Family Ties

by Sparkle_Free

Summary

Watson's brother comes to stay at Baker Street, leaving Watson concerned about how he'll get on with Holmes, only to find out they get along very well. Too well.

Watson turned the letter over in his hands once more, contemplating the contents. His younger brother's neat handwriting was the same as ever, and he couldn't help but smile slightly at the familiarity before he returned once more to worrying over the words. His younger brother, James, would be visiting London for several weeks on business and needed a place to stay. Naturally, he had written his only relative in the city.

In truth, Watson was delighted at the idea of seeing his brother - he hadn't been back to Edinburgh in several years - but he was worried how Holmes would react to the news. He imagined a flat-out refusal, or worse: a sudden increase of malodorous experiments, the emergence of that dreaded morocco case. And his brother - how would he react? Even if he had read Watson's accounts of some of their cases in The Strand, a sentence or two here and there about his friends eccentricities were nothing compared to actually living with them. Surely his brother would get suspicious as to why Watson continued this living arrangement, long after both he and Holmes had become financially solvent.

Watson was so engrossed in his imagination, he didn't realize Holmes had moved from his chair until he plucked the letter from Watson's fingers and began to read. Watson tried to be angry, but Holmes chose that moment to rest a hand on his shoulder casually and lean against the side of his chair, and Watson forgot how to do anything but breathe and savor the warmth at his side. Moments like these were all he had; it was embarrassing how much he'd come to rely on these fleeting touches.

"Your brother?" Holmes said, sounding slightly surprised. "You haven't mentioned him before. He lives in Scotland, I suppose?"

Watson cleared his throat. "Yes. Apparently he'll be in town for a while and would like to -"
"Yes, yes, I read the letter," Holmes said dismissively. He let it flutter back to the table and pushed away from Watson's chair. Watson bit back a sigh at the loss of contact.

"I haven't seen him in years. Although, I have a photograph," he stood and crossed to his desk and began to rummage through the bottom drawer. "It was taken when he first joined the Army, two years after I did." Finding it, he pulled it out and looked at it fondly. A clean shaven, handsome young man looked back with large eyes that Watson knew were a paler blue than even his own. He passed the portrait to Holmes with no small amount of pride. Holmes stood silent for a moment.

"Of course he can stay here; though, I'm not sure where he'll fit." He said finally. Watson looked around and privately agreed. He couldn't in good conscience leave his brother on the settee, but there wasn't enough room in his own bedroom to place two beds. Holmes's room was big enough, but he had no idea how to pose that question, so he stayed silent.

Holmes, however, had been watching his face the entire time, and sighed dramatically. "Needs must," was all he said. He rose and crossed to the mantle and began filling his pipe with tobacco from the persian slipper.

"I'm not even going to ask how you knew what I was thinking," Watson said wearily. Holmes's lips quirked momentarily at that. "But why? What do you get out of this?" he asked suspiciously.

"My good man, I get to help my dearest friend in the world," he said with wide-eyed innocence.

"Fine then, don't tell me," Watson grumbled. "And I'm your only friend," he added. "Nevertheless, I'll arrange to have a bed delivered tomorrow. Thank you, Holmes." He couldn't help the genuine affection that crept into his voice at the last, and Holmes favored him with the kind of bright smile that always left him feeling a bit flustered. He mumbled an excuse and fled from the room.

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Watson eyed the tattered luggage piled at the bottom of the stairs, his thoughts racing between the man outside paying the cabman and the man upstairs, currently scratching away at his violin.

His brother Jim was a kind enough man, he supposed - save for the special torments that were common between brothers (and himself and Holmes, whom he most definitely did not regard as a brother.) There was no reason to believe there would be any animosity on his part. Holmes, however...

The door opened behind him and his brother strode in with a grin. Save for his reddish blonde hair, they could have been twins: they had the same muscular build, were roughly the same height (though Jim liked to tease him about the two inch difference); Jim had even grown a close-cropped moustache since the last time he'd seen him. At the sound of the door closing, the violin playing ceased. Watson felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up, though he couldn't figure out where this nameless apprehension was coming from.

"It's good to see you again, brother," Jim said with a soft Scottish lilt.

"It's good to see you as well," Watson smiled and gripped his brother's hand. "It's been far too long."

