. “Let’s shower. I want to go check out this hotel you booked.”

“Lucky man,” John breathed in his ear, wrapping him in a most unsportsmanlike bear hug from behind. “Let’s shower. I want to go check out this hotel you booked.”

Dino grinned ear to ear as they exited the ring and headed for the locker rooms. He was almost as delighted as Angelo that they were a couple—“And about time, too,” as he’d told them several times. He’d taken to humming “That’s Amore” every time they were in his presence. John knew how he felt. He felt like humming a good deal of the time when in Sherlock’s presence.

“Hello,” Sherlock explained as they zoomed up in the lift. “Double glazed windows, well-constructed walls, state of the art sound system. We won’t be able to hear a thing. We can, however, see any fireworks over the river if you so wish.” They arrived at the Penthouse level and Sherlock used the keycard to open the lift doors.

“Bloody hell,” John breathed as they stepped into the suite. It was the image of every luxurious, expensive, beautifully appointed hotel room from any big budget movie. “Sherlock, love, you didn’t have to do this…this must have been expensive.”

“They’re on the Penthouse level, stories above the City,” Sherlock explained as they zoomed up in the lift. “Double glazed windows, well-constructed walls, state of the art sound system. We won’t be able to hear a thing. We can, however, see any fireworks over the river if you so wish.” They arrived at the Penthouse level and Sherlock used the keycard to open the lift doors.

“Bloody hell,” John breathed as they stepped into the suite. It was the image of every luxurious, expensive, beautifully appointed hotel room from any big budget movie. “Sherlock, love, you didn’t have to do this…this must have been expensive.”

“I have the money, John, and more importantly, I wanted to.” Sherlock set down their bags and joined John at the wall of windows, slipping his arms around him and resting his chin on his shoulder as they admired the lights of London spread out below them.

“I have the money, John, and more importantly, I wanted to.” Sherlock set down their bags and joined John at the wall of windows, slipping his arms around him and resting his chin on his shoulder as they admired the lights of London spread out below them.

“What if I expect this every year?” John joked.

“What if I expect this every year?” John joked.

“Why then, you shall have it…assuming we don’t have a case.”

He smiled and reached up to ruffle Sherlock’s hair, turned his head for a sweet kiss, “It wasn’t necessary for you to go to these lengths, but I appreciate it. This is gorgeous.”

They stood in silence for a while, holding one another and pointing out the outline of familiar sights.

“They’re on the Penthouse level, stories above the City,” Sherlock explained as they zoomed up in the lift. “Double glazed windows, well-constructed walls, state of the art sound system. We won’t be able to hear a thing. We can, however, see any fireworks over the river if you so wish.” They arrived at the Penthouse level and Sherlock used the keycard to open the lift doors.

“Right,” John said briskly, “I should call Molly before it gets any later. Make sure she’s still okay handling both Alex and Rosie.”

“Greg’s with her,” Sherlock pointed out.

“Greg’s with her,” Sherlock pointed out.

“I know, but I feel guilty…it seems like I’ve been pawning Rosie off on other people too often lately.”

“I know, but I feel guilty…it seems like I’ve been pawning Rosie off on other people too often lately.”

“She has a very active social life,” Sherlock agreed with a faint smile, “But I do believe she is enjoying it—you know she would object if it were not the case—and I don’t think we have
abused the good nature of our friends and family.”

“Maybe,” John sighed, and dialed Molly, who answered cheerfully and assured him they were having a lovely time and then put Rosie on, who demanded to talk with them both. It was some time before they got off the phone, and by then John was feeling less guilty about leaving Rosie with Molly. In the early days after Mary’s death, he had abused Molly’s good nature; and although she had never mentioned it, he was aware that she had made life so much easier for him in his grief and isolation than it might have been. He tried to extend her the same help and support, and to not ask too much of her.

They found a music dock next to the television, and John pulled up his music file, selection January on his mobile, setting it on repeat. “Dance with me?”

“This isn’t really a song to dance to,” Sherlock pointed out, but they moved into one another’s arms, finding a rhythm and swaying in one another’s embrace.

“I love this song,” John said on the second time, rubbing his cheek against Sherlock’s chest. He’d briefly fought a half-acknowledged instinct to allow himself annoyance and a feeling of emasculation at being the shorter partner but then abandoned it in favour of holding the man he loved.

“I wrote it for you,” Sherlock said in a low voice, fingers splayed low on John’s back, the other hand buried in his hair. “It’s my love for you, John. All the ways I’ve felt for you since we met.”

“This is us?” John asked in surprise, raising his head, “I—I knew I loved it, but I couldn’t have told you why.”

“Do you recall the day you cried? The day you saw Mary for the last time and you confessed yourself to being only human? The day I held you?”

“Of course,” John said around a lump in his throat, “That day is burned in my memory for more than one reason.”

“It was my birthday, and I told myself the only gift I needed was the return of your friendship. And it’s true, John, your friendship will always be important to me. But in the last several years it became very apparent to me that my feelings for you were deeper still in another way; every year, when you hugged me and wished me happy birthday, I knew that I wanted to be able to tell you how I felt. I didn’t think I would ever be able to do that—I didn’t think there was chance but I needed to tell you. So I composed this.”

“I’m glad we finally moved past our doubt enough to come together,” John told him tenderly, stroking his back, his neck, his face. He kissed him and they slowly stopped moving, standing still as the kiss deepened. “I love you, Sherlock.”

“I love you, John.”

“God,” John said on a smile, “I never get tired of hearing that.”

“Nor do I.” Sherlock rumbled, parting long enough to select another track and then enfold John once more in his arms. They danced a little, mostly just swaying in place, holding each other. John’s hands smoothed up and down his back, pressed him closer, and they shared a kiss, feet stilling once more.

“I have a surprise for you,” John whispered sometime later; they had shed their shoes and
were stretched out on the bed. “I have an idea for something I’d like to try, and I can’t think of
anyplace better than this. Stay right there for now.” He fondled Sherlock’s bum as he got up, going
to rummage in his bag. Setting the items he pulled out on the marble topped table near the window,
he moved a large, plush armchair until it was facing the windows, and pulled the drapes so they
could see more of the view.

“Almost done,” John promised, fetching a towel from the huge bathroom—where he had to
stop and stare at the sheer opulence, promising himself they would take a bath in the huge, jetted
tub—and going to drape it over the chair. He had plans for that chair.

*****

Sherlock rode John’s tongue, blissed out and forgetting to pay proper homage to John’s cock,
which was filling his mouth. He didn’t forget for long, and even as he wiggled his arse in John’s
face he gave a long suck, hands caressing John’s inner thighs, fingers slipping inside him. The full
scope of John’s plan had not yet been revealed, but he had deduced elements of it and he was
planning a surprise of his own.

Impatient, he tried to hurry John, who refused to stop teasing him. He wanted John inside
him now, not a half hour from now. But John was stubborn, and patient, and just mean enough to
make him wait whilst driving him crazy. “Greedy,” he heard John reprove, and spread his pucker
with his thumbs as he pressed his face between Sherlock’s cheeks, tongue darting in and out of his
fluttering hole.

“Now!” Sherlock demanded impatiently, tickling John’s prostate with one long finger and
jacking him with the other hand. “I’m horny, John—gah!” He clutched at John, back arching as he
tried to back himself deeper onto John’s agile tongue.

appreciate the enthusiasm, but I do still need to breathe.”

“You can breathe all you wish if you’d just fuck me,” Sherlock whinged, rubbing himself
against John’s chest. His lovely, lovely chest. He shifted so he could feel the difference in texture
between John’s smooth, unblemished skin and his scar tissue. He had a clearly insane but
biologically strong desire to mark John with his scent. Mine, he thought smugly.

Nuzzling his cheek quite sweetly against Sherlock’s, erm, cheek, John stroked Sherlock’s
hips and buttocks, “We have all night.”

“I want to come now…and later.”

“You will,” John said with sultry promise, and spread his legs a little more, allowing
Sherlock better access to his own fun zone. He licked and lapped at his arsehole and reached
between them, stroking his firm palm up and down Sherlock’s length, “Come for me now and I’ll
do a little dance for you. And then when you recover I’m going to sit you on my cock in that big
comfy chair and make you see stars.”

“You sound far too in control, John,” Sherlock repressed a shudder, “I want you begging for
me to fill you.”

“That—that’s now how the night’s going to go,” John stuttered, hips shifting as Sherlock
pulled his hand away and then returned with two fingers. “I have plans.”

“So do I.” Sherlock warned, sucking just a tiny bit too hard on John’s head and drawing a squeak from him. He smiled around his delicious mouthful; he liked taking John apart every bit as much as he liked being deconstructed to a quivering, needy mass of lust.

Those plans were slightly delayed as John took up the challenge and tantalized Sherlock’s prick with his hard hand while he ate him out. Sherlock tried to keep focused, but kept stopping his assault on John to cry out. The keen delight he experienced made it hard to concentrate. At last he was reduced to frantically licking at John’s shaft and rapidly and erratically finger fucking him as John’s hand moved faster and his tongue did ever more wicked things. What a spectacle they must make, Sherlock thought dimly, eagerly fucking John’s hand and then rocking back onto his tongue. John’s tongue wiggled deeply as he rapidly masturbated Sherlock and Sherlock arched and came hard, his fingers deep in John and his mouth falling away from John’s eager flesh as he let out a wailing yelp and spilled messily all over John’s body.

Spent, he let himself lie heavily on John, cheek on his groin, aware of the faint, irritating prickle of John’s closely shaved pubic hair against his face. Focusing properly, he ran his eyes over John’s length, which looked angry, blood-red. Right, he should probably return the favour.

“You can lie still for a moment,” John said in a tight voice, “I can wait.”

Selfishly, Sherlock relaxed, trying not to crush the smaller man, but not wanting to move from his present position. Presently, however, he became aware of the cooling stickiness of his ejaculate gluing him to John, the roughness of John’s pubic hair scratching his face in earnest now, and thought guiltily that John would probably at least wish to be somewhat less confined, particularly as he hadn’t yet achieved orgasm.

“I want to taste you in my mouth, John,” Sherlock purred deeply, moving sleekly as a cat down the length of John’s body, pressing open mouthed kisses to his legs. Shifting, he crawled back up the bed, facing John properly, and took him between his lips, savoring the way his lips had to stretch around John’s thickness. “Mmmm…” he hummed along his length, pulling slowly off with a pop, “You’re so salty…hard and randy…”

“Uhhnn…” John groaned as Sherlock sank down onto him, hollowing his cheeks.

Saliva dribbled from the sides of his mouth, and Sherlock sucked and licked and hummed his way happily through the slowest blow job he’d ever given John. Hard fingers clutched at his hair and John groaned, “God, sweetheart, please finish me.”

“Oh…are we in a hurry now?” Sherlock pulled off long enough to ask sweetly. He laughed evilly when John groaned and kissed just the tip, then ignored the straining member entirely to kiss John’s belly. “As hard as you try to rid yourself of it, you have the slightest bit of softness just here.” He shushed John, “You think I mind that? No. I love it, John. It’s not only a part of you, but it is so delectably soft and in contrast to the hardness of your chest and legs it makes me quite lightheaded with desire sometimes.”

Cursing softly, John gasped and sighed, seeking the heat of Sherlock’s mouth. Unable to deny either of them any longer, Sherlock let his lips glide down John’s shaft, rising back up to suck on the sensitive frenulum and then engulf him in his mouth again. He continued this until John clamped hard thighs around his head and in a desperate voice which attempted to be carefree, laughingly threatened to wrestle him into submission. Smirking at his triumph, Sherlock entered John abruptly with two fingers, his thumb massaging his lover’s perineum as he deep throated him. John wailed in a soft and broken voice and pressed hard against Sherlock’s throat, coming suddenly
and flooding his throat with cum.

An ignominious choking hadn’t been how he had pictured this going. Sherlock gagged and wheezed, trying to simultaneously swallow and clear his throat. A bit maliciously, he dragged his fingers from John, who squawked and dribbled cum on his hip. “Sorry,” he panted, realizing he’d nearly caused his boyfriend to aspirate on semen, “I lost control for a moment.”

Busy hacking, Sherlock glared but waved away John’s alarmed lunge for him; in the bathroom he hung over the sink coughing until his throat had cleared and the urge to gag had passed. Rinsing his mouth with water he snorted. It had been a bit funny.

John clearly didn’t think so. He was sitting on the edge of the bed, looking guilty and miserable. “Are you okay? Jesus, I’m sorry. I’m not normally so selfish.”

“I’m fine,” Sherlock assured him with a faint rasp. He cleared his throat, “It was done in the heat of the moment, John, and I refuse to allow you to beat yourself up over it as I see you are prepared to do.” He went to investigate the full size refrigerator, which had been stocked to his specifications. “I need a drink.”

He poured them both glasses of orange juice and carried them to the bed, urging John to scoot over. “Here,” he instructed, handing one of the glasses to John. “Drink this and do cease looking as if you killed me.”

It didn’t take too long before John was able to smile about it. Sherlock finished his juice and demanded he quit brooding and focus on him. With a bit of bratty posturing he soon had John’s mind firmly on other things. They wiped down with flannels and curled up under the fluffy duvet, turning on the telly and arguing happily over what to watch. Halfway through their compromise on some ridiculous scripted forensic program—which Sherlock kept mocking—John finally shut him up by diving under the covers and proceeding to tease him into a randy state of eagerness. “Now,” John instructed cheekily, sauntering over to the chair and holding up his items, “Are you ready for a bit of fun?”

“How about?” Sherlock countered, extracting his surprise from within the depths of his own bag.

“What’s that?” They asked simultaneously.

“Prostate stimulator,” Sherlock answered, “I gathered you intended on topping me in that chair and I wanted to make sure you were enjoying the full experience.”

“Very generous of you,” John grinned, beckoning him with a crooked finger. “I do indeed want to sit in that chair and look out at the city and screw you slowly, until you’re boneless in my lap. I thought this would be a fun little addition.”

Sherlock examined it; it was a pale pinkish peach, slippery and soft and shaped vaguely like a two headed penis. “What on earth does it do?”

“Fill it with lots of nice lube,” John explained, demonstrating, “and then you slide your dick inside and wank with it.” He smiled, “It’s fucking amazing. I’ve used one quite a bit over the last couple of years. Makes solo fun loads more fun, I can tell you.” He turned it, “It’s double ended, twat or arse.”

“Not as fun as the real thing,” Sherlock scoffed.

“It comes pretty close. Try it and see for yourself.”
“You first,” Sherlock smirked. John rather lost the thread when Sherlock bent him over the chair and slowly introduced the stimulator. “It has settings,” Sherlock whispered in John’s ear, keeping him bent over, breath hot on his neck, clicking the first, lowest setting on. John whimpered and rubbed his arse against Sherlock’s hand. “Oh, yes…I thought you’d like it.”

“Bloody hell,” John groaned, glad he’d already sheathed himself, “hurry up and climb on my cock, angel, I’m not sure I’ll last long with that inside me.”

Pleased with himself, Sherlock waited until John was seated before he turned his back to John, straddled his legs and lowered himself, trusting John to line them up. Despite the preparation he lost his breath as John entered him, overwhelmed by the flood of sensation. “Uhhhh,” he moaned, relishing the stretch, and rocked himself on John’s erection. “Oh, just there…yes.”

“But wait, there’s more,” John laughed softly in his ear, reaching around Sherlock’s lean middle and brandishing the flesh tube—the, the, what had John called it? Oh yes, the pocket-sized stroker. Silly name and definitely not going to, ohhhhh… “Oohhh, John…”

“Yeah?” John sounded a bit rough, and he was moving in tiny pulses inside Sherlock, who was torn between the differing but both exquisitely good sensations. “You like that, my love?”

“Verrrrry much,” Sherlock groaned, head falling back on John’s shoulder, he stroked himself with the toy, already feeling his orgasm appear on the horizon. Fumbling, he found the controller to the stimulator and clicked it up a setting.

“Ohhhh…” John groaned in turn, thrusting up into Sherlock, “Bloody hell, love, that feels—”

Sherlock groaned with him, trying to press down on John’s thick cock as his hand moved in long, slow pulls. The inside of the clever, clever little toy was so…what was the word? Tactile, snug…delicious…oh, oh, oh! Um…sensitive…no, no that was him. It was, it was—

“Fuck!” John, spurred on by the slip of Sherlock’s fingers on the controller which turned the toy up higher still, gripped the younger man’s hips hard and surged up into him. “Fuck, yes, sweetheart…God…yes…”

“You feel so good,” Sherlock whimpered, head flung back, throat arched as he ground himself on John’s lap and squeezed the stroker harder. He was almost there…almost there… “You fill me up so…so…oh, John! OH GOD!”

