Recovered Memories

Two years after Sherrinford, the estranged Holmes brothers are about to learn about themselves, each other, the family and their (gulp) feelings.

Mycroft wants to gift Sherlock back his good memories, and all sorts of truths come spilling out.

Notes

A bit of a saga, with heartfelt high romance, humour, angst, fluff and filth. Eventually, loads...
of hot filth.
Unapologetically unseasonal. Come December I'll be writing picnics.

Minor liberties taken with Holmes family lore.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Sherlock sighed deeply as he exhaled a cloud of cigarette smoke into the chill morning air. *Ooh, yes.* This was just what he'd needed to make this trip bearable. A breakfast fag to offset the appalling prospect of Christmas at the Grange. With Mycroft and all the family. He'd arrived by train yesterday.
evening, against his better judgement. Mycroft had actually bothered to collect him in a Range Rover, of all things. Barely a word had been spoken since then.

*Dying for a cup of tea now. Can’t have a smoke without a cuppa.*

Only three days to go - Christmas Eve, the stupid Day itself, and the even stupider Boxing Day. Utter pointless tedium. Why Mycroft had suddenly taken to the season was beyond him. Getting sentimental in his old age? No, he'd probably belatedly realised the whole thing was primarily an excuse for gorging yourself into a coma without having to feel guilty about it. There was surely enough posh food in the larder to satisfy even his brother's gargantuan appetites.

This morning Sherlock had woken from a shallow sleep at the crack of dawn and snuck out of the rather grandiose room he'd been given (surprised that his brother hadn't assigned him the boot room). That bloody four-poster bed had oppressed him too much, its overwrought canopy looming above him and making him mildly claustrophobic. *Time for some air. Well, time for some nicotine and tar anyway.* He’d trudged out to the stables in an old pair of Wellingtons he found in the wardrobe.

He stood behind the rundown old stable block and gazed into space, watching his blue smoke mingle with the morning mist, dirtying the sweet, clean-smelling air that hung on the meadows surrounding the eighteenth-century country pile and its outbuildings. He shivered and huddled himself up in his scarf and coat, wishing he'd changed into proper clothes instead of just slipping into the slobby pyjamas he would wear down to breakfast (because it irritated Mycroft), but which he never wore in bed.

He could have smoked in his room. That would have annoyed Mycroft adequately too. But he didn't really like the smell of stale smoke indoors. Smoking outside felt healthier and offset the guilt at his failure to control his addictive impulses. He hated being a slave to vice, but it was Christmas. *You're allowed a ciggy at Christmas, especially if you have to spend it with your bloody family.* Not that he'd seen anyone apart from his brother since he arrived. Plenty of time for fake smiles and strategic silences later.


He took another long drag and held it in as long as he could stand it, then let it out with as much control as possible.

A sense of calm descended over him as he mused, his brain suspiciously and surprisingly quiet. People always said the countryside was peaceful, but they were obviously idiots who didn't listen properly. Nobody listened properly. The air contained a cacophony of birdsong, whistling wind, rustling trees, animal noises and the incongruous whooshing of cars from the distant motorway. But it was calm of a sort, he supposed. Not precisely comforting to an adoptive city boy like himself, but familiar at least.

He knew these fields, the land around here. Or at least, had a vague sense of having known them. It was the Holmes country retreat, handed down for generations, and gifted into Mycroft's ownership by Siger upon his premature passing. Mycroft had been 14 when their real father died, and he had come fully into possession when he turned 18.

As the inheriting son, Mycroft owned all of the property - apart from the family seat of Musgrave Hall, which legally belonged to Uncle Rudy before he went insane and destroyed the place all over again. After Rudy went missing and was declared officially dead (though Sherlock had severe misgivings about the diagnosis), no-one could bear to establish ownership of that derelict ruin. Not that they'd ever want to go back there now, after everything. It remained abandoned in the harsh
northern territory of youth. A monument to Holmsian pain.

The elder Holmes brother owned a portfolio of swanky properties; the six-bedroom town house in Hampstead, the neat Dorset cottage, and the sprawling farmhouse in the south of France. Though he was most often in residence at his large grace-and-favour penthouse flat in St James's (so convenient for Whitehall, don'tcha know?). Most of the family assets were in his keeping by the time he was 25. Sherlock didn't care - had never cared. He was glad never to have had to get to grips with stupid, pointless details like contracts and leases and estate management. If he'd been left anything of real value, he'd have sold it for drugs years ago anyhow. Everything was safer with Mycroft. He managed land like he managed everything else - with calm, methodical, thorough control. Responsibility looked good on him. Mostly.

Not that Sherlock had ever gone without. He'd been as spoiled by wealth and privilege as anyone that had been born to it. There had always been plenty of places for him to rest his head, once he'd had enough of back-alley street life. Money just didn't matter to him. It was there, it was useful. It meant he didn't have to work. He'd always hated work. What he liked was play. It was what he was best at and what he'd done all his life.

He'd had the choice of either living off detection or living off his inheritance. Though he had struggled against dependency on the family millions at first, deliberately squandering his share on chemicals and bad times, he never felt right about taking money for the cases. Made it feel too much like a proper job. But being bailed out repeatedly by his disapproving elder brother when he'd burst his latest credit card or handed all his cash over to the purveyors of finest Class A was an indignity too far, and injured pride had gone some way to setting him back on the not-exactly straight and narrow. That, and the rehab Mycroft had personally repeatedly forced him through.

When he was ready to put his mind to use again, he'd decided it was more important to stay sober, let the clients off the bill (the ones who scored seven or above anyway; anything less he charged as a fine for timewasting) and just accepted the money his brother had tied up in trust for him. In trust. That telling phrase. Mycroft was entrusted with his trust fund. Mycroft had allowed him the money only when he deemed him trustworthy enough not to blitz through it. He had then finally been free to focus all his energies on playing games and solving puzzles properly. Everything else was irrelevant.

Until recently. Until Eurus, and the aftermath. Until that little breach of trust. Was that why Christmas this year? Had enough time passed for it not to be awkward to have them all in the same room again? With extended family too, so the invitation suggested. Oh God, what if Mycroft has lost his mind and asked Great Aunt Muriel, who thought she was a parrot. Or Second Cousin Julius, the dreadful, dullard director of the village Gilbert and Sullivan Society?

Was this strange gathering Mycroft's attempt at ingratiating himself? Surely there was no need. Mummy and stepfather had forgiven Mycroft's sins, even if he could not forgive himself. Sherlock had forgiven him, though he had never said so. But who needs to say things to Mycroft? He knows everything already. He preferred to keep the incident behind a very, very strong, locked door in his Mind Palace. Though, try as he might, he still heard the scenes being replayed behind it sometimes.

'Let's try for that, shall we? Goodbye, Brother Mine...'

The Incident had been two years ago. Eurus had been dead for over a year now - wasted away to nothing through self-imposed starvation, her last days spent in unresponsive stupor. Finally at peace, perhaps. She had seemed to find nothing more of interest to keep her attached to the world, once she had been in the same room with all of them, one last time. After he and his little sister had conversed through their duets like strange children giving a parlour concert; after Mycroft had broken down and all but disappeared from his life.
He’s not as strong as he thinks he is.

Mycroft’s face when he told them... Mycroft’s face when...

He shivered and drew breath suddenly, surfacing from thought. Stop it. Not good.

Bloody Mycroft.

What was going on with Mycroft? He’d heard nothing from him for the best part of a year, since they’d sat at opposite ends of the same pew at their sister’s sparse but incongruously beautiful funeral. No calls, no texts, no unannounced visits. No poorly disguised Spooks following him down side streets; no conspicuously discreet black saloon cars; no whirring of cameras turning to watch him in the dark. He wasn’t being monitored anymore. He could sense the absence of scrutiny. He could feel the lack of observation, and of concern. He could feel nothing.

Then, out of nowhere, a month ago, a crisp white envelope dropped through the letterbox at 221B, bearing that ghastly embossed seal Mycroft used when he was trying to look grown up. An actual invitation on poncy card with a gilded border. ‘You attendance is requested by Mycroft S. Holmes... family Christmas at the Grange... RSVP 5th December, latest...’ Formal and boring as hell. When he chucked the thing in the bin, however, he saw his brother's neat calligraphy on the back. 'Don't throw this away. Do please come.' So he'd scrawled 'Fine' in lurid green biro and posted it back. Why was he unable to disobey Mycroft's instructions? It was infuriating. Ah, but it wasn't an instruction, was it? He'd said please. He didn't know which of them was more pathetic - his brother for writing it, or himself for falling for it.

He told himself he'd only agreed to come because he was hoping to nick some useful state secrets in between courses. Not that Mycroft didn't already know that. He would have put measures in place to block him and throw him off the scent. Still, it would be more fun trying to thwart him from within the perimeter, as it were, and, he admitted to himself, infinitely preferable to spending Christmas alone at Baker Street.

John was spending the week in Scotland with his new-ish girlfriend. What was her name? Can't remember. Doesn't matter. She seemed kind, and she was normal, not a spy (that was important). A social worker or something do-gooding, but not a naïve person by any means. She’d seen the rough end of life, been in the trenches, so to speak. She made John laugh and sleep better than he had in years. That was all that really qualified someone for being John's girlfriend, as far as he was concerned. A good person. There was no need to know more. Sherlock Holmes had given up getting to know anyone new. He had all the people he would ever know.

Soon John and Rosie and the decent woman would move into a place of their own. It was a relief in many ways. Though he and the Doc had their easy routine - and though he took his un-godfatherly duties seriously - living with a toddler and her stressed, over-anxious father was really quite wearing on the nerves.

Mrs H was at her sister's again. There was no-one else suitable with whom to while away the stupid so-called holiday. Couldn't very well invite himself round to Lestrade's. Though, I probably could actually... He knew from past experience that no interesting cases ever came up in late December. Even the criminal underworld and psychopaths took time off at Christmas. No. Let Greg have his break in peace. He deserved it.

So he found himself alone again. In the New Year he would go back to the puzzles. He and John would continue to work together. But privately. Quietly. No blogging. The blog didn't matter now. Not after Sherrinford. It was best not to be renowned these days. God knows, he had not really enjoyed being famous. Not for itself. It was the reputation he enjoyed. The interesting doors it could
open. Best to let the world at large forget he ever existed now. He should never have let himself become addicted to the attention. Vanity, he knew, was the most destructive of his vices.

Still, there was alone and there was alone. Mycroft’s invitation had piqued his curiosity, as no doubt it was intended to do. So along he had come, back to the large Grange he hadn’t visited since he was a child. Following that unexpected ‘please’. Following some scent he’d picked up but couldn’t yet identify.

Had Mycroft been alone this past year? Or…not? Had he met someone? Who? How? When? But really, who? Was that why he’d gone off the radar? He hadn’t seen any sign of another person in the house, but one never knew with Mycroft. Was all this a prelude to some embarrassing public announcement? The thought caused a little clutching sensation in his throat and a worrying jolt to his heart.

Something was definitely up. How he hoped it was nothing boring. Or unhearable.

Suddenly overcome by a shudder, he flicked his dog-end into the dewy grass where it hissed until he ground it under his toe. He ran his fingers through his hair, the natural curls made even wilder by damp, and rubbed at his face to bring some feeling back to it.

He checked his phone - no signal this far from the house, it’s barbaric - and saw that it was 8.35am. He’d been standing outside for nearly an hour, and it was noticeably brighter than when he’d left his room. Against his will, his stomach growled at him. No sense fighting it. Not at Christmas. There’d be breakfast. A big Mycroftian one, no doubt.

He hastened across the field, to the back door that led into the main house, avoiding the kitchen entrance for fear of running into the staff. He couldn't cope with any obsequious 'Good morning, Mr Holmes'-ings or 'How are you today, sir?'-ings. All that rot was Mycroft's gig.

He discarded his boots in the passageway, not bothering to wipe them off. Well, if you're going to have staff in the first place, may as well give them something to do.

Padding round in his woollen socks, still decked in coat and scarf, Sherlock found his way to the main dining room. He hugged himself and rubbed briskly at his arms to bring the feeling back. He saw that his fingernails were quite blue, and his hands blotchy and mottled after their prolonged exposure to the freezing air.

He stepped into the large, surprisingly cosy room at the centre of the ground floor, eye-rolling at the absurd, too-long dining table, set with only two places, but noting with furtive delight a sideboard loaded with tureens, platters, dishes and cloches full of hearty breakfast fare. The riot of delicious smells and warm air nearly buckled his knees.

Until that moment, he hadn't been fully conscious of just how cold he was, and now realised he was shivering rather uncontrollably. Pain started to grip his extremities as his body greedily leeched heat back into his blood. He couldn't feel his hands.

"Where the hell have you been?!” cried Mycroft Holmes, from the head of the table, in an all-too-familiar disapproving tone. Sherlock jumped in spite of himself, cursing inwardly at his current lack of physical control. Mycroft threw his copy of The Times onto the table and plonked his china cup down a bit too hard, so that the tea sloshed onto the saucer.

Shit.

"Outs..ssi...," attempted Sherlock, irritated to find his mouth wasn’t working properly.
Mycroft’s eyebrows raised in alarm.

"For God’s sake, you silly boy, you're practically blue. Come and sit over here, by the fire. I'll pour you some tea." Mycroft got up swiftly and crossed the whole length of the room to usher his brother over to the fireplace, rubbing at Sherlock’s gangly arms as he manoeuvred him, frowning crossly.

"Nn...n-no nee…"

"Oh, do shut up, you sound like an imbecile."

Sherlock did as he was told. Just this once, he told himself. Because he really was bloody freezing.

Mycroft pushed him into a large velvet armchair and inspected him. ‘Like a vet looking over a lame horse,’ thought Sherlock. He huddled a little closer to the roaring blaze under the marble mantelpiece and brought his hands up to meet the heat, wiggling his fingers.

"You went outside for a cigarette. You've been there for about 45 minutes, standing still in minus ten degree weather. You're in your pyjamas, and you went Mind Palace wandering. Your blood flow has slowed, your heart rate has fallen, your judgement is impaired. It's not quite full hypothermia but your nose is as red as a fictional reindeer's."

Sherlock scowled. "F...ff...fu.....o...off..."

"Yes, thank you. Drink this." Mycroft brought Sherlock hands together to form a bowl, and thrust a tea cup into them.

Sherlock sipped at the soothing, sweet liquid gratefully, though he tried to look begrudging. Rather hard to begrudge tea, though. Especially the good Oolong, with milk and sugar exactly as he liked it. Sensation returned to his fingers, and his arms stopped aching as badly.

Mycroft looked down at him with something like despair, sighed quietly, and re-took his place at the table, turning his back on his rapidly-thawing brother.

Sherlock faced the fire, and listened to the Lord of the bloody Manor clanking about with various bits of cutlery and crockery as he obtained breakfast from the chafing dishes on the sideboard, before rummaging through those on the table.


Giving up his sulk as a bad job now he was warm again, and ravenously hungry, he gracelessly got up and flopped in front of the only other place setting, at a right angle to Mycroft's position. He poured himself some more tea, plinked three sugar cubes into it with showy carelessness, then swiped a whole toast rack, the butter and the pot of plum jam, and began loading up.

Mycroft gaped at him.

"What?" said Sherlock, bolshily.
"Would you kindly remove your coat at the breakfast table? I take it you're no longer in danger of frostbite, Scott of the Antarctic? We are not savages."

Sherlock simply pulled his coat tighter round himself and took a large, passive-aggressive bite of the really rather excellent toast and jam. Only his uptight brother cared about things like coats at the breakfast table.

He noted that His Majesty was neat, washed and pressed, swathed in a deep emerald robe of heavy silk, a pair of 1920s heliotrope pyjamas beneath, with refined tan leather carpet slippers on his feet. _Honestly, does the man not even have the decency to look casual at breakfast?_ Not that the ensemble wasn’t fetching on his brother’s tall, elegant frame, setting off his pale, pampered complexion perfectly. The colour scheme was reminiscent of a peacock. _And he thinks I’m an unbearable poser!_

Sherlock scanned his gaze over his brother, re-learning his form. Seeking information. He found nothing much changed. Except… The dark auburn hair was worn a little longer than usual, revealing the natural, genetically-shared wave that identified them as brothers. Mycroft rarely let his hair grow out, generally favouring a closer crop. He never had been able to tame that curly cowslick at the front.

_He’s lost weight. Too much. Don’t like it. Dieting? Stressed? Or… Was he…ill? Was it that kind of announcement? Is this about to be the new contender for ‘worst three days of my life’? _More data needed.

The cool grey eyes seemed normal enough. A little dulled and more sunken than usual, perhaps, but not yellowed, cloudy or bloodshot. _Tired. Or something worse?_ The thin, pink lips that turned habitually upwards so that every expression contained an incidental smirk, opened and closed delicately around a silver fork. _Teeth are fine._ His hands seemed steady enough. Fingernails manicured (the big tart) with no signs of vitamin deficiency. The scent of…something Penhaligon-y. _Lemon verbena, rosemary, bergamot, cedar._

Mycroft felt himself being analysed and glanced up to catch his brother’s curious look, shooting him a confused one of his own. As soon as Sherlock realised he’d been caught gawping, his face quickly shifted from an open expression to a studied dark glower.

Mycroft rolled his eyes and tried to ignore his brother in favour of the eggs and bacon.

After ten minutes of deliberately loud and obnoxious munching from one part of the table, and deliberately nonchalant nibbling from the other, Sherlock finally huffed and shoved his coat and scarf off.

_Too hot._

Mycroft raised a satisfied ‘told-you-so’ eyebrow. Sherlock grimaced sarcastically back at him and bit into his sixth piece of toast.

_Starving._

"Better?" said Mycroft, looking at his brother almost…

_Kindly? Mockingly? Why can’t I tell? This is intolerable._

"Mm. Good jam." Sherlock dropped his eyes to his plate, wondering why he felt disconcertingly bashful.

_Odd. Atmosphere._
"Yes, it is rather. New cook."

"S'good."

Silence fell again.

Mycroft cleared his throat slightly. Sherlock looked askance.

"What?"

"Nothing. You could simply smoke out of the window next time, if you must smoke."

Sherlock didn’t dignify this with a response. He wasn’t entirely sure it was what his brother had intended to say. He sensed Mycroft deflating a little.

After another little while, Mycroft finished his breakfast and rose from the table. Sherlock frowned as he tried to identify his brother’s mood. Embarrassed, was this? Or...what? Awkward, certainly.

Sad?

Was it sad? So hard to tell.

Why is it so hard to tell?


"Shan’t keep you,” said Mycroft, stiffly. “Do please help yourself to whatever you want. I know you will anyway. But, uh... If you need anything... Right. Must get on.”

He began to walk away.

"Hang on," interjected Sherlock, holding up a jammy hand. "Get on with what? What is there to do? You have an army of servants. You can’t have any work to do. I know for a fact the whole bloody government shuts down at Christmas, or you wouldn’t even be here.”

“I have arrangements to make.”

Sherlock rattled on. “Bollocks you do.”

‘Your language has seriously degenerated since you took up with the army doctor,’ scolded Mycroft, transparently playing for time.

Sherlock ignored him. “When’s everyone arriving then? Actually - who is everyone?”

"Ah.” Mycroft stopped short, turned back and looked (oh, no) guilty. Mycroft looked guilty.

Coldness seem to return to Sherlock’s body. Oh. No. This could not be happening.

"No."

"Well, if I could just..."

"No way, Mycroft. You're not about to tell me that, in fact, no-one is coming? That you have actually, actually lured me here for some bizarre amusement of your own?"