"Yes, it has." Jim tilted his head toward the stairs. "Was that your friend? The famous Mr. Holmes?" Watson bristled slightly at the teasing way he'd said 'famous.'

"Yes. Come, let me introduce you." He led the way up the stairs. He paused just outside the sitting room door and took a deep, steadying breath before he pushed it open.
He looked around. Forgetting his brother momentarily, he stepped back a fraction and bumped into him.

"John?" his brother asked. He felt Jim crowd closer to look around the room in confusion. "Is something wrong?"

Watson took a cautious step inside the sitting room. The clean sitting room. Holmes was sitting in the basket chair, fully dressed, Watson noted, though he'd usually be lounging in his dressing gown still at this time of day. His hair was slicked back and Watson stared a moment longer than was proper. Holmes was handsome even in his most disheveled state, but he could be positively devastating when he wanted to be. And today, apparently, he wanted to be.

"You must be Mr. Holmes," Jim said cheerfully when it became clear that Watson wasn't going to introduce them.

"Indeed. It's a pleasure to meet you, James." Holmes stood and extended his hand.

"Call me Jim, sir." Jim was grinning widely at Holmes as he gripped his hand. Watson felt the knot of apprehension in his chest loosen slightly.

"I'm afraid your brother's speechless state is entirely my fault," Holmes said. A teasing glance was thrown his way, and Watson felt the apprehension tighten again so far that he thought for a moment he might gag. "I must confess, I prefer things to be slightly less... tidy." Watson sighed in relief.

"Slightly?" he teased, and was rewarded with an amused smile in return.

"Yes, well, I wouldn't expect to find the sitting room in such a... collected state over the course of your stay. Also, since we are lacking in a guestroom, I fear we'll have to resort to more unorthodox sleeping arrangements."

Jim merely shrugged. "John and I shared a room for a while as kids. I don't mind doing it again."

"Actually, Watson's room is slightly too narrow to fit two beds. Mine, however -" he gestured at the open door, through which two beds could easily be seen. "Unless rooming with a stranger is disagreeable to you?"

"No, no, it'll be just fine."

"Excellent. I'll ring Mrs. Hudson for tea, and we can bring your luggage up to the room." Holmes led Jim down the stairs, and a moment later they returned with their arms full. Watson just stood to the side, dumbfounded, as Holmes and Jim dropped the luggage on the spare bed and returned. Holmes was being helpful, charming even, for no reason whatsoever. It was enough to make him sit heavily in his chair, watching as the two men chatted amicably and waited for tea.

The rest of the day and all of the next passed easily, Jim coming and going regularly, mounds of paperwork trailing him. Holmes was content to confine his experiments to when the man was out of the house, and for his part, Watson passed the time reading and chatting with his brother whenever he had free time.

What surprised him the most was that Holmes seemed to drop everything as well whenever Jim would sink down onto the settee to relax. The two men seemed to have fallen into a fast friendship, and while Watson would have expected that to ease his discomfort, he found himself irked by the development. The second evening, he begged off to his club for dinner, leaving the two men alone.
The next morning, he woke to find Holmes and Jim at the table, empty plates pushed aside so they could go over the paperwork now spread between them. Watson stood next to them, looking at the empty plates.

Two empty plates.

"You ate," he said dumbly.

"Sorry, I guess we really should have waited," Jim began. Watson shook his head to silence him.

"You ate," he repeated to Holmes suspiciously. Holmes hardly ever did more than pick at his meals; usually it took extremely high spirits on his part and much threatening on Watson's part to get him to do so.

"We wanted to get started on this paperwork. Mr. Holmes is simply brilliant," Jim gushed, "and he's offered to help me. Isn't that wonderful?"

"You have no cases, then?" Watson asked pointedly. He sat down and uncovered his own plate.

"Nothing of interest is stirring in the criminal world, mother hen," Holmes replied. Watson nearly choked on a mouthful of eggs as Jim snickered behind his hand.

"Mother hen?" his snickers turned into all out laughs. "What does he call you then?" Holmes didn't look up, but his lips curved up gently.

Oh God, no. "What are you working on, then?" Watson snagged a paper from the top of the pile. Holmes made a displeased noise and grabbed it back.