Grunting hard and low, John jerked when Sherlock accidentally turned the egg shaped stimulator up all the way and he held Sherlock down hard and fucked him. Sherlock found he was chanting fuck over and over as John bottomed out inside him, grinding his hips in aborted circles; only a death grip on the stroker kept it from flying out of his rapidly moving hand. “Fuck me harder,” he hissed rather angrily, and snarled as John laughed, a sound which was cut off as he came, his arse clenching and fluttering around John. Groaning, Sherlock spilled inside the glorious little toy, his arse filled with John, his senses surrounded by John’s heat, his smell, his presence.

John held him tightly to his lap with one arm banded across his hips, and the other arm came up, turning his head so he could seek Sherlock’s slack mouth. Trembling with the aftershocks of his release, Sherlock let his head loll against John, haze slowly lifting as John grunted and thrust, holding Sherlock down as he pushed up into him. He wanted to spur him on with his words but he was drifting on a tide of bliss and could only hum and sigh as John ground against him and finally came. It seemed to go on forever, John groaning and swearing, and Sherlock suddenly realized he hadn’t turned the toy off. He did it and John shook his way to stillness, quivers rippling his belly
against Sherlock’s back.

It took some time before either of them felt capable of moving. Feeling as fragile and stiff as an old man, Sherlock eased himself off of John’s lap, staggering when he got to his feet. John summoned the energy to give his bum a lusty slap, which earned him a dark glower.

“I drooled on myself,” John laughed in disgust, wiping at his mouth. “I felt like I was being electrocuted there at the end. I just kept coming and coming, those vibrations going off in my arse like rockets. Christ that thing ought to come with a warning.”

“Shall it go into our rotation?” Sherlock asked slyly, as John awkwardly pulled it out, making a most interesting face as he did so.

“Along with the boots…” John’s face was beatific, “God, those boots and this little beauty… can you imagine? I could light up all of London with the sexual energy it would produce.”

“Deal with this, would you John?” Sherlock tossed the cum-filled toy, like some kind of filthy éclair, at John, who fumbled to catch it automatically, and then exclaimed indignantly, “Hey!”

“Only if you deal with this,” John countered, brandishing the egg-shaped stimulator on its cord. “Why should I clean up all the toys?”

“Because you’re my assistant.”

“Oh that’s it--!” John tackled Sherlock, tacking him down on the bed with a bounce that threatened to send them onto the floor. A most undignified tussle ensued, ending with Sherlock arse up in the air, cheek pressed against the cushion, one arm bent behind him. He was annoyed at John for besting him and yet slightly turned on. Alright, more than slightly.

“Horny fucker,” John teased, watching as Sherlock waved his arse at him. “Trying to seduce me to compliance with that sweet bum of yours.” He leaned over, nipped Sherlock’s earlobe, “Well too bad…now you’re cleaning both toys.” Hopping up with a slight crack of his knee, he slapped Sherlock cheerfully on the arse with a sharp snap of his hand, and dropped the toys on the table.

“I’m having a bath.”

Sherlock flounced on the sofa, turning over and pouting brooding. Sometimes John ignored his p--brooding and sometimes he laughed at it, and once or twice he had declared it stupidly adorable and come back and kissed him until they forgot why Sherlock had found it necessary to brood in the first place.

John, apparently in fine spirits, hopped lightly and slapped both hands on the door lintel as he passed into the en suite. “I think I earned a soak in this gorgeous swimming pool they call a bathtub.” He struck a pose, which Sherlock watched hungrily, “Someone could come join me if they stop pouting and finished their chores.” He disappeared from Sherlock’s line of sight, and the sound of running water muffled his next words, “Then we could have a nice soak and sip champagne and maybe after I’d give that same accommodating someone a massage all over his lovely, creamy body.”

Waiting two minutes so he didn’t appear to be too eager, Sherlock finally stood up and sighed loudly, then stomped into the bathroom, and silently but forcefully cleaned the toys. He sat them on a folded flannel on the counter and turned toward the tub.
“Ah, ah, ah!” John reproved playfully, floating happily in the bubbles, “What about the champagne?”

“John…” Sherlock growled warningly.

“I would dearly love some delicious, cold, bubbly champagne to sip in between kisses,” John flirted shamelessly. Sherlock turned on his heel and returned with the bottle and two flutes. He set the flutes on the broad edge of the tub and ripped off the foil and untwisted the wire, impatiently working the cork loose.

“Ah,” John said in satisfaction, as the cork popped out of the bottle and the champagne foamed over. Sherlock, suddenly mischievous, bypassed the flutes and aimed the bottle at John’s mouth. “Mmm,” John hummed, obligingly wrapping his slips around the bottle and sucking the foam into his mouth. He met Sherlock’s eyes and fellated the bottle, pulling away slowly and licking his lips.

“Uh,” Sherlock said brilliantly, mind derailed by John’s seductive antics.

“I do love it when the cork blows,” John said, leaning back and rubbing his chest lazily. He smiled the smile Sherlock had seen him use with countless women in the past, when he was trying to pull, “That moment when all the pressure is released and the foam spews out wildly.” He licked his lips, “If you’re lucky you get to taste the first, sweet, heady drop.”

Recklessly setting the bottle down, Sherlock climbed hastily into the bath, sloshing water, and knelt on John’s lap, shutting him up with a kiss. John giggled against his mouth and Sherlock resisted it for a minute but then he snickered and they hugged each other, laughing.

“Really, John,” Sherlock finally mocked gently, pouring them both glasses, “You’re going to seduce me with poorly phrased innuendo?”

“Not that I need to seduce you,” John reminded him, running a hand up Sherlock’s thigh and cradling his soft penis in his hand, “But don’t even try and pretend like it didn’t work.”

“That certainly won’t work,” Sherlock said with a nod toward his groin, “At least not for some time. I cannot possibly attain an erection again anytime soon.”

“Did I ever tell you I can hold my breath underwater for a really long time?” John asked, blowing his cheeks up comically and pretending to dive under the water. He popped back up and leaned back, drawing Sherlock to him; the tub was almost long enough that Sherlock could float full length. As it was, he anchored them with his feet against the far end and floated with one arm around John and a champagne flute held above the water in his other hand.

“I don’t need you hard and ready, sweetheart,” John sighed, setting down his glass and rubbing his hand affectionately over Sherlock’s chest, fingers trailing over the scar from his gunshot wound. “The sex is lovely, better than that, but I really am running out of words to properly describe it…no, great as the sex is, I don’t need it all the time. This, you and me, this is what I need.”

“I feel the same,” Sherlock agreed, resting his cheek against John’s hair and smiling. “Well, you and a good mystery.”

“And Rosie.”

“And Rosie.”
“And some greasy Chinese…and Bond nights…”

“Mystery honey and, and quiet nights reading stories to Watson…”


Life, Sherlock thought, was pretty wonderful. And so much richer and much vaster than the stunted version he had lived before this man entered his.

******

“Myc,” Greg whispered, gesturing at the phone as he rose from the sofa, and stepped carefully over the sprawl of limbs on the nest of blankets in front of them. After a very exciting bonfire experience, they had bought hot cocoa from a stall and walked a bit, enjoying the crowds and admiring the fireworks some people had purchased. Molly loved Bonfire Night and was happy to have Rosie along with them; the little girl loved every minute of it and she and Alex were quiet and tractable by the time the four of them returned to Molly’s.

Having picked up a pizza on the way, they settled the kids in front of the telly and watched movies and chatted about the night as they ate. Greg cleaned up and brought them both more beers and they turned the sound down as the children fell asleep slowly, reluctant to give up their exciting night. In the quiet dark of the room, lit only by the glow of the television and the light over the sink coming from the kitchen, they chatted easily.

They’d ended up stretched out on the long, low slung sofa, heads on opposite ends; Molly tucked her perpetually cold toes into his underarm and he muffled a yelp and they giggled. “Are you trying to freeze me to death, woman? Those must be the coldest toes in Great Britain!”

“You’re so nice and hot though,” Molly said plaintively, trying to squirm her feet back into the warm cave of his armpit. He grabbed her ankles and tickled her, and she’d immediately given up.

“You’re damn right I’m hot,” Greg had said, waggling his eyebrows like Groucho Marx. “Many a woman has tried to breech the sanctity of my armpits, drawn by my incredible hotness.”

It was very much how they got along now, friendship and mild flirting and a good dash of silliness. Mycroft was always slow to start when he joined them, but in their presence he loosened the rigid hold he kept over his public persona and softened into a man it would be very easy to imagine herself loving.

With Greg’s body heat gone Molly shivered and pulled the chenille throw blanket down over her, turning on her side and watching the old film which was playing almost on silent. She recognized a young Gregory Peck but wasn’t sure who the other man was. Absently she watched the men slowly fall asleep on a rocking train and then wake to find a pretty blonde sleeping on the seat opposite, her feet on the seat between them.

She turned up the sound and smiled along with the rapid banter. Greg returned and sat down, patting her feet through the blanket, “Sorry, Myc was apologizing profusely for missing the evening.”

“But silly man,” Molly laughed, “He’d have hated being surrounded by all the people,” Her
imitation of his was good enough to make Greg chuckle wickedly, “…and can you imagine the headache for his security detail with all those crowds?”

“He does fuss over not being able to keep his obligations,” Greg sighed, “I told him numerous times, I understand, and I don’t take it personally. I’ve had to cancel on him last minute a time or two.”

“He was missed,” Molly smiled, nudging him with her foot, “I hope you told him that Alex and Rosie both asked after him.”

“I did,” Greg assured her, standing and crouching next to the sofa. He tucked her hair behind her ear, “He said to tell the children he would make it up to them, and he asked me to give you a kiss.” He leaned over her, surrounding her with his arm, and kissed her gently on the cheek. For just a moment she wanted to turn her head and fit her lips to his. His hand came down and rested lightly on her back and Greg pressed his forehead to her temple. After a moment he stood up and resumed his seat at the end of the sofa.

But he didn’t lie down cozily with her, he sat on his cushion, absently toying with the loose end of her sock and watching the screen. Molly sat up, curling her legs up and turned up the sound. After a while they relaxed and gravitated unconsciously toward one another, happy to be touching, neither entirely aware that Molly had curled up at his side and he’d put his arm around her.

“Ironic,” Greg said, as they watched the blonde propose a “gentlemen’s agreement” with her two male compatriots, both of whom was in love with her and wanted an exclusive relationship; the jealousy was straining their friendship. Instead she convinced them to try a platonic arrangement. “Out of all the awkward dynamics in all the world, you hadda walk inta mine,” Greg paraphrased in a terrible Bogart impression.

“They’re not wanting a threesome,” Molly said with a dry mouth, “They just want her for themselves.”

“How greedy,” Greg teased, giving her a squeeze. “I bet you anything, by the end of this movie she’ll be giving them both the wink.”

“Men,” Molly said gamely, “All you think of is sex. I wager you five quid you’re wrong.”

“You’re on,” Greg agreed, shaking her hand, as the characters on screen came to an agreement. “How shall I spend my money…?”

*****

“Mummy and Father are petitioning hard for the family to gather at The Cottage for Christmas,” Mycroft informed Sherlock, leaning on his umbrella. He studied his Oxfords, looking gloomier than usual.

“Too bad. I have no intention of subjecting John to an entire weekend trapped in the countryside with Mummy’s gentle-as-a-brick hints of marriage.”

“It would surely be better than the year you drugged everyone before being arrested for murder,” Mycroft reminded him.
“Hmm,” Sherlock said skeptically.

“Less talk of murder, if you please,” John said in annoyance, nodding up the stairs, where Rosie was primping for her date with Mycroft and Greg. He stopped behind Sherlock’s chair, hands massaging his shoulders anxiously, “Besides, that’s hardly a good memory or a matter for joking, even for you two.”

“Sorry, John,” Sherlock said contritely, shooting a glare at Mycroft, who had started it.

“Yes, of course, my apologies, Doctor Watson.” Mycroft turned, smiling, cold annoyance dissipating, “Ah, fair Rosamunde! How very pretty you look my dear.” He took her hand, bowed in a very courtly fashion and kissed her tiny knuckles, “You will take away Gregory’s breath with your beauty.”

She smiled from ear to ear, looking unusually demure, “Thank you, Uncle Mycroft. I like your suit.”

He stage whispered, “Do you really? It’s a surprise for Greg. I’m glad to know you approve… I was a bit nervous about trying out a new look.”

Nodding decisively Rosie took his hand, “It’s very nice. It looks like Pop’s clothes, only with a tie.”

Sherlock sniffed, admitting that his brother’s suit was much more sleek and modern than his usual attire, being single breasted, with one button, and coordinating rather nicely with the dark blue shirt he’d paired it with, but it certainly was not up to his standards. And only Mycroft would be enough of a dandy to wear a suit in such a bold shade of blue. With a fuchsia silk tie none the less. Ties just dangled in experiments and offered handy garrotes for assassins. Although all those ties from grateful clients had offered John a fine selection of restraints the other evening…he was looking forward to returning the favour. Tonight would seem to be an excellent opportunity as Watson would be occupied with her date.

Impatiently Sherlock hurried the pair out of the flat, locking the door firmly and overriding John’s exasperated objections to his perceived rudeness by the simple expedient of kissing him silent. No time to waste, there was an experiment to begin.

******

“That wasn’t so bad, was it?” John asked mildly, tugging off his jumper. Sherlock had already hurried out of his clothes and into his favorite pyjamas and his scarlet dressing gown and was pacing the flat. Rosie had remained downstairs telling Mrs. Hudson about their excursion.

“Christmas music, John! They were playing it incessantly…and it is barely the middle of November!”

“They’ve had decorations for sale since last month,” John snorted, disappearing into the kitchen to plug in the kettle. “Which you would know if you ever went to the shops.”

“I went just last week!”

“And yet you forgot the milk—again.”
“Are you going to twit me about that forever?”

“Are you ever going to remember the bloody milk?” John clattered about—quite unnecessarily, in Sherlock’s opinion—muttering to himself.

“I have a mind built for higher things, John.”

The sound of definitely snarky muttering was barely audible over the sound of John tearing open a package. The muttering became muffled and John came out, mouth full of Jaffa cake, and shoved one in Sherlock’s face, swallowing hastily to say, “Would you eat something? I think your blood sugar is low…you’ve been tetchy all morning and it’s making me feel a distinct urge to throttle you.”

“I’m not hungry,” Sherlock objected, only to be betrayed by his stomach rumbling noisily. He scowled as John tried to push the cake against his lips. “M nt ngry!”

“Open those plump lips, and take a nibble,” John teased, “Mmm, yummy, yummy Jaffa cakes…”

“Jn,” Sherlock objected, lips sternly pressed together, refusing to be swayed.

“Just a bite or two. It’s good, see?” John took a bite, showering crumbs on Sherlock, “Mmm….”

“I shan’t,” Sherlock said quickly, and closed his mouth again.

“I don’t know why you refuse to eat, especially when you’re hungry!” John drew away, exasperated, and flopped in his chair. “Hard-headed, contrary…”

“I’m right here, John. I can hear you.”

“Good.” John angrily ate his Jaffa cake and licked his fingers. “Let me get all fat from eating your share of the sweets.” The kettle clicked and he moved into the kitchen. “Tea? Or are you abstaining from that as well?”

“Of course I want tea.” Tea wouldn’t add weight. “Black, no sugar.”

John stuck an incredulous head out of the kitchen, “You want what?”

“Black, no sugar,” Sherlock said airly.

“Sherlock…are you, by any chance…on a diet?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, John.” Shut up, John.

“Because you’re refusing to eat—even worse than you ever did in the past, despite the fact that you’re not on a case—and now you want black tea, no sugar…Sherlock, you love milky tea with sugar!”

He did. He really, really did. “I’m not hungry, and I just feel like a change.” A change which was wholly necessary, as he had put on two pounds this year alone.

“You don’t like change,” John said slowly, sitting down on the edge of the cushion next to Sherlock’s hip. “You don’t like to be bored, certainly, but you’re actually quite the creature of habit. So again…are you on a diet? And for God’s sake, why?”
“I like to be fleet of foot,” Sherlock muttered.

“You’re very fleet.”