"Sherlock...."
"I knew it! Why did I know it and come anyway?!"

"Will you kindly stop making a scene?!"

"A scene? For whom, pray tell? There's only us here. For God's sake, Mycroft!"

Sherlock stood up from the table with some little violence, and the chair crashed to the floor behind him. Mycroft flinched and an unmistakable look of fear passed briefly over his face.

Sherlock seemed about to say something. Something deliberately hurtful. But his face slightly crumpled at the last moment, and instead he fled from the room dramatically, flouncing upstairs in princely high dudgeon.

Mycroft flinched again as every single door his brother stormed through from the ground to second floor was ostentatiously slammed. He ran a hand over his forehead, exhaled a little unsteadily, and replaced the fallen chair. Then he rang the bell to indicate to the staff that they could clear the room, and went to his study, feeling vaguely sick.

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Four hours later, Sherlock had still not left his bedroom.

Mycroft had spent a fretful time in his study, flicking through a Russian novel without concentrating on it. He had Beethoven’s piano concerti on the record player, but his ears were pricked for telltale sounds of escape from upstairs. He had deliberately stayed away, giving his brother space to calm down, or make a run for it. A year of conscious non-interference in his brother’s life, and barely anyone else’s, had not made him a more patient man. It was agonising not to know the precise nature of the disaster he was going to be dealing with – storm or silence? He couldn’t quite face either.

He fought down the instinct to go and investigate, or hammer down the door. He wanted to give Sherlock enough time to make an exit, if that’s what his little brother wanted. He had no intention of holding him captive. There’d been enough of that sort of thing to last them both a lifetime.

*Couldn’t just leave him alone, could you, Holmes? Couldn’t be alone, could you? You should have kept your promise. Weak. Fool. He’s far better off without you boring him to death or messing with his head again. Stop this.*

God, this whole idea was a mistake. Breakfast had been a debacle. They’d only exchanged a handful of sentences since Sherlock arrived, and they’d clashed before the toast was cold. He’d been hoping to hold off a scene until well after lunch. But that had been a naïve hope at best, he realised. The way Sherlock had looked at him, scrutinising him like he’d barely met him before. He’d been prepared for hostility. But that look…

He wondered what Sherlock was truly seeing when he looked at him like that. Running his gaze over him like he was something on a slab. A year of separation and he seemed to have lost the ability to read the capricious expressions behind his brother's bright eyes.

*Disgust. Contempt. Or…pity, was it? The thought made his heart plummet. A sad, ageing bore. A washed-up, out-of-shape dullard at the absolute nadir of his powers. That’s what Sherlock sees when he looks at you. Simply the truth.*

Four hours of deafening silence and self-torture was about all he could take. He sighed aloud. If Sherlock hadn’t left by now, perhaps he wasn’t going to. Unless he’d gone out the window… Unlikely given it was a three-story drop, but nothing would surprise him, given Sherlock’s catlike climbing ability and love of Byronic gesture. Best to just face it.
He grunted in frustration with himself as much as Sherlock, slammed the book shut, took the record off, and went to investigate.

His feet dragged as he made his way up to the largest bedroom on the uppermost floor. Pausing like a schoolboy at the door of the Headmaster’s office, he knocked gingerly on the oak panelled door. Then shook himself, tucked his sleeves more firmly into his arm garters, and knocked hard.

“Sherlock, I would appreciate it if you would come out and talk to me.”

Answer came there none. He knocked again. Still nothing.

“I’m…sorry. I should have told you. I didn’t think you’d come on your own. I just wanted us to…”

He pressed his forehead to the door and tried to detect movement from the room. Not a sound.

He tried a different tack.

“You know I have keys to all the rooms, it’s pointless locking yourself in.”

*Oh, yes, ‘mildly threatening’, fantastic strategy, Holmes, you idiot.* He sighed softly again.

“Of course you may depart, if you wish. But you’re very welcome to stay. I shan’t trouble you. You can take meals up here, if you like. Or I shall retreat to the study. We needn’t see each other, if that’s your preference. You have your laptop. There’s the library, the games room. I’ve kitted out a lab in the basement. I was going to tell you at breakfast, but it…got away from me. I don’t give a toss if you wear your coat at the table. I’d just really rather you didn’t leave. Actually. Please.”

*Inarticulate idiot.*

Silence.

*He’s bolted. Of course he has.*

“Fuck!” he exclaimed to the tastefully striped wallpaper.

Mycroft slumped against the wall and sank into a sitting position on the floor opposite the door. He folded his knees up to his chest and rested his forearms across them, letting his head fall forward into an attitude of exhausted defeat. After fifteen minutes his back started aching. He let his legs down and started getting up, muttering to himself:

“Out the window. Knew I should have activated the alarm system… Better check he hasn’t brained himself on the way down. Oh God, he’ll have nicked the car. *Hope* he’s nicked the car, freezing out there otherwise…”

He heard a rough guffaw from the bedroom, and a lead weight lifted from his shoulders.

The door creaked opened. Sherlock stood in the doorway, wrapped up in his bedsheets, naked underneath as usual. His eyes were droopy and sleep-stupid; his hair rumpled into a mad bird’s nest. He yawned impressively, gazing down in bemusement.

Mycroft swallowed hard as he took in his brother’s appearance and awkwardly attempted to rise to his feet.

Sherlock rubbed his eyes against the light of the hallway. “Yes, top notch deduction, brother dear. I escaped through the window. That’s just what I fancied doing in the middle of a blizzard.” He tutted sarcastically. “I went back to bed, moron.”
“Evidently. How long have you been awake?”

“Minutes. I heard you muttering to yourself out there. I’d never steal your sodding Rover. So provincial. The roads are too icy to drive - wouldn’t risk being caught dead in the horrid thing.”

Mycroft schooled his features against the laugh bubbling up in his chest, desperate to shake off his earlier despair with hysterical relief. When there wasn’t a case at stake or a problem keeping him up all night, Sherlock could sleep through Armageddon. He’d been that way as a child. Either a complete insomniac or a sloth. He supposed it boded well. Baby brother was perhaps more relaxed about being here than he’d feared. And his talent for sarcasm was thankfully undiminished. A sort of normality there – a starting point.

Sherlock beheld the sight of an off-guard, wrong-footed Mycroft with an amused air. His mouth raised up at the corners. The extra sleep had improved his earlier mood.

“What were you doing on the floor?”

“I really have no idea and if you mention it again I’ll deny everything,” said Mycroft, recovering his composure. “Would you care to join me for some tea, in the library perhaps? Restart the day? If you’re staying that is…,” he finished uncertainly.

Sherlock sighed with long-suffering affectation. “Yes, tea. Tea. Where would we be without tea to oil the wheels of fraternal communication? You can give me tea, and then an explanation. A bloody good one. And then, if the tea and the explanation are satisfactory, I’ll decide whether or not I’m staying.”

Mycroft nodded, rather taken aback by this unexpected directness.

Sherlock nodded, then retreated back to his room, slamming the door for good measure.

As Mycroft was turning to leave, the door swiftly reopened and the mop of hair reappeared round the jamb.

“I’ll need biscuits as well, Myc!” called Sherlock, and promptly disappeared again, leaving Mycroft tutting in the corridor.

From within his room, Sherlock grinned to himself, feeling absurdly…happy.

No family gathering! Just me and him. He said sorry. And please. He’s made me a lab!

He pulled himself together, frowning.

Wait. Stop getting carried away, you prat. He abandoned you (abandoned? Do I feel abandoned? I’m not a child), then he lured you here under (easily deduced) false pretences. I think we’re about to have A Big Talk. Or worse, a small talk that ends in another row, or something thrown, or something said that can’t be taken back. He’s all…discombobulated and unsure of himself, somehow. Don’t like it at all. Ugh. Emotions. Ghastly. What are we, of all people, supposed to do with them?

It was a puzzle. It was something, at least.

He hastily showered, brushed his teeth, sprayed himself with something far too expensive he found in the bathroom cabinet, and arranged his hair into some kind of order. He dressed, discarding a few outfits - no, not black, too funereal; could wear the slashed jeans to annoy him; don’t wear a jacket, you’re not going to the opera for God’s sake - until he found what he was looking for. A simple pair
of dark grey flannel slacks and a slim-fitting indigo pullover. He checked himself over in the full length mirror on the door of the wardrobe.


Regarding himself with self-reproach and exasperation, he ruffled his hair a little more in defiance at his bizarre urge to look kempt, then turned on his heel and prepared to do the unthinkable: go and talk to his brother.
In the library, Mycroft had ensconced himself comfortably opposite another fireplace and settled into a high wingback leather armchair. A small tea table was set between himself and an identical chair. He found he didn’t quite know what to do with his hands, and spent a bit of nervous energy fiddling with the cups, repositioning the sugar bowl at an exact right angle to the tongs, and making a symmetrical pattern out of the ginger nut biscuits.

He sat back, attempting to steady himself.

_**Tea and explanations. Just focus on the tea part for now, Holmes. Tea is distinctly manageable.**_

He was in the process of consciously un-gripping his fingers from the arm of the chair when Sherlock sauntered in, his face set in a mask of pointed neutrality. Mycroft sprang into action, pouring from the teapot with avid concentration, neatly straining the tea leaves, and adding milk and three sugars to the small china cup. He placed a biscuit on the saucer.

Sherlock dropped into his seat and brought a foot up onto the opposite knee. Mycroft wordlessly passed the cup and saucer to his brother, and sat back, sipping at his own cup of very strong, unsweetened brew.

A confounded silence fell. Biscuit-crunching filled it. Sherlock slurped, aggravatingly. The horrendous realisation dawned that someone was going to have to say something. Both men wondered from whom the initial incursion would come.

“Why am I here?” blurted Sherlock, surprising even himself. Then he realised it wasn’t quite the right question.

“Oh, why are any of us, Brother Mine? Rotten luck and lack of an organising force in the universe?” shot back Mycroft, slipping so easily into their traditional game of one-liner one-upmanship. He almost openly grimaced at his own crass predictability. Sherlock’s mouth tightened in irritation.
“Don’t do that. Why am I here?” he demanded again.

Mycroft hesitated. Sherlock found he couldn’t quite endure a pause.

“I mean, I know why I thought I was here,” he said, frowning.

“Do you?” asked Mycroft, speculatively tilting his head, his voice soft and tinged with melancholy.

Sherlock pretended not to have heard the curious tone. He clung to his high horse for safety.

“What was that stupid invitation? Couldn’t have just called or had a minion kidnap me off the street?”

Mycroft simply refused to dignify the final comment with an answer. “Would you have answered, if I’d called?” he asked, seriously.

Sherlock balked and attempted nonchalance. “Probably. Perhaps.”

His brother compressed his lips doubtfully.

“Hmm.”

Silence fell once more. The mantle clock ticked in mockery. Sherlock scowled at it accusingly, willing it to spontaneously implode.

Mycroft sipped at his tea, and seemed to come to a decision. He cleared his throat, and Sherlock had the horrible feeling he’d rehearsed whatever he was about to say.

*Should have stayed in bed. Not too late to escape out of the window, is it…?*

His brother inhaled deeply. His hands gripped the arms of the chair, making his knuckles white. Sherlock, feeling distinctly seasick, braced himself for something portentous. Something permanent.

Mycroft hesitated slightly, before leaning forward with deliberate intent. He planted his feet. He looked his brother square in the eye - as though remembering instructions he’d been given to do so - saying carefully, and with grave determination: “You are here because I am a liar, Sherlock.”

*Not the expected answer. Not predictable.*

Mycroft nodded, satisfied that he had indeed said what he’d intended to, and sat back again, waiting for…?

*A blow? Another flounce? The end of the world?*

“What?” said Sherlock in a near-whisper, his voice tinged with trepidation.

“I am a liar, Sherlock. I lie to you,” reiterated Mycroft, blinking a little this time, as though surprised to hear the words coming out of his mouth.

Sherlock shrugged. *Fuck.*

“Yes, that much I had worked out. I don’t see what that has to do with…”

Mycroft’s eyes briefly closed, as though pained.

“You once asked me - implied, rather - that I was…lonely,” he said.
A look of something like panic momentarily crossed Sherlock’s face.

“So? You denied it.” No, no, no. Don’t.

Mycroft swallowed, forcing more incriminating words out with faltering cadence, resolved upon seeing this through. From where Sherlock was sitting, it looked very much like torture. It sounded like someone in their first Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.

“It was a lie. Perhaps I didn’t know it back then. But I know it now. I am a lonely liar, Brother Mine. I have led this family to ruin because of my arrogance, my need to control and conceal. I have lied to you many, many times, and all I have wrought is pain. I have given you nothing but misery and lies. My only defence is that I thought I did it all for the best. But that’s a lie the arrogant tell themselves, isn’t it?”

“Right. And that’s why you needed to drag me out here, is it? To listen to you state the obvious,” replied Sherlock, cruelly, trying to distract himself from the creeping sense of unease stealing over him; trying to alleviate the lead weight in his gut caused by all these indigestible, out-loud words.

Mycroft attempted to disguise the flinch that flickered over his cheek.

“I’ve had a lot of time to think,” he continued, softly. Sherlock shifted in his chair, casting around the room for help he knew wasn’t there.

“Since when did you need time to think? You do nothing but think, Mycroft, as you so regularly tell me.”

Mycroft smiled the sad smile his brother was already sick of seeing on his face.

“How astute you are, Little Brother. I should say, I have had a lot of time to feel.”

Sherlock briefly wondered if he should call the doctor and get him to examine this stranger in front of him. He didn’t seem entirely well.

Help me, John. I think my brother’s broken something. I think my brother’s broken.

“Oh. That’s...not usual, is it?” he said, approaching highly perturbed.

“No, indeed. It has not been my custom - as far as you knew. But I did tell you I had a heart in me somewhere.”

“So you did.” We’re not really going to talk about this, are we? Not over tea. I can’t....

“I rather fear, when you pointed the gun at it, you ripped it open, Brother Mine. Even though I did not die as I deserved to; all my truths came spilling out like so much blood.”

Mycroft’s voice had become oddly distant and tightly wound; his mind’s eye all-too-obviously seeing again and again the horrors of Sherrinford. The brothers’ recent separation had not rendered that look unrecognisable, at least.

You deserved to die, brother? Is that what you thought? Is that what you think?

“Will you stop it?! I can’t have this conversation,” Sherlock shook his head rapidly, attempting to shake off the drowning feeling that threatened to submerge his self-control.

“It’s not a conversation yet. It’s a confessional. Just listen. Please. If you would.”
The look had a plea in it. A tincture of need. Sherlock nodded minutely.

*Need. He needs to say this.*

“You are here, Little Brother, because I do not wish to be a liar anymore”, said the halting stranger’s voice. Sherlock noted the other man’s troubled gaze drifting off to the side, and then caught his conscious decision to drag his eyes back to face him again.

“You are here because I should like to tell you the truth.”

Sherlock’s mouth opened and closed pointlessly. At a loss. All at sea.

“I don’t know… What are you talking about Mycroft? I don’t want anything from you.” *You don’t owe me anything.*

Mycroft nodded in agreement, as though on cue. As though he had practiced his response to that particular statement - practiced hard to accept it.

“No, of course not. I know. I do know that and I respect it. I merely… I wanted to ask you… I wanted you here so I could ask you to…let me tell you the truth. Truths, anyhow. If you don’t want them, I won’t continue in this vein. I realise all information from me is likely to be unwelcome. If you even believe me capable…”

“What truths? You can’t just dangle that in front of me! Now I know there’s something to know, do you think I’ll walk away?! It’s not really a choice at all, is it?” Sherlock’s voice rose in – *is it fear or loathing?* – and, by instinct, Mycroft’s dropped to the calm, considered tone he often adopted in the face of his brother’s more animated outbursts.

“It is a choice. I ask… I am asking that you give me these next three days in which to undo some of the lies I have woven into our lives. Your life. I am aware of the irony of having lied to get you here, but I told myself it was the last time I would do so. It is as addictive as a chemical substance, lying. One thing does lead to another.”

“You’re preaching to the choir on that front.”

“Do you remember this house, Sherlock?” Mycroft said, suddenly.

Sherlock balked at the apparent change of subject. “Vaguely,” he replied, aiming for indifference.

“That’s fitting. It was this house we brought you to after…Redbeard. It was here I made my first intervention into your mind, deprogramming you of all that ghastliness and distress. Much good it did us.”

“Why have you brought us back here now then?! What good could it do? Or is this about indulging your self-pity?” he challenged, pushing, pushing for clarity.

Mycroft shrugged, wearily, not even attempting to refute the accusation.

“It’s Christmas,” he said, simply. “A time for giving, so the goldfish say.” He looked down almost timidly, his nerves getting the better of him as he fiddled with his tea cup unnecessarily.

“I… I should like to give you a gift. One that can only be given here.”

Sherlock blinked, confused now.
“What gift?”

Mycroft took a breath. “I should like to give you back your memories.”

Sherlock snorted dismissively.

“I don’t want them! I already remember as much about Victor as I need to.”

“You misunderstand. Not memories of Victor, or…our sister. Memories of us. Of you. The good ones. There are good ones, you know.”

“Are there?” replied Sherlock with great cynicism, finding it easier to doubt than to believe.

“Yes. I would like to give you back the good and wonderful memories you’re entitled to, but which I have erased, inadvertently, along with the bad. As I said - truths.”

“Right… You just – what? - go rummaging in my Mind Palace and stir up a few little pleasant vignettes for me, do you?” scoffed Sherlock, increasingly uncomfortable with the direction of this. *Too much, too soon. But if not now, when…?*

Mycroft sighed, reluctantly.

“No. No tricks. No neurolinguistic programming, no swinging watches, no rapid eye movement. Simply… Simply let me sit and tell you stories, like the ridiculous sentimental elder brother I truly am. Then at least you will have a fuller picture of your childhood - one that belongs to you and is not tainted by the darkness of recent events.”

He paused, uncertainly. “I have no right to ask, but I am asking all the same.”

Sherlock eyed him sceptically, working him out. The question he most wanted to know the answer to, but most dreaded to ask, left his mouth before his brain had time to censor it.

“Why?”

“Because… Because it’s all I have to give you. Information.” *All I’ve ever had to give you.*

“How will I know you’re not still lying? Planting false positives. Meddling in my brain again?” He had to know.

Mycroft smiled the smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “I deserve that. You’ll know,” he said, reassuringly. “You always do, really, don’t you? Clever boy that you are.”

Sherlock looked into his brother’s eyes, seeking clues.

“You’re asking me to trust you.”

“If you can. A little bit,” said Mycroft, a half-smile quirking one side of his lips. He held up a finger and thumb a small distance apart.

He seemed hopeful, Sherlock realised. Not entirely desperate; definitely not begging. Not taking an answer for granted. Just… Unbearably hopeful. He caught no hint that he was being manipulated one way or another. He felt he was being genuinely asked.

Sherlock made his decision, and it came easier than he expected it to.

“Then… I shall.”
“Why?” That infernal question.

“Because…you asked. And gifts are traditionally exchanged, aren’t they? I am prepared to offer my consent in fair exchange for your truth. Because it's all I have to give you. Didn't buy you socks or anything.”

To Sherlock’s abject dismay, Mycroft’s voice was choked and strangulated by the near-onset of tears.

"Thank you, Brother Mine. I am so tired of it all. I do so need you to understand. No gift is unselfishly given, you know. I want you to have it. But I am, of course, attempting to soothe my own wounds by it."