"According to Mr. Holmes, I need to file," he frowned and rummaged through the pile, "this one, and get approval for these plans -"

"-these plans," Holmes corrected, pulling a second copy from somewhere. "Those are the drafts. Perhaps I'll accompany you today." Jim looked at him so adoringly that Watson felt his appetite shrivel up and vanish.

"If you're not busy," he said breathlessly.

"Of course not," Holmes gathered up the paperwork. "Watson?"

"I have patients today," he said, suddenly glad for the excuse. The last thing he wanted to do was watch his brother fawn over Holmes all day. God, the man was practically making puppy dog eyes.

"Of course," Holmes frowned. They both knew that Watson canceled on a moments notice far too often to be proper anyway, but thankfully he chose not to comment.

"In fact, I'll be off a little early today," he continued as he walked toward the door. "I have a very sick patient that I should like to pay a visit before my usual appointments. Good day, gentlemen." They both called back their goodbyes. As Watson pulled the sitting room door closed behind him, he heard Jim say, "D'you want to know what we called him when we were kids?" he groaned and hurried down the steps.

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The next evening Watson trudged from his practice back to Baker Street. The wind and the rain
whipped at his hair and face until he was hunched over as far as he could go, limping agonizingly slowly through the streets. He thought briefly of hailing a cab and taking his weight off his sore leg, but the thought of arriving home a moment before he had to was singularly unappealing at the moment. The entire previous evening Holmes and Jim had been hunched over the paperwork, heads inclined toward each other, looking for all the world like long time best friends. They passed documents back and forth, talking lowly and chucking occasionally, until Watson could no longer stand it and curtly excused himself to his room.

He didn't understand where this anger was coming from. He should be thrilled that his brother and his best friend got on so well. Indeed, with Holmes involved he always had to be on guard in case new introductions came to blows.

He couldn't possibly be jealous, could he? He scoffed aloud at the notion. Jim (who was in London only temporarily, he reminded himself) had taken an interest in his brother's long time companion, something he himself would surely do, were he to visit Scotland. And perhaps Holmes took such an interest in Jim out of interest in Watson's own childhood. He'd never been very open about it, after all, and everyone knew how much Sherlock Holmes liked a mystery. His heart felt a little lighter at that thought. He tried to push his doubts aside for the rest of the walk.

When he'd finally reached 221B, he stood on the street glaring at the sitting room window. He could see the candlelight flickering, and it caused the irrational rage to grow. He wanted to rush in and turn up all the gas lamps, to chide Holmes for wasting his time, and for the love of God, to throw his brother and his sodding paperwork out on the street.

As soon as the rush of emotion came it was gone, leaving only a sick feeling of guilt in it's wake. Holmes had no friends save for himself; he should be happy for the man. Steeling himself, he opened the door and walked in.

He froze, however, hand still on the doorknob, and listened for a long moment.

Holmes was playing his violin. Not the usual scratchy sounds he produced when distracted, or the slightly off-tunes he sometimes produced while practicing. No, he was playing masterfully, a beautiful concerto to his usual audience of one.

_No_, he thought bitterly. _Not his usual audience_. His breath caught in his throat when the sound died down for only a moment, then returned, his favorite Mendelssohn sonata floating down the steps. He stepped back out onto the street, carefully closed the door behind him, and turned in the direction of his club, instead. Once there he sat quietly, letting the conversation drift over him, and didn't dare to return to Baker Street until he was sure the candles would have been long put out.

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Grumbling, Watson rummaged through the wreckage that could be called Holmes's desk. True to his prediction, Jim had only been there a week and the sitting room had been reduced to it's usual fantastic mess. A telegram had arrived from Lestrade that morning, requesting a document from Holmes regarding a case they'd finished a few months prior. Watson had left the telegram on the table and thought nothing of it. However, hours later, Holmes and Jim were still nowhere to be seen, and he was quite cross with both of them for disappearing on him. Finally, irritated, Watson had taken to searching Holmes's desk for the offending paper, partly to pass the time, and partly because he knew it would irk the man once he noticed.