“You danced around me like I was a maypole in the ring the other day,” Sherlock grumbled, face hot. He would have flounced onto his side facing the back of the sofa, but John was sitting on his dressing gown. “Last week you patted my stomach and told me ‘welcome to the club.’”

John’s expression lightened and he rubbed a hand over his mouth, doing an extremely poor job of hiding his smile. “Is that all?”

“I refuse to be fat, John! Mycroft is the fat one!” He huffed, “Domesticity is slowing me down.”

John dropped his hand and leaned over, trying to kiss Sherlock, who turned his head. John kissed him on the cheek instead. “You’re mad, you know that? Absolutely bonkers. You’re not fat, you berk, you’re still all long, lean muscle. Hardly seems fair that you assured me you like my soft bits and yet you’re on a hunger strike because you’ve gone a bit soft yourself. You just have a tiny bit of softness on your belly—which is lovely, by the way—and I find it adorable and a bit comforting, to be honest.”

Sherlock scoffed, “No one finds me adorable.”

“I do,” John confessed, crowding onto the edge of the sofa and plastering himself to Sherlock. He kissed his neck and Sherlock tried not to shiver. He would not give in. John was just confusing him, telling him one thing when clearly—

“You’re a real knob, sometimes, but you’re also surprisingly sweet and adorable…” John tickled Sherlock’s stomach lightly, then slipped his hand under his t-shirt and splayed his warm palm over his bare skin, “This? This is just a faint softness, something that happens to the best of us. Unless you’re prepared to start doing sit-ups and crunches, you’re going to have a wee bit of give right there.”

“Fat, you mean.”

“Just natural middle-aged pudge, if that,” John scoffed. He tugged his button down out of his trousers and raised his shirt, poking his belly out exaggeratedly and patting it, “Look at me! I’ve got a bit of podge. Can’t shift it, no matter what I do. But I like my meals, the occasional pint…a Jaffa cake or two…so I accept it.”

“I’m not middle-aged.”

“You’re a twelve year old, terrorizing London in the guise of a forty-year old man,” John laughed, going back to stroking Sherlock’s belly. It felt quite nice, and he certainly didn’t seem to be put off by it. Sherlock wriggled a little, turning just enough so that John could kiss him if he so desired. It seemed that he did, nibbling softly on his lips and petting his belly happily, and Sherlock decided that perhaps his soft belly wasn’t such a bad thing. He put a hand tentatively on John’s own very sexy stomach and gave it a bit of a squeeze, which met with an approving purr.

Yes, perhaps growing older with John was going to be alright. More than alright, actually.
The movie Molly and Greg watch is Ernst Lubitsch's 1933 pre-Code film, Design for Living, based on the Noel Coward play; starring Miriam Hopkins, Gregory Peck and Fredric March as rather Bohemian young people living in France and falling in love. I love it, but I shan't spoil the ending by revealing who won the bet, Molly or Greg, in case you ever have the opportunity to watch it.
December

Chapter Summary

December is a busy, happy, sometimes stressful month for our little gang. They deal with carol singers, an influx of Christmas cheer, colds, fights, winter carnivals and ice skating. Despite a few dark moments of reflection for the Holmes boys, their lives are both in good places and they're set for a happy Christmas with their loves. Even if said loves basically have to drag them to The Cottage to enjoy it.

Chapter Notes

We're approaching the end of our tale; there will be a chapter devoted to Christmas, and then an epilogue. Thank you everyone who has stuck with me so far, and greetings to any new readers who come along!

“I hate carol singers,” Sherlock muttered, flopping onto the sofa dramatically. He was in a right mood; Rosie had requested that they watch *Nativity 3: Dude Where’s My Donkey?!* and to be perfectly frank, John himself could cheerfully run amok on a murder spree at this point. Sherlock wasn’t the only one who could sulk. Only difference being, he was the oldest, it was his daughter and he had to be adult and reasonable and endure the sodding movie while pausing it every so often so the two of them could troupe downstairs and join Mrs. Hudson in listening to the carol singers.

“They’ve started early this year,” was all John said. He wondered if he could get away with ear plugs. The singers weren’t so bad—alright, some of them actually were—but the movie was in danger of turning his remaining brain cells into goo. John loved Christmas, but Rosie loved Christmas; and he loved that about her but his enthusiasm was beginning to wane. Resigning himself to a sulky boyfriend and a terrible movie, John made another round of cocoa.

“Don’t you like Christmas, Pop?” Rosie asked plaintively, employing her biggest puppy dog eyes. She slipped her hand in his and he glanced at her, sighing, then sighed more deeply still and sat up, letting her climb on his lap.

“Christmas is fine,” he said grudgingly, “but this movie is atrocious and in danger of destroying all cognitive thinking, rendering us drooling imbeciles, capable of little more than humming “Good King Wenceslas” and sucking on peppermint rock.”

“We can watch something else,” Rosie appeased him, patting his arm as if he were a drooling imbecile. John, coming into the room, snorted and snickered under his breath. Rosie always managed to nicely put Sherlock in his place; Mary would have been proud.

“Yes, Sherlock, why don’t you tell the four year old you don’t have the patience to sit through her movie choice?” John needled in a sweet tone, locked eyes with his boyfriend over Rosie’s head. “Never mind that you made us both sit through that documentary on bees and colony collapse.”
“That was very inter’sting,” Rosie objected, “I like bees.”

“I like bees, too,” Sherlock piped up, indignant, “and we all learned something, didn’t we?” The two of them frowned at him in disappointment.

“The bees were very nice,” John said hastily, passing out cocoa all around.

“He got two!” Lip poking out in the beginning of a pout, Rosie pointed at Sherlock’s mug, which sported two peppermint sticks.

“He needs extra sweetening,” John whispered loudly, “Don’t you think he’s in a bit of a mood?”

“He’s just bein’ Pop,” Rosie said practically. Sherlock smirked triumphantly.

“What she means is,” John leaned in to murmur in his ear, “You’re always a knob.”

Sherlock glared at him and sucked ferociously on his peppermint rock. John chuckled and settled in to endure the rest of the dreadful movie. Once it was over he was going to pick the next one, something nice and classic and Christmassy like A Christmas Carol, or maybe A Christmas Miracle. In the meantime, he had his cocoa and his loves and—oh, hold on, there went the doorbell—more carol singers.

“I’m ripping that thing out,” he heard Sherlock mutter darkly as Rosie flew to the door, John hurrying along behind her.

“Don’t you dare,” John hissed, sticking his head back in the flat, “Not for another hour anyway.”

******

“I thought I was a knob?” Sherlock refused to soften into John’s embrace.

“Mmm,” John hummed, nuzzling his nose against Sherlock’s spine and rubbing his belly happily, “Yeah, but you’re my knob.” He grinned when he detected a hastily swallowed laugh. “Aren’t you, sweetheart?”

They were standing in the doorway to what had officially become their bedroom—they had plans in the New Year to renovate John’s old bedroom into Rosie’s “big girl” room and turn her former-box-room bedroom into a play room for her—and John had his arms wrapped octopus-like around Sherlock’s frame. “Hrmph,” was all the reply he got, but since the other man didn’t extract himself, John went on rubbing his belly and kissing his back. He was overflowing with affection, even more so than usual. “I love you, lack of proper Christmas spirit and all.”

Sherlock’s hand covered his and his other hand reached back and snugged John to him. He brought their joined hands up to his mouth and kissed John’s knuckles, “No proper Christmas spirit, hmm?” He reached out and turned on the light and John’s breath was arrested. Instead of the overhead light coming on, strings of previously unseen fairy lights glowed softly to life bathing the room in that soft magical glow that John loved as much as he had when he was a boy.

“Love…”
“You must have told me at least four times in the last week how much you wanted to make love in the lights from the Christmas tree.” Sherlock’s voice was smug. “But since you were worried Watson might come downstairs and get an eyeful of something more than presents under the tree, I did this.”

“This is brilliant!” John stepped into the room and took it all in, then turned and hugged his boyfriend enthusiastically, “I can’t believe you did this, angel!”

Sherlock kissed him breathless and then pulled back enough to say, “I do have some romantic impulses, John.”

“I didn’t mean to imply you don’t,” John said, vowing not to tease Sherlock too much; he didn’t want him to get defensive about expressing his emotions, or feel that John didn’t appreciate the gestures he did make. “You’re lovely and I love you.”

“I love you as well, even if you are disgustingly awash in the Christmas spirit.” Sherlock mocked gently, unbuttoning John’s shirt. “I thought you would like this—particularly as your knee and both our backs would thank us for making love on the bed like civilized adults instead of on the rug.”

“Practical and romantic…how did I get so lucky?” John asked, returning the favour. They efficiently stripped and dealt with their dirty laundry; some of the urgency had dissipated from the early days. They could take their time now. Sliding into the cool sheets, John shivered, and then shivered again when Sherlock crawled in after him and covered him, sinking into kisses that still had the power to deliciously derail John’s thoughts. “I want you inside me tonight,” John murmured, scratching Sherlock’s scalp and relishing the resulting shivers. “Nice and deep and slow…how does that sound, hmm?”

“As if you read my mind, John,” Sherlock said, eyes closed as he leaned into John’s hands. He lowered his head and kissed the scar on John’s shoulder, stroking his hand down John’s chest and circling his hip in one hand. He urged John’s leg up over his hip, turning onto his side and smiling that bloody gorgeous, smug, pleased-with-himself-and-the-situation-in-general smile that John loved; he hooked his muscular leg behind Sherlock’s thigh and pulled him closer, so their growing erections came into contact. He lazily brushed his fingers over John’s pucker, kissing and nibbling at his lips, with occasional forays to his ear and neck; John was rocking into him slowly, hands mapping Sherlock’s chest, arms and back. John sighed happily as Sherlock delicately breeched him, and a sigh turned into an indrawn breath when he slid his cock over John’s as his finger began a steady rhythm. “Yes, love, oh yes…”

They kissed, aware there was plenty of time to enjoy themselves. John pressed his forehead to Sherlock’s shoulder and rode his fingers, feeling the growing spiral of desire in his core. As wild an edge as they had teetered in the beginning of their physical relationship, and as deeply sexy and outright filthy as things between them had gotten at times, John thought he loved this even more. They were an established couple, with rhythms and routines and the lazy perfection between them of what they each loved and how to arouse one another best. Routine might be the word, but it never felt less than inspired.

Rather than take them both in hand the way the impatient part of him wanted, John caressed Sherlock’s delightful bottom, palming and squeezing his cheeks. Teasingly he drew a finger over the cleft of his cheeks, drawing ever closer, until he circled and pressed and slowly massaged his way inside. Sherlock lost the pattern of his breathing and the steady tease of his own stroking, and John pressed their foreheads together as they locked eyes and slowly synchronized their motions. “I
am so ready for you, sweetheart.”

“I want you on your back, please,” Sherlock said in a low voice, kissing John and sliding his fingers free. He reached for the lube— they really needed another bottle—and a condom. “I want to be pressed against every inch of you, honey, face to face and within reach when I want a kiss.”

“Happily,” John sighed, reaching for his lover as he rolled back to him and took him in his arms. He spread his legs and guided Sherlock to his entrance; the intensity of holding one another’s eyes in this moment was sexier by far than most of the shagging he’d done in his hedonistic younger days. There was definitely something to be said for being madly fucking in love with the man who was presently splitting your arse with his cock and whispering your name with that devastating little hitch in his voice. “I love it when you call me honey,” John confessed, once he was able to breathe properly. He settled in, wrapping one arm around Sherlock’s neck and the other around his waist.

“I find endearments difficult to employ,” Sherlock murmured, “But I do feel each one when you call me a sweet name, John. I try to reciprocate but I’m not always able to change a lifetime of habit.”

“You never have to do anything you don’t want with me,” John assured him, drawing him down for another kiss. “But I do love it when you make the effort. It’s all the sweeter for being rare.”

“And I do love rare honey,” Sherlock teased, returning the kiss.

“Making puns now? How far the mighty have fallen!”

Tongues tangling lazily, they settled into the mattress, Sherlock slowly sinking fully into John’s body. Finally he began a minute rocking, more of a tease than anything else. John tightened around him and smiled at Sherlock’s breathy “oh!” as he stilled, head dropping between his shoulders. John squeezed the back of his neck, whispered in his ear, “I know…it gets better every time…”

“It does, John…I keep waiting for it to become routine, but it never is.” Sherlock raised his head and kissed John with lush strokes of his tongue. He pulled back, and then pushed back inside John, moving with a smooth rhythm that kept both their fires stoked. It was a slow, easy, delicious love making perfect for a quiet night in bed with the man you loved, made more perfect still by the fairy lights magical glow, the warmth of their bed on a cold night.

Eventually Sherlock’s movements became slightly erratic, a little more forceful, and he hooked John’s knee over his arm and changed the angle, hitting his prostate with intent. Unable to speak, John threw his head back, panting, and came in leg-shaking waves, fingers digging tightly into Sherlock’s back. Sherlock cried out softly, wordlessly, and pumped into John with quick, urgent movements of his hips, dropping his leg and bracing both hands on the mattress as he chased his release. John slid his hand firmly down Sherlock’s spine to the small of his back and massaged his sacral nerve, relishing Sherlock’s helpless moaning. When he came it hit him hard and suddenly, and he let out a low, guttural, open-mouthed groan, hips pressing John into the mattress as he came.

Happily, John hugged and snuggled Sherlock as he sprawled on top of him, head on his shoulder. After a bit he collected himself and moved to one side, letting John pull him close. He was sliding towards sleep but murmured when John went to sit up, “Where are you going?”

“Oh honey, just going to turn off the lights and turn on my nightlight.”
“Leave them on instead,” Sherlock suggested, drawing him back with one long arm. “They’re pretty.”

Content, the two men lay in one another’s arms, eyes slowly closing as they enjoyed the pastel lights washing them in a distinctly beautiful light. “Your skin in these lights,” John said on a yawn, “It’s too lovely…”

“You’re the lovely one,” Sherlock mumbled, already stealing the duvet, the devious sweetheart, “My lovely John.”

John kissed his cheek and fumbled for his own blanket, tucking himself up and rolling back up against the blanket burrito that was his boyfriend.

******

“Oooh! Pretty! Can I have this in my room?” Rosie’s excited voice penetrated John’s consciousness and he opened a bleary eye.

“Shh, you’ll wake Pop,” he whispered, trying to wake up properly, groping about; hoping that their nudity had stayed concealed by their covers. Luckily all the relevant bits seemed to be decently draped.

She stood on Sherlock’s side of the bed, “He’s already awake, he’s just pretending.”

“Is that so?” John asked, trying to peek in at his boyfriend, but foiled by the duvet wrapped around him. There was nothing to see but a ruffle of curls at one end and a few long, bony toes at the other. “He isn’t moving. Maybe you’d better tickle his feet, see if he’s awake.”

“Noooo!” Sherlock yelped when Rosie turned her wiggling fingers on his feet. She broke into giggles, and John joined her, laughing harder when Sherlock’s indignant face emerged. “What an ugly betrayal, to be so accosted by my loved ones!”

“Aww, you’ll forgive us, won’t you?” John asked, stealing a kiss. Rosie hopped up on the bed, demanding her fair share. Snugly wrapped in their blankets, the two men let her crawl between them, bestowing kisses and asking after her sleep.

“I dreamed about my presents,” Rosie sighed happily. “I got a fox and balloons and paints and my own fowensics kit and new dese guyses and a mouse and lots and lots of sweets!” She held out her arms to indicate just how enormous was the pile of sweets, and narrowly avoided smacking John in the eye.

“Hmm…perhaps Father Christmas will bring you some of those things.”

“If you’re well behaved,” Sherlock cautioned, trying to keep her from pulling his blanket down.

“But I’ll still get presents from you and Nana and Aunt Molly and everyone, won’t I?” John smiled at her anxiety, “I’m sure you’ll be as spoiled as ever.”

“What’s that?” Rosie asked in curiosity, having pulled Sherlock’s blanket askew. She was
pointing at the scar from his gunshot wound. Their eyes met over her head and John’s brain stalled.

“It’s a scar from a wound I received some years ago,” Sherlock said, putting Rosie’s hand on it. “But it’s quite healed now, see?”

“Does it hurt?” She patted it.

“Not at all. I spent time in hospital, and your Daddy cared for me and helped me heal.”

“Did you get hurt in a war?”

“Not a war,” John said, after clearing his throat. “Pop was wounded trying to keep someone safe.”

Rosie considered John’s words, and then squeezed Sherlock’s arm in her small hands, patting him approvingly, “You’re a hero like daddy!”