Sherlock couldn’t take it anymore. This bloody emotional earthquake, shifting the ground between them so unpredictably. Intolerable uncertainty.

“Jesus, I told Lestrade to look after you! Why hasn’t he?! Why aren’t you all right?!” he demanded.

“You told Lestrade to look after me?!” Mycroft’s high forehead creased in puzzlement, his earlier melancholy temporarily laid to one side at this bizarre onslaught.

“Yes,” said Sherlock, simply. And then, less certainly, “After Sherrinford. I asked him to go to you, to make sure you were all right.”

“Lestrade?” came the incredulous response. “Is that why he called that night? I mean, he’s a perfectly decent chap and all, but what on earth did you think he could do for me?”

“He’s a D.I. He’s good. Nice. He’s used to dealing with, you know, trauma and stuff. He knows about some things we don’t so much. I thought he’d… help. Or find you some help, or… I don’t know, put a blanket on you, take you to the pub. Something.”

“Me. In a pub.”

“I don’t know! I just knew the last person in the world you’d want to see was me, or John. Lestrade is, you know, decent, and normal, and attractive, with a sensible job… And I don’t know anyone else, and neither do you!”

“Sherlock, are you telling me you tried to set me up with Detective Inspector Gregory Lestrade to help me cope?” said Mycroft, slowly.

“He fancies you.”

“He most certainly does not!”

“I’ve seen him looking! I thought you fancied him…” he said, grumbling under his breath. Stop talking, Sherlock. Ugh.

“You what?!” Mycroft’s mouth dropped open in disbelief.

Sherlock squirmed. “I thought…”

“That you’d offload me to a nice policeman, and he’d…take me on a date? Make it all better? Marry me and have my babies, what?” said Mycroft, indignantly.

“All right, so it was a stupid idea!” replied Sherlock, defensively. “I don’t know! I was trying to be helpful!”
“Helpful. Yes. Of course you were.”

Mycroft pinched the bridge of his nose. Sherlock frowned. What was wrong with it? It should have worked. It had been so obvious at the time. No doubt at all about the right course of action.

“Sherlock…,” continued Mycroft, with heavy reluctance. “Do you know what happened…to me? While you were rescuing John, and her?” He ended more bitterly than he’d intended.

Sherlock blinked at him. “I… No,” he admitted, lamely. “They just said they’d found you. You were alive, unharmed. I was - trying not to have a fit - greatly relieved, of course I was. But I didn’t think to ask more, in the moment.” Couldn’t.

He fought down his rising concern and the acid-burn of guilt in his chest. “So much was happening then. And I needed to get John straight, after everything he’d already been through... I assumed further interaction on my part would be unwelcome.”

You know, after you tried to persuade me to kill you, as if it were the easy choice. As if you thought I’d be able to live with it.

“Unharmed. A relative term.” Mycroft sipped the last of his lukewarm tea. He sighed, shaking his head disconsolately. Another decision was made. Another disclosure forced from him in a blank, dull voice that no longer sounded like his own.

“I did promise truth. Perhaps we had best start here as anywhere.” Please don’t let this be a mistake. Please don’t let this make it worse.

“When I woke from the tranquiliser,” he said, carefully, "I was locked in Eurus’s cell. Lying in… what I can only think of as a lake of blood. A literal pool. About eight pints - the full human complement.”

Mycroft’s eyes closed as he visualised it. One of his hands raised off the arm of the chair, semi-consciously, as though warding off a demon. Sherlock regarded him with apprehension and concern, seeing past his own discomfort to bear witness to whatever his brother wished him to bear witness to.

“Somebody had been completely exsanguinated,” he continued, disbelievingly, “and I was awash with their life’s blood.” His mouth was dry. Eyes dilated with memory, then screwed closed against it.

“There were two words scrawled in that blood, on the glass wall – her sticky hand prints streaked through it.”

“What did they say?” asked Sherlock, levelly. Oh, God.

His brother’s eyes opened suddenly, boring into his own.

“Can’t you guess?”

Sherlock flinched, his voice raised in mild panic. “Of course I can bloody guess. I don’t want to.”

“It’s his,” Mycroft said, quickly, getting it over with. Then more slowly. Deliberately. Making it real. “It’s. His.”


“So I took it to mean. As she intended.”
“Oh,” breathed Sherlock. “Oh. I… I should have known.” Because he should have. Because what else could one say?

“I don’t remember them rescuing me,” continued Mycroft, as though he hadn’t heard his brother speak. He felt it was best to try and just state the thing. Comprehensively. Factually.

“I don’t remember getting to the hospital, you see. Afterwards they said I had experienced...a dissociative event. I believed them.”

Mycroft's pace quickened as he ploughed through his confession, his face a mask of shame. Sherlock recognised that emotion now. How could he fail to? His brother reeked of it. It rolled off him in waves.

“I was practically catatonic for the next 24 hours. I couldn’t hear or speak. Apparently, they kept telling me you were alive, but I wasn’t taking it in. They showed you to me on cameras. Some of my team. I think I may have spoken to you on the phone briefly. I don’t remember. Lestrade did come in handy, as a matter of fact. He was the only one I trusted to tell me the truth. After a while, it got through to me that you weren’t dead. That I wasn’t, after all, responsible for your loss. I wasn’t going to have to live out a future where I was accountable for your loss.”

Sherlock said nothing, his mouth tightly closed, fingernails digging into his thighs. To speak would be to break the trust being asked of him, which he was determined to honour. He had promised to listen, and listen he would. Besides, he could think of nothing meaningful to say whatsoever, as his brother pronounced excoriating words that flayed the skin off them both.

Mycroft barely noticed his brother now – lost in himself as he re-experienced the recent past in vivid, agonising detail.

“I smashed the place up. The hospital room. Broke three fingers on my right hand. Knocked myself unconscious against the wall. They sedated me. They…actually restrained me, strapped me to a bed. That was less fun than you’d think,” he said, sardonically.

Sherlock didn’t acknowledge the minor attempt at levity. He sat stunned. Eyes blown wide with some inexpressibly large feeling.

“I was signed off work, of course,” continued the elder Holmes. “Four months in so-called therapy, which was as hateful as you can imagine. A condition of keeping my job. Another vile little ultimatum for me, but there we are. You were alive, and safely ensconced with your family at 221B. And nothing else mattered.”

Sherlock looked at him aghast. Horror-struck. Then a thought occurred. The words had been right, but a meaning was wrong somehow.

“My family?” he said, puzzled. His brother nodded.

“John. The child - Rosie, isn’t it? Your saving graces,” Mycroft said, his mouth twisting into a would-be supportive smile. “My good wishes may be unwelcome, but you have them all the same. For what it’s worth. I very much hope you…that all of you…thrive, and -”

“What? What, Mycroft?”

“That you’re all happy. Then it was all for the best, after all.”

“I don’t know what…”
“I would like to, erm, offer my… I mean to say, if you ever need anything, of course you must feel free to come to me. Money, I mean. The little girl… School, or music lessons, or whatever small humans get up to these days. She is…a niece of mine, I suppose, if you… If that were acceptable to you and John, naturally.”

He was blushing pink, forcing presumptuous pleasantries out of himself as though speaking a recently-learned foreign language.

“Mycroft…,” said Sherlock, tilting his head in suspicion. “Do you think me and John are together?!”

Mycroft looked up sharply.

“So I had deduced, yes.” He frowned in consternation. Don’t mock me now.

Sherlock laughed despairingly. “You haven’t deduced anything, Mycroft! You’ve been sitting here imagining things. God, how long have you been turning that one over in your head?” Then, with anger, “How could you know anything to do with me or John? You haven’t even been there!”

“I… Not?” I can’t be wrong. I can’t be.

“Not like that. How many times?! I love John Watson dearly. I dote upon his daughter. Even now they’re doing a Highland fling with a perfectly lovely woman whose name I don’t know! Family, yes, of course they are, but not…” He threw his hands up. “You’re my family, for God’s sake! My blood. My bloody brother. Where the hell have you been?! Why didn’t you come?!” Sherlock shouted wildly, instantly transporting back to childhood, demanding answers and attention. Demanding Mycroft.

Mycroft’s face twisted in anguish. He sat bolt upright, gesticulating with outstretched hands. So uncharacteristically animated that Sherlock recoiled in surprise.

“How could I come to you?!” he all but hissed. “How could I show my face to you, of all people, after that monstrosity?! After I put us all in that cell, and you got us out. And afterwards…,” he stopped himself short, panting slightly from exertion. He closed his eyes and inhaled shakily, holding up a hand as though to halt himself.

“Afterwards I was useless,” he resumed, sounding reconciled to fact once more. His voice shifted back to the leaden, flat tone that Sherlock now identified as desolation. Despair. “Useless to myself. Useless to you.”

“What are you talking about?” probed Sherlock, urgently pushing for more. Tell me. “How useless? You were alive, weren’t you?”

This was like floundering in the ocean with no land in sight. If we continue, will we reach terra firma eventually? Or smash to pieces upon the rocks?

Mycroft grimaced in disgust. “Oh, yes, I was alive,” he said, harshly. Full of bile.

“Alive and…simply useless. For once in my life, I… I could not control my mental processes. It was as though some amputation had occurred. I could not manipulate the data, Sherlock!”

He sounded outraged now. His eyes flashed with fierce intensity. With rage.

“Images, memories, feelings were let loose. Such feelings I couldn’t… I couldn’t grasp any of them! Don’t think I wasn’t alive to the irony that the one thing I have relied upon all my life – my ability to keep feeling at bay, to stop it destroying everything - was just one of the many things I lost in that
godforsaken place. That mausoleum to my pride!"

He seemed almost to be ranting to himself while Sherlock gaped, heart clenching with every word.

“Pictures in my head, sounds ringing in my ears, so real I thought they were in the room. The pervasive iron stench of some poor bastard’s blood - of your blood, so my mind told me – that smell everywhere I went. Your body limp and cold in front of me every time I closed my eyes… Weeks and weeks of it. Months! And not a single lockable door in my head to hide them behind; not a single safe-room or dungeon inside me to banish these nightmares to. I thought - well, this is it, this is where the hereditary insanity kicks in. But eventually…”

“Eventually…” prompted Sherlock in a whisper, unable to help himself.

“Eventually I understood that such a reaction is all rather depressingly normal. As extraordinary as the Holmes brain is, dear brother, it is still in thrall to basic chemical reaction. We must still obey evolutionary laws. As your good Doctor knows all too well, from his Afghanistan days.”

Sherlock wondered whether he dared say those four letters. But it seemed there was nothing to lose by it.

“PTSD.”

Mycroft nodded, though he was still not quite comfortable with the diagnosis.

“Quite. But unlike other sufferers, my feelings of survivor guilt were entirely rational and deserved. My fault. Mine alone.”

“I pity the poor sod who had to try and give therapy to you.”

Mycroft huffed a wry laugh, feeling reassured by Sherlock’s habitual irreverence. He discerned the kindness behind it; the opportunity to break the tension.

“Oh, so did I. Needless to say, she was extremely well compensated for having to listen to it all. She was, in the end, rather good. They don’t ‘give you’ anything, you know. You have to do it for yourself. That helped take the sting out of it, somewhat. I was able to ‘work through it’, as they say. I have, somewhat, come to terms. All that is left are the things I must share with you. I think it might be part of ‘the process’, as they so unimaginatively call it.”

Sherlock nodded, attempting to take everything in.

“It doesn’t excuse you,” he said, firmly.

Mycroft hung his head disconsolately. “I know. I don’t intend to make excuses to you for what happened.”

“No, I don’t mean for the incident. I mean… What better reason was there to come? Or call? Did you think I wouldn’t… Did you think I’d forgotten about you?”

“Of course. Or rather, I believed you would forget. If you must know, I believed you would delete me. I would have, if I were you. But then I saw at the funeral… You hadn’t taken the trouble to do it, obviously.”

“So you deleted yourself by buggering off? For God’s sake, Mycroft! You think you’re… I mean, I know my mind is powerful, but I’m not actually a magician. Some things - some people - are not removable. Your hand prints are all over my life. I couldn’t erase you if I wanted to!”
“I know and I’m sorry,” said Mycroft, instantly.


“Partly because I was, to put it euphemistically, ‘on sabbatical’. Partly because I promised myself I would never meddle in your life again. But mostly because I am a physical and moral coward. Don’t you know that, Brother Mine? You’re the brave one. The grown-up.”

“Brave? I’m just reckless and addicted to dopamine,” said Sherlock, ignoring the second accusation. That’s the joke of the century.

“The result is the same. Except now, it seems, I am attempting something that might very generously be called courage. Of the metaphysical kind, at least.”

“Sentiment, brother?”

“God, yes, sentiment. I am drowning in it. As you see. There is a reason I have kept it at bay all these years. But the floodgates are open now and I fear I may never be able to close them again. I don’t mean to embarrass you with it.”

“Not embarrassed.”

“No? I am. It is…taboo, between us, is it not?”

Sherlock cocked his head in silent query.


He inhaled sharply, suddenly completely certain about what needed to happen next.

“Let’s get drunk,” he said, smiling brightly. Mycroft paused, momentarily thrown by this turn of mood - and he exhaled in one relieved breath. His shoulders seemed to sink by inches. He bought the heels of his hands to his eyes and rubbed at them, exhausted.

“Oh, Lord, yes. Yes. Let’s get drunk, Brother Mine. I entirely see your argument that sobriety is overrated. I wonder why I ever fought it.”

Fuck it. If ever there was a time for irresponsible substance abuse...

Sherlock chuckled, delighted and somewhat taken aback that his brother was going with his rather reckless suggestion.

Let’s get some life back into us.

“As Doctor Watson says, sometimes you just need to get fucking drunk.”

“And they let this man practice medicine, you say?” replied his brother, with ironic amazement, sounding more like Mycroft than he had all day.

“I blame the army, personally,” returned Sherlock.

“I don’t, I’ve met too many medical students,” said Mycroft, drily raising a well-groomed eyebrow.

Ah, there you are, Mycroft. There you are.
The palpable pall over the room seemed to lift. Both men breathed a little easier.

The pot of tea was discarded for a decanter of single malt hidden in a large antique globe. The only truly sensible option under the circumstances. Crystal tumblers were retrieved from a cupboard beneath a mahogany bookshelf, heaving with limited editions and rare publications; unique treatises, esoteric theorems, monographs, obscure volumes of scientific discourse and natural philosophy, all handed down through generations of Holmses.

The heir to the family fortune poured two large measures of whisky.

“Soda?” he offered.

“Nope,” came the dismissive reply of the second son.

Mycroft’s mouth turned up at one side, and he handed his brother a glass with a sure and steady grip. Their fingers briefly brushed as it was passed from one to the other. An accident. Static shock.

Sherlock raised his glass in a toast which he hoped seemed disrespectfully sarcastic, but which was entirely meant. “Your health, brother.”

“Likewise.”

They sipped. Mycroft groaned a little at the satisfying burn down his gullet, feeling it flow into his bloodstream and slacken his muscles. Sherlock huffed a little laugh through his nose.

“Tell me you haven’t been hitting this stuff too often in the past year. Don’t need another addict in the family.”

“I haven’t, as it happens,” said Mycroft, rolling his eyes. “That really wouldn’t have…been right. Tempting though it was to block everything out. Decided to do it the harder way.”

“Unlike me, you mean? With my old reliable escape act.”

“That’s not what I meant at all. I…understand that.”

“I know you do,” said Sherlock, quietly.

“I wanted to - needed to - feel every last bit of it. Can you comprehend that? Me. I thought, if I’m going to be beset by untrammeled feeling, I had better understand every facet of it. I had best truly experience it. All or nothing. Understanding is my only natural defence, after all.”

“It’s a curse.”

“Oh, indeed.”

Sherlock steeled himself to break this oddly companionable lull. Can’t stop now. All or nothing.

“What don’t I remember, Mycroft? What don’t I know? Tell me. All of it. Any of it.”

Mycroft paused, his glass halfway to his lips. He nodded, slowly, seeing the look of acceptance and soft solicitude in his brother’s bright, mercurial eyes.

He placed his glass on the side table, adjusted his cuff-links and cleared his throat.

“Now?”
“Now. Tomorrow. The day after. See how it goes,” said Sherlock, attempting casualness. Mycroft’s eyes narrowed slightly as he explored his brother’s face for a catch or a condition. He found none. Just willingness to learn - as reassuringly normal as always.

“You don’t remember Siger. Do you?” he said, evenly.

“Father?” said Sherlock, his brow creasing in bafflement.

“Siger,” he retorted, swiftly, with some little force.

Sherlock shook his head. “No.” Then, “Yes. A little.” Do I?

“What do you remember?”

“He was - tall. I was a bit frightened of him, I think. But I don’t recall anything specific. Why?”

Mycroft shrugged. If we are doing this... “It all starts with Siger, really. I think… I think I must start with him.”

Sherlock cast his brother a look as if to say ‘How so?’

Mycroft propped his elbow onto the chair arm, and leant his head on his hand. Fixing Sherlock with a thoughtful gaze, he prepared himself to be as honest as he knew how to be.

Understanding is my only defence. Information is all I have to give. Caring is not an advantage, but...

“Siger was a brute, Sherlock”, he said, darkly. “He taught me everything I know about control and secrecy and lies. He taught me very well how to harden myself to my own weaknesses. Siger is the reason for everything. In order to tell you about yourself, about me, I must first tell you about Siger.”
Drinks before dinner

Chapter Summary

Sherlock learns more about his brother and their shared past. They reach more of an understanding than they've had in decades. An emotional rollercoaster, which ends a lot happier than it starts. The weekend finally looks like improving.

Chapter Notes

Some non-graphic descriptions of violence. Siger was not nice to Mycroft. Parental issues ahead, but nothing explicit or too squicky, I hope.

Mycroft sighed as he sat back in his chair, feeling exhausted already. He swirled his whisky contemplatively, searching for the right place to begin from. Anywhere at all.

In over my head now. Almost.

He seemed to abruptly change his mind about something, and rose to his feet again. He moved to the fireplace, sipping at his scotch.

Sherlock gazed up at his brother’s broad back, speculatively and silently. He took in the customary silk-backed waistcoat - this one pale blue, with grey tweed frontage - and the simple white shirt, the sleeves looser and more casual than the usual dandyish attire his brother considered to be a professional uniform. Mycroft leaned down slightly to take up an iron poker from the stand by the hearth. Sherlock’s eyes were drawn inexorably to the seat of his trousers, in the same grey tweed, pulled tight across his backside as he bent.

Does he dress like this when I'm not here?

Feeling himself subject to scrutiny once more, Mycroft swiftly stood back up and turned to the side, idly stoking at the grate to stir bigger flames into existence. Still the bloody carriage clock ticked and ticked.

Sherlock downed his whisky and reached for another, feeling as though he were about to have a tooth pulled without anaesthetic.

It's not for me to rush him. Whatever this is.

Mycroft put down the poker and leaned gently on the marble mantle. He exhaled through his nose, then turned back round to face his brother, but seemed to gaze out to some mid-point above his head. He took another breath and plunged in, feeling, upon reflection, that if one must speak of the past, it was best to start with context.

"Holmeses have stalked the halls of power since… Well, since there were halls of power. Our family tree has ever wrapped its branches around the heart of government,” he began, on safe, academic
“Our ancestors mingled with Walsinghams and Cecils. The great spymasters of old. From Elizabeth the First, through various Kings George, to the formation of modern parliament, there have been invisible Holmses in and around government and its industry of secrets - in the shadows of Westminster and Whitehall - advising, steadying the ship of state, gathering information and intelligence.”