Once he'd managed to wrench open the top drawer, he picked up the pile of papers on top of what at first glance looked like junk and scanned them half-heartedly. It was starting to look hopeless, since Holmes had a filing system undecipherable to the rest of humanity. He glanced inside the
Tucked under a pile of junk, almost as though Holmes had been embarrassed by them, were two tickets to La Bohème, for that afternoon. He'd mentioned to Holmes recently how much he'd like to go, but he hadn't thought the man was paying attention. He couldn't suppress a silly grin as he ran a finger over the edge of the tickets fondly. Deciding Lestrade could wait, he dropped the papers back inside and closed the drawer. He sat comfortably in his chair by the fire and pulled out a novel, humming. Suddenly he felt better than he had in days.

It wasn't much longer before he heard the quiet click of the door and footsteps on the stairs. He smiled at the soft conversation as they ascended the stairs. Suddenly it seemed quite absurd to be bothered by the situation when in a matter of hours he'd have Holmes to himself again, at least for the evening.

The door burst open and the two men came inside. Jim beamed when he saw him, and shifted away from Holmes slightly, who had been walking very close behind him. "I wasn't expecting to see you," Jim said as he walked over to the table and sat. Suddenly Watson felt very guilty for avoiding him the past week. He rose from his chair and went to sit across from his brother, patting his hand fondly. Holmes smiled at him at the gesture. Watson felt a rush of affection toward both men.

"Where have you been all morning?" he asked.

"Finalizing papers. Boring stuff mostly," Jim shrugged. "We're almost done, I suspect. Still, I'd like some time to enjoy London before it's time to return home."

"Well, perhaps there's still time to make plans," Watson said. "I hope at least you'll allow me to treat you to dinner before you go."

"That reminds me," Holmes said softly. He stood and walked over to his desk and slid open the top drawer. Heart beating in his chest quite absurdly, Watson leaned forward and waited.

Holmes pulled the tickets from their hiding place and slid the drawer shut. Turning, he walked over to the table. Watson fought back the silly grin from earlier - he didn't want Holmes to realize he'd spoiled the surprise. Once there, Holmes casually slid the tickets across the table to Jim, who grasped them eagerly.

Holmes smirked at the excited expression and Watson narrowed his eyes.

"La Bohème! However did you know I wanted to go, Sherlock?"

Watson's head whipped around fast enough to put a crick in his neck. He was about to admonish Jim for his assumed familiarity - after all, Holmes certainly couldn't have invited such intimacy - when Holmes spoke.

"They're for this afternoon. I do hope you'll join me for dinner before the show."

"Of course," Jim smiled warmly. "Please excuse me," he stood and walked toward Holmes' room. His hand rested lightly on Holmes's shoulder as he passed by, leaving Holmes leaned back in his chair looking extremely self-satisfied.

No.

It was the first coherent thought he could form. There was simply no way. He even shook his head, as though to dislodge the thought. The image of Jim's hand lingering on Holmes's shoulder
wouldn't budge, however.

"Watson?" he looked up. Holmes was leaning forward now, his elbows resting on the table. "Whatever is the matter? You're as pale as a ghost."

"Nothing," he lied quickly. "Holmes, I realize that Jim is as much your guest as mine, at this point -"

"Moreso, it seems," Holmes interrupted, "with all the time you've spent at your club."

"- but that doesn't mean you need to entertain him. Take him to the opera, and all that."

Holmes merely shrugged. "Perhaps I wish to. I've taken you to the opera, to which you've never complained."

Something about that statement nagged at him, but it was lost in the rush of pain. "We've known each other for years! You've only just met Jim! And why take just him? Why not buy three tickets, then?" at some point during his bitter tirade, he'd risen from his seat. Holmes was staring at him, wide-eyed. He took a deep breath and tried to regain his composure.

"If you feel I'm monopolizing your brother's time in London, I can certainly -"

"Never mind," Watson interrupted stiffly. "I'm sure it's none of my business. Now if you'll excuse me, I believe I'll take my supper at my club this evening." Unable to meet Holmes's gaze, he walked stiffly out of the room.

It was well into the evening before Watson returned home, stumbling up the stairs. He tried his best not to rouse Mrs. Hudson, who would not be pleased to find one of her tenants fumbling around in the stairwell, drunk.