Sherlock looked startled, and John reached over their daughter and took his partner’s hand, “He is a hero. Bravest man I know.”

Nothing like running after a suspected murderer to get the blood pumping, Sherlock thought, but once John had landed on the skinny meth-head in a flying tackle, and Lestrade and his team had finally caught up and they’d gone back to the Yard to give their statements, he got a bit chilly. It was bloody cold out and they’d been out for hours.

“We need a good, hot cuppa to warm us,” John shivered, stomping his feet on the doorstep as Sherlock unlocked the front door. “It’s parky in the hall, too.”

Slamming the door behind them, Sherlock turned and backed John up against the wall. “I’ll warm you,” he purred, lowering his head to kiss John, who forgot all about his shivers. He unzipped John’s serviceable all-weather jacket and slid his hands inside, seeking the warmth of John’s body.

“Chilly appendages,” John said, jumping a bit at the cold touch of Sherlock’s fingertips soaking through his shirt. A gleam entered his eyes, “Are all of them chilly?”

“John?” Surely he wasn’t going to suggest what he thought?

“I can…warm it for you.”

“John!” Sherlock looked about in alarm, hoping Mrs. Hudson wasn’t about to come through to see what all the slamming of doors was about. Surely…surely John didn’t intend on touching him in that fashion in the hallway?

“Just one…” John leaned in, “quick…” he had mesmerized Sherlock with his gaze, “kiss.” A flurry of tickly nose rubs astonished Sherlock, who stood still as John rubbed his nose on Sherlock’s. John pulled back and smiled sunnily, “I told you I have a great nose for Eskimo kisses. Better, right?”

“You are a truly evil man.”
“Heh, thought I was going to try and whip it out right here in the hall, didn’t you? You sounded scandalized and more than a little hopeful. What a fantastically filthy mind you have, dear.”

He was not blushing.

“I thought nothing of the kind. I have restraint. I do not indulge in public exhibitionism.”

“But you’d like to, wouldn’t you? At least feel that thrill that comes of knowing someone might walk in just at the wrong time.”

“John Watson, I have absolutely no intention of engaging in such behaviour! Do not attempt to dissuade me!”

John giggled and cupped his bum under the cover of the Belstaff, “I have no intentions to dissuade you, love.”

He was not disappointed.

“Come on,” John finally sighed, releasing him and giving him a little nudge to get moving, “Let’s collect our girl and go home. I need a pot of tea and a nice piping hot bowl of soup to warm me.”

“Of course,” Straightening, Sherlock popped his collar and shoved his wandering hands into his coat pockets.

John looked over his shoulder, smiled with promise, “And after a certain someone is in bed a certain someone else is getting Eskimo kisses everywhere.”

*****

Snug—but lonely—in his office, deep beneath the Ministry of Transport, Mycroft sipped his afternoon cup of Russian Caravan and nibbled his smoked salmon finger sandwiches and watched his beloved Gregory, dear Molly and wee Alex.

The trio was snugly bundled in winter coats, scarves, hats and gloves, bound for the small park where, Greg had informed him, there was a small ice skating rink set up adjacent to a winter fun fair. It was entirely the sort of thing he would have avoided in the past. In the past…when he did not have people whom he cared about deeply, people with whom he liked to spend time. Time which he did not always have to give, sadly.

He knew that his presence would be very welcome and was always desired, and his absence was not viewed as neglect, nonetheless, Mycroft worried. He worried that in time the lack of his attendance would be the norm. That eventually they would forget to include him in outings, since he never joined in. Alright, perhaps never was an exaggeration, but it was infrequent enough to make him feel lonely. It wasn’t that he feared being supplanted in Gregory’s affections by Molly, but that he would become less than necessary. He had grown astonishingly accustomed to being considered necessary.

The heavy weight of responsibility which he had carried since he was a weedy teenager and Uncle Rudy had drawn him into his confidence regarding a good many things, including the
unofficial family business and the dreadful, sordid, complicated mess that was Eurus, had never lessened. In fact, over the past thirty years it had merely grown all the heavier. At times it was a toss-up as to what might kill him first: Sherlock, Eurus, or his career.

For the past several years all he had had to contend with was his career. Sherlock, with John and Rosie Watson in his life, and with the able assistance of Dr. Fassbender, was on the most stable arc he’d experienced since the age of twenty, when he first responded to the siren call of drugs. Eurus had been, if not diffused, at least safely contained. The island of Sherrinford was even more fortress-like than previous, and the rotation of the staff was on a monthly basis, no less than three guards being allowed in her presence lest she attempt to manipulate them. She had not spoken in the last three years, but the measures taken to guard against her possible reawakening were still very much required.

Mycroft was no longer needed to stand guardian for his siblings—in fact, he had been forcibly removed from overseeing Eurus’ care by both the Crown and his parents; and Sherlock did not need his interference, did not want his help, and in fact seemed at times to be trying to encourage him to turn his energies to his own personal life.

A life which he had essentially not had until recently; now he had Gregory, his dear Detective Inspector, who illumined his life like a medieval monk illuminating a manuscript. Gregory, handsome, honourable, passionate, dazzling, Gregory, who had extended a warm and willing friendship and eagerly accepted his diffident suit, the older man’s own loving nature turning them quickly into a couple. The intimacy and joy of their union had fast become addicting. Mycroft could not imagine life without the other man.

And Molly; sweet, funny, kind-hearted, ferociously independent Molly Hooper. Not for one moment would Mycroft have imagined their passing acquaintance—which could have stood as the definition of awkward—would somehow develop into a tentative friendship. It was purely at the goodness of her own self that his initial visit in the days following Sherrinford had ended in her quiet offer of tea “if ever you need to talk.”

Imagine that: if he needed to talk. There she was, alone, pregnant, worried about the future and reeling from baring her soul to Sherlock at the bidding of a madwoman, and yet she thought he needed a kind ear. She was quite right of course only he hadn’t recognized it nor appreciated it at first.

Somehow, over the last three years these two generous, lovely, loving people had come to mean so much to him. And even more incredibly, he meant something to them.

What had his career ever cared for him? He was a shadowy figure, in turns overlooked—as he preferred to be, since his work depended on a public persona which was the veritable picture of a milquetoast—and feared, hated, admired or utilized. Utilized, like a tool, a machine. Which he had used to be but he was slowly, owing to circumstance and the caring of these two good people, becoming more human. Due to his dedication, work did not suffer. But his personal life might, if he continued to put his career ahead of all his needs.

“Did you need something, sir? Mr. Holmes?” Ignoring his PA’s blankly astonished face, Mycroft pushed open the door to the outer office and turned, “I find myself with responsibilities elsewhere. I shall be absent for at least the next three hours. Protocol 7.” The door swung shut on her bafflement and he strode off, shrugging into his Chesterfield with as much élan as ever his tiresome younger brother displayed.

Traffic obliged him, and he jumped out jauntily at his destination, assuring his driver he would call for him when he was ready to leave. He felt quite…buoyant…and the nip in the air
exhilarated him. His leather gloves kept his hands warm, his cashmere scarf warded off errant fingers of wind, and his lamb’s wool Ushanka was both practical and stylish.

Mycroft surveyed the crowd automatically, found his quarry and smiled. Crossing to the stand manned by a quartet of elderly women, he doffed his hat politely and paid for the rental of a pair of skates. Firmly ignoring thoughts of potential bacterium lying in wait, he found a seat on a nearby bench and changed into his borrowed footwear, leaving his elegantly shined Oxford’s in one of the cubbies. Heaven help anyone who laid a single finger on his handmade shoes.

Oh my. His ankles had quite forgotten that sensation. Mycroft very much feared he looked like a somber, wobbly stork as he made his way out onto the ice. It had been quite some time since he last donned a pair of ice skates; eight years, to be precise. His negotiations with the diplomat from Denmark had faltered until they took to the ice. Ah, it was coming back to him. Time to set course for the reasons he had come out today.

There they were; his rakish, carefree Gregory’s silver hair ruffled in the stiff breeze—the foolish man disdained hats—his blue and gray striped scarf pulled up high around his ears as he held onto one of Alex’s mitten-clad hands. Mycroft’s small namesake was quite lost in a puffy green coat which he believed had belonged to Rosie two winters ago, a pink and white striped bobble hat covering him down to his dark eyes. His other hand was held snug in Molly’s grip, her free hand coming up to adjust her slouchy lilac knit beret. She looked like a modern Christmas angel in her blush pink pea coat and ivory mittens.

With a bit of flair, Mycroft sailed up to them, intending on cutting his blades into the ice and presenting himself with an unspoken ta da! Instead, he overshot his mark, skates slithering uselessly on the rink, and barreled into Gregory, taking them both down like bowling pins. An ungainly tangle of long legs and waving skates ensued, Gregory cursing merrily until he began to laugh helplessly. They got themselves straightened and his dear one looked at him properly for the first time. His warm brown eyes widened and a brilliant grin flashed out on his face, “Myc?!”

“Erm, hello.”

Molly was giggling, muffled by the mitten dangling from between her teeth as she used her naked fingers to take pictures with her mobile. Alex sucked on the end of his scarf and watched them with wide, startled eyes.

“What are you doing here?” Gregory asked, slipping as he got his skates under him. He leaned down to help Mycroft upright.

“Are you alright?” Molly asked, somewhat belatedly, brushing at his coat.

“My posterior remains intact, although I do believe my consequence suffered a blow.”

“Not your consequence!” Greg expostulated, clapping his hands to his pink cheeks. “Where is it? Shall I rub it for you?”

“It’s a wonder that you’ve managed to keep from snarking your way into disfavor with your superiors at the Yard,” Mycroft sniffed, hiding a smile. He leaned closer, so Alex couldn’t hear him. “I do believe my consequence would relish a good rubbing once we return to the warmth and comfort of my bed.” He considered, “Or perhaps by the fire. With a spot of brandy.”

“Done, done, and done,” his beloved winked.

“Are you going to skate with us, Mr. Mycroft?” Alex asked, tugging on his coat.
“I am indeed. And then I thought perhaps we could warm ourselves with some of the
delightful,” doubtful, in all likelihood it was mediocre at best, “cocoa or cider on offer. Perhaps to
be enjoyed whilst strolling the fair and peruse the offerings of the church matrons which are for
sale?”

His dear ones were regarding him with awe, delight and disbelief, “Myc, really?” Gregory
finally asked, looking as if he had been told he’d won the pools. Mycroft went quite soft inside, lit
from the warm glow of knowing one was wanted, and wanted fulsomely at that. “That’s brilliant!”

“Oh Mycroft, that’s lovely,” Molly said, smiling her dear, dimpled smile, hugging his arm.
“The only thing missing to make this the perfect day was you!”

Alex was hanging off his coat, smiling face tipped back. Mycroft felt quite awash in their
mutual regard and admiration. This, this was what had been missing from his life. His career,
important and fulfilling though it was, had not given him this simple joy.

It was time to recall that he was not obliged—and often was not able—to follow banker’s
hours. He was determined to start making time for moments like these.

******

Martha Hudson was in heaven. Her dear boys were just as sweet and happy as two lovebirds
in the nest (not that she would ever describe it to them thus), her hip was feeling nearly as good as
new thanks to these new soothers from Morocco, sweet Rosie was perched on a chair, learning her
family recipes for biscuits, and Radio Christmas was playing her favourite tunes.

This time of year could be a joy, a real joy, but it could also be lonely, stressful and trying.
She had been alone during the holidays before, and she knew just how difficult it was to feel the
holiday spirit when you felt you had nothing to live for. Every year she began a campaign of
baking in early December, which she kept up right until Christmas Eve. She distributed them to
friends, of course, but she also popped in to see singles, elderly neighbors who had no one to visit,
dropped in on shopkeepers who easily forgot the joy in the season of joy, as downtrodden as the
masses of short-tempered shoppers could make them. She handed them out to Sherlock’s homeless
network, who knew by now to stop by for sweets and a warm drink.

Closer to the big day she would deliver packets of sweets and cakes to her church for
distributing to the shut-ins, drop off packets to the local Meals on Wheels, and have the boys help
her deliver boxes of sweets to the homeless shelters that had given Sherlock assistance in his dark
days, and to the women’s shelter she had hidden in during some of her own dark times.

Rosie was an enthusiastic assistant, but they did end up with a bigger mess on their hands
once they were done. But looking at that happy, focused face, Martha—Nana, thank you very
much—was perfectly happy. Sherlock, and John, were almost as close and beloved as sons, and
they had given her the miracle of a grandchild, for which she would always be grateful. It was
heartbreaking that sweet, troubled Mary had died so tragically, and after only experiencing
motherhood for such a short, short time...Martha always said a little prayer for her soul, for all the
good might come of it. Martha had more than her fair share of black marks on her celestial record,
of that there was no doubt.

She hoped the younger woman knew that her daughter was safe, loved, happy and thriving.
She hoped that she knew that John was stable, successful and in love. Martha rather suspected that Mary would have been happy to know that John and Sherlock were together properly. The two of them made a perfect little family with sweet Rosie. And Martha was a happy fourth.

“Let’s have a tea break while the honey cakes bake,” she suggested to her granddaughter. They settled in at the small kitchen table by the window and talked about baking, and carols and Father Christmas and how he visited every child in the world in one night, and presents for Daddy and Pop.

“I wish I could get a present for Mummy,” Rosie mused, swinging her short legs.

“You could,” Martha said after a little pause to blink away tears and clear her throat. “I’m sure she’d love to know you’re thinking of her.”

So they talked about good gifts for Mummy, and how Rosie could get them to her.

*****

“We look like a comedy singing duo in some cut-rate resort,” Sherlock groaned, dropping the picture in disgust, “With the requisite cute child act.”

“Are you the straight man?”

“I’m quite bent, John,” Sherlock said, leering.

John laughed, “That you are, love, that you are.” He regarded their Christmas card, which he had picked up on his way home from work. “I think we look ridiculous but festive! And look at Rosie’s face,” He nodded at the little girl, who was beaming ear to ear as she stared at the card in her hands.

“The things I do for you Watsons,” Sherlock grumbled.

“Oh, you’re secretly pleased,” John scoffed, gathering up the cards and putting them back in the box. “We can start on these after tea.”

“What? What do you mean, we?”

“I mean we, as in you and me. You signed up for this when we started a relationship.”

“I most certainly did not!” Sherlock was hotly indignant.

“It was in the fine print,” John said dryly, clearing the table, “Rosie, go wash up! We’re going to eat and then we’ll sign the cards.”

“Soup again?” Sherlock asked gloomily, lifting the lid of the slow cooker and staring at the simmering liquid as if he had read his fate within the depths, and that fate was a bleak one.

“Yes.” John said shortly, “Soup again. I worked today, if you’ll recall. I’ve been forced to pull extra shifts with the clinic short-handed, and soup is easy. If you object,” he added rather tersely, “please do feel free to start cooking dinner more than once every three months.”

“I made dinner last week!” Sherlock shot back, crossing his arms over his chest.
“Cold cereal is not dinner!” John gritted out, setting bowls down on the table with more force than necessary.

“Are you fighting?” Rosie stood in the doorway to the kitchen, one foot stacked on top of the other, hands anxiously twisting in her shirt.

“No,” John said, just as Sherlock said, “Yes.”

They glared at one another. Rosie’s lower lip quivered. John breathed in, reining in his temper. “We’re not fighting, darling; we’re just having a little disagreement. It’s over now. Come sit down and have your soup.”

“You sure you’re not fighting?” She asked, looking back and forth between them.

Sherlock slouched silently in his chair, refusing to lie. John turned his back and rolled his eyes, wondering how he could be such a child sometimes. He turned back, spoons in hand, “Definitely not fighting.”

“You have to kiss and make up.” Rosie would brook no refusal, and they gave in with ill-concealed annoyance. John’s lips touched Sherlock’s and he softened, one hand coming up to touch his hair.

“I’m sorry I snapped.”

“Your apology is accepted John,” Sherlock assured him grandly, “I realize you’re tired from overwork.”

“Now you say you’re sorry,” Rosie commanded. John smirked, leaning in to whisper, “Have to learn your lessons from a four year old, dear?”

“I haven’t done anything for which I need to be forgiven!”

“Say you’re sorry or you can sleep alone tonight,” John whispered with sweet menace.

“Erm, sorry, John.”

“Good enough,” John shrugged, and kissed him again. “But you’re doing the dishes.”