“Well, that would certainly account for the hereditary arrogance, wouldn’t it?” said Sherlock, attempting to leaven his brother’s lecturing tone, refusing to seem too interested. The comment glanced off Mycroft, who simply made a small moue of assent and continued.

“All the great Prime Ministers had a Holmes. Churchill, and the wartime cabinet had Siger. After the First World War, a Holmes recommended the establishment of the Government Code and Cypher School. During the Second, Siger created its ultimate achievement, bringing to fruition a project set in motion by his own father.”

"Bletchley," said Sherlock, dredging the word up from his data bank.

Mycroft nodded, matter-of-factly, placing his hands behind his back.

"Yes. Siger set up Bletchley Park. Invented it, really. Brought it forth from his imagination; made it real. The right people listened and they filled the place with the best men and women, the best minds in the country - one of whom was Mummy, of course - to crack the codes of the enemy and end the war early. At least, that was the idea. Siger handpicked Turing. Did you know that?"

"No. Never cared much for family history or war stories," shrugged Sherlock.

"Quite so. Well, whatever else he was, Siger Holmes made that one fine contribution to his country, and his name will never be known for it. Then after the War, he formatted, shaped and ran what we laughingly call Circus. MI6, and the other unnamed agencies. Sadly diminished in recent days. A dearth of talent. Or at least, a dearth of willingness and commitment from the top to bolster our Not-So-Secret Service. Fathom that. In this day and age."

Sherlock frowned, almost scornfully. "Why is this important?"

Mycroft made eye contact, finally, his pale grey irises meeting Sherlock’s brighter, bluer ones.

"It was my inheritance. All that. Do you see?” he said, seeking understanding. “I was trained for the Service, trained to serve. Siger destined me for my role in life. I was invented by him too. Brought forth from his imagination as well as his loins. Mycroft Siger. First born son. Heir to the family legacy. Given over at birth to our sire’s keeping, to prepare me to take my rightful place. Another Holmes man; grist to the power mill."

A small realisation dawned upon Sherlock, knocking him a little off balance. "You didn't want it."

Mycroft shook his head definitively. "I did not want it. Not even slightly."

"What did you want?" said Sherlock, perplexed. *Who are you?*

Mycroft’s eyes raised to the ceiling, as though seeking the answer and coming up short.

"I wanted... I have no idea what I wanted. There were no other available choices and so I could not imagine an alternative future or an alternative self. I was well-trained. Responsive, receptive to my lessons. Impeccably correct. Or tried to be,” he said, shaking his head at himself.
Sherlock’s eyes narrow as he tried to jump ahead to where this might be heading, but his brother looked so jaded, so hollow, that he found it impossible to acknowledge much beyond what was unfolding in front of him.

Mycroft resumed, smiling slightly now as he went off on a little flight of fancy. “I think, perhaps, given the chance, I’d have become a dilettante Aesthete, slumming it around café society on the Continent; taking the Grand Tour; learning to paint; adding to my languages; going to the theatre; writing sprawling novels, and setting puzzles for myself. Perhaps even helping people, for a change. I should have liked time and space to find out. I ought to have probably been a dusty old linguistics Don in some ancient leafy College at either of the Universities. I don't know.”

Sherlock chuckled. "I don't think any of that would have suited you, brother."

Mycroft flinched a little. "Don't you? Or can you simply not imagine a world in which I weren't a controlled and controlling arch-manipulator of events?"

"Frankly, no. I can't imagine... I can't imagine you as anything other than yourself. As you are."

Why would you want to be? Where would I be then?

"Ah. That's because I'm so appallingly dull," said Mycroft, attempting to be flippant and not quite pulling it off.

Sherlock raised a questioning eyebrow, and his brother felt he was being disapproved of for some reason.

"Are you?" asked Sherlock, rhetorically, raising an eyebrow and setting his mouth into a firm line.

"Well, I bore you, don't I?" As though it were a mere fact of life.

Sherlock leaned forward intently, eyes flashing. "Shall I tell you what bores me, brother? It bores me to hear you make presumptions about what I think. It bores me to hear you say things that aren't true. I thought you were attempting not to lie to me anymore? I'll decide what bores me. It isn't you."

Mycroft blinked, taken aback at this scolding. Abashed, he came back to his seat and settled back into it, placing his glass on the little table between them. He was over-heated from standing close to the fire, and sweating slightly. His forelock curled softly down over his forehead, loosened by warmth and moisture, and his brushed it off to one side fruitlessly. He undid his cuffs and rolled his sleeves to the elbow, then crossed one leg over the other and steepled his fingertips beneath his chin.

"Continue," said Sherlock, imperiously, flicking a hand in the air. "You've started so you'll bloody finish. Why do I need to understand Siger? He sounds deathly dull, in my opinion." You say his name like it's a hex.

"If only he had been dull. He was...unpredictable. Temperamental. Ha, there’s an understatement,” Mycroft laughed, bitterly. “Towards the end he was simply unhinged. But throughout my formative years, he was a scourge. I can't put it any other way."

Sherlock suppressed a shiver, despite the roaring fire. All his darkest forebodings seemed to be about to be justified.

Mycroft sat forward suddenly, taking up his glass once more. He brought it to his lips and down again, leaning his forearms on his thighs and holding it in both hands between spread knees. Sherlock noted that he’d never seen his brother shift position so much. Mycroftian fidgeting. In itself, severely discomforting.
Mycroft continued in a precise, straightforward manner, explaining as clearly as he could. His eyes remained fixed to the carpet now. Sherlock frowned.

Carpet, ceiling, fireplace. Everything in the room is getting this tale told to it directly except me.

“For most of my life I believed Siger to be the most intelligent man I had ever known,” said Mycroft. “But now… I realise now, he was profoundly stupid.”

“Stupid? The Holmes sire?” said Sherlock, with ironic incredulity.

Mycroft huffed disdainfully.

“He believed perfection was real,” he said, shortly. Scornfully.

“Ah.”

“He demanded it in all things.”

“A losing battle if ever there was one,” agreed Sherlock.

“Undoubtedly. But he never let experience, or even observation, contradict his certainty that perfection could be achieved - outside of nature and mathematics. He thought people were like codes. They could be cracked. Or like equations that could be perfectly, satisfyingly solved.”

“Stupid indeed. At least, very unscientific.”

“He was simply wrong. Wrong, and never thought he could be wrong. Never factored in the possibility of wrongness to his calculations. For all his undoubted genius, he had a few crucial blindspots – all Holmeses do – and that was the most significant one.”

“Sound familiar, brother?” Sherlock mentally kicked himself as soon as the words left his mouth. "Don’t do that. Don’t do that to him."

Mycroft bristled, and his mouth set into a line of hurt, turned down at the edges. “I am not unaware of the irony. That’s what I’m trying to…”

“I don’t just mean you,” interjected Sherlock, hastily. “We’ve both learned our lessons the hard way, haven’t we? About limitations and our wrongness about people.” Amongst other things.

Mycroft cocked his head to the side, regarding his brother with impassivity. “Learned? I like to think so. Where would we be if we hadn’t? Though it was a baptism of - blood - fire.”

He seemed to shake off a troubling thought.

“Siger never wished to tackle the complexities of people,” he resumed. “He loathed them for not conforming to the data he expected to read; for defying his predictions. He loathed me with a passion.”

Sherlock frowned. "Loathed you? Why?"

"Because I was not quite his. Biologically, yes, of course I was. But I was not quite right for him in some fundamental way I never truly understood, at the time. Not quite strong enough. Not perfect.”

Mycroft shrugged, as though still finding it hard to admit to. A disgrace to the family name.
Sherlock scoffed. “You? I find that hard to believe. Model son, surely.”

“So I strived to be,” sighed Mycroft, grimly.

“But?”

“But… How to explain?” He poured himself another drink. Anything for a few more precious seconds in which this information remained utterly private.

“Siger took my education into his own hands, naturally. I can’t imagine it resembled anything like any other child’s, but, I suppose, I was a child unlike any other. Most others,” he acknowledged, holding up a correcting finger before continuing in a heavy voice.

“His methods were unorthodox, to say the least. I was made to memorise whole books, and recite them long into the night. Often I was not allowed to sleep until I had completed whatever mammoth task he had set me. Construing Euclid, Pythagoras, Democritus before I was ten. It wouldn’t do to simply rote-learn. I had to demonstrate that I understood.”

“Well, you were – are – a genius, brother.”

Mycroft brushed this off. “I am certainly well-read. I consumed every book in the Great Library at Musgrave Hall under his instruction. Insistence. Every single one. From Plato to Machiavelli. Islamic Golden Age medical texts, Renaissance theories of art, Enlightenment astronomy and physics. The Life and Times of Great Men. For such I was intended to be. Thousands of books. Political, economic, philosophical masterpieces; Paine, Wollstonecraft, Kant, Wittgenstein…”

“’Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.’” quoted Sherlock, in spite of himself. Mycroft swallowed thickly. Sherlock looked down at his feet, cursing his own blundering idiocy. Where did that come from?

“Quite.”

“I… Did you teach me that? It’s hard to tell what’s you and what’s me.”

Mycroft’s mouth opened slightly, then closed.

“Sorry, I don’t mean to interrupt, brother.” Sherlock gestured to him, encouragingly, eager to dispel the faux pas of repeating unrepeatable things to this pallid, anxious man now trying to disguise the tremor in his hands.

“You would pick them up after me. The books,” Mycroft said, with ineffable sadness.

Sherlock shrugged, attempting casualness in the face of whatever dark chord he had unintentionally struck. “Some of them stuck, I suppose.”

Mycroft nodded grimly. “Yes. How I hoped they wouldn’t. I hoped you would be an ignorant child.”


“So you would be useless to him,” Mycroft said, seriously. “I hoped you would slip through Siger’s clutches. I would tell him how stupid you were. But you gathered up the fallen crumbs of my hard-won knowledge, and they settled so easily in your brain. You - I think - looked up to me, wanted to know what I knew. You would scream at me for not sharing what I had learned. But there was no stopping you. Never has been. You’ve always been the smart one, dear brother.”
Sherlock gaped at him. Must it only be one or the other? Can’t we both be smart? Or equally stupid in our different ways.

Mycroft downed his drink. “You were a little autodidact,” he said, almost throwing the words away. “Whereas I had to have information force-fed into me, like a goose being fattened up for foie gras. You learned more easily because you weren’t terrified of not remembering things.”

“But you were.” You are struggling. “Do you want to stop?”

“Do you want me to stop? Am I boring…” Mycroft corrected himself. “Is it too much? All this historic drivel.”

“Mycroft. Say what you need to say. You haven’t finished, have you?” said Sherlock with as much gentleness as he could muster.

Mycroft shook his head imperceptibly, his voice falling to a near-whisper.

“No. Siger was… He was very big on consequences. Very big on ultimatums: work or starve, run or be beaten, learn or be locked in the attic. Be silent or you won’t see Mummy. Behave or I’ll send you away. Be better or I’ll send Sherlock away. Control yourself or I’ll cut you off, throw you out, and you can fend for yourself, out there in the terrifying, uncontrolled, noisy world of philistines, where no-one understands a damn thing. Feel nothing or… Obey or…” Mycroft swallowed against the rising gorge in his throat.

“Brother…” Sherlock’s voice came out as a hoarse murmur. Ultimatums all your life.

“Siger pushed me beyond my mental and physical limits - the latter sadly more limited than the former - to increase my tolerance for pressure; increase my capacity for information; its retention and application. He built my Mind Palace. Constructed it brick by metaphorical brick. Forced his way into my mind and stayed there,” Mycroft said, flatly.

“You built mine. Or helped me to do it.”

Mycroft sighed, regretfully. Guiltily. “I did. In a far kinder way than I was taught, I flatter myself. Well, I thought it was a kindness. Now, however, I doubt that. You may have been better off without it. Better left to fully experience yourself rather than locking it all up in metaphors.”

“Of course it was a kindness! You were always… To me. You helped me manage my mind. It needed managing,” insisting Sherlock, unsure where this new line of self-recrimination was coming from.

“But I passed on all of Siger’s rotten little strictures too. About people. About caring. I gave you his wrongness too.” Mycroft’s face crumpled into a mask of revulsion.

Sherlock snorted, sardonically. “Luckily, I don’t really listen to what I’m told, do I? I observe. I try to listen to what’s there, even if I can’t understand it at first.”

Mycroft nodded as he considered this. It was not new information to him. “You do. I thought I did too, but… I have always… In spite of what you may think, I have always admired you for that.”

Sherlock did not know what to say. How should one respond to words one has never heard before?

Silence fell by mutual consent. It seemed to be needed, to allow for respite. Both men shifted in their chairs. Their breathing fell incidentally into synchronicity. Both noticed it at the same moment and acknowledged it flickeringly, their eyes meeting in mild amusement.
Mycroft smiled slightly, suddenly remembering something.

“Do you know, our erstwhile progenitor was obsessed with unbroken codes; ancient glyphs, enigmas that had defied every living cryptographer in the history of the world. Used to make me go over and over them, looking for solutions. The Rohonc Codex. Never had any luck with it. Even had me trying to decipher the Voynich Manuscript day and night for a few months.”

“Well, if anyone could…”

“Hardly, brother! My theory was that it’s…”

“A hoax.”

“Of course it’s a hoax! Best practical joke of the 15th century.”

“Obviously. The Voynich manuscript, my foot! It has nudey drawings in it!”

Sherlock felt eternally grateful for this chance to break the tension and grasped at it with both hands.

“I know! That’s not a bloody code, is it?” chuckled Mycroft, the sound seeming odd and new to Sherlock’s ears after so much dour, flat explanation.

“Well, it means something…”

They chuckled together with companionable warmth. As the laughter died away, each caught the other’s smiling face and giggled slightly again, before looking away self-consciously.

Mycroft seemed to be the first to remember that he wasn’t trying to tell a funny anecdote. His face fell, and so did Sherlock’s heart.

Mycroft once again leaned forward, bringing one hand up to rest his chin upon it.

How to say this last part. How to share this trust without…being reduced in his eyes. Without garnering pity.

“Siger was a sadist,” he forced out, his voice cracking a little.

“He sounds it.” Sherlock braced himself.

“He sounds it.” Sherlock braced himself.

“I mean it literally,” said the first born Holmes, gathering in intensity and pace as his most intimate truths poured forth.

“Siger liked blood. He liked to draw it from me, liked to see it being spilled for him. He was obsessed with it. Saw it as an educational aid; a gift. Bloodsports were what he enjoyed. It pervaded my life, against my will. He insisted I ride to hounds, blooding me in aged seven. All very gentlemanly. Boxing. He and I. Shooting anything with a heartbeat on the estate - amassing great piles of birds, deer, rabbits. Siger with a shotgun was a sight to chill the marrow, let me tell you. Even fishing, which I had no real affinity for. Let the fish swim, say I, don't coax them onto hooks. Ironic, I know. My entire career has been about baiting hooks, spilling blood - or having it spilled. For Queen and country. But really, of course, for Siger.”

What I can only think of as a lake… I was awash…

“He gave me fencing lessons. No pads, no body armour, no mask. A hit was a hit. He said pain would help me learn. It did. I ran to Mummy when he introduced sabre play though, fearing he’d kill
me. She intervened and had it stopped, though she never knew the extent of it. And she never will. When you could tear her away from her theories and her equations, she always knew how to work around Siger’s moods. He never hurt her. She was too beautiful to hurt.”

Sherlock shook his head, trying to shake off these appalling words, these unacceptable mental images. “I don’t remember... Was it all before I was born? Why didn’t he hurt me too?”

Mycroft smiled bleakly, and gazed into the middle distance once more. Seeing it all laid out in front of him.

Sherlock regarded him with a devastated look, absorbing every word - wanting his brother to see his respect in the simple act of listening.

“Did you know the stables in the grounds here used to have horses?” said Mycroft, seemingly tangentially.

Sherlock shrugged and said nothing as he gave his full attention.

“I used to ride, if you can believe it. Siger wanted you to learn too. But you were only four, and frightened of the big pony he tried to force you to sit upon. You shrieked and kicked at him, like a little banshee. It was rather glorious,” he smiled, genuinely this time, as he recalled that scrappy, tiny wild-haired boy.

“Siger loathed noise. Absolutely hated fuss and disobedience. He was livid and rapidly losing control. But you kicked on. I have always loved that in you, brother. You knew how to kick. I always froze.”

He paused for breath. Sherlock leaned forward onto his elbows too, mirroring him. The brothers seemed now to be in close conference, each intently focused on the other, wordlessly supportive.

“You slipped from his grasp as he lifted you,” Mycroft narrated, “and the pony jolted in shock. When you landed on the ground in front of it, it bit you on the arm, quite hard. God, how you screamed. I ran to you, but Siger reached you first. He slapped you round your chubby little face as you cried. A sure sign he’d lost all rational thought. How could a slap do anything but increase the incessant howling? In that moment, I honestly believed I would find a way to murder him.”

Sherlock jolted. “You didn’t, did you?”

“Alas not. The heart attack took care of that. Nothing to do with me,” said Mycroft, shaking his head ruefully.

“And then?”

“Then I picked you up and took you back to the house, leaving him incandescent with rage but unable to follow because he could not bear the cacophony of you. I took you up to my room, soothed your little arm with its big toothy bruise, put some cold cream on you. I held you until you calmed down. I put you in my bed to sleep. Then I presented myself to Siger’s study, as I was expected to, and he thrashed me mercilessly, and in complete silence.”

“Mycroft…”

“Worth it. Completely worth it. Thereafter, he left you alone. And I became your horsey for a while, you know. You wouldn’t ride the real thing, but you’d sit on my back and I’d walk and trot you round the fields on all fours, with you pulling my hair like a mane. You’d kick at my ribs with your little feet and laugh yourself silly.”
Sherlock laughed in spite of himself, the happy noise punctuating the dolorous atmosphere.

“Huh. I didn’t know that. Sounds fun. For me anyway,” he corrected himself, hoping it didn’t sound too insensitive.

“For me too,” said Mycroft, with something Sherlock recognised as affection.

_He remembers me fondly._

“In spite of it all, I believe those were the happiest days of my life. You used to adore me, I think. Siger adored no-one but Mummy. Mummy loved us, of course. But she was…” Mycroft temporarily lost his footing.

“Not quite of this world,” said Sherlock, helpfully. His brother nodded, grateful for the tact.

“No. Not quite.”

“And you had to deal with Siger all by yourself.”

Mycroft snorted derisively. “I became what he trained me to become, though I could never learn enough for him. He hated my weakness. What he saw as my slowness. Hated that I allowed my body to become fleshy and cushioned instead of lean and spry like him. But however much we suffer, our minds always produce something to protect us from harm, don’t they? If we’re lucky. He withheld much from me - company, sleep, food. Indulging my appetite behind his back was a minor rebellion against his iron rule. I think it was also a literal way of defending myself from his weapons. More padding, perhaps. I became fitter and stronger only after his death. There are no coincidences, as any therapist will tell you.”

Sherlock replayed every cruel comment he’d ever made on this subject and felt deeply ashamed.

“Do you...worry that you’re like him?” said Sherlock, perceptively. Mycroft acknowledged the direct hit at the heart of the matter.

“I... I have his eyes, I am told. I see him looking back at me in the mirror. I have long since surpassed Siger, in power and position, not to mention temperament. I created my own role, from my own imagination, based on the needs of our own times. Not one fashioned by him. I have never personally raised my hand in violence against another person except in self-defence, or in defence of you. Though I have ordered violence done in the name of the state, in the name of security, and other weasel words. I have never hurt a child, though through my work I have made children fatherless. I take no pride in it. I have arrogantly attempted to control every last aspect of our lives and failed, just as he failed, to notice that it simply cannot, should not, be attempted,” he said, with bleak resignation.