He had just reached the top of the stairs when what sounded like a pained grunt came from behind Holmes's closed door. Worried, he started toward it, only to have a long, breathy moan freeze him to the spot. The room was spinning, whether from pain or drink he couldn't tell, and he forced his feet away from the door and toward his own room. Every step felt like he was moving underwater, his entire world narrowed to the fading sounds coming from the other room. When he finally reached his own room, he collapsed fully clothed on the bed. Here, he could tell himself that the wetness on his face was the effects of too much drink. Here, he could tell himself that everything would be alright in the morning.

Here, he could tell himself that his heart was not breaking.

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Watson groaned, squeezing his eyes shut farther as he rolled carefully away from the window. The stabbing pain in his eyes subsided enough for him to realize his stomach was rolling. He wrapped an arm around his waist and groaned again for good measure.

He wondered idly as he lay there how long he could go before he had to leave his room. Usually, he'd be certain that Holmes would drag him bodily from the room in less than a day, but now he didn't feel so sure. He couldn't even summon the anger that had sustained him anymore because really, who could he blame? He had no claim on Holmes, after all. That was perhaps the cruelest thing of all: he'd lost before he'd even been aware he'd had a chance.

He swore as he pushed himself from the bed, determined to shake this self-pity. Holmes had made his choice; Watson had to accept that. He padded over to his mirror and winced at what he saw. His
hair was sticking up at all angles, his tie pulled lose and collar askew. But the worst thing was his face. Blotchy and pale with nausea and pain, his cheeks a bright red and his eyes swollen from crying. He quickly set to putting himself to rights.

Twenty minutes later he was standing outside the sitting room, fully dressed, impeccably groomed, and feeling like hell. His stomach rolled again in a way that had nothing to do with his hangover.

Taking a deep breath, he pushed open the sitting room door.

Holmes was lounging in his chair by the fire, mousy dressing gown pulled snugly around his thin frame. His posture was so relaxed he looked nearly asleep - his eyes half-lidded, cigarette loosely held, a pile of ash on the arm of his chair indicating it had burned down in that position. There was a soft, sweet smile hovering at the edges of his lips.

It was too much. But at the same time... he couldn't remember ever seeing Holmes look so content. Heart twisting in his chest, he stepped into the room.

"Where's Jim?" he asked.

"Still sleeping, I'd suspect," Holmes murmured lazily. He turned to look at Watson, and tensed immediately. "Watson? Are you ill?" he stood and guided Watson to his chair. Holmes knelt in front of him and looked up into his face, all wide eyes and soft concern, and to his horror, Watson could feel his eyes fill with tears once more. He'd never seen Holmes this open, honest. Watson passed a hand over his eyes.

"I-I think I must be," he said. Certainly, his stomach was rolling again. "Excuse me," he brushed past Holmes and hurried back up the stairs.

Safe inside his room once more, he laid down on the unmade bed and slid back into a fitful sleep.

He awoke sometime later to a knock. "Come in," he called, expecting Mrs. Hudson to peek in. Instead, the door was flung open, and Holmes stood there with a tray in hand. Watson sat up quickly and winced. "What are you doing?" he asked. Holmes carefully sat the tray down on the nightstand. There was tea, a small plate of biscuits, mint leaves, ginger candies, and lemon wedges. Holmes gave him a tight smile and wordlessly poured him a cup.

"Where's Jim?" Watson asked for the second time that day. It seemed easier to do that time. Maybe he could get used to this after all. Holmes finished preparing the cup and passed it to him.

"He's finalizing his paperwork. He should be finished in just a few days." He was so casual when he said this, Watson had to regard him suspiciously. He took a sip of his tea and was grateful when it instantly began to soothe his stomach.

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Why? You've hardly spent any time with him," Holmes pointed out.

"I meant sorry for you," Watson heard himself saying. He was surprised to discover it was true. Holmes looked away, obviously embarrassed. "I didn't figure it out until yesterday," Watson confessed. "I imagine you're quite disappointed in me," he tried to say it lightly, but it sounded rather plaintive instead.

"I would have preferred you not figure it out at all," Holmes muttered tightly.

"I have a question," the words came out in a rush. He sat his cup back on the saucer, only shaking
slightly. "What made you chose him?" Holmes turned away, a sour look on his face. Watson stopped him with a hand on his arm. "Please," he said gently. "I have to know."

Holmes took a deep breath. The pain that fluttered over his features was nearly too much for Watson to bear. For an instant, he regretted saying anything at all. Holmes muttered something.