After their dinner the three of them signed almost half the box of cards before a grateful Sherlock escaped by snatching up a yawning Rosie and marching her to bathe and then settle into bed. “I’ll be up to kiss you goodnight,” John called absently. He considered the card in his hand. They undeniably looked like Christmas-crazed muppets, but it was a tiny bit cute despite that.

John had a particular card he wanted to write while he had some peace and privacy, but he wasn’t going to use this card for that message. He got up and rummaged in the sitting room until he unearthed an old box of generic holiday cards. Selecting one with snowflakes sparkling on the front and a blank inside, John chewed his biro thoughtfully, trying to plot out how he was going to convey what he had been thinking. After a minute he got up and fetched a sheet of paper; this was going to be a long one.

Finally he began to write, haltingly at first, but soon the words began to pour out of his pen, his hand moving swiftly as he tried to keep up with his thoughts. His flow was interrupted when Rosie called for him; John spent some time getting her settled and when he went downstairs at last he found Sherlock standing next to his chair, fingertips on the table next to his letter.
“What are you doing?” John asked in disbelief, even though the evidence was in front of his eyes.

“Dear James,” Sherlock answered, his voice sneering. He continued reciting the opening of John’s letter, ignoring the building explosion that was John Watson. “Despite how embarrassingly long it has been since my last email, I wanted to write and wish you a Merry Christmas. I’ve been doing a lot of thinking about things lately, the past included—”

“Stop now,” John warned, hands fisting. “You have a lot of bloody cheek reading my letter—”

“It was sitting out in plain sight, John,” Sherlock said coolly, “how was I to know it was a lovesick ramble about the past?”

Fuck. Fuck he wanted to lose his temper so badly right now. He wanted to rage and kick things and shout. “Go ahead, read the rest of it then.”

Astoundingly, Sherlock actually hesitated at the tone of John’s voice, his hauteur breaking slightly. “John…”

“No, please. Read it.”

After a brief pause, Sherlock resumed, his tone more respectful, “—especially our days in the Army. I don’t know if I ever said it, but you were my best friend. I had a lot of friends, mates, lads I knew well enough to drink and brawl and talk about football with. But I didn’t have best friends. You were that though, although it got harder after you were promoted.

I know you probably don’t like to think about those days, about what they meant and how much you loved them, and all you lost. I feel a little of that, too, although my life right now is more than I ever expected to have when I was invalided home. But you—you were a career soldier; it meant something deeper to you than it did to me. Losing that…I think it made it harder for you to look forward to the future, or bear to think about the past. I know I was one of those things that you left in the past. Just the same way I tried to wipe out everything when they sent me home and I thought all the good times in my life were over.

God, this sounds embarrassing to say, but I’ve done a lot of talking with my therapist, and even a bit with old Murray, and I just wanted to tell you…you were my friend and someone I trusted implicitly, and someone I admired more than anyone else I knew. Because I’m thick as two planks it honestly never occurred to me back then that some of that admiration was because I fancied you.

Jesus—this card. I was just going to say hey, Happy Christmas, call me once in a while.

And if I didn’t even realize how I felt about you, I’m wondering if I missed how you felt about me. Bill said he always figured one day I’d leave the Army and you and I would get together. I’m wondering if maybe you weren’t thinking the same thing. If you were, if I’m not making a complete ass out of myself, please James, know that I never meant to take you for granted or to dismiss anything that was there. I was just really, really dim.

My life is in a different place right now…not sure if you know or not, since you’ve buried yourself in the country, but Sherlock and I are together now. He—” Sherlock faltered, cleared his throat, “—he makes me happier than I ever thought possible, and he and Rosie, Christ, they make life so good. It’s taken a long time… I didn’t always think I deserved it, and often I thought it just wasn’t possible…but I’ve finally come to a place where I feel like I can let go of the bad shit and
look forward to a future. A real, proper future.

I guess why I’m writing is to say hello, and happy Christmas, for God’s sake call me once in a while, and please stop hiding away. You didn’t do anything wrong—it wasn’t your fault, what happened to those boys. You’re the most honourable man I know and you deserve happiness.

I hope you stop hiding long enough to find it, or to let it find you.”

“Love, John,” John said softly, taking the letter from Sherlock’s limp hand and adding his signature. He put down his biro, took Sherlock’s hand and met his eyes, “I’m still really pissed that you would read a private piece of correspondence like that, but I hope that what you read shows you that you don’t have anything to worry about. Sholto is my past. You’re my future.”

Sherlock didn’t answer, staring down at their linked hands. John shook his hand slightly, “Hey, you still with me?”

“I was jealous.”

“But you see now that there’s nothing to be jealous of right?”

“Not now.”

John frowned, “What?”

“I wasn’t jealous tonight, well, I admit at first I was. But I mean…I was jealous. Me. Of Sholto.” Sherlock bumped his thumb over John’s knuckles, “Mary…she was something else altogether. I had always assumed that someday I would lose you to a woman, but…you and I, we were so close, I knew that despite your many friends, there wasn’t anyone you were so close with. Comrades, partners. Secrets and in jokes and trust and admiration…” Sherlock looked embarrassed. “And then I saw you, the way you looked at him and I felt stupid and embarrassed and confused. You only ever looked at me that way.”

“Love,” John said on a sigh, tucking Sherlock into his arms. He ducked his head so he could meet those troubled eyes, “You are extraordinary and you were indeed the first civilian I ever felt that kind of bond with, and you’re the first man who has ever owned my heart. There’s no need to be jealous of James.”

“But I’m not the first,” Sherlock grimaced, glancing at John and then away, “Mary said it, she said, “We’re neither of us the first,” and she was right.”

“She said that?” John was surprised. Mary had always seen too much.

“Mmm, at your reception.”

“Jesus.” John shook his head, “I never saw it, but both of you did.” He snorted, eyes crinkling, “Miracle I’ve made it this long, if I’m this blind.”

“You see, but you do not observe, John,” Sherlock said, tone lightening. He looked at John from the corner of his eyes, smiling shyly, “Was it really that much of a surprise to you?”

“I’m never going to hear the end of this, am I?” John groaned dramatically, “Forty years from now you’ll be twitting me about how clueless I am.”

“Forty years?” Sherlock brought his arms up and wrapped them around John, turning his face for a kiss, “Are we to be together that long?”
Unless one of us murders the other one, yeah,” John was consciously lighthearted. “Is that a problem for you? Tired of me already?”

“You are very nearly endlessly fascinating, John.”

“So I’m good for the next forty odd years?”

“We shall reevaluate in a decade.”

“Knob.”

“I love you too, John.”

Rosie screamed in delight as she sledded down the “hill” at what seemed to her to be an exhilarating speed. Her sled was snagged by a spotty volunteer who helped her coast to a stop and then disembark, “Again!”

“You’ve been a dozen times,” John laughed, cupping her red cheeked face in his gloved hands, “Perhaps we should go warm up with some cocoa?”

“No! Again! Pleeesease!”

“Make it a baker’s dozen, John,” Sherlock said, tugging Rosie’s hat down more firmly around her ears. “Let her go once more.”

“I’ve no hope whatsoever against the two of you, have I?” John asked, shaking his head. His loves were looking at him with pity.

“None whatsoever,” Sherlock agreed.

“Alright. One more time! Then we go have cocoa.”

“And chips!”

“Recall what happened the last time you had cocoa and chips,” Sherlock said hastily, looking a bit bilious.

“Then can I have candy floss?”

“Candy floss and cocoa do not a balanced meal make. We can stop by Angelo’s on the way home,” John offered, “A white pizza for you and a lovely slurpy plate of pasta for Pop, and some hot minestrone for me.”

“Look at her face,” Sherlock said, watching Rosie stomp excitedly up the stairs to the “hill” which her school had set up as part of a festival closing out the term before winter break.

“She’s loving this,” John agreed, tucking his hand in Sherlock’s pocket and winding their fingers together. “Can you imagine how much she’d love real snowy hills and sleds and horse-drawn sleighs?”
Sherlock was thoughtful, “I do know of a beautiful place in the Alps where we could experience all those things...perhaps next year for the holidays?”

“That sounds wonderful,” John agreed, “But can you imagine the uproar from the grannies if we absconded with our chick during Christmas?”

“They may come along then,” Sherlock waved an imperious hand, “But we will get our own chalet.” He ducked his head to murmur in John’s ear, his breath warming his cold ear, “I wish to make love to you on a bearskin rug in front of a roaring fire while the snow blankets the mountains.”

*Sherlock Holmes, consulting romantic*, John thought, and resisted kissing his boyfriend. Sherlock was not a fan of public kisses. But when they got home... “We can explore your fantasy tonight when Rosie’s gone to sleep.”

*****

“This was not what I had in mind,” Sherlock scowled, trying to untangle his fingers from the cello-tape with which he intended on sealing Rosie’s gift.

“We’re in front of the fire,” John pointed out, putting a label on his own simply but efficiently wrapped gift. He grinned at his boyfriend, “What’s going on over there? Usually your gifts end up looking like something from the Harrod’s gift wrapping department.”

“There is a period of experimentation before the finished product is ready for viewing,” Sherlock said haughtily.

“Learn something new every day,” John remarked cheerfully. He wrapped paper around a package intended for Mrs. Hudson and snagged the tape from Sherlock. “There! I’m done. I think I’ll go have a nice hot bath and then an early night of it.” He made to get up from the floor.

“John…”

“Yes, my love?”

“Wouldn’t you like to stay here and keep me company?”

“I don’t know,” John said airily, “It was a long day out in the cold...a hot bath sounds a treat.”

“Pour yourself another cup of tea and wrap up in the blanket,” Sherlock countered.

“I could have a cup of tea whilst in the bath.”

“If you wait, I can assist you in your ablutions.”

John pretended to consider it, “Hmm, well, I do like having someone to wash my back.”

“I’ll wash all of you,” Sherlock purred, going all heavy eyed and promising.

“In exchange for helping you?”
“I don’t need help,” Sherlock protested. “I am perfectly capable of wrapping gifts under my own aegis.”

“But are you capable of finishing before dawn?”

“Time means nothing when one is seeking perfection.”

“What about,” John asked huskily, rising onto his knees and leaning in to hover a kiss over Sherlock’s luscious lips, “if one is seeking sexy snuggles with one’s boyfriend who will definitely be grumpy if he doesn’t get at least seven hours sleep before his shift tomorrow?”

“One might then concede that assistance is sought by those of superior intellect,” Sherlock allowed.

“Thought so,” John kissed him and sat down, taking up a gift and beginning to wrap. “Because I’m brilliant and insightful and I know things.”

“You do know that gloating is not an attractive quality, don’t you John?”

“You like it.”

“Mmm…”

John finished and watched in exasperation as Sherlock slowly created a knife-edged crease and carefully moved the box to replicate the crease on the opposite side. “Lord, we’re definitely going to be here all night if you’re going to get geometric. Just wrap it, Sherlock!”

“This gift is going to Mycroft and he will instantly notice any and all flaws,” Sherlock said defensively. “Of course, this problem would be non-existent if you hadn’t insisted it “wasn’t nice” to not get him a gift.”

“He is your brother,” John said mildly. “And that doesn’t explain why you’ve been just as careful with each and every one of the—I mean, the two previous—gifts you’ve wrapped.”

“Cease your prattle, John! We have gifts to wrap.”

John grinned to himself, shaking his head. He was dating a giant toddler, no doubt about it.

*****

“With as mad as our schedules are,” Greg sighed, “This is probably the last time the three of us can find time to see one another before Christmas.” He was snug in the middle of his sofa, his feet propped on his coffee table, a blanket draped over his legs. Mycroft sat on his left, looking tired—small wonder since he’d been incommunicado for four days and God knows what he’d been up to—and nursing a cup of tea and a cold.

“Then I suggest we watch another movie and forget about the future,” Molly said from his right, putting down her empty tea cup. “Mycroft, dear you still look dreadful and sound stuffy…I think you need to take your medicine. I know it’s a half hour early, but I’m going to fetch you some water, and a fresh cup of tea.” She stood and stretched, “Greg, do you want anything?”

“No thank you, Molly…I need a pee, however.” Greg kissed Mycroft on his temple and left
“Are you hungry at all?” Molly asked, regarding him with sympathy as he obediently took his pill and then blew his nose with a grimace. He hated being sick, of course, but he especially hated that he was so disgustingly... *juicy*... and phlegmy in front of others. If Mycroft hadn’t been deeply in need of a little quiet time with his beloved ones he would have hidden away in his home.

“Not particularly,” he rasped, and cleared his throat. “Tea should suffice.”

“You need to eat at some point. How about some yoghurt? Or applesauce? Maybe a mug of hot bone broth and a few cream crackers?”

“Invalid food,” Groused Mycroft, sulking.

“You’re an invalid, Myc,” Greg reminded him, coming into the room. He shook his head, “You don’t need rich, spicy things.”

“I counter with yes. Perhaps a spicy curry is just the ticket, clear out my sinuses and sear my lungs of excretions.”

“Indian food is not sickbed food.”

“Indian people would probably differ in their opinion.”

“Chinese,” Molly suggested, scrolling through her mobile. “Lots of soups and maybe some steamed dumplings? Stir-fried veggies full of vitamins?”


“Fuck me, that sounds good,” Greg agreed, as his stomach grumbled loudly. He hunted through the DVDs, “What shall we watch next?”

“Mycroft can choose.”

“I chose the last one,” he objected politely.

“Yeah, but you’re sick,” Molly and Greg spoke at the same time and laughed.

He brightened, rubbed his hands together like an evil genius, “Does my cold earn me the right to ultimate decision making vetoes?”

“Power mad fool,” Greg teased, massaging the back of his neck and giving his forehead another kiss.

“Stop that, Gregory, you shall catch my cold.”

“Nonsense, constitution of a horse!” Greg blustered, pounding his chest. Molly made a face behind his back and Mycroft muffled his laugh, humour fading as he began coughing.

Food ordered, they continued their nesting on the sofa, beginning *The Thin Man* as they waited for their food to arrive. Mycroft sighed happily and let his drowsy head drop onto Greg’s shoulder; he was warm, with the people he loved, watching a delightful old movie and with a stomach pleasantly growling with hunger in anticipation of the impending Chinese food feast. If he must be sick and weak, at least he had someplace comforting and safe to succor him in his illness.
John giggled. Sherlock pushed him back against the wall with a firm, “Stay there.” John began to list, sliding to his right. Sherlock left off struggling with the zip on John’s coat and righted him.

“Look at your cute little curls,” John slurred, plunging his fingers into Sherlock’s hair and ruffling it. “Just like a, like a…what’s it called?”

“What is what called?” Sherlock asked, jerking at the zip. This was ridiculous, how on earth had John become trapped in his coat?

“The thing that you—” John hiccupped gently, “—re-rem-resl—look like.”

“A man?” Was the fabric trapped in the teeth of the zipper?

“Noooooo…well, you do look—” hiccup, “—like a man. But also a thing. A…cutie thing.”

“That is remarkably unedifying, John,” Sherlock huffed out a laugh and gave up on the coat for the moment. Had someone glued John’s zip shut as a prank?

He guided John to his chair, “Sit down.”

“How come?”

“I need to take off your boots.”

“Okay!” John tumbled back into his chair and stuck his legs up in the air.

“Thank you.” Sherlock unlaced the boots and pried them off of John’s feet, a task which was not helped by the doctor waving his legs in the air. He dropped the boots on the floor and went to the kitchen.

“Hey!”

“Yes, John?” Sherlock called from the kitchen. “Why are you shouting?”

“You—” John burped, shook his head, “you left me. Why did you leave me?”

“To fetch these,” Sherlock brandished the shears.

“Do I need a haircut?” John anxiously felt his hair with both hands, “Don’t cut it too short or I’ll look like I’m in primary school.”

“Your hair is adequate. This is for your coat.”

“Thanks!” John beamed at him, “I’m so lucky…I have a cutie boyfriend and adequate hair.” He frowned as Sherlock pulled his coat away from his body and set about cutting it up the front. “Why—why are you doing that?”

“It was misbehaving,” Sherlock said, carefully snipping up the coat. A task which would have been less harrowing had John not been wiggling.
“Naughty coat,” John rebuked.

“Indeed. There, sit up, John, and we shall remove the garment. You must be hot.”

“Yeah I am,” John flirted, walking his fingers up Sherlock’s chest. “Not as hot as you, though…my hot boyfriend who is also a, a cutie…thing.”

“Hold out your arms,” Sherlock instructed.