“Am I like him?” _Does this creature reside in me too?_

“You have his hair. And you have his quick temper, though not his violence. Nor his madness. Your relationship to violence, to pain even, is different than mine. I can find nothing interesting in it whatsoever. I was bored of it a very long time ago. I have tried to be there, whenever you were putting yourself in harm's way, to prevent what violence I could from befalling you, because it is abhorrent to me. Though you do seek it out, don't you?”

Sherlock acknowledged this, even as he glared resentfully at this perennial bone of contention between them. He did not view his own self-destructive chasing after danger with unequivocal self-approval, but his ambivalence about it now seemed almost an insult to his brother's efforts to prevent him being hurt. Violence, pain, made him feel something, at least. Physical sensations were...complicated. That much had always been clear. Now, in the face of such painful honesty, he
wondered how it had been tolerated for so long, and why he hadn't seen before just how much his reckless thrill-seeking had disturbed his brother.

As though reading this thought, Mycroft spoke reassuringly, "I don't resent it. We were - are - both adults with jobs to do. Roles in life which we have chosen, for one reason and another. I... I am grateful that you allowed me to oversee you for so long, though you kicked against it. That you let me attend to you, when you were hurt. And that you never seemed to hold it against me when I had no choice but to use your talents for the greater good. I hope you believe me when I say I wanted to protect, not suffocate. I... Never wanted to see your blood, Brother Mine. But I was complicit in putting you in dangerous situations, even though it was the very last thing I wanted. Hypocrisy of the highest order. Blind stupidity."

"Brother. I..."

"You are not like him," interjected Mycroft, refocusing himself. "You are beautiful like Mummy was. Cheekbones, structure. You have a lightness about you, which is just... And you…liked me, as a child, at least, which he certainly did not."

"Eurus was like him most of all, wasn’t she?" said Sherlock, shrewdly, trying to move them forward.

"Oh, yes. Our little sister bore Siger's likeness the most. In personality, in calculated cruelty, tiny as she was. I believe her brain to have been the most similar imprint to his own. She heard the noise in her head loudest, though she could never be induced to control it. The cleverest of us all. Daddy’s little girl. And Eurus never cried or screamed, so he doted upon her. Who knows what may have happened, had he lived? God knows how he'd have handled Redbeard. No coincidence that it happened the year after he died. Her howl of protest, I've always thought. Had he lived, perhaps he’d have had some success in making her an even greater monster than she was. But then, you and I may not have survived them both."

"Christ, brother. How did you?! How did you survive him?"

"You know how," said Mycroft, simply. Kindly.

The scales fell from Sherlock’s eyes. "Because... Because of me? Because you had to look after me." Simplicity itself.

"I won’t have you think it was all like that - all trouble, all the time. There were long periods when he was away in London, or God knows where. Or weeks at a time when his catastrophic depression would render him immobile, and he would be locked away in his room, unresponsive. There were also times when he simply couldn’t be bothered, and ignored us completely. Those were the best times for you and I, Little Brother. When we would just be left to our own devices, left to play and imagine and roam freely. But they were inconsistent. That was part of the torment of it. It was random, his attention. His demands were random, his wishes were random, his expectations seemingly just whims and fancies, changing with the wind."

"Well, that does sound like me," said Sherlock, gloomily.

Mycroft huffed. "You're never random. We call you ‘mercurial’, don’t we? Mummy’s lovely word for your mood swings. Accurate. Charming. You were a little whirlwind. Siger was not charmingly mercurial. Not simply capricious and unpredictable: he was disordered. Try as he might to be controlled, he was Chaos itself. Especially towards the end. There’s more irony for you, if you needed any. Neither of us are like that. We are ourselves. In spite of and because of him."

Sherlock’s blood suddenly ran cold as a hitherto un-thought-of horror suggested itself. “There was
nothin…else, he did?”

Mycroft understood and shook his head firmly. “Ah. No. No, dearest. Nothing like that. Not – oh, God… Tell me you’re not asking because…?”

“No, no, brother. Never touched me,” replied Sherlock, hastily, keen to dispel further unnecessary distress. “The man was a stranger to me and then he disappeared. He was irrelevant. Just a shadow. Dead by the time I was seven.”

“I’d have got you out. If there had been anything,” said Mycroft, fiercely.

“I believe you. But who would have gotten you out?”

Mycroft ignored the question.

“I don’t tell you all this to complain,” he continued. “Or even to blame him. Certainly not to elicit sympathy. He was who he was. All his hard lessons had their benefits, I can’t deny. I am prepared for anything as a consequence of my childhood education. I do know how to defend myself. Physically and mentally. But emotionally too, of course. Which is to my detriment now. To our detriment, I should say.”

“Blessings and curses, Brother Mine. Life is all blessings and curses,” Sherlock mused expansively.

“How true. There’s many a good man whose father loathed him. I dare to aspire to be one of them. One day. When I have corrected as many of his mistakes as I am able.”

Sherlock’s outward calm broke into sudden impassioned energy.

“How he loathed you, brother!”

Mycroft flinched as Sherlock gestured fervently, his hands outstretched, trying to make his brother see another, unconsidered truth.

“You were his replacement. His rival! He was jealous of you, Mycroft, can't you see that?! You vastly outstripped his intellect. You proved his wrongness about people. You were supposed to be a little automaton for him, but instead you were a boy. Just a small, extraordinary human, with extraordinary human gifts which he tried to take from you, but couldn’t, not properly! He was terrified of you. He knew you’d be twice the man he was. Three times. More!”

Mycroft shook his head in denial, the words almost too painful to believe at this late stage.

“I don't know. He was certainly resentful that I took up Mummy's attention. I had her to myself for seven years. First born neuroses. I also think it angered him that I took everything he dished out. He hated that I tried to please him.”

“It was a rigged game. He never intended you to please him,” said Sherlock with disgust.

“I was a disappointment.”

“What was I, then?!”

“A blip on his radar, I think. The uncontrollable middle child. An inconvenience. The spare boy. He completely gave up on you that day, when you were four. Thank God for it. He let me have you for a pet, thinking you were worthless. As I said: a profoundly stupid man. I was, of course, careful not to show too much how I.. How much you mattered to me. Or he'd have removed you. Fortunately,
he did not recognise it when he saw it. I got too good at disguising what I felt.”

Sherlock ran his hands through his hair, and sighed deeply.

“He was violent towards you very often?”

“He was.”

“With his fists too?”

“Oh, no, he never got his hands dirty. He was very vain about his hands. It was all standard issue corporal punishment. Or so I imagined. Implements. Canes, mostly. All the usual clichés. The little rituals.”

“I wish I had known before this.” I wish I could have stopped it. I wish I’d killed the bastard.

“You did, actually. You walked in on it once or twice. Stood there, taking in my silent humiliation with big, innocent eyes. He enjoyed you watching, enjoyed making me face you as he flogged me. I can't say I regret removing those memories from you.”

“Christ, Myc... I'm so...” Sherlock’s voice broke and he hung his head, pulled at his own hair, letting the mild pain bring the words out.

“Don't be,” said Mycroft, waving a dismissive hand. None of that, please.

“But I... I've hurt you too. Physically. Haven't I?” Sherlock looked up, eyes wide and aghast. “Roughing you up when you've aggravated me. Shoving you, twisting your arm. And verbal violence too. Bullying you when I couldn't get what I wanted. Just like him!”

Mycroft remained stock-still and calm. “I'm a big boy now, Sherlock. I never equated your temporary need to lash out with his conscientious desire to cause me pain,” he said, reassuringly. Meaning it.

“It's the same thing,” insisted Sherlock.

“It certainly is not.”

Another pause fell as they returned to drinking. Sherlock broke it.

“Do you hate him?” he blurted.

“Yes,” said Mycroft, instantly.

“Do you hate me?”

"No, Little Brother. Assuredly not.” Truth.

“Do you hate yourself?”

“Very much.”

Sherlock could think of nothing to say. Nothing seemed adequate.

I wish you didn't. Please don't. I can't stand it.

Mycroft took another sip, pressing his lips together as he swallowed. He seemed resigned, sad, but
not self-pitying or overly distressed. The whisky addled his feelings a little, and he wondered whether he would feel any lighter for having said all this, later. He wondered whether it had done any good at all.

After a little while, in which many changes of subject were turned over in two, substantial minds, Sherlock said, “Do you think Uncle Rudy's dead?”

Mycroft looked up in surprise and barked a laugh. “Of course not! He's in Milan. Shacked up with the lead cellist at La Scala. Gianni, or possibly Guiseppe. There's a forty-five year age gap!”

“Naughty Uncle Rudy!” exclaimed Sherlock, delightedly.

“The Mad Maestro himself,” Mycroft chuckled with great fondness. “It runs in the family.”

“Madness or music?” quipped Sherlock.

“Homosexuality. And naughtiness,” said Mycroft, winking and smiling ironically to himself.

“Right.” Sherlock found himself blushing, and shifted uncomfortably in his seat, disconcerted for reasons he couldn’t quite fathom.

Do I want this conversation? Is Mycroft... I've always assumed he was, sort of. Hence Lestrade. Why was that a good idea, again? He's always been a bit that way... I think. Maybe he's both. Or nothing at all. Would Mycroft even like... Has he even...before? Shit. I've stopped thinking in complete sentences. Change the subject.

“Did Siger play any instruments?”

“Fuck, nice work - why are you bringing him up again, you imbecile?”

To Sherlock's dismay, Mycroft's eyes flickered narrowly and his face momentarily hardened. Then in an instant, the expression was gone.


“He taught you piano, didn't he?”

“Yes, and the oboe, of all things. Mummy insisted. No hardship. I liked spending time with Uncle Rudy. He was very kind, and scurrilously funny.”

Rudy makes him smile.

“Did he teach our sister the violin?”

“No. She picked that up on her own. Prodigy, like him in that, and only that.”

“And she taught me.”

“Yes. It was a way of taking you from me. Her favourite toy. And her hero.”

“Hero,” scoffed Sherlock, disgusted at himself for enjoying hearing it.

“Pirate captain. Swaggering swashbuckler. Consulting detective,” Mycroft teased, seeming inordinately pleased with how the words sounded on his tongue.

“Oh, shut up,” retorted Sherlock, suppressing a grin.
“Must be lovely, to be like that. A natural adventurer,” mused the elder Holmes, pensively.

Sherlock shrugged it off. “Wish I remembered things more clearly. Without you having to tell me,” he said with wistfulness. *I would spare you this.*

Mycroft’s face fell again. He pinched the bridge of his nose briefly and ran his hand up over his hair, as though pushing away some inexpressible tension.

“I know. I will try to fill in some of the blanks, from before and after Siger. Mostly after. But perhaps you could have a delve into the mists yourself. Meditate. Go for a wander round the grounds of your Mind Palace. Perhaps this conversation will be enough to shake some images free. See what you turn up.”

“I shall, brother. Thank you.”

Mycroft looked askance at him and grunted contrarily as he knocked back another finger of single malt.

“Don't thank me.”

They fell to drinking and listening to the clock tick.

Sherlock picked at the arm of the chair, then seemed about to say something, but Mycroft interjected, cutting him off.

“Tomorrow. We shall resume tomorrow. You’re only supposed to open presents on Christmas Day itself, you know. There are pleasanter things for us to speak of in the days to come, I promise. Better things to do. You haven’t even had the tour yet. I would like you to enjoy yourself as well, if at all possible.”

“What do normal people do at Christmas?” asked Sherlock, his words slightly slurred by booze.

Mycroft frowned, perplexed. “I have no idea. Fight, I gather.”

“We really are abnormal,” giggled Sherlock.

“Mm,” Mycroft agreed, affably. “Haven’t fought less than this for the best part of 40 years.”

“Let's play something!”

“Oh God, you are properly rat-arsed, aren't you?”

“Yup. Only had tea and biccies since breakfast. Ooh, go on, don't be a spoilsport,” he coaxed.

“I like being a spoilsport. All right, fine. What?”

“Not Operation.” Sherlock shook his head with the exaggerated movements of a very tipsy man.

“Decidedly not.”

“Scrabble?”

“I am not going through that again,” said Mycroft, with a shudder.

“Monopoly out of the question, obviously.” Sherlock wagged a reproving finger, though whom he was reproving was unclear.
“Unless you want one of us to end up dead and buried under the summerhouse. And don’t you dare say ‘Cluedo’ or I will spank you,” said Mycroft, deadly serious, pointing an accusing finger of his own.

“How about Chess?!” said Sherlock in triumph.

Mycroft titled his head and thought through a haze of whisky. “Hm. Have we ever actually played Chess?”

“No. We have set the board up many, many times for appearances sake.”

A querying eyebrow raised itself rather crookedly on a high, befuddled brow. “Do either of us know how to play it?”

“I'm sure we'll pick it up,” slurred Sherlock, confidently.

One hour and 24 checkmates later, they abandoned Chess.

“Don't see what all the fuss is about,” mused Mycroft, blandly.

“Nope. Far too easy,” agreed Sherlock, with contempt.

At the same time as one said, “Basic,” the other said, “Pathetic,” which made them both laugh. It was still a rare sound - their intermingled baritones joining in a flash of mutual pleasure – but it sounded somehow right to their ears. Melodic. Satisfying. Inevitable.

“More whisky,” slurred Mycroft, definitively, reaching for the decanter with a slightly mis-aimed hand.

“Yup,” nodded Sherlock with solemn certainty.

Another half-hour later, the hysterical giggling started, though neither could quite recall what set it off. Sherlock trying to catch the last biscuit in his mouth, or Mycroft nearly knocking the table over as he tipsily misplaced his glass.

The mantle clock struck, breaking through their alcoholic fog.

“It's six o'clock,” said Mycroft, in surprise.

“I had, in fact, deduced that. So?”

“Dinner's at seven.”

“Is it? Thank God. Starving!”

“Yes, they'll start setting it out soon.”

“Your minions.”
“Valued staff, Sherlock.”

“Oh, I forgot, Mycroft Holmes is an Investor in People.”

Mycroft kicked at him from across the divide. Sherlock was a bit too far gone to dodge.

“Ow! Mean. Send them home tonight, won't you? Let them have Christmas Eve with their families. Give them the weekend off.”

“They do get paid to work here, you realise? Very well paid.”

“We'll do for ourselves.”

“You just want me to make my roast potatoes,” accused Mycroft, with satisfaction.

“Yum! Should be just family together on Christmas, shouldn't it?” *Take the hint, Mycroft.*

“All right. I'll give them their bonuses and send them packing. Bah humbug.”

Mycroft swirled the last of his whisky in the glass as Sherlock let his head fall against the headrest. His eyes fluttered closed as the soporific effects of drinking since 3pm kicked in. With studied casualness, Mycroft broke his reverie. Sherlock jumped slightly as he spoke, and regarded his brother with one eye open, the other closed.

“Tomorrow... Could you bear to dress for dinner?”

“Seriously, Mycroft?”

“If you could. There's one of my old evening suits in the wardrobe somewhere. It'll hang off you, I'm sure, but...”

“Why?”

“Humour your big brother. It would be...fun.”

“Would it? Hmm. All right, but at a price.”

“Name it.”

“Could you bear *not* to dress for dinner?”

“You wish me to dine in the nude?” Mycroft's lips quirked upwards in mild tease.

Sherlock blushed.


“Oh, really!”

“Come now, brother, quid pro quo. I'll tart myself up if you slob yourself down. And I don't mean those silky numbers you call pyjamas. Your nightwear is ridiculously smart. I mean a pair of jeans, or something.”

“You imagine I own jeans?”

“You can have a pair of mine.”
“Lovely idea, but we're not all blessed with 30 inch hips.”

“32 these days.”

“Even so.”

“You could fit them. You're far too skinny, by the way. We'll fix that. Lots of roast potatoes for you.”

“Do shut up, dear,” huffed Mycroft, rolling his eyes.

“You have to wear a t-shirt,” decreed Sherlock, nodding to himself.

“I look preposterous in a t-shirt.”

“A long-sleeved one, then. Or a horrible jumper. Perhaps yoga pants.”

“What on God's earth are yoga pants?!”

“Or whatever silly things you wear to jog in.”

“Fine, but you're wearing the full black tie, and a pocket square, and French cuffs too.”

“Fine, but you have to roll your sleeves up, and you're not allowed to put any product in your hair.”

“You have to brush yours into a side-parting.”

“Deal.”

“Done.”

“You're an idiot,” said Sherlock, genially.

“So they tell me,” confirmed Mycroft, smirking.

Sherlock stood, wobbling precariously as he extracted himself from the armchair. He held out a hand to his brother, who took it firmly, and let himself be hauled to his feet. Sherlock yanked a little too hard and Mycroft fell bodily against him. He stayed put as he lost his bearings, chuckling into Sherlock’s prominent collarbone. Sherlock grinned slackly and brought a hand up to pat at his brother’s head, as one would with a beloved dog. Neither man moved, clinging to each other’s upper bodies, their lower halves at a slight distance.

Mycroft made a delighted little hum of comfort, and the patting became a light caress which rumbled the hair at the base of his skull into scruffy curls. Sherlock let it tangle idly round his fingers.

The room seemed to spin around them, and Mycroft clutched the back of his brother’s jumper with one hand, bringing the other to the small of his back. They hung together in an awkward embrace, neither yet able to orientate themselves.

Sherlock placed the flat of his palm between his brother’s shoulder blades to steady them both, and sniffed at the top of his head, vaguely wondering why the urge to do so felt so necessary, though not really caring to light upon an answer. His hand slipped from the nape of his brother’s neck, and simply cupped the back of his head, holding him in place.

_Whisky and lemon and ginger. Brother and home. Solid and real. Safe now._
Mycroft rubbed his head along Sherlock’s jawline, his eyes closed, and a contented, faraway smile on his thin lips. He ran one fingertip up and down his brother’s long spine as though tracing the length of him. The finger glanced off and away as it reached the curve of the top of his buttocks, and Mycroft brought his hand to rest on his brother’s jutting hipbone. Sherlock shivered and closed his eyes, making a happy little ‘hmm’ sound and breathing deeply into his brother’s delicate ear.

They nearly overbalanced as Mycroft pressed himself further towards his brother. Though an inch taller than Sherlock, he was crooked up against him, gathered to him like a child. Sherlock was knocked slightly back and caught at Mycroft to prevent an embarrassing fall.

They stumbled against each other, laughing drunkenly, losing control of their limbs as the alcohol hit them anew. They separated and stood facing each other, swaying slightly, grinning like idiots; their bright, dilated eyes twinkling with unspoken mirth and some unspecified meaning.

Sherlock stepped in towards him, and Mycroft’s eyes widened slightly. He pressed their foreheads together, so their noses touched, and they quietly breathed each other’s air, going cross-eyed as they tried to hold eye contact.

Mycroft was the first to pull away, pecking a tiny kiss to the tip of his brother’s nose as he did so, winking rakishly at him. Sherlock’s eyebrows rose in surprised delight, and his bowlike mouth spread into a Chesire Cat grin, shoving at Mycroft’s shoulder with teasing insolence, as if to say ‘sod off.’ Mycroft snorted and brushed a few loose, dark curls from his brother’s cheek with long, elegant fingers. Sherlock bit at one of them, growling playfully.