"What?" Watson leaned closer.

"I said he reminds me of you," Holmes ground out. He was looking anywhere but Watson, now. A bubble felt like it was going to burst in his chest, and a grin tugged at his lips. Holmes was scowling at the wall opposite, oblivious. "Should I pack my bags, doctor?" The way Holmes said his title, so formal, so desperately reaching for dispassionate and cool, made Watson shift closer and tighten his grip on his arm.

"Holmes," he said, his voice thick. Holmes did turn to look at him then. "You see, but you do not observe," Watson chided him gently. Holmes's face relaxed into the most beautiful look at wonder, and there was nothing in Watson's power that could have stopped him from leaning forward and pressing their lips together in a short, impossibly sweet kiss.

Watson sighed and leaned back slightly. He reached up to cup Holmes's jaw and stroked his smooth cheek, smiling at the vulnerable expression on his face.

"Watson," he whispered. Suddenly he surged forward, locking their lips together in a far less gentle kiss. Watson barely had time to moan before he was driven backwards, Holmes urging him flat on his back. Holmes licked at his lips, demanding entrance, and Watson sucked him inside greedily. Heat was building in his abdomen, making him grasp Holmes by the hips and pull their cocks flush together through their clothes. Holmes broke the kiss and swore, pressing his hips down frantically. His face was flushed, his eyes never left Watson's as he bucked against him, making him writhe and moan.

"Oh God," he whimpered. "Holmes..." he spread his legs farther, Holmes's longer ones settling easily between them. Holmes moaned in encouragement and gripped his thighs. Watson leaned up to capture his lips once more, forcing his way inside and thrusting his tongue in time with their hips. He felt Holmes's cock twitch, then he was moving frantically, holding Watson's thighs in a bruising grip. Wetness washed over his own member and Watson convulsed, his own orgasm rippling through him.

Holmes collapsed on top of him with a contented sigh. For his part, Watson could do little more than wrap an arm around his waist. Dimly, he wondered if he should be embarrassed that their first sexual encounter had amounted to nothing more than rutting like animals, but he found he was too drowsy to care. There would, after all, be plenty of time to practice.

He awoke later that afternoon alone, the blankets tugged over him. The tea tray was gone. He sat up and grimaced when the movement shifted his clothing where it had stuck to him. Blushing, he quickly rid himself of the offending garments and re-dressed, eager to see Holmes again.

Watson couldn't suppress his grin when he finally emerged from his room and saw Jim's bed had been rolled out into the sitting room. Holmes was at the table pouring over the newspapers, and Jim was nowhere to be seen.

"He's finished with his work," Holmes said. "He's making travel arrangements now. He expressed interest in leaving as early as possible, in fact." He shot Watson a meaningful glance. "Although he did say he'd like to have dinner with you tonight, if you were able. What will you say?"
"Yes, of course. But Holmes, you didn't tell him we..." he trailed off awkwardly, unsure of what to say.

"No no. I did, however, inform him his... services were no longer required."

"Services!" Watson sputtered. Holmes smiled at his outraged expression.

"Yes, well, I may have phrased it slightly more gently than that, having no desire to find myself with a blackened eye, but for all intents and purposes, that is all it was." The paper rustled as he turned a page. Smiling fondly, Watson crossed the room and tugged the paper from his fingers. Holmes's eyes were bright with amusement as he tilted his face up. Watson leaned against the table and ran a hand gently through his hair, nails scraping gently, causing Holmes's eyelids to droop. Smiling, Watson leaned close enough that there lips were practically touching.

"Am I a service to you, then?" he asked, lips brushing together ever so lightly. Holmes shuddered.

"No. You're a gift," he whispered, breath ghosting over Watson's lips. His tongue darted out to wet his lips and a shock went through Watson when it accidentally brushed his lip. "Are you going to kiss me, then?" Holmes asked after a long silence.

It was all the invitation he needed. He lowered his head a fraction of an inch and then their lips were pressed together, warm and wet. Watson's hands clutched and Holmes's shoulders as his tongue thrust into his mouth. His knees felt weak, and as though sensing it, Holmes slid his arms around his waist to steady him.

The sound of the front door slamming caused them to jump apart. Watson slid into his own chair and Holmes barely had time to straighten his hair and pick up his paper before the door opened.