John held his arms out for a hug and Sherlock grinned, kissing his cheek. John turned his head and captured his mouth greedily. Sherlock grimaced at the taste of alcohol but crouched next to the chair and kissed his boyfriend back. John’s hands stole back into his hair. Sherlock decided that perhaps John was not too intoxicated, and the likelihood of a frolic between the sheets was in order. John burped into his mouth and he pulled back, “Eugh, John.”

John giggled a high, manic giggle and groped Sherlock’s bottom, “Let’s do something crazy!”

“Such as?” Sherlock panted, trying to evade John’s hands and wrestle him out of the remnants of his coat. Hopefully John would tire himself out and go down for a nap, er, down for the night, soon.

“Let’s go up on the roof and set off fireworks!”

“Um, let me think. No.”

“Spoilsport,” John pouted.

“Verily, that is my middle name.”

“Nooooo, that’s not it…it’s….something. Scotty!”

“I am not a terrier, thank you very much.”

John caught sight of Sherlock’s microscope and notebooks, “We could do science!”

“Never while drunk, John.” Sherlock was exasperated, but amused. Drunk John was adorable. It seemed the Christmas party the clinic had thrown had been a success.

Eventually he managed to strip John down to his briefs, but he was daunted at the idea of trying to redress him in his pyjamas, so he just added one of the orange shock blankets he had appropriated to their bed. Coaxing John to settle down took some time, and he had to redirect his amorous attentions more than once. John suddenly dove under the blankets and began trying to remove Sherlock’s pants. He got his hands on him and shouted, “Blimey! It’s a penis!”

Sherlock metaphorically threw his hands in the air. Laughing, he joined John under the blanket and set about appeasing his boyfriend’s lustful advances. A quick, sweaty tussle later they were panting in one another’s arms, and Sherlock kissed the top of John’s head and used one long arm to feel about for a cover.

“Cupid,” John said sleepily.

“Hmm?”

“You have curls,” John yawned, sighed, “like a cupid.”
“You are drunk, John. Go to sleep.”

“Might be drunk,” John agreed placidly, “But you’re still all cute and Cupidy.”

Cupidy. Sherlock sighed; John was becoming ridiculous. “Go to sleep John.”

“M’kay…”

******

“Ohhhh….oh God, I’m dying…”

“What’s wrong with daddy?” Rosie looked up from her puzzle.

“Daddy is hungover.” Sherlock smirked at John, who was standing in the entrance to the hall, looking like one of the shambling undead in that histrionic movie he liked.

“Uhhhhn….“ John edged his way across the room and lowered himself into his chair.

“Do you feel bad, daddy?” Rosie asked in concern, leaning against his knee.

“Not…not so bad,” John winced, eyes closed. He peeked at her with one eye, tried to summon a comforting smile. “My head hurts. Do you think you could turn off the lights?”

“Okay!” She spoke loudly in her enthusiasm and John whimpered.

Sherlock snickered, which summoned a black glare from his afflicted lover.

“Don’t laugh at me you evil git. I’m suffering, make me tea.”

“Of course, John. How about breakfast as well? Rosie and I have already eaten, but I’m sure Mrs. Hudson would fry you up some eggs and rashers of bacon,” Sherlock ignored John’s groan, “Or something simple? Beans on toast perhaps?”

“Shut. Up.”

“I can make you tea, daddy!” Rosie beamed at him. “I know how.”

“Let me help you,” Sherlock offered hastily, rising to his feet. He oversaw her tea production, which was less haphazard and prone to end in minor flooding of the countertops than previously and toasted a slice of bread. He took them in to John and fetched an ice pack and some paracetamol as well.

“Are we still going to the Zoo today?” Rosie asked, climbing up on John’s lap to hold the ice pack on top of his head while he sipped his tea.

He hated to disappoint her, but… “No, sorry, poppet, not today.”

They derailed her disappointment by offering to go the following day, and Sherlock suggested taking Biscuit for a walk to look at holiday decorations whilst John took a shower. “Then perhaps popcorn and a movie.”
“And a blanket fort?”

“Possibly.”

“With all the cushions and pillows like when I was sick?”

“I think that might be arranged.”

*****

“Bless you,” Mycroft said politely. He passed Greg his spare handkerchief, as his boyfriend’s own was rather overused by that point. “Are you sure you don’t wish to postpone our plans until you’re feeling more the thing?”

“No,” Greg insisted stubbornly, wiping his nose and trying to look as if he weren’t sick as a very sick dog, “We haven’t had a proper date in weeks, between our schedules and your cold.”

“My cold is a thing of the past,” Mycroft noted.

“This is your cold, you gave it to me; therefore it belongs to you.”

“I did point out several times that you shouldn’t kiss me whilst I was under the weather.”

“But you looked all sad and ill and tired and I wanted to make you feel better.” Greg’s tone was verging on annoying. Mycroft hid a sigh. He didn’t mind spending time with his beloved whilst he was ill, he did, however, object to listening to him pout and fuss all night when they could have been comfortably ensconced at his lovely home. Where the cushions were soft, the rooms quiet and Mycroft had a bevy of soothing libitations to hand. By which, of course, he meant juices and herbal teas for his Gregory. Although a generous measure of brandy for him wouldn’t come amiss at this time.

“And so you did. However, you are now paying the price.”

“Why won’t you kiss me?” Greg asked, employing his best puppy dog eyes, which were really quite compelling.

“Because I’m no fool,” Mycroft said coolly.

“But it would make me feeeeeel better…”

“Tough cheese,” Mycroft informed him. He took a small tin out of his inner oxter pocket and presented it to his boyfriend, “Cough lozenge?”


Mycroft paused; was he, perhaps, falling into his old ways? Should he bend his stance from the practical to the emotional? What harm could come of one small kiss?

Greg sneezed mightily, cough lozenge flying from his mouth to ricochet off the glass privacy window between them and the driver. He snuffled snottily and wiped his nose, groaning like an old wooden house settling. Mycroft grimaced and resisted hunting out the small spray bottle of hand sanitizer he had been carrying around with him.
“Gregory, my love—”

“Yeah?” Greg sniffled again, and blinked his bleary eyes.

“My love for you is nearly boundless—”

“Nearly boundless?”

“However, I refuse to arrive at my parent’s home in a few days with a miserable cold. I will be deep in purgatory as it is.”

“It’s because a bit of snot shot out of my nose when I sneezed, isn’t it?”

“It only firmed my resolve.”

*****

“Are you clean?” Molly’s voice was muffled. She held the cowl neck of her jumper over the lower part of her face and squinted suspiciously at Mycroft.

“Whilst tenacious survivors of my antibacterial purge may be clinging limply to my person, I have every confidence that the long battle is over and no more shall fall victim to the foul scourge.”

“Thank heavens,” Molly sighed, letting go of her jumper and opening the door wide, “Do come in.”

“Thank you, my dear.” Mycroft hung up his umbrella, removed his gloves and tucked them in one pocket of his Chesterfield, unwound his cashmere scarf and hung it on the coat rack along with his overcoat. He bent to hug Alex, who kissed him stickily on the cheek and ran back to immerse himself in his Mandarin lessons on his tablet.

“Tea or coffee?” Molly patted her son on the head and led the way to the kitchen.

“Tea please,” Mycroft followed her into the kitchen and pulled the biscuit barrel out of the pantry as she lifted the tea pot in its knitted cozy onto the trivet in the center of the table. “Is that a new cozy?”

“It is!” Molly smiled, “I’ve been doing a lot of knitting this winter.”

“It’s charming,” Mycroft complimented, accepting his cup. He offered the biscuits and then selected his own.

“Thanks…I think it’s a bit too old maid of me to knit, but I enjoy it.”

“My paternal grandmother taught me to knit when I was a boy, but I certainly never attained this level of skill,” Mycroft said. “I don’t think there to be anything inherently the auspices of the “spinster” but rather occupations and habits that can satisfy anyone.”

“I’m going to make Alex a jumper next, he’s quite excited.”

“Grand-mummy used to make our jumpers and mittens, although Sherlock was forever
unpicking his to look more like a rascally pirate.”

Molly giggled her enchanting giggle, “Whereas you were always perfectly turned out?”

He smiled self-deprecatingly, “I was a portly child who was always dropping food on my clothes or outgrowing them at a breathtaking pace.”

“I’m sure you were adorable,” Molly assured him, “I can almost picture you with round cheeks and a nascent scowl, bossing your clothes into fitting.”

As always she made him smile, although his past gluttony and lack of self-control was a matter of embarrassment and shame for him. “I will admit that Grand-mummy loved to pinch my cheeks, and she always snuck me another helping of pudding when Mummy and Father were fussing.”

“She sounds a lovely woman,” Molly said wistfully. She crumbled her biscuit, letting the crumbs fall onto her saucer, “I wish my mum was a little…warmer.”

“What has she done now?” Mycroft had no patience with the woman. Were she not Molly’s mother he would be tempted to turn her in for tax evasion or drugs smuggling.

Molly glanced into the sitting room, lowered her voice, “I called her last night to let her know we were going to come in on the mid-day train tomorrow and she started in about how I had better not let my grandson dress like a fairy and that we certainly weren’t welcome in the family pictures if I let him wear girl’s clothes.” Molly pressed her thumbs to her eyes, fighting tears, “He’s my son…I love him so much and he’s so sweet and loving and I don’t care if he wants to wear his Winnie the Pooh pyjamas and a raincoat, or his Belle costume every day for the rest of his life…I don’t understand how my mother can act like he’s this huge embarrassment and some kind of abomination!” Breaking down, she tried to muffle her sobs with her hands.

Mycroft lifted her onto his knee and gently pushed his chair back so they were out of Alex’s direct line of sight. He wasn’t used to holding crying women, in fact, he was completely terrified of weeping and excesses of emotion, but this was Molly. He let her silently cry into his shirt collar, grimacing at how wilted it was going to be. Luckily he had a spare shirt in his office and his scarf would cover the damage until he was able to change. When the worst of her emotion seemed to have subsided—and she must be used to hiding her emotions and rationing her indulgence in tears, because she sat up sniffling in a remarkably short amount of time—Mycroft offered his handkerchief.

He seemed to be doing that a lot lately.

“Sorry,” Molly mumbled, going to slide off his leg, “I’m sure I’m crushing your leg.”

“You are a veritable butterfly, and I am happy to have been able to offer my humble leg to serve as your support.”

She smiled tenderly at his poor joke, “Your support is never humble, Mycroft. Thank you.” She kissed his cheek and after a moment of hesitation he put his hand to her cheek and turned their mouths together. His kiss landed delicately, a gentle, searching pressure. Following a brief pause Molly returned his kiss, her hands sliding up, one to cup his cheek and the other to lightly feather over his ear. He shivered, and kissed her more deeply.

“That was…lovely,” Molly said a few minutes later, brow lightly furrowed, “But we shouldn’t have done that. It’s not fair to Greg.”
“On the contrary, Gregory asked me specifically to give you a kiss and wish you a very merry Christmas.” He gave her a patently false look of innocence, “Merry Christmas, Molly.”

“Perhaps,” Molly agreed, “but I’m sure it wasn’t that kind of a kiss he had in mind!”

Mycroft smiled slyly, “He demonstrated on me just what kind of kiss to deliver and I assure you that I displayed admirable restraint in relaying his message.”

“The two of you are impossible,” Molly giggled. She gave him another kiss, soft and glancing, and withdrew her fingers regretfully from his jaw, standing up and tugging at her perfectly straight blouse, “Delightful, but impossible.”

“Or perhaps impossibly delightful?”

“Mmm, that too,” Molly smoothed his hair, stroked his cheek, as if she couldn’t quite help herself. “I don’t know what I shall do when—” Cutting off her words, she shook her head and moved back to her chair.

“What is it, my dear?”

She smiled falsely, “Nothing. More tea?”

“Molly.”

Biting her lip she looked sad, “I’m going to miss you both when, when you’re gone.”

“Are we going on a trip?” Mycroft asked with interest.

“Mycroft…”

“Perhaps it is no mere cold, but rather a wasting disease which has gripped the two of us? Dearie me, I must see that my affairs are in order.”

“Mycroft!” Molly was exasperated.

“Yes, my dear? Do please, go on…where are Gregory and I bound for?”

“Come on…you must see that it’s inevitable…one day the two of you will tire of this silly game and admit that you don’t need anyone else in your relationship. Eventually…eventually, you’ll move on.” She shrugged, trying for worldly indifference, “It’s what happens.”

“There are things of which I am not certain, my dear Ms. Hooper,” Mycroft said, smiling, “But that our devotion to you is but a whim…nay, that is not one of them.” He stood up, lifted her out of her seat and kissed her, “I’m going to bid your delightful son—whom I hope flaunts his individuality this Christmas season—a happy Christmas and farewell, and then I am going to return to my office and attempt to leave a clean desk before I depart. I hope you will enjoy your Christmas despite your mother’s needling comments, and I hope that you remember that Gregory and I both hold you in sincere and lasting regard.”

“…Merry Christmas, Mycroft,” Molly said, eyes soft as he pulled back from kissing her. “I do hope you both have a lovely time at your parents, and at Greg’s family gathering.”

“We shall, though we shall miss you and Alex.” Mycroft tipped her chin up, “Regard this passing season and the approaching New Year as an opportunity for change, my dear…because once we three have returned to our usual schedules, I plan a campaign of courtship.”
“Oh dear,” Molly said faintly.

“In combination with darling Gregory’s quite irresistible charms, I do believe your defenses will give before January is out.” Mycroft kissed her one last time, and left.

“Blimey,” Molly breathed to her tea pot.

******

“Remind me again,” John raised his voice to be heard over Rosie’s enthusiastic but tuneless singing of “Let It Go” and Biscuit’s accompanying whimpers, “why it is that I’m driving us all the way out to your parent's cottage when Mycroft very kindly offered a ride in his chauffeured car?”

“We would have had to ride with Mycroft,” Sherlock said, as if that was that. John supposed it was. Despite any softening of relations between the brothers, they still squabbled like children. Throw in a sugar fueled four year old, a whimpering dog with a tiny bladder, and Greg Lestrade at his most loquacious and you had a recipe for fights, sulking, migraines and anarchy right there.

“Stupid question.”

“Yes, it was.”

“Still and all, Christmas should be nice. Your parents are loves.”

“Urhn,” Sherlock grunted. He slouched in his seat, arms folded across his chest.

“No, they are. You and Mycroft treat them like they’re embarrassing inconveniences, but you’re lucky to have them both.”

“Hrmph.”

“I’m not hearing a display of Christmas sweetness and cheer,” John sing-songed, “In fact, I detect bah humbugging and Grinchy grouchiness.”

“I am not the Grinch!”

“I’m not saying you are…I’m just saying, no one has ever seen you and the Grinch in the same place at the same time…”

Determinedly not smiling, Sherlock launched into all the very good reasons he was not the Grinch, and John listened distractedly. He was happy to be included in the Holmes family celebrations—and Rosie was ecstatic—but this would be the first time since Appledore that he had been back to The Cottage. He was uneasy with the flood of memories he was afraid it would unleash.

“John?” Sherlock drew his attention, “I do believe the hell beast needs to void its bladder yet again.”

“Right,” John indicated, and pulled off the motorway, cautioning Rosie to wait on him. Daughter in hand and dog on leash, he walked up and down the verge whilst Sherlock slouched in the car and madly texted. Finally Biscuit stopped weeing miniscule amounts on every blade of grass she encountered and they piled back into the car.
“Can I listen to my song again?” Rosie demanded from the backseat.

“Use the earbuds,” Sherlock tossed them to her. She popped them in and fiddled with John’s old .mp3 player. He looked back at John, who had not yet put the car in gear. “Are you alright?”

“Hmm? Fine. Yeah, why?”

“You’ve been very absent minded all morning.”

“Just…just a lot of ghosts, you know?” John sighed, scrubbed his face with his hands, “Haven’t been back here since…”

“Ah. Yes.” Sherlock nodded, looking grave. “Is…do we need to turn the car around John? I will gladly tell Mummy and Father we can’t make it.”

John laughed, tension easing, old memories softening in the face of his present happiness, “Naw, can’t disappoint Violet and Siger. Don’t give me that look; I know you were hoping I’d say yes. Just trying to use me as an excuse to get out of a nice family Christmas.”

“Well of course,” Sherlock scoffed, “There must be some benefit to dating you.” But he was smiling that smug, smart-arsey half smile that meant he was teasing, and John put his thumb and finger on Sherlock’s chin, turned his face toward him.