They laughed together again. Then, propping each other up, arms round shoulders, they stumbled off in search of dinner.
Chapter Summary

Another bit of a rollercoaster, with a few more personal revelations. Mycroft shares the things that have been keeping him occupied during their separation, and Sherlock tries to tune into himself as well as his brother.

Chapter Notes

I know this is a bit of a slow burner, and I appreciate you bearing with its pace, if indeed, you still are. :-) x

In the dining room, the huge table was set for two once more, the places set opposite each other this time. No-one would sit at the head of the table. The room was cosy and warm, candlelit from sconces around the walls, and from a modest, unshowy chandelier - if such a thing could be said to exist. The orange glow of the fire added to exactly the soft, comforting atmosphere required after an afternoon’s drinking and revelation.

The Holmes brothers extracted their arms from each other, stepping unsteadily apart, mildly self-conscious now they’d left the scene of their former camaraderie. Outside of the confidential environs of the library they felt suddenly exposed, and no less emotionally raw.

Mycroft steadied himself with a hand on the doorframe, and Sherlock tried to disguise the lilt in his gait as he walked towards the table. He gazed upon the still-extravagant number of tureens and utensils laid out for them with awe and anticipation.

“They’re like magic mice, your staff. Never see them enter or leave a bloody room. Won’t even notice they’re gone tomorrow,” he said, meaningfully.

Mycroft held up a finger, remembering the bargain he’d struck. “Ah, yes. Give me a moment or two. I shall dismiss them with great fat cheques. Snow’s stopped. The advantage of maintaining tradition and hiring from the neighbouring villages. People can get home easily.”

Sherlock nodded dispassionately, pleased his hint had not been ignored. Mycroft turned rather woosily on his heel and departed, quietly practicing what to say and how to say it with a convincing enough impression of sobriety.

Sherlock took the moment to relieve and freshen himself in the downstairs bathroom. He splashed water on his face and tried to focus himself a little more as he regarded his blurry reflection in the mirror. He grimaced at the slack-eyed, lopsidedness which betrayed his tipsy lack of self-command. Not his best look. Ah, well. It had been an utterly necessary bit of mutual self-medication.

The cold water took his breath away slightly, and he was grateful for its bracingness. But it did nothing to wash away the words still repeating in his mind, uncontained and sharp as loosed arrows.
Siger was a sadist. I got too good at disguising what I felt. I always froze.

He shook himself and dried his face, blinking at the sting in his eyes.

Who would have gotten you out…?

He scooped some water from the tap and drank it, suddenly parched and ravenous.

As he made his way back to the dining room, he saw standing at the end of the hallway, just before the front door, a tall, stocky man, somewhere in his late-50s - black-haired with greying edges. Ramrod posture in a long, black coat. Ex-military, most likely. The shock of it nearly made him trip. His brother stood face-to-face with him, and Sherlock viewed both men in profile. A member of the staff, he realised, tutting at his own susceptibility.

Sherlock held back, pressing himself to the wall at one side of an archway in the corridor, so he was tucked out of sight. From this position, he could see the man’s striking, mature features, and the grateful, rather earnest expression on Mycroft’s usually taciturn face. For some reason, he had not envisaged there being another man in the house. Not one who looked like that, anyhow. Precise. Well turned out. Handsome.

He peered round and zeroed in on the square, outstretched hand as it shook Mycroft’s; his brother’s elegant, white fingers wrapping around it. The stranger’s other hand came up to grip his brother’s shoulder at the same time. Mycroft mirrored his actions, shaking and gripping, in an attitude of thanks and appreciation. And of obvious familiarity.

*Get your hands off my brother. Get your fucking hands off.*

Sherlock snarled inwardly, and caught himself doing it, wondering at himself from the objective place in his brain which always observed and analysed his every move. The thought, the feeling, triggered a vague wisp of a memory. An old one that sounded like: *No-one must touch Mycroft.* He filed it away to examine later, cursing himself for a drunken, confused fool.

The man exited the house, gallantly gestured out by the Holmes heir in full Lord of the Manor mode, except for the telltale off-centre posture. The door closed, and Mycroft stood with his back to Sherlock, taking a few seconds to stand with his hands on his hips, before he threw the bolts, chained and locked it.

Sherlock watched as Mycroft ran his hands through his hair, trying to tame the unruly mess his cowslick had become. He crossed to the large mirror on the wall of the vestibule and checked himself over, frowning and looking disappointed at his own reflection. He adjusted his waistcoat, and sighed wearily as he examined himself, turning from side to side. He seemed to give up on something, and headed up the corridor back to the centre of the house, towards the dining room. Sherlock bolted ahead, clambering for his chair at the table just as his brother, hot on his heels, entered the room.

“Were you running from me?!” chuckled Mycroft, affably.

“Yes,” nodded Sherlock, standing on his dignity. “I thought it would be fun.”

“Silly boy. Let me know next time and I’ll chase you,” said Mycroft, smiling at his brother’s apparently bizarre drunken antics.

Sherlock snorted at the image and found himself blushing again. “So… Staff all sorted, then?” he enquired, hoping he sounded as casual as he should have done.
“What? Oh. Yes. Paid up and on their way to home and hearth.”

Mycroft sat down at the table, groaning a little as he did so, still feeling his head swim with any sudden change of altitude.

“Good. Won’t even notice they’ve gone.”

“You’ll notice when your laundry starts piling up and we have to wash our own plates,” warned Mycroft, wagging a big-brotherly finger.

Sherlock balked. “I’m not doing any washing! Bugger it. Save it for them for after Christmas.”

Mycroft chuckled indulgently at his brother’s customary disregard for menial labour. He began lifting lids off dishes. Clouds of savoury-smelling steam wafted up to make both their mouths water.

“Chicken pie! Oh, yum!” exclaimed Sherlock, like a delighted child. Mycroft smirked and started cutting it into pieces.

“Not like you to have an appetite,” he said in mild tease, but evident delight at this unexpected gastronomic enthusiasm. His mood rallied as he looked forward to a decent dinner, in company for a change.

Sherlock shrugged, somewhat puzzled by himself. “Been starving ever since I got here.”

“Then you must eat, brother mine. Partake of the bounty, is my advice. Help yourself. There’s gravy and some really genuinely excellent mashed potatoes. Fairly rustic, I know, but very satisfying. And necessary after a skinful, I’d say. At the risk of sounding overly paternalist, do try the vegetables. Carrots, I think you like. Peas. Sprouts, out of deference to the season.”

“Oh, God, no, please, not sprouts. Spare me the sprouts! I simply won’t acknowledge their right to exist,” grimaced Sherlock, looking exactly like the scampish five-year-old his brother remembered so clearly.

Mycroft shook his head, pantomiming disapproval. “No taste, some people. Sprouts are excellent, and these are fried in bacon and onions, so frankly it isn’t ontologically possible for them to be anything other than delicious.”

“How can you be this pissed and still pronounce the word ontologically?!” Sherlock was outraged.

“Because I’m so clever. And so are you.”

“I am, but I won’t eat my sprouts,” the five-year-old Sherlock huffed, putting it on for entertainment value.

“I won’t insist upon it, for fear of driving you back to bed. I know how unadventurous you are...,” said Mycroft, cajolingly. Sherlock scowled.

“I’ll try one. Half of one. I’ll lick one. Just to prove I’m not set in my ways.”

“You’re a ridiculous boy. Eat your dinner,” scolded the elder Holmes, with great pleasure.

Sherlock smirked and began attacking his plate.

They fell upon the food like hyenas on a carcass; Mycroft with rather less respect for table manners than was his well-practiced habit. Sherlock groaned with gratification as he consumed his first truly hearty meal in days. Possibly weeks. It was sumptuous even in its relative simplicity.
“Chicken pie’s my favourite,” he said, his voice muffled by piecrust and mash. He wasn’t aware until that moment that it was. But it rang true.

“Yes, I know,” said Mycroft, without missing a beat, or looking up.

They didn’t bother with the wine that had been left out for them, preferring to let sustenance and plain water bring them back down to earth a little.

When they had finished eating, without exchanging many more words than “delicious” and “exemplary pastry”, each man sat back in his chair, replete and full. Sherlock had a little bout of hiccups, which, Mycroft observed, ought to have been risible, but which were somehow rather becoming.

He tutted affectedly. “Eating too quickly. Mummy would tell you off if she were here.”

“Ah, well you can – hic – do it instead,” Sherlock said, between embarrassed chipmunk-like spasms, glaring with a not unironic scowl.

“Behave or you won’t get dessert. Treacle tart, and cream. My favourite, I’m afraid. The usual vice.”

Sherlock snorted contemptuously. “Looks like you haven’t had any vice for ages. You deserve it, Mycroft. If a man can’t have a heavy dessert after a very heavy afternoon…”

After a very heavy life...

Mycroft raised his eyebrows in acknowledgement of the wisdom of this.

“I take your point and I will indulge. For you?”

Sherlock nodded with hungry vigour. “Yeah. Big bit. Like that.” He made a large triangle with his thumbs and forefingers.

Mycroft smiled, cut the slices and passed Sherlock his. Another silence fell, punctuated by the crackling of the fireplace, the scraping of spoons on plates as every last drop of cream was licked up. Finally, sated, the brothers pushed away their place mats and heaved mutual happy sighs.

After a while, the relative peace became loaded with some indescribable weight once more, without either Holmes quite knowing why.

“So…,” ventured Sherlock, as something nagged at him. “How many little mice are there scurrying in the walls? How many cheques did you have to write?”

“Only five. Two full time people, three seasonal. Rainsby, my - I suppose one would call him a valet - keeps me in good order; pressed and patched. He’s the man you saw me with at the door.”

Mycroft gave his brother a knowing look.


“Then there’s Marie, the housekeeper, and her daughter to assist when I’m in residence, so to speak. I know that makes me sound like the Queen, so don’t say it, thank you,” said Mycroft, his lips quirking at the corners at Sherlock’s childish giggle.

“There’s Angela, Mrs Bonnetti, who keeps me fed – she’s Italian but has managed over the years to perfect all the English stodge and nursery puddings that keep me plugging away at the treadmill. And Oliver. Ollie, I should say. A youngish lad who does most of the washing up and clearing away in
exchange for help with this catering college fees. None of them live in, but there are rooms they can
stay in if necessary. Not that I’ve been entertaining these past few years. Not that I did much before
that.”

Sherlock nodded, twirling a napkin round his fingers distractedly.

“First name terms, then? Apart from Rainsby,” he said, with apparent insouciance.

“Yes, it’s the twenty-first century after all,” said Mycroft, eyes twinkling with self-awareness.

Sherlock shrugged. “Wouldn’t think it to look round here.”

“No, I know I’m anachronistic. They’ve all worked here for years, on and off. When I’m not here,
they keep it ticking over. They have other jobs, of course, but I try to keep them in shoe leather.”

Sherlock frowned and looked at his brother through narrowed eyes. He pointed at him suspiciously.
“Thought you had a new cook? You said so this morning.”

Mycroft unaccountably flushed. “Ah. Yes. No…” He huffed a little private laugh to himself. “I was
referring only to the jam. I’m the new jam cook, as it happens.”

“You what?!” exclaimed Sherlock, sitting bolt upright, almost more shocked by this than by anything
else he’d heard tonight.

“I make it. Became a sort of a hobby. One must have things to do when one’s life is falling to pieces,
you know. I find pleasure in preserving things. I suppose it’s ‘therapeutic’. Don’t look at me like that,
I haven’t gone completely stark-raving. I don’t bake cakes or embroider cushions or press flowers. I
just find pleasure in putting things in jars. Surely as a scientist you can comprehend that?”

Sherlock’s eyes were wide with incredulity. “Jam-making, honestly!”

“And pickles. And chutneys. Come, little brother, it can’t be a shock to you. You’ve always thought
I was rather fruity.”

Sherlock was caught out into a burst of delighted laughter. The sound rang round the room and
Mycroft let it fall over him like sunlight.

So taken was he by the distracting sound, he forgot to make any further comment. There was a pause
as each man contemplated what next to say, and wondered whether they should open the wine after
all. Sherlock broke cover first.

“So…Rainsby’s your manservant of sorts?” he coaxed, placing some additional meaning on the
operative noun, in an odd tone that Mycroft couldn’t quite discern.

Mycroft’s forehead wrinkled in mild bemusement. “I don’t call him that, but yes. Peter is his first
name.”

“Oh, is it?” said Sherlock, suggestively, mercurially shifting from the bright levity of mere moments
ago, to a mocking, rather sour mode of expression.

Mycroft felt suddenly wrong-footed. This can’t be what it sounds like.

“He’s taking the Rangey tonight, dropping everyone off. He’ll bring it back in a couple of days.”

“So now there really is no escape,” said Sherlock, not unpleasantly, but as though attempting a bad
joke which he knew would fall flat.
“Hardly. We’re not literally snowed in. There’s a Bentley in the garage.” Mycroft tried to reign in the conversation, and spoke casually, neutrally, for fear of stepping on a Sherlockian land mine.

Sherlock rolled his eyes sarcastically, abruptly unable to accept neutrality. “Oh, but of course. Good man is he, Peter?”

He said the name emphatically, returning to the awkward subject without quite knowing why - except that he needed to know more. Needed some kind of confirmation, one way or another.

Mycroft looked askance. “He is a good chap. Keeps me presentable. Pleasant enough company. Reliable. Irons an excellent trouser crease,” he said lightly. His esteem for the man showed through. Mycroft Holmes was not a man to trust just anyone with his wardrobe, or his person.

Sherlock could not help but pull on the thread he’d begun to unravel. Or thought he had.

“I’ll bet. What else does he do for you?” he asked, with bitter innuendo. He froze at his own, he admitted to himself, utterly transparent, immature question.

“Sherlock…!” Mycroft sounded rather shocked and dismayed. A pleasant dinner marred by the encroachment of emotional upheaval. Was there no escaping it?

“Never mind,” Sherlock back-peddled, rearranging his cutlery and stacking a few plates perfunctorily. His face became a closed, petulant mask once again. The expression was all too familiar from the very start of the day, and rather hard to take at this point.

Mycroft struggled for a response, opening and closing his mouth like the goldfish he categorically wasn’t.

“I… Nothing is…,” he stuttered.

Sherlock shrugged and waved his hand rapidly, as though trying to erase the question from the air.

“Shouldn’t have said anything. None of my business.” Where is this coming from? Don’t care, don’t care.

“Well, it isn’t, I suppose. I don’t mind you asking, but…,” said Mycroft, disconcerted but attempting to be reasonable.

Sherlock snorted more adolescently than he intended. Don’t tell me, don’t tell me.

“You can shag who you like in your own house,” he threw out, carelessly. A welter of sadness seemed to burgeon in his chest as the words blurted from his mouth.

Mycroft remained open-mouthed in sheer astonishment. His face reddened with what his brother supposed was embarrassment, or irritation at being caught out.

“Sherlock! That is… Absurd! I have never crossed that line and I never would. What do you take me for?” He looked aghast.

Sherlock barked a sarcastic exclamation, unable to stop now he had sunk his teeth in, no matter how unaccountably it seemed to pain him. Both of them.

“So you restrain yourself for ethical reasons only? No privileged access? I’m sure he’d be delighted to do a bit of overtime. Even if he wasn’t working for you…”

“That’s ridiculous! No. Not even then. I don’t…,” insisted Mycroft, feeling entirely defensive.
Defensiveness turned to irritation at having to justify himself in this unacceptable way. He recovered his wits.

“What’s it to you anyway?” he said, challengingly, trying to deflect these unexpectedly vicious barbs. “I thought you were desperate for me to shack up with some decent chap with a sensible job!”

Sherlock slammed the table. “That isn’t fair!”

“No, it bloody isn’t!” cried Mycroft, slamming back.

“I don’t care who you fuck!” Sherlock’s voice cracked as he found himself having what he suspected was a very undignified mini-tantrum.

Mycroft all but gasped. He was momentarily livid. “I’m not fucking anyone! All right?! Why does it even... Stop it! Just stop it! I can’t...do this. I don’t want to fight.”

He held his hands up in appeal, his anger trailing off to simple hurt as he recovered his composure.

“Neither do I!” yelled Sherlock, like a baffled child.

“Stop shouting then!”

“All right!” Sherlock flung himself back in his chair and folded his arms in a huff.

An awkward silence did not so much fall as plummet. Mycroft cast around his brain for something to say and found absolutely nothing. Sherlock’s inner five-year-old wanted to bolt – he would usually have bolted, just to avoid his own discomfort. And yet he stayed glued to his chair. Unable to flounce. Unwilling to avoid. He sighed and wiped at his brow with the back of his hand, hardly stunned to recognise that he was feeling ashamed of himself.


Mycroft looked at him with even more astonishment than during the outburst of whatever had just passed between them.

Is this an apology?!

He shook his head, tolerantly. “Mm. It’s fine. Forget it. Wouldn’t be Christmas without a bit of drunken shouting. And on that note, I’m going to bring coffee. I think we need it, don’t you?”

Tired and emotional, as Mummy would say. We are both tired and emotional.

“Yes, please,” said Sherlock, meekly. Mycroft regarded him as though he were ill.

He left and returned with yet another silver tray, a large cafetiere, and the good china. He poured two cups, sugaring one but leaving both black.

They sipped and let the caffeine offset the residual effects of the alcohol and the shouting. It settled their stuffed stomachs and revivified their brains. It buzzed through their bloodstreams and chased away the acidic remnants of their little contretemps.

Sherlock set down his cup with a plonk, and said, more convivially than not, “Did you mean what you said before? In the library?”

He caught the momentary flicker of worry as Mycroft misunderstood which parts of the earlier conversation he was being quizzed on. “About helping to provide for Rosie?” he clarified, quickly.
Mycroft looked relieved and nodded. “Of course. I wasn’t being kind. I feel a sense of familial obligation. Blood or no blood. To make it up to John, I suppose. For putting him through all that mess. Whatever it takes. Unless there’s anything preferable I could do…”?

Sherlock grinned in satisfaction. “We’ll take you up on it. You can be her mysterious benefactor. Or Uncle Mycie, if you really want.”

_Mycie. When did I last say that?

Mycroft raised a sceptical brow. “Let’s not get carried away.”

“You’d love it. She’s exactly on your intellectual level.”

“Funny boy.”

“You’d be all right with her. You were all right with me, when I was little - from what I do remember and from what you’ve said - and I was a ghastly child.”

Mycroft nodded wryly. “You still are.”

“Exactly. And we’re still talking, aren’t we?”

“It would seem so,” he said, as he sipped the dregs of his coffee. “You weren’t, actually.”

“What?”

“A ghastly child. You weren’t at all. You were…”

“A noisy brat, as you were telling me mere hours ago. A little horror show, surely?”

Mycroft’s face softened. “You were…quite far from that. Dreadfully behaved, of course. But you were…” *Pride and joy, if you must know.* “You were just Sherlock.”

“Well, I still am,” he said, simply.

“Indeed you are. So, if I’m to be Uncle Mycroft…”

“Mycie,” interrupted Sherlock, pleasantly. “She won’t be able to pronounce Mycroft.”


_Lock. Have I heard that name since I was a child? Do I recall the last time?

“If you must know…,” sighed Sherlock, making a show of reluctance.

“Yes?” Mycroft enquired, arching an intrigued eyebrow.

“Bearing in mind she’s only two and a half…”

“Right.”

Sherlock shifted in his seat. “And they don’t develop very sophisticated speech skills until a bit later. You know, the normal ones…”

“Come on, what does she call you?” Mycroft leaned forward, sensing some juicy bit of information about to be imparted.
“Shock.”