"Oh, hello John," Jim studiously avoided looking at Holmes. "I didn't think you'd be up. Mr. Holmes said you were ill, and well, you do still look a little flushed."

Jim crossed the room and reached out to feel his forehead.

"I'm fine," Watson said hastily. "It was just a chill. Holmes tells me your business in London is done, then. When will you be returning home?"

"Tomorrow morning, first thing," Jim replied. He patted his breast pocket. "I've got the tickets right here."

"You will still join me for dinner, of course?" Watson asked. Jim glanced uneasily at Holmes. "Just the two of us. Please, to make up for my churlishness these past weeks."

"Of course, if you're up for it."

"I am," Watson confirmed.

Watson retired shortly after to prepare for an evening out with his brother. They chatted amicably during dinner, but after the plates were cleared away, Jim fell into an uneasy silence. Finally, Watson could no longer stand the tension.

"Jim," he said sternly. His brother jumped guiltily and resumed staring at the tabletop. "What's wrong?"

"I have something I need to tell you," he said miserably. Cowering in his seat, he looked more like the nervous little boy Watson remembered than the strong, exuberant man he'd grown to be. Watson reached across the table and squeezed his hand reassuringly.
"You don't have to tell me anything," he said softly. Jim looked up, eyebrows raised. "I know all about it." Jim leaned back in a slight panic, and Watson tightened his grip on his hand. "It's alright." They sat in silence, Jim studying his face, Watson trying to maintain an air of calm steadiness. Finally, Jim relaxed and Watson withdrew his hand.

"I suppose Sher- that is, Mr. Holmes told you."

Watson shook his head. "Not at all. Holmes is not one to betray a confidence, Jim, not even to me. Still, it would be impossible to live with the man for several years and not absorb at least a few of his methods."

"Well," Jim laughed nervously, "You still agreed to come to dinner with me. That's something."

Watson frowned. "What are you on about?"

"You're not angry with me?" He sucked in a deep breath. "This is - rather, it's not like I'd - I've never done anything like this before, and I swear, I won't do it again." He wrung his hands, looking thoroughly miserable.

"Jim, whatever you and Holmes had, it doesn't bother me," he reassured him.

"I'll meet a nice girl, back home," Jim said quietly.

"If that's what you want. It's alright if it's not, as well."

Jim shot him a grateful smile, and with a sigh of relief he steered the conversation to more light-hearted topics. Soon, they were laughing, completely at ease once more.

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It was shortly after noon when Watson arrived back at Baker Street from seeing his brother to the train. Holmes was flipping idly through his correspondence, ignoring the smoke filling the room. Watson coughed pointedly and threw open the windows.

"Were you planning on asphyxiating sometime soon, Holmes?" he asked, "because I would like to have use of the sitting room this afternoon."

"Atmosphere, Watson, atmosphere. It sets the mood."

"It smells like a pub at 3 in the morning in here."

"...that is agreeable to my mood."

"Well, perhaps I can entice you into a better one." It was an innocent statement, but the effect it had was profound. Holmes dropped his letters and turned to look at Watson with a sinful smirk, eyes dark with a sudden need.

"Perhaps," he murmured. That one word and all it's unspoken promises sent a shiver down his spine and his mouth ran dry. Holmes rose from his chair, graceful as a cat as he approached. Watson gripped the windowsill, throat bobbing as he watched his languid approach. He stopped a few inches short, looking down at Watson from his greater height.

"Would you care to -" he leaned over and spoke directly into his ear, "- entice me, doctor?" Watson made a noise somewhere between a whimper and a groan. Something warm and wet slid over the shell of his ear, followed by a soft rush of air that made him shiver. "That's a start," Holmes
muttered appreciatively. "I would not be adverse to retiring to my room, at this juncture," he gripped Watson's hand and led him away from the open window.

Watson could do nothing but stare until the door closed behind them. The moment Holmes turned the key in the lock, however, he threw himself at him, pinning him against the door and capturing his lips in a bruising kiss. Holmes made an appreciative noise and melted into his embrace. He spread his legs wide until he'd slid down the door far enough that they were at eye level, never breaking the kiss. His arms wrapped loosely around Watson's back. They stayed like that for several minutes, savoring the feel of each other finally in their arms. Their need became insistent, however, and soft caresses turned to gripping hands and questing palms, soft pressure turned to undulating hardness. Breathless, Watson pulled away, panting. Holmes's cheeks were flushed, his pupils dilated. He had never seen anything so beautiful.