“Thanks, though, love…I know you mean it, if I said yes, you’d call them right now.” He kissed him lightly, aware of their audience, “Thanks.” He dropped his hand to cover Sherlock’s, “Are you okay?”


“Honestly? Because you haven’t wanted to talk about it at all, and it’s kind of a big deal. It’s okay if you’re feeling stressed…even when you’re not imprisoned there, Sherrinford is no picnic.”

Sherlock had gone for a visit to his sister, along with Mycroft and the elder Holmes three days prior, and he had acted blithe upon his return. John tried to give him space, hoped he would bring it up, but finally decided he would have to broach the subject.

“It was…grim, as always,” Sherlock let his head drop back against the head rest, “She still isn’t talking. But she smiled at me. Once, but it was something.”

John frankly found the idea of Eurus Holmes smiling to be the stuff to freeze the very marrow of your bones, but that was hardly politic to say. “And did you play?”

“Mmm, we both did. Mummy cried. Again.” Sherlock met John’s eyes, looking troubled, “I think she somehow still thinks that with enough visits her daughter will someday be able to leave there.”

This was altogether too grim for the side of the road, two days before Christmas. John was helplessly aware that there wasn’t much he could say to make any of it better.

“It’s alright, John,” Sherlock said, mouth turning up humourlessly, “I know you’re struggling to find comforting words, but there are none.” He squeezed his fingers, “It’s enough to have you here. To know you’ll listen if I need.”

“Always,” John said, and raised their clasped hands, kissed Sherlock’s knuckles.
“Hey! Why aren’t we going?” Rosie demanded, pulling out her earbuds. She looked between them, “Granddad and Gran are going to be wondering where we are!”

“Sorry,” John laughed, holding up defensive hands. He put the car in gear, “We’ll go now.”

“I want to sing songs,” Rosie said, kicking the back of Sherlock’s seat, “Sing with me!”

“Do you know this one?” John asked, and began singing in his admittedly slightly flat voice. As they rolled down the A3, singing “Over the River and Through the Wood” John smiled to himself, it was going to be a brilliant Christmas.
Christmas

Chapter Summary

Over three days at The Cottage, Rosie, John, Greg, Sherlock and Mycroft enjoy (and to some extent endure) a close family Christmas. Be prepared for silly sibling squabbles, an excess of food, an overindulgence in liquor, holiday themes, cuteness and a little lechery.

Chapter Notes

Having done a bit of research, I am now drooling at the idea of a classic British Christmas repast. If ever I am able to visit the British Isles, I do hope one of you delightful Brits will invite me to partake.

You may notice that the chapter count went from 16 to 17; there is an epilogue to follow. I’ve had endless trouble keeping proper track of the chapter count since I began. I was always rubbish at maths.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Christmas Eve

“Fa la la la la, la la la la!” Rosie gave off singing and tugged impatiently at Mycroft’s sleeve, “C’mooooo, Uncle Mycroft! Hurry up, Granddad and Greg is waitin’ on us.”

“My apologies, dear girl, I was finishing my repast. There! I am done and at your service.”

“Hurry along, brother mine,” Sherlock urged, “Now that you’ve eaten all the food we’ve worked to prepare, do run off before you can assist in washing dishes. The rest of us shall just continue to slave away for your comfort.”

“You didn’t prepare anything, Sherlock,” Mycroft reproved, buttoning his overcoat, “And I highly doubt you will be found anywhere when it comes time to wash a dish.”

“I made the crostini,” Sherlock objected; snatching one up and cramming it in his mouth, he glared at his brother. “That’s preparation!” He spoke through a spray of crumbs.

Mycroft fastidiously brushed at his coat, “Drizzling honey over goat cheese and toast rounds is not food preparation.”

“Lads,” Greg sighed, having stuck his head back in the room, “do try not to fight for five minutes. Myc? Let’s go, yeah?”

Sherlock pouted, hampered by his overfull mouth and exaggerated chewing; John called his name, asking him to bring the dishes in to the kitchen. He complied, but once the last of the things were cleared he left the room as if to fetch more and disappeared upstairs to check Twitter.
“He’s not coming back, is he?” John joked, hearing the thump of Sherlock’s feet overhead.

“Historically, the answer to that question would be no.” Violet chuckled and handed him a pair of Marigolds, “You don’t have to stay and help, dear.”

“Nonsense, can’t have you slaving away in here whilst we all frolic,” John said, suiting up in his gloves and a flowered pinny, “Observe, your willing lackey, madam.”

“And so young and handsome, too,” Violet patted his cheek in a very motherly way. They worked in comfortable silence; John found the Holmes parents delightful and he was happy to have them stand in the stead of grandparents for his child. It was touching that they had so happily and generously welcomed he and Rosie into their home and their family traditions; he hoped Clara’s parents were as warm with Harry. He owed his sister a Skype call later in the day; they had seen one another just over a week prior, and were planning on having dinner sometime after the New Year, but he was still feeling mildly guilty that he had spent the last two Christmas seasons with the Holmes family.

Violet and Siger had even extended an offer to call them Mummy and Father, which had caused Sherlock a fit of some strong emotion that fell between embarrassment and horror. But John couldn’t imagine calling them that, and thus Sherlock’s gyrations had ceased when he cheerfully asked if he could continue calling them by their given names.

“John?”

“Mmm?”

“While it’s just the two of us and quiet,” They shared a smile at how boisterous the house had gotten, “I wanted to say thank you. You and Greg…you’ve both been such steadfast friends to my boys—even when it wasn’t easy or safe—and now you’ve brought them more happiness than it seemed they would ever be granted.” Violet turned her face and wiped her cheek on her sleeve, smiling through her tears, “I love my sons but they can be so difficult for people to understand, and it brings me more comfort and joy than you can imagine, to know that they have the love of two good men such as yourselves.”

“I…” John blew out air, embarrassed and pleased, “I don’t know what to say, except that for any happiness I give Sherlock, I receive it tenfold.” Well, except when he wanted to murder him; but really, that was part of his charm.

His boyfriend’s mother dropped her sponge and flung her arms around him, squeezing the air out of him in a wonderful, tight, mum-hug. John hugged her back, trying not to get his soapy gloves on her cardigan. After a few minutes they straightened and had an emotional giggle and went back to the dishes.

*****

“This is fab’lous!” Rosie yelled, hugging a doggie-coat-clad Biscuit to her as they rode along on the sled Siger had liberated from the cellar. He was tramping alongside her, beaming at her chatter; Greg was pulling the sled with one hand, the other firmly in Mycroft’s grip. Mycroft cradled a saw gingerly in his free arm.

“Are you having a good time, my dear?” Siger asked happily.
“Oh yes, Granddad!” Rosie tipped her head back and smiled at him, “This is a ‘citing a’venture!”

“So it is,” he agreed, rubbing his gloved hands together, “Follow that swell down toward the canal, Myc my boy. There should be some good ones there.”

“Did you and Gran used to do this with Pop and Uncle Mycroft?”

“Indeed we did. Until they were too old to want to bother.”

“I’ll never be too old,” Rosie said firmly. “Can we do this ev’ry Christmas?”

“Every year,” Siger burred cheerfully. Mycroft smiled slightly. He was cold, his nose was in danger of falling off, and he was afraid the saw would damage his overcoat, but he was actually enjoying himself. He’d forgotten—rather, consciously abandoned—the memories of those carefree early days, when they had done such things as a family.

“There we are,” Siger pointed, “Lots of good bushy branches for cutting.” He grunted as he lifted Rosie onto his shoulders, “Alright, darling, go ahead and pick out the ones you think Gran will like.”

With Rosie choosing, Greg cut the branches and Mycroft laid them across the ground cloth he’d spread over the sled. Once they had a sufficient abundance, they bundled the cloth up and secured it with twine. Turning back towards The Cottage, Rosie and Siger led them in song.

******

“Smells like a proper Christmas bower in here,” Greg said approvingly, inhaling deeply the scent of the pine boughs they had festooned with ribbon and decorated the rooms with. There were fragrant mugs of mulled wine for the adults and cider for Rosie, fat vanilla and bayberry candles were burning and the fire crackled merrily away at its lunch of apple and drift woods.

“Another sticky bun, Greg?” Violet asked, holding the platter out.

“I shouldn’t…”

“Oh go on, it’s Christmas.”

“I don’t see how you can eat anything after the prodigious lunch and mountainous tea you consumed,” Sherlock snorted. “I suppose the only thing that stopped your efforts was the locust famine that is Mycroft when he gives in to his base urges and descends upon the table to eat all that remains.”

“You mouthy—” Greg glanced at Rosie, “git. I ate a perfectly normal lunch and so did Myc. And we actually expended energy today.”

“As I recall,” Mycroft drawled in a bored tone, “you, little brother, were the last to eat from the luncheon table leavings.”

Sherlock’s mouth snapped shut and John and Greg shared a look at how neatly big brother and little brother could needle one another. It was actually quite refreshing to see the two geniuses
devolve into sibling squabbles about who ate more of Mummy’s lunch offerings.

“This was a lovely tea, Violet,” John complimented, “You’re spoiling us all…we’re not going to be satisfied with tinned soup and sandwiches, or store bought crumpets and tea bags now.”

“Stop trying to sway Mummy into offering you more sticky buns, John,” Sherlock reprimanded, “You’ve had enough. I refuse to roll you around London when you grow as big as a house.”

“Rude,” Violet tutted.

“You wouldn’t like me with just a little bit of sticky bun plumpness?” John muttered in his ear, brushing his fingers over the back of Sherlock’s long neck. “I know how fascinated you are by my soft belly.” He let a tiny kiss grace the curve of Sherlock’s ear, “You do love…rubbing up…against my belly, you filthy thing.”

“Is he offline?” Greg joked, as Sherlock sat frozen.

“Just gave him something nice to think about,” John laughed.

“When he comes back to the land of the living, we must have some music,” Mummy clapped her hands.

*****

The last quivering notes of Sherlock’s violin wove in and out of the fading chords Mycroft had drawn from the baby grand Steinway in the small music room. The flame of the candles threw shivering shadows on the dark red walls, the leaping fire bathing the rapt faces in a warm glow.

Communicating with their eyes, the brothers moved into another piece, and Mummy squeezed Father’s hand. John hugged a sleepy Rosie to him. And Greg silently promised Mycroft a proper standing ovation when they were alone in their room later. Of course, since Sherlock as well as Mycroft could correctly divine the thoughts he was having, both brothers went red.

“Pianissimo,” Mummy cautioned softly, nodding toward Rosie’s drooping head. Ever more softly and slowly they began a quiet duet of *Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht*. The sound was so lovely and haunting that it was no surprise that it brought tears to the eyes of the listeners.

Moving slowly, John stood up and nodded toward the stairs. Mummy hugged both Sherlock and Mycroft and whispered in their ears, caressing their faces with her cupped palms. Sherlock dropped his gaze to the rug so no one could see his reaction to his mother’s words; Mycroft looked almost tender and abashed, and Greg swallowed a lump. God he loved this man.

Bidding his boyfriend’s parents goodnight, Greg followed Mycroft up the stairs and down the hall to their room. He was bloody grateful that the loo was between their room and the one John and Sherlock occupied, as he had no desire to hear them having it off. Of course, he still had to be wary of the fact that Violet and Siger—whoops, Mummy and Father, as he’d been asked to call them—were across the hall. No matter, he could always get a bit kinky and use a gag on Mycroft, who was a bit of a squealer when he was particularly aroused.

“All you want a shower before bed?” Greg stood at the end of the bed, eager to get
undressed, but not wanting to suffer drafts if Mycroft was going to indulge in one of his hour long baths.

“No thank you, my dear. The pipes rattle and groan and creak most ominously, so out of courtesy to the household we tend to not use the shower late at night. If you must use the facilities, I suggest you afford yourself of the water closet downstairs, it’s much less bothersome when one flushes.” Mycroft loosened his tie and smiled, “The rush for the shower in the morning will be most interesting with all of us here.” His eyes gleamed, “I shall have to rise at precisely the right time to allow Father and Mummy their ablutions but still beat Sherlock to the hot water.” His eyes lost their competitive light, “I do hope you don’t feel soiled, Gregory.”

“I’m not dirty…yet.” Greg smiled in satisfaction when the other man’s fine, elegant hands stilled on his waistcoat buttons. Their eyes met in the cheval glass.

“Oh?”

“Mmm, yes…oh.” Greg walked up behind him, resting his chin on Mycroft’s shoulder and held his gaze in the mirror as he reached around and finished easing the buttons out of the holes. He flattened his palms on Mycroft’s lean, warm belly and kissed the back of his neck. “So many buttons,” he breathed, starting on the shirt, “Such a buttoned up appearance my Mycroft shows the world. And what a sweet, generous, torrid lover he is when we’ve locked the world away.”

“Gregory…” Mycroft sighed and tilted his head to allow for more kisses on the side of his neck, reaching back to tunnel his fingers into Greg’s hair. “Your lips should be registered as a dangerous weapon.” He smiled with darkly amorous eyes, “You could be had up for arms dealing.”

“I’ve got a warrant card and I know a very powerful man…besides, I don’t use my weapons indiscriminately.”

“For which I am grateful, although it is sad for the rest of the world which misses out on your very interesting skill set.”

“Perfected that skill set in my misspent youth,” Greg growled, pulling back on the open plackets of Mycroft’s shirt so that his arms were immobilized. He sucked lightly on the back of his boyfriend’s neck, just below where a shirt collar would cover any marks.

“Oh? Do tell me about the bad old days, Inspector.” Mycroft reached behind him and worked on the flies of Greg’s cords. “Are there any pictures? I will have the opportunity to coax your mother into sharing the family snaps.”

“You want to see me in my leathers and Mohawk? A safety pin through my ear and eyeliner on?”

“God, yes,” Mycroft assured him. He shifted, brushing his buttocks over the bulge in Greg’s trousers.

“Only if I can see your family album…I want to see young Mycroft.”

“I assure you, you don’t,” Mycroft said dryly, a grimace twisting his elegant features.

“Hey, none of that, sunshine. You’re gorgeous, remember? All of you, at all times.” Greg walked around him and kissed him sweetly, “When those ugly thoughts come up, just remember that you’re talking about the man I love.”
They sank into a kiss, and only parted long enough to continue disrobing and fall onto the bed. Despite the central heating, the cottage was old, and thus a bit draughty, and they burrowed under the covers and continued their lovemaking. No gag was necessary, but Greg did end up covering Mycroft’s mouth to muffle the cries as he attained his pleasure.

******

Christmas Day

“Did everyone,” Mummy tittered, bright-eyed and fluttery with glee, “sleep well?” Mummy was even more prone than usual to giggling and innuendo this morning.

“Don’t grin at Mycroft in that disgusting fashion you lecherous flatfoot,” Sherlock hissed at Lestrade. “It is bad enough knowing that you instigated sexual athletics for which my elderly brother’s enormous frame is poorly equipped, but you are forbidden from leering in my presence.”

“Sherlock,” Mycroft snapped, cheeks red, “Do shut up! Or would you prefer I make my deductions as to the acrobatics you got up to with Doctor Watson once young Rosamunde was abed?”

Rosie looked up from her smoked salmon and scrambled eggs, “Did you stay up and play circus? Without me?” Prepared to pout, she was nicely distracted by Mummy sliding a toasted oatcake slathered in Nutella on her plate and asking her if she had heard Father Christmas visit in the night.

“Boys,” John muttered, “Try to keep the verbal skirmishes to a minimum, eh? It’s Christmas Day. And we’ve got a little pitcher with very big ears listening to everything we say…one who is already barely behaving since she’s wild to open her gifts.”

Breakfast passed in a fairly mild fashion after John’s rebuke, and with an eager Rosie spurring them on, they finally took their plates into the sitting room and nibbled and sipped as she dove joyfully under the tree and began hauling out packages. Soon a positively greedy ripping of paper and strewing of ribbons ensued, the carnage being archived by Siger, who had out his old Leica and was snapping away, his own gifts half-forgotten in the greater joy of witnessing his family’s gluttony and avarice.

“Well,” John asked their girl a long time later, as she and Sherlock eagerly explored the chemistry set that he had foolishly objected to and Sherlock had triumphed on, “Did you get everything you wanted?”

“Except for the fox,” Rosie hummed. She stuck her feet out in front of her and smiled, “but I have my fox socks from Uncle Mycroft! And I didn’t get a mouse…”

“I told you, dear, Biscuit is a terrier and terriers and mice are natural enemies. Besides, I think Nana would draw the line at more wildlife in the house. You like the aquarium Gran and Granddad got for you though, don’t you?”