“Shock?!” Mycroft laughed out loud.

Sherlock slapped at his arm in retribution from across the table.

“Yes, she can’t pronounce Sherlock. So it’s Shock. Why is that funny?!”

He suppressed a grin and threw a sugar lump at his tormenting beast of an elder brother.

“That’s marvellous. What a wonderful child,” giggled the elder Holmes, delighted with this new piece of ammunition.

“Actually, it mostly comes out Sock.”

Mycroft almost doubled over, falling into a very unmanly giggle fit. “Oh, no, please! Sock?! Even better. Oh, that’s just… I concede there may be something to these small creatures after all.”

Sherlock refused to be amused, to make it more fun. “Shut up! Can’t believe she’s getting laughs off you already, at my expense!”

“Sock. That’s rather priceless. I shall lavish her with gifts for that. She’s already wildly exceeded my expectations. A sound female, the young Miss Watson,” chuckled Mycroft, panting and wiping his eyes.

“Yes, I think she takes after her mother,” quipped Sherlock.

They chuckled companionably together, and felt their equilibrium returning full force. Time to capitalise on it, thought Mycroft.

“Right. Do you… Do you want me to give you the grand tour?” he offered, open-handedly.

Sherlock pretended to consider this. “Maybe. OK. Yes. What’s there to see that I haven’t already seen?”

“Ah. Well, the basement, of course.”

Sherlock’s eyes lit up. “My lab!”

Mycroft nodded hammily as though he’d only just remembered it, tapping his chin with his forefinger. “Oh, your lab, yes, I suppose we could take a turn about it.”

“Show me!”

“This way, then, Sock,” Mycroft quipped merrily, causing Sherlock to groan and stomp in protest.

They rose with renewed energy and Mycroft ushered his brother out, showcasing his most amiable hosting skills. As they passed the various rooms on the lower floor, he made a point of indicating even the ones he knew his brother was already aware of, maintaining a light-hearted flow of description.

“So – Bathroom; Library, of course; main Sitting Room with all the best chairs and the television - terrestrial only I’m afraid. The Morning Room, where the newspapers are if you ever want them. Boot Room if you want to borrow any for walking the grounds, with or without cigarettes to accompany you. Passageway to kitchens and pantries if you want a midnight snack later, in your currently gluttonous state. Security room at the front, if you want to dismantle all my systems for fun.
Please don’t.”

They continued on. Mycroft pointed.

“Verandah through there, for a nice view of the gardens round the side. And down here, the wine cellar. Take what you like, but leave the bottles at the far end, they’re a bit expensive, and most probably undrinkable anyway. Erm, and this door, the chamber adjoining the cellar. Your lab, Sherlock.”

He opened the deceptively small door with what he hoped was not too much of an obvious, self-satisfied flourish. Sherlock smirked, knowing he was being shown-off to and liking it.

They descended a renovated staircase, which must once have been crumbling stone steps like the ones leading to the wine cellar. Mycroft flipped a light switch, and they blinked as neon strips sprang to life. The lab was a bright, sterile, contemporary space, rather than the spider-web-infested cavern Sherlock had been expecting.

“Wow,” he breathed, truly impressed.

Mycroft looked unutterably pleased, and Sherlock simply beamed without censoring himself.

The room was, of course, equipped to the nines, obviously very recently converted. No expense had been spared, due to typical Mycroftian attention to detail and a lavish insistence on doing things properly if one is going to do anything at all. It was kitted out with every piece of equipment, every amenity that anyone who had reason to work in an underground laboratory would require.

Sherlock, hands on hips in the centre of the room, scanned everything, unsure of where to begin, too excited to settle on just one part of it.

“All present and correct?” checked Mycroft, hopefully.

Sherlock took an inventory, circulating and opening cupboards, assessing the glassware, the chemical supplies, the vortex mixer, the centrifuge, and burners, and scopes. He examined the work benches in the centre and off to the side, running his hands over the cool, smooth steel surfaces with covetous approval.

“To a tee, brother,” he confirmed, wide-eyed with appreciation.

Mycroft was a little puffed with pride.

“There’s good extraction now, and proper plumbing. A chemical disposal unit. Safety kit and protective clothing in that closet. I wanted to put in an electron microscope but I can’t generate the kind of power to support it. When you’re down here, kindly press this button, and a red light will come on outside the door upstairs. So I shall know not to disturb you.”

“And you’ll know where I am,” teased Sherlock, correctly.

Mycroft had the decency to look chagrined. “Well, yes. There’s an alarm system, so if you get into difficulty or something, just hit it. I have visions of you hurting yourself… Or overwhelmed by toxic fumes, but that may just be because I remember your ‘biggest ball of smoke’ competition when you were nine. Hardly a competition with only one participant, eh?”

“I can’t… I just…” Sherlock was lost for words, still whirling round the room with a spring in his step.
Mycroft waved away the unspoken gratitude. But Sherlock couldn’t quite find it in himself to allow it to be unspoken. Not for this.

He came up to stand in front of the elder Holmes, who looked at him with open curiosity. He stuck out his hand, like the tall valet had done earlier, and titled his head in quiet challenge. He looked his brother full square in the eye. “Thank. You,” he said with deliberate provocation, knowing how the words made the other man squirm.

Mycroft glared at him all-too-knowingly, then took his brother’s hand, still chilled from the cold steel. He shook it firmly and confidently - in a manner much more akin to the diplomatic stalwart of the British Government that Sherlock recognised as his elder sibling.

“You’re. Welcome,” said Mycroft, with a sharp, authoritative nod. They smirked at each other’s antics.

Then, “Onwards and upwards?” queried Mycroft, still holding that chilly, strong hand.

“Always, brother mine,” said Sherlock, squeezing a little harder before they both relaxed their grips by tacit agreement.

They turned and ascended back to the main house, each man feeling light and airy; on some kind of adventure as they explored a place that had no reason to be exciting or even unfamiliar.

Sherlock followed on, averting his eyes from the suddenly distracting sight of his brother’s backside, tensing and shifting in his tweed trousers as he climbed the stairs.


On the first floor, Mycroft pointed out some guest bedrooms, an upstairs sitting room, his study, and the master bedroom where he resided at night. He opened the door but made no move to go inside or to invite his brother in.

“I’m in here, if you ever need me and I can’t be found elsewhere,” he said, perfunctorily, as Sherlock examined the classic Victorian room from the doorway - all dark, carved wood and rich textiles. Arts and Crafts inspired, he noted. 1890s. Redolent of taste and a type of English refinement. He’d expected nothing less. The bed was simply enormous; another four poster inspired by medieval old-world craftsmanship, but with a fresher feel than a mere antique. The bed curtains were deep blue, fringed with silver thread.

A few family photos were dotted about on side tables and the small desk facing the large windows. He caught sight of his own image amongst them, more than once, and felt a jolt of pleasure.

“You sleep here,” said Sherlock, stupidly, then switched to safe territory. “God, how many wardrobes does one man need, for heaven’s sake?! Bloody Beau Brummell,” he chided, playfully.

Mycroft held up his hands. “I admit the fault. For someone who has not mingled with the outside world for the best part of a year, I am excessively well-provided for with outer casings. I do make the effort to dress every day. Even when things were…,” he said, delicately, “I mean, it helps. Wearing the costume of one’s former self. When one is remaking it. Frankly, some days, it was all I could do. I’d feel an overwhelming sense of achievement for having put on a shirt. Ridiculous.”

Sherlock looked down and nodded, biting his lip.

“Understandable,” he said, quietly. “Well. You have enough things to choose from. Better than lounging around in pyjamas or sheets like I would.”
Mycroft swiftly changed the subject. “Games room down there,” he said, pointing to an alcove.

“Won’t be using that.”

“I pot a bit of snooker to myself occasionally. You’re welcome to come and laugh at me.”

“I shall.”

“My little cinema room is on this floor too, if you wish to join me for a film. Or not. I mean, do fire up the projector yourself if you’re minded to.”

“Why is it up here…? Ah.” Sherlock hit upon an instant, easy deduction. “It used to be in the basement. Adjoining the wine cellar.”

Mycroft shuffled a little uncomfortably at having been found out.

“There was always a draft down there. Completely ruins Tracy and Hepburn, a draft. Couldn’t very well put a lab up here either.”

Didn’t have to make a lab in the first place. But you did.

“Shall we?” said Mycroft, smoothly moving them along and up the next set of stairs to the floor where Sherlock’s own room was located.

“The best bathroom is up here, across from your room. If you tire of your en suite, the huge freestanding bath is practically Olympian in scale. Which suits me very well. And up here…”

Mycroft led them to the end of the corridor, to a door which opened upon yet another ascending staircase.

“The roof?” queried Sherlock, not having realised there was access from inside the house.

Mycroft turned on the stairs and cast a thrilled and secretive smile which stopped Sherlock in his tracks. He said nothing and climbed. Sherlock followed, enthralled. And then the full extent of their destination was revealed.

“My God,” said Sherlock, in wonder - even more astonished than he had been in the basement.

He gawped at the large attic room, almost a gallery, which ran almost the full length of the house. It had a huge set of double glass doors looking out towards the back of the rolling land around the Grange. The room itself was simple, clean, plainly whitewashed, with bare white floorboards. It was well-furnished in ergonomic Scandinavian style, nothing like the heavy Victorian interiors of the rest of the house. It was not exactly sparse, and the walls were neatly hung with framed maps and charts. Trunks of papers and scientific instruments sat off to the edges, with assorted childhood toys incongruously placed upon a chest of drawers. Some old boxes, which seemed likely to contain keepsakes and heirlooms of one kind or another, had been stacked in one corner. There was a black box which Sherlock knew contained an oboe. There was a simple, grey textile easychair; a pine desk; an office chair. And above their heads, set into the ceiling, a vast, retractable skylight, through which the light of the heavens beamed.

Mycroft’s face was radiant with veneration, as it always was when he stepped into his rooftop safe haven; peace and serenity etched into every softening feature of his face. Sherlock thought he could detect the lowering of his brother’s shoulders; the slackening of his neck muscles; the slowing of his heartbeat.
Mycroft didn’t say a word, but simply indicated with a crooked finger for Sherlock to follow him through the doors and out to a wide terrace balcony, boundaried by a thick stone ledge. A huge antique telescope sat amid a neat array of perennials and succulents which occupied most of the outside area.

Sherlock gaped, with a crooked smile on his face. Mycroft turned to him.

“Do you like it?” he asked, picking his nails with subconscious anxiety.

Sherlock chuckled. “Like it? It’s extraordinary. Mycroft! I had no idea there was a terrace up here, let alone an observatory of sorts!”

He wandered around, absorbing it all, cataloguing the genera of plants almost without thinking. He leaned back on the stone balcony ledge and regarded his brother with new amazement.

Mycroft nodded, modestly, and looked around him in satisfaction. “Yes. I had a lot of structural work done. It wasn’t very stable when we were young. But I always fancied a rooftop garden, and I always wanted somewhere worthy of my telescope. Family heirloom. Siger had no interest in it. It’s a thing of beauty.”

“And a joy forever, no doubt. You really have been occupying your time since…”

“Yes. I am a man of leisure. Or have been. Hobbies, brother. Staying interested in the world around you. The key to sanity,” Mycroft said, sagely, and came to stand next to the younger man. Both leaned back together and enjoyed the view inwards to the attic room rather than out to the grounds.

“Does dissecting things count?” mused Sherlock.

“If it keeps you sane, yes,” said Mycroft, firmly.

“Not sure about that.”

“You’re welcome to cultivate astronomy as a pastime. Or anything else here. I am at your disposal.”

“So to speak.”

“Quite.”

Mycroft’s voice took on a more distant, reflective tone. Not the flat, dull one he’d used as he recounted past horrors, but a contemplative, relaxed timbre, which soothed Sherlock’s ear.

“I sit up here rather a lot. I have seen the skies change and stars return ever since Sherrinford. A useful lesson in perspective, my little observatory. I… I felt the need for time and space. Here I have them. Which is to say: spacetime.”

“Relativity, brother. All is relative,” quipped Sherlock, with deliberate irony.

Mycroft huffed a small laugh. “So it is, so it is. There is great comfort to be found in the secular heavens. The laws of physics are the same for all non-accelerating observers…,” he paraphrased.

“The speed of light within a vacuum is the same no matter the speed at which an observer travels,” responded Sherlock, automatically.

“Yes, and in space no-one can hear you bloody scream. Come on, look at this,” said Mycroft, smiling dryly, breaking the rhythm of their reflections.
“Not much light pollution out here,” observed Sherlock, casting his vision out into the black night, dotted only by a few pinpricks from the neighbouring village lamps. The motorway ran on the front side of their land, but back here were only country lanes and unoccupied farmland.

“No, indeed, the sky is really very visible on a clear night. The moonless ones are best for pure stargazing. Winter skies are best of all. Cloudless. Cold. This time of year is my favourite. Darker longer, therefore brighter stars. Worth waiting for.”

Sherlock placed a hand on the other man’s shoulder. “Darkness has its advantages.”

“Oh, I have learned that, brother mine.”

“So what are we looking at tonight?” asked Sherlock, curiously examining the telescope. Astronomy had not really been one of his interests, except for basic concepts. He’d never taken a case that required its assimilation, and if he had known anything more extensive he had long since erased it from his hard drive.

“Well, we’re looking out at the South skies here. Erm… Why don’t you use the telescope, I’ll move it and adjust the lens,” said Mycroft, positioning the instrument and angling it downwards, with a concentrated look on his face. He placed a hand lightly at the base of Sherlock’s spine, guiding him towards it, and Sherlock felt a tingle run up his back at the unexpected contact.

Mycroft did not seem to notice his reaction. “I confess I do have a far more modern one up here, but it’s a bit of an ugly brute. I hide it because it isn’t as Romantic, if you know what I mean. Glamorous, I should say,” he chattered with seamless, new-found confidence, his tongue unleashed by the sharing of this particularly dearly-held passion project.

Sherlock smiled at his brother’s evident glee, watching as he regressed to a more youthful identity, all giddy enthusiasm and geekery. Sherlock bent himself to the eyepiece and gazed, without quite knowing what he was looking for. Mycroft’s hand stayed on his back, warming him in the damp night air.

“I recognise Orion.”

Mycroft patted him slightly, as though in approval. “Yes, very clear there. Use the Belt to find other constellations. If you follow the line of it to the right, you come to a V-shape of stars – Taurus’ head – and then a small group of faint stars – the Seven Sisters, or Pleaides cluster. It really is a good night for this… Sometimes if it’s really dark and clear, you can detect a faint smudge on Orion’s sword.”

Mycroft bent a little lower towards his brother’s back. “See it?” he asked, in a low voice, near the shell of his ear.

“Yes! Oh, yes,” exclaimed Sherlock, thoroughly immersed in the sky. “A sort of fuzzy bit there. A… blast! What do you call it?” Sherlock clicked his fingers, impatient at his slow brain. Mycroft had the advantage of him when it came to astrophysics, evidently.

“A nebula. Orion’s nebula. Where new stars are being formed before your eyes,” said Mycroft, with something reverent in his voice.

“Yes! Oh, yes,” breathed Sherlock, turning his face from the telescope. He found himself a little closer to his brother than he anticipated. He gazed up into his face, alight with the excitement brought about by teaching and learning. His brother’s cheek twitched a little, and his eyes seemed huge in the dark, like pale moons.

Mycroft gave him a gentle push back towards the telescope and Sherlock dutifully took his
“Yes. Now, if you follow the line of Orion’s Belt to the left, you come to Sirius.”

“The Dog Star, brightest in the sky,” said Sherlock, remembering something he’d once heard from some unknown source - though he could, of course, guess at it.

“Brightest and most beautiful, brother mine,” said Mycroft, in a near-whisper.

“Light and warmth, millions of years away,” murmured Sherlock.

“The observable past.”

Mycroft said no more. His hand slipped from Sherlock’s back, and moved, tentatively at first, but then with definite, strong pressure, round to his slim waist. It gently held there – unmoving and unassuming. Sherlock relaxed into the touch. Allowing it to be. Breathing lightly.

You are beautiful like Mummy was. You have a lightness about you, which is just...

Sherlock stood slowly, and Mycroft’s hand fell away once more. Sherlock turned, stepping that tiny bit closer towards his elder brother. He swallowed hard, and placed his hand, deliberately and consciously, onto the other man’s smooth, pale cheek, unable and unwilling to blame whisky for it.

“Thank you for showing me,” Sherlock said, his voice husky and deep with sincerity. He heard the pounding of blood in his ears. Mycroft, however, seemed calm. Tranquil rather than troubled. It was not quite what Sherlock expected, and it pleased him more than he could account for. Mycroft’s face; open and calm, and glowing through the darkness. How that look suited him better than the mask of officialdom and family tragedy.

“Lock,” said his brother, simply, holding him in his spellbound, starstruck gaze. He brought his hand up to press Sherlock’s own as it rested on his face. Mycroft seemed to waver slightly, but then came to a micro-decision, the import of which showed momentarily in his dilated eyes.

He took two of Sherlock’s long, violinist’s fingers, and kissed them. Sherlock stayed stock still, and let his hand go limp, unresisting. He focused only on his hand; his brother’s mouth; their synchronised, fast breathing.

Mycroft drew the fingers to his lips once more, opening them slightly. He quirked an eyebrow at Sherlock, who gave a tiny flicker of ‘yes’. Sherlock held his breath, heart thudding, as the tips of his fingers met with his brother’s tongue. He bit his own lip, and, as naturally as he knew how to, caressed his brother’s lips, and pushed, ever so gently pushed his two, wetly kissed fingers into Mycroft’s mouth, feeling his teeth and his soft palate. A current of sensual pleasure flowed from fingers to arm, to solar plexus, to spine, to groin, down his legs, and up inside of him. On. He felt switched on.

A memory stirred. Its origin fuzzy.

I have fallen asleep with his fingers in my mouth, instead of my own thumb. A child. An innocent comfort for us both. He has held me through the night. I have slept on his shoulder.

Mycroft’s eyes closed as he all but sucked on his brother’s digits, blissful and dreaming and aching.

Then his eyes flickered open again, and the Holmes brothers stood staring at each other - neither breaking cover, neither querying a motive - with a stunned, complicit look of permission and shared understanding. Self-analysis, second-guessing shut down completely, as they simply felt - as two animals felt, entirely on instinct - an old, dormant bond being reforged and solidified.
Mycroft opened his mouth and released his brother’s hand. He shook himself a little, perhaps merely shivering in the night air, and stepped back unsteadily. He licked his lips, took his handkerchief from his top pocket, and used it to gently pat Sherlock’s fingers dry, smirking with self-deprecation and something delightfully close to mischief.

Sherlock giggled and Mycroft snorted. Naughtiness out of nowhere. Without shame or regret.

Mycroft cleared his throat and adopted his grown-up, munificent persona once again, for appearance’s sake. Sherlock folded his arms, and fondly let him perform it.

“I’m glad you like it up here. You’ll navigate your way around the skies without me in no time. There are, of course, far more stars to be seen than just these, but if you can find these ones reliably, then you can use them to find your way round other constellations too. There are plenty of sky-charts and resources inside. I mean, I know you can get everything online, but I prefer the manual approach to this sort of thing, really. I like to put the work into it.”

Sherlock nodded. “That seems entirely characteristic, yes.”

His head span at the turnabouts and thrills of the last hour. He felt the deep need to do something with his hands. Too empty, too exposed, too…flappy and in need of occupation. His empty fingers quested for something else to do.

“Would it ruin the purity of your atmosphere if I smoked up here? Just fancy one. Sorry.”

Mycroft tutted disapprovingly. “I’ll allow it if you’ve got one for me.”

“God, yes. Here.” Sherlock offered him the pack and lighter from his back pocket.

Mycroft lit his own cigarette, and chivalrously held the lighter for Sherlock, like some suave P.I. in one of the “he walked into my office” film noir scenes he took such guilty pleasure in. The brothers inhaled simultaneously, held their breath, and groaned with repletion as they exhaled at the exact same moment. Sherlock leant on his forearms upon the stone ledge and hung a little over the edge, mentally measuring the drop. Mycroft stood with one hand in his pocket, in his customary smoker’s pose, breathing blue clouds into the chill air.

“You be careful, you,” Mycroft said, dryly. “We’ve had enough of you falling off rooftops.”

“Enough for two lifetimes, brother,” agreed Sherlock.

“Oh, God, why is it bad for you?” exclaimed Mycroft, suddenly, looking at his cigarette with great offence. “Why does something so absolutely bloody fantastic have to end up killing you?!”

“Because God is a sadist?” riposted Sherlock, unthinkingly. “Because everything enjoyable is a one-way ticket, brother. Everything is temporary, good or bad. Even stars. Best to just enjoy what you can. We’re all leaving the party eventually.”

“Yes, well, I take the point, but it doesn’t apply to certain things. Some things are not worth the pain,” retorted Mycroft, looking at him meaningfully from the side of his eyes.


Mycroft inhaled deeply, his rib cage lifting and expanding visibly. “I do know. I do.”

They smoked together in amiable silence. Mycroft stubbed his dog-end out on the ledge, and
Sherlock flung his out into the night, as his brother had known he would.

“Please do come up here whenever you tire of the basement,” Mycroft said, with the same magnanimity he’d been showing all evening, as he led the way back inside.

Sherlock snorted at a sudden thought. “A madman in the basement and a lunatic on the roof. Well, a melancholic, anyhow. Are we becoming a Victorian novel, brother?”

“Ha! I do hope not. Far too sentimental. And too moralising by half.”

“With few happy endings,” added Sherlock.

“Oh, I don’t know. Some of them turn out all right. The mysteries and sensation novels are the best ones. But I suppose you do have to behave yourself to be allowed a good ending in those stories.”

“Exactly. None of the monsters or the interesting people live happily ever after. Idiotic.”

“Perhaps we shall be Neo-Victorians instead,” suggested Mycroft, brightly.

“Good idea. They can do anything,” agreed Sherlock.

“So they can. Steam-powered dirigibles, mechanical hybrids, time travel....”

“Sexier clothes too,” said Sherlock, nudging his brother with his elbow.

“No comment.”

They made their way back down to the second floor, rubbing their cold hands together and blowing on them as their eyes readjusted to electric lighting. Each noted the appealing flush in the other’s face. They stood awkwardly together again, out of context, like two teenagers who had no idea how to finish a first date.

Mycroft scratched at his head and stretched his arms and neck, feeling stiff and in need of soothing.

“I shall put the house to bed downstairs. Then I’m for the bath, I think, and bed myself. It has been rather a long day.” Understatement of the decade.

Sherlock snickered. “You love a good soak, don’t you?”

Mycroft agreed, cheerfully. “I have a horrible feeling I am a natural wallower. Like the hippopotamus in glorious mud.”

Sherlock’s nose wrinkled in bemusement. “Why a hippo? Is that a reference to something?”

Mycroft seemed slightly embarrassed. “It’s just a silly comic song. Flanders and Swann. Much beloved by Uncle Rudy. We had it on the record player sometimes, when we were allowed. Don’t remember it?”

“No. Sorry,” Sherlock said, guiltily.

Mycroft batted away the unnecessary apology. “Don’t be. Just one of those irrelevant little details of childhood. There are more relevant ones. We’ll come onto those tomorrow.”

“Whatever you… I mean, we don’t have to,” said Sherlock, offering an out. He would, he felt, continue to offer it throughout this rather extraordinary weekend. Come what may.
“Yes. Yes. I think we do have to.” Mycroft turned to go and turned back again. “If you’re staying up, would you leave the vestibule lights on? I sometimes get up in the night and last time I did it in pitch black I knocked the hall table over, and a drawer fell out and landed on my foot.”

“Ouch. Think I’ll go to bed. Bit knackered.”

They shuffled awkwardly on the landing.

“Yes. Sleep soundly. Goodnight, then.”


“Night, Lock,” said Mycroft as he descended the stairs, without turning back this time.

Sherlock gazed wonderingly at his back as he went, then went into his own bedroom. He hardly felt like winding down, but he was too drained to do more than undress, complete his ablutions and lie atop the covers. He stared up at the swirling patterned canopy of the bed as he attempted to process even half of what had transpired in the last 24 hours.

_From one cigarette to another, in a hundred different, not-so-easy steps. Mycie. Hurt and tired and angry and scared and appalled and kind and generous and sweet and witty and… Looking at me with moon-rock eyes._

How to comprehend Mycroft now. How to comprehend himself. He found he did not miss either of their former selves. The ones who seemed to exist mere days ago, but which he realised now had been well-constructed falsehoods. Falsehoods. That much nicer word for lies.

_Fingers in his mouth. Hand on his back. On his cheek. In his hair. Eye to eye._

He tossed and turned, unable to fully relax. That edgy, itchy, tingling feeling, which he identified as forbidden to him, but which he felt like the swell of a tide nonetheless, pulled and tickled at his senses. He tried to focus his mind, to master the onset of confusing arousal, but was beset in his mind’s eye by stars, and lips, and teeth, and walking up stairs.

_Don’t touch. Don’t intervene. Let it come through in the dreams, where things are most usefully processed. Don’t dispense with it. Learn what it means first. Let the transport do the work unimpeded._

He fought himself, and eventually the images subsided as his body and brain demanded rest.

He must have dozed off for a short time, because he was woken with a start by a sound from outside. He saw the hall lights were still on, bleeding under the door. He grumbled as his bladder complained at him, and he realised he’d have to get up. He stumbled blearily to his feet, wrapped himself up in his bedsheet, and saw that it was only just past midnight.


He opened his door, and as he crossed the landing, squinting, the door to the large bathroom opened, and Mycroft emerged from the steam, a white towel wrapped round his waist. His naked upper body was moist and slightly pink; his still-uncombed, damp hair delightfully disarrayed. Sherlock halted in his tracks and gaped. He averted his eyes in haste, then realised something had been wrong.

Mycroft had momentarily frozen on the landing, not quite knowing whether to dash for his room and risk seeming even more awkward, or to just saunter past.
“I didn’t mean to wake you, I sat up reading…,” explained Mycroft, feeling ridiculous.

Before he could decide which way to move, he heard an almost inaudible gasp from Sherlock, and balked slightly as his little brother moved to stand before him, with a curious, childlike frown upon his finely-wrought features. His eyes, bright blue and alert, were fixated on Mycroft’s bare chest.

**Scars.** Little white nicks scattered across the otherwise smooth and lightly haired expanse of skin. Sherlock’s heart caught in his throat.

A curved, snakelike gash about three inches long - but old, decades old - adorned his brother's left pectoral, almost framing his nipple. He judged from the scar tissue that it would once have been a rather vicious, deep cut: it resembled the letter S.

Just below Mycroft's collarbone a series of crisscrossed scratches drew his eye. They were white with age but stood out more prominently from the heat of the bath. A faint horizontal line ran along his right upper arm; another two, darker ones on his right hip. Cuts. Rapier, foil, sabre.

Sherlock reached out a loose, gentle hand towards his brother, who shied and skittishly stepped back. Mycroft’s eyes were dull and downcast, and he was struggling to breathe normally. Wordlessly, Sherlock brought a hand to his brother's shoulder, and turned him around with gentle pressure. He turned obediently, and as he turned, the towel slipped away. Neither man made a move to retrieve it. Sherlock let his bedsheets fall in solidarity, he supposed. And in acknowledgement of joint vulnerability.

The scarring was fainter but a little more extensive on the older man’s broad, soft back. Remnants of suffering. Not signs of deep cuts or gashes, but longer, thinner marks between the shoulder blades. What was obviously a cigar burn, 30 or more years old, where his lower back and buttocks met. Mycroft's head had dropped forward onto his chest, and his hands opened and clenched repeatedly.

Sherlock brought him round to face him again, and cupped the man's head in both hands, seeking eye contact, staring wildly into his soul. Mycroft averted his gaze, shuddering; fighting against the disgusting sensation of being about to weep.

Sherlock said nothing. His mouth a firm, compressed line. Mycroft spoke before he could, in a tight, strained voice.

“Some of them were caught in the line of duty, if you can believe that. Basic training wounds. The vicissitudes of early undercover work. Special skills stuff, as necessary. I am grateful to have never been shot, unlike some,” he offered, forcing a lightness of tone which was impossible to achieve.

Sherlock traced the outline of the curved, curly scar with his fingertrip, brushing it so faintly that Mycroft felt it tingle and spark.

“An *aide memoire*. S for Siger,” said Mycroft, grimly, full of shame. "Most of these are gifts from him," he admitted, unnecessarily. All his former, excitable confidence shattered once more. Sherlock felt responsible. His own chest hurt with it.


With slow, deliberate movements, Sherlock leaned in close, eyes bright with undropped tears, mirroring the glazed, watery pools of his brother. He brought a hand up to Mycroft’s face, cupping it gently. Mycroft regarded him with a desperate, mesmerised expression. Their lanky, lightly muscular bodies, *au naturel*, were held millimetres apart, and each man felt the thrum of resistance in that
miniscule space, vibrating and pulsing between them, though they tried so hard to ignore it.

Sherlock wavered only slightly, the after-effects of whisky and adrenaline affecting his balance, but not his intent. He ran a gentle thumb over Mycroft's cheekbone, leaned his head in closer still, and kissed his brother's parted mouth.

He pulled away gently, but kept a hold of the panting, sweating man before him. “Poor brother mine,” he whispered in a faint, dreamlike voice, directly into the shell of his pink, hot ear. “Poor, poor Mycie. Oh. Let me. Please let me.”

He fell forwards again and Mycroft met him halfway - not tentatively, not carefully - to deepen the kiss. Sherlock licked his tongue gently against Mycroft’s, who responded with heaving sighs and deep, languorous licks of his own. The older man shuddered and inhaled deeply against Sherlock's questing lips, pressing himself to the lithe form with instinctive, urgent longing. Their upper bodies, their thighs, their hard and quivering pricks met, kissing at the same time as their mouths. Electricity like neither had known crackled around them and through them, and was them.

Then, without warning, Mycroft pulled away sharply, gasping as though cold water had been poured on him. Sherlock read hurt and fear in his eyes, though his pupils were nonetheless dilated with desire.

“I won't tolerate pity from you,” he ground out, as though in physical pain.

“Don’t pity you. Don’t pity you,” insisted Sherlock, coming back for more. Mycroft’s palms raised defensively up to Sherlock’s chest, and he looked away to the side, face red with thwarted need and humiliation.

“Please. Please,” he choked, shaking his head in denial.

Sherlock stepped back, giving him space, trying not to just be sick.

“I…”

“Go back to bed, Sherlock,” instructed Mycroft, harshly, looking off somewhere to the right, as though hoping the ground would swallow him.

Sherlock hesitated for a moment. If he retreated now, would this be all there ever was? If he stood his ground, would his brother forgive him?

"I need to..." he began. Do something I have never done before. Say something new. Now.

"What?” appealed Mycroft, desperately, begging to be put out of his misery. In his distress, it simply did not occur to him to be the one to walk away.

"I need to… Mycroft. I'm sorry, my brother. I am sorry!” exclaimed Sherlock, his voice high and loud. “I ought to have known! I should have asked what happened to you, years ago. I don't know why I didn't!”

If he had imagined saying these words at all, he had not imagined saying them naked in a corridor.

“Sherlock, please… Don’t need to…,” began Mycroft, in utter shock. These words. Now? He exhaled shakily, and covered his eyes with his hands.

“I didn’t help you, Mycroft,” said Sherlock, horrified to find his face wet with salt, but not as horrified as when Mycroft removed his hand to reveal red, streaming eyes and twitching,
downturned lips working against his sobbing breath.

"Because I'm invincible, of course. I'm supposed to be all right, aren't I? An immovable object. What a betrayal it would be if I crumbled to dust!" cried Mycroft, folding in on himself, leaning back against the wall. One hand braced himself against it, the other clawed at his hair. "I cultivated that, Sherlock. It isn't your fault that you did as I intended. You weren't supposed to help me. I wouldn't permit it, not ever!"

Sherlock stepped back in, pulling his brother upright again. Shaking him by his upper arms.

"I have relied so much on your invincibility. Your inevitability. I depend upon it. Just...," his voice strangulated on the words and they refused to come out.

_Can't bear the idea of you wounded! It sickens me. You. In pain. Alone._

Sherlock found he could not halt the stream of self-reccrimination tumbling from his lips now.

"It was preferable, more palatable to forget that you were capable of suffering. To ignore it. The lies I told myself! How could you possibly have been all right?! I saw it in your face, when you told us she was dead, when you looked right through me at the funeral. I saw it and I turned away, because it fucking terrified me that you weren't my...Mycroft anymore."

Mycroft looked up at this, staring into his brother's face, gulping and trying to breathe regularly.

"Dearest...," he said, placing a firm hand on Sherlock’s chest, palm flat to his heart.

"No, don't comfort me, you idiot," spluttered Sherlock, making them both laugh with gallows humour. "I am a selfish bastard. It is the worst of me. I sent Lestrade in half-heartedly to do my dirty work, and not for the first time. It was convenient. It got you off my conscience. 'Not as strong as he thinks he is' I said to him, when what I meant was 'not as strong as I need him to be'. I needed you not to be hurt, instead of properly getting involved when I knew you so obviously were. It should have been me who came to you. It should have been me who understood this first," he said, indicating the map of scars, so like constellations on the skin.

"Not your job, little brother," said Mycroft, wiping his nose with the back of his hand, shaking his head firmly.

"If not mine, whose? Who watches out for you?" said Sherlock, fiercely. "I don't mean your minions, your bloody spies. Who else should be looking but your only brother?!"

"It's not what I wanted! Not your burden to carry. I absolve you of it," stated the elder Holmes. Sherlock snorted.

"Rubbish. I let you chase after me, don't I? I let you feel like an unwelcome presence - I am pursued and never pursuing. Playing bloody hard to get," said Sherlock, sounding disgusted.

Mycroft smiled kindly if forlornly, and shook his head ruefully.

"You don't do it very convincingly, darling. You've never been all that hard for me to get."

Sherlock sniffled and laughed sadly. Their breathing calmed a little.

"No. I suppose I know that too. I pretend that I mind it. I pretend not to notice... Pretend you're my biggest blind spot, when... I see you, Mycroft. Everything about you! Everything."
Mycroft tilted his head. "Do you?"

Sherlock nodded, frowning. "I'm a liar too. I feel your eyes on me and I turn away. But I won’t. I won’t."

Mycroft opened his mouth to contradict, or say something soothing and generous. "You..."

"No! Forgive me. Forgive me, brother. Please, please...." begged the distraught detective, sounding more like the child his brother remembered so vividly, but which he himself had no real recollection of. He leaned in, pressing the top of his head into his brother’s chest, grasping at his arms. Mycroft found himself with a handful of writhing Sherlock.

"I do. I do. Stop. Baby boy, please stop. It's all right. God, I'm no more able to cope with you crying now than I was 40 years ago," mumbled Mycroft, pulling him in for a chaste embrace, hardly noticing their mutual nudity now - just holding, and rocking back and forth on deeply remembered instinct.

Sherlock’s curls bounced as he shook his head emphatically, head buried against the crook of Mycroft’s bare neck. "Not crying."

"No, of course not. Never do, do you? Little toughie," teased Mycroft, stoking the dark curly mop on his shoulder.

"Never." Sherlock chuckled, wetly.

*God, if John could see this. The Great Sherlock Holmes and the British Government, naked and weeping like babies. Who would believe it?*

They stood in each other’s arms until their breathing levelled off and they calmed down sufficiently to realise where they were and what they were doing.

Mycroft was the first to come to his senses.

“Erm... I am suddenly acutely aware that I’m naked.”

Sherlock giggled. “Yes, I’d noticed. I don’t mind.”

“I think I do. Hand me my towel, please.”

Sherlock bent and grabbed it off the floor.

“Here. But you’ve nothing to hide, brother,” he said, shyly, even as he kept his eyes chastely above his brother’s waist. It seemed a little late for it, but nevertheless.

Mycroft shook his head, sighing despairingly. “No. That is true. Nothing about me is hidden any longer. I am...exposed in plain sight.”

“I think we both are. Give me my bedsheet. You know how bashful I am,” joked Sherlock, receiving a watery grin.

They leaned against each other with their foreheads touching.

“Come and sleep in my room. Just to sleep. Will you?” asked Mycroft, quietly. Sherlock noted and ignored the clarification, filing it away for later, as with so many things.

Sherlock considered the request for a split-second, but he’d known the answer before the question
was asked.

“I will. I think…not for the first time.”

“No. You always used to clamber in with me when something was amiss, or just because. We have slept many a night in just such a sorry state, dear boy.”

“So…”

“Tomorrow, Lock. Tomorrow. Talking, all the rest of it. Just rest tonight, with me.”

“Yes, brother. Take me to bed. I’m exhausted, I’m snotty, I may very well still be a bit tiddly, and I’m all full of sentiment.”

“Ha. Merry Christmas, then,” chuckled Mycroft, wiping his eyes again and shaking his head in self-effacement.

Wrapped once again in their improvised coverings, they tottered off down the stairs, not holding hands, but each man walking under his own steam. They entered Mycroft’s large bedroom. Sherlock stayed wrapped up in his sheet and flopped onto one side of the enormous four-poster. Mycroft discreetly and quickly dressed in his pyjamas and slipped beneath the heavy duvet. He held out the arm nearest his brother, and Sherlock wiggled into the crook of his armpit, resting on the chest – his curly head over that deep, carved S. Over his brother’s heart.

Not a word more was spoken, and they slept until dawnrise.
Dawn

Chapter Summary

A Sherlock-focused interlude.

Chapter Notes

Huge apologies for those waiting patiently or otherwise for me to catch up on this. I haven't wanted to rush it, so I can only hope it's worth the wait. If you're still with me, I love you! xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The dreams came, as they often did, in the early hours of the morning. On the threshold between sleeping and waking, where lucidity provided insight and a measure of control, Sherlock dreamed for answers. The steady heartbeat under his ear, and the warmth along his side lulled him into a trance-like state. Images of the day flashed through his brain. The sensation of a kiss tingled on his lips. The ghost of bodily touch left him hard and aching, but unresolved. He forced his mind away from his body, and disappeared into mental processing.

Semi-consciously, he visualised the rooms of the Grange – library, lab, and observatory. They merged with the rooms of Musgrave Hall – nursery, bedroom, study – which merged with the cells of Sherrinford, until they were almost indistinguishable from the rooms of his Mind Palace.

In his half-waking state, Sherlock searched for information. He rummaged through boxes and drawers and books, opening all the files of Mycroft, searching all the rooms where he so often appeared to taunt, and question, and advise, and challenge, and elucidate.

In the dungeon of the Mind Palace, Sherlock stood before the one un-openable door; a thick steel vault, a safe, closed against horrors which nevertheless leaked out in soundwaves.