"Bed?" Holmes asked, amused. Watson could only nod wordlessly, not trusting himself to speak. They stumbled over to the bed, fingers deftly flying over buttons and flies, hands exploring whatever new territory they could find.

Holmes spun them at the last moment, leaving Watson to fall down hard on the edge of the bed, Holmes kneeling in front of him. In a flash he was bent over, encouraging Watson to lift his feet out of his pants.

The sight of Holmes on his knees before him, shirt parted and flies undone was nearly too much. He closed his eyes while he shrugged out of his own shirt. A hand began to carefully trace over his chest, closely followed by a wet heat. Watson bit his lip to hold in his cries. He heard cloth shifting and opened his eyes to see Holmes slipping his pants off, mouth still attached to Watson's collarbone and drawing obscene noises from him. The sight of his cock standing red and engorged drove Watson to grip Holmes by the hair and pull him back just far enough to plunge into his mouth. Holmes was completely submissive, allowing Watson to grip his hair painfully as his other hand wandered over his upper body, feeling his wiry yet muscular frame, pinching and rolling his nipples mercilessly. The thought drove Watson even higher, prompting him to pull away with one final lick and pull Holmes up onto the bed.

He rolled the detective below him, basking in the bewildered, aroused and completely trusting look on his face. He bent and placed a soft kiss on his mouth, lingering and sweet, before he bent to explore farther with his lips and tongue. Holmes gasped when he licked at his nipple, and he moved to do the same to the other before biting gently. He moved lower, leaving hot open-mouthed kisses on his abdomen. He could feel Holmes tensing up farther as his excitement built.

Nervousness flooded through him at the thought of what he was about to do. Finally, his mouth hovered over his cock, and with Holmes still staring at him, he snaked out his tongue over the slit, gathering up the bead that had formed. Holmes convulsed, letting out a long and shaky, "oh," and that was all it took. Watson lowered himself eagerly, taking the head into his mouth and sucking mercilessly.

Holmes thrashed below him, keening out in pleasure as Watson found a rhythm. He put his hands on Holmes's hips and pressed them into the mattress, forcing him to give up all control over the situation. Both of Holmes's hands ended up buried in his hair, his knees raised as he dug his feet into the mattress. Watson looked up to see him staring down at him as though he couldn't believe this was happening. His breath hitched as they watched each other and he tried again in vain to buck into Watson's wet heat.

Watson sped his rhythm, still watching his lover's face. His own cock ached to be touched, but his
only tightened his hold on Holmes's hips as the man's eyes slid closed and his head fell back. Shudders wracked his body as Watson's mouth filled with bitter fluid, which he swallowed with some difficulty. When Holmes's shudders subsided, he drew his mouth away and moved to lay next to him. Holmes was breathing deeply, eyes closed, and Watson simply watched, content. Suddenly, his eyes shot open and he forced Watson back against the pillow and kissed him soundly. Before Watson could even realize what was happening, Holmes slid down the bed and swallowed him down.

Watson let out a long moan as Holmes's throat muscles worked around him. He could tell this wasn't Holmes's first time, but at the moment, he didn't care. All that mattered was that his wickedly talented tongue kept doing what it was doing.

He might have been able to hold on longer, but just then one of Holmes's hands snaked behind him and rubbed at his entrance. He tolerated the fleeting touch for just a moment before pleasure overcame him and he cried out, driving himself farther into Holmes's throat when he released. Then he was dimly awake of Holmes's sliding up next to him once more.

Holmes stretched, then in one sweeping movement wrapped himself snugly around Watson's body. Chuckling, Watson buried his face in his hair and wrapped an arm around his shoulders.

"Keep this up and you'll spoil me, Magpie," Holmes teased. Watson passed a hand over his eyes with a groan. Holmes chuckled.

"He did tell you about that. Honestly Holmes, I was 12 - "

"Hush, my dear," Holmes said fondly. Watson chuckled and rubbed his nose in Holmes's hair. Holmes pulled the blanket up and over them and together, they drifted off to sleep.

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