“Uh huh,” She nodded her head emphatically.

“We’ll come up to London soon,” Violet promised, “And take you to the pet store and buy you fishes for your aquarium. Mycroft loved his aquarium when he was little.”
“That’s because he’s a cold fish,” Sherlock interjected. His mother bopped him on the back of the head. “Ow!”

“Be nice or I’ll take away your presents, dear.”

“I’m not a child,” Sherlock muttered, rubbing his head.

“Then don’t act like one, William.” When she called him by his first name, he knew to back down.

John finished picking up the wrapping paper and sat down behind him on the love seat, leaning forward to drop a smacking kiss on his cheek, “Feeling queasy from all the sentiment yet?”

“Thankfully I have a strong stomach,” Sherlock grinned. He leaned back against John’s legs and watched as Rosie examined the chemistry set. He recalled the first year he received his own, and how excited he had been to begin experiments.

Despite their generous breakfast, Violet soon rose to continue preparations for lunch; since Mycroft and Lestrade were departing at one to leave and pick up Lestrade’s son and join the Lestrade family for Christmas Day dinner, they were going to have the main meal at midday. Both Lestrade and John rose to assist—though what use either of them thought they could be, Sherlock could not say—and Siger willingly gave in to Rosie’s request to go make a snowman. Which left the brothers alone.

Sherlock picked up the box and pretended to read the instructions for the experiments suggested. Mycroft sat quietly, eyes closed, hands crossed over his waistcoat. The only sound was the pop of settling logs and the distant rise and fall of voices from the kitchen, punctuated every so often by high-pitched giggles and squeals from outside, which brought smiles to both brother’s faces. After a few moments Sherlock dropped the box and closed his eyes, retreating to his mind palace. Much though he loved John and Rosie—alright, and his parents and even Mycroft and Lestrade—his head was beginning to echo from all the voices. Say what one would about Mycroft, at least he knew how to be silent.

Quietly, the brothers sat in peace.

*****

“I do hope no one is going to miss the turkey too much,” Violet fretted, as they cut into the rare roast beef with individual mustard Yorkshire puddings. The table was festively set and quite crowded with platters of braised Brussel sprouts, glazed carrots, and honey-mustard roasted parsnips; there were also bacon wrapped stuffing balls, bread sauce, Port gravy, cranberry sauce and numerous nibbles to fill in any cracks possibly left in the stomach. John had wisely tied a voluminous serviette around Rosie’s neck and was wondering if Greg wouldn’t need one fashioned for him as well.

“Leave a nook or cranny for tonight,” Greg counseled, refilling Mycroft’s wine glass, “Marm makes food enough for half of the West Country.” He grinned at Violet, “It must be a mother thing.”

“You said you have five siblings, Greg? Are they all married?”
“Oh aye,” Greg had slid further into his native accent the more he drank, a phenomenon John was familiar with from pub nights. “Got four loud-mouthed and bossy older sisters; Gertie, Alice, and Janie are all married, they’ve got seven kids between them; Phil’s husband died some years ago and her son lives with her, real lay-about that one. My younger brother Dean lives with his boyfriend Ben in Canada…they’re not making it home this year. There are umpteen grandkids going to be running about, which thrills Marm.” He grinned, “Da spends a lot of time in his workshop when we all get together.”

John didn’t miss Mycroft’s shudder, quickly quelled though it was. Greg grinned and nudged his boyfriend, “Myc here got noise cancelling headphones in his stockings because I’m a brilliant boyfriend.”

“I’m perfectly capable of socializing, Gregory,” Mycroft reproved primly, patting the corners of his mouth. “Unlike Sherlock, I am an adult, with self-control and a mastery of polite conversation.”

“Is that why you’re downing wine at such a rapid pace?” Sherlock needled, “Because of your mastery and self-control?”

“Son,” Siger sighed, reaching for his own wine glass, “leave your brother alone.”

“At least I don’t drive others to drink with my mere presence,” Mycroft snipped.

“It’s Christmas,” Violet warned, hand on the wooden spoon in the dish nearest her, as if she was prepared to brandish it at the merest hint of further squabbling.

John and Greg rolled their eyes at one another, shaking their heads at the childishness of two such intelligent men. Good thing Mycroft and Greg were departing in an hour to pick Greg’s son Nick up from his mother’s boyfriend’s family’s house; it was becoming clear the Holmes boys had had just about enough together time.

*****

“Let’s have another toast!” Sherlock waved the empty champagne bottle dangerously about, “To Christmas and stealing Mycroft’s wine, and, and…”

“And getting to bed before dawn?” John asked in amusement, taking the bottle and trying to steer Sherlock toward the stairs. “I think we had enough toasts, don’t you?”

“Nooooo…” Sherlock pressed back against the hand John had planted in his back, “It is still Christmas, and you loooooove Christmas, and I want you to be all, all, um…merry and bright!”

“I think you’re the one who’s merry and bright,” John snickered; glad he’d stopped drinking some time ago. He’d had just enough for this to be amusing, and to not be able to feel his toes. “Shush now…let’s go quietly upstairs and get in our warm bed. Rosie will be up at dawn wanting to make snow angels and play with her gifts.”

“You just want to get me in bed,” Sherlock squeaked out a hiccup, “so you can do bad, bad, badbadbadbad things to me…cuz you’re a bad, bad, badbadbad…bad man. Aren’t you, John…John…”
“Yes, I am John. You’ve got my name right; now let’s toddle upstairs, hmm?”

Sherlock shook his head and then clutched it when dizziness appeared to set in. “What’s the rest of it? John…something.”

“Okay, definitely time for bed if you can’t remember my name!”

Digging in his heels, the ungainly form of a very tipsy Sherlock Holmes wind-milled his arms, “Hamish! It’s Hamish! John Hamish Watson!”

“Very good,” John giggled, trying to capture his arms, “Well done you. Now, let’s celebrate your victory by silently sneaking upstairs and soundlessly creeping into our room and noiselessly falling asleep, eh?”

“I have a muuuuuuuch better idea,” Sherlock went all purry and chest-rumbling bass, those long arms winding around John, fingers trying to slither down inside his waistband, “L—pardon me—let’s quietly close and lock the door, and softly lie down in front of the fire, and sneakily rut like r-rabbits.”

“That…that is a, um, enticing plan, but you’re blotto, love. I’d be a shameful boyfriend if I took advantage of—Jesus, Sherlock! That’s my—stop!” Trousers sagging around his hips, John silently grappled with his boyfriend in the dimly lit hall, trying to keep his spidery hands from pulling down his pants. “What if someone comes down for a glass of water and sees—Sherlock!”

“Mmm,” Sherlock hummed, vigorously mouthing John’s rapidly stiffening cock.

“S-stop…” John shivered and took advantage of Sherlock’s need to breathe by pulling back. He glanced around, and then waggled his dick at his boyfriend, inching backward, “Come on then, into the sitting room. You say the door locks?”

Door safely barred against any unexpected visitors, they staggered-knee-walked-crawled to the hand-woven rug in front of the fireplace and Sherlock pushed John down unceremoniously, climbing on his lap and sucking John’s tongue into his mouth. John groaned and pushed an errant tree branch out of his face, hips rising to rub up against Sherlock’s delicious bottom as he kissed him back. There were bound to be bruises in the morning from the undignified wrestling that ensued, but at last they were mostly naked, and John gave up all semblance of control and thrust into Sherlock’s rapacious mouth.

The alcohol he had consumed wasn’t enough to dampen his erection, but it was enough to erode John’s control; in a shamefully short amount of time he was biting the side of his thumb to stifle his squeal, and coming in Sherlock’s mouth. Sherlock crawled up over him and covered him like a blanket, kissing his ear and murmuring filthy things that only half made sense. After a few minutes of drifting pleasantly, John wiggled, trying to shift his lover’s heavy weight, “Love? You want to roll onto your back and let me at that long, beautiful erection I feel against my leg?”

A soft snore ruffled the disordered hair over John’s temple. “Uh…Sherlock? Sherrrrrrlock…?”

Wiggling about and tickling those long, ticklish sides resulted in a snuffling snort and a squirming Consulting Detective, but did not yield freedom for John. After a few minutes he gave up and snagged his shirt, bundling it under his head and closing his eyes. He really hoped Violet and Siger didn’t have a key to the door and decide to come investigating in the morning…
Boxing Day

There was some small satisfaction to be had for John in watching Sherlock’s petulant suffering; of course, Sherlock’s suffering equated to everyone else’s suffering. But still and all, it was worth it.

“Never going to recover from being caught bare-arse naked on the rug with tinsel in my hair and my cock in your mouth. By your mum of all people.” John stuck his face in his second Bloody Mary, reemerged, “I’m just grateful she didn’t take pictures.”

Sherlock rubbed his temples, “Can you please keep your shrill yapping to a minimum, John? My head is echoing like an empty soup pot being hammered by a ladle from the mere echo of Mummy’s titters and coos upon discovering us in flagrante delicto.”

“I’ll show you yapping,” John muttered, but it was half-hearted. He really didn’t have it in him to increase his own ladle-hammering-pot discomfort. John kept closing his eyes against what felt like the overly bright light from the one lamp that was on, but every time he did he relived the moment when he had just surfaced from sleep to discover Sherlock sucking him off, right before Violet opened the door. “I don’t understand how you can be so miserable right now and yet an hour ago you had the wherewithal to perform oral.” And he hadn’t had the chance to either finish or reciprocate. Although now that he thought of it, having been caught already, they might as well have carried on. Damn alcohol for clouding his thinking!

“I was still drunk,” Sherlock groused, “Now I’m just hungover and in pain.”

“Hair of the dog,” John suggested for the third time, tilting his glass at Sherlock. Violet, bless her, had whipped them up a pitcher, and John intended on getting stuck well in before the elder Holmes returned from church with Rosie. He might just keep on drinking until he passed out, if any further mention were made of how lucky her dear boy was to have such a generous and clearly enthusiastic man to warm his bed. John could have lived his entire life without Violet Holmes knowing what he looked like without his kit on.

Sod it; he was pouring himself a third glass.
we wanted to show her off to our line dancing friends next weekend on New Year’s Eve.” He smiled his affable smile, “It’s to be a family affair, lots of kiddies running about for her to play with. I promised her I’d teach her to square dance as well.”

“Siger, that’s so generous,” John began, trying to fight back the guilt that warred with avarice at the idea of a week in which he could indulge in naked hide and seek, mornings in, overindulgence in takeaway and booze, and—most enticing—freedom to drag Sherlock to the Yard’s epic New Year’s Eve party. “But she’s a handful, we couldn’t ask you—”

“They offered,” Sherlock interjected quickly, glaring at him, “Of course it will be a blow to be parted from Watson for an entire week, but think of her, John.” He assumed a sanctimonious expression, “Ponies, John! Would you deny our daughter ponies? And a church fête?”

“I’d be a beast if I tried,” John said solemnly. He looked at Siger, “I think it’s safe to say, Rosie is yours for the week,” he laughed at Siger’s delighted expression, “If she’s too much for the two of you, just say so.” Ignoring his boyfriend’s indignant objection, he added, “Lucky I packed plenty of extra outfits for her, in case of accidents. Let me give you some money, in case she needs anything, or wants a trinket at the fête.”

“Nonsense,” was the response he got, “We regard her as our granddaughter, John, my boy, and she’ll be treated as such. We can see to her little needs. I’ll just go tell Vi we shall have her ‘til Sunday next!”

“And I shall see to your needs,” John promised Sherlock in a low voice when they were alone again. He risked jostling his finally quiet head by moving to the other plump sofa where his boyfriend was sprawled, and nuzzling Sherlock’s cheek, kissing his prickly jaw. “Just think, angel, we can indulge in a Bacchanalian display of lust in every room of the house.”

“I may not put on clothes all week.” Sherlock mused, rubbing his jaw. “I think I need to shave.”

“A shower would be in order,” John suggested. They looked at one another. “We could quietly retire upstairs and lock ourselves in the bathroom…let the grandparents have a crack at watching Rosie?”

“Excellent notion, John,” Sherlock approved, rising. He hustled John toward the stairs, hands on his hips, “Cleanliness and efficiency are highly prized attributes in a mate, and you possess both. What a lucky man I am.”

“That you are!” John agreed, taking the stairs two at a time, quite chipper now that he was going to get a chance at a naked, wet and slippery Sherlock. Time to pay him back for the morning’s shenanigans, “C’mon, love, let’s use up all the hot water while I lend you a hand.”

In the kitchen, over the sound of running water and knocking pipes, Rosie continued to outline the plot of Beauty and the Beast to her doting grandparents. They shared a look, eyes twinkling knowingly; it was good to know that, despite a late start, their Sherlock was fully committed to a healthy sexual relationship, helped along by a good deal of romance. It was a Holmes family tradition, after all.
I just realized I totally forgot to include mention of the family enjoying the Queen's Speech, which I'm sure is terribly American of me to have done. But since I AM American, I'll just beg pardon and hope it isn't an unpardonable offense.
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

A small wrap up to Honey: A Year in the Life.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this is so short, but I thought it said it all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“…I didn’t get the fox I asked for, but Uncle Mycroft got me dese neat socks…” Rosie pulled up her trouser leg, “…the top is a fox’s face! And he adopted a fox for me…this is its picture, I named it Vivian.” Smiling at the picture in her hand, Rosie put it back in her Captain Britain rucksack and rummaged around, “And he also gived me a plush fox, its name is Vivi. I would let her sleep in bed wif me but Biscuit gets jealous an’ tries to chew on her.”

Vivi received a kiss on her patent leather nose before being tenderly shoved into the depths of the rucksack. She looked up from under her knit cap and smiled at her daddy, who was leaning against a nearby tree; he was smiling but his eyes looked sad. “Um…and I have fishes, well, I will have fishes, when Gran and Granddad come to buy ‘em for me.” She scrunched her nose, “Do you know who they are? They’re Pop’s mummy and daddy. I ‘dopted them, so I get to call them that.

“Pop used to be my uncle Sherlock—Daddy said you and him was fwiends, so you know who he is—but now he’s my Pop, cuz he and Daddy are boyfwiends. One of my fwiends at school has two daddies too, but he has a mummy also. She’s not dead like you are.” Rosie’s face puckered, “I wish you weren’t dead. I don’t remember you.”

The wind ruffled the bare branches of the trees, a creaking sigh emanating from them. The sky was white from low-lying clouds, the landscape was bleak; the snow was nearly blown away from the fierce winds of the day prior, but remnants remained. The stones of the graveyard stood as silent sentinels in the gloomy parkland; there was no one else around. In the distance a car sent plumes of exhaust into the frigid air.

“Daddy shows me pitchers of your wedding and tells me stories, and Pop says I look like you…” Rosie put a hand tentatively on the white stone, “He says I sound like you too, and that you’d be proud of me. Especially my high kick, and how good I am at darts,” She sniffled, tears and snot beginning to gather in the back of her nose, “I wished you didn’t have to be just in pitchers though. I wish you could live with us. We have room.”

She stood quietly, not able to think of anything else. Finally, “I hope you had a good Christmas in heaven, Mummy. I was going to get you a pwesent, but Nana and I talked and decided maybe it would be better if I just bought you flowers sometimes…when it isn’t fweezing. I pwomise, when it’s spring I’ll bring big, big bunches of flowers. Daddy says your favourites was blue hydrwangeas…so I’ll buy some of ‘em.” Rosie put her lips to the cold stone in a tender kiss, missing the spasm of grief that passed over her father’s face, ‘I’m goin’ to go now, but I’ll come
again.”

As the little girl walked across the frozen grass towards her father, he looked over her head toward the gravestone that bore his wife’s name, and for just a moment he thought he saw Mary, smiling at him, her hand lifted in a silent wave. And then she was gone and Rosie was taking his hand, and they were walking back to the car, where Sherlock waited for them.

Chapter End Notes

This work is now part of a series, called Rare Honey. The sequel is coming soon, it will be called Pas de Trois. It deals with polyamory, so for those of you whose bag that most emphatically is not, thank you for reading to this point and I hope you enjoyed it! For anyone else who is planning on carrying on to Molly/Greg/Mycroft’s story, thank you for reading on with me!

It's been a pleasure to write this story, and a privilege to receive so many thoughtful, enthusiastic and insightful comments. Thank you all for your time and courtesy!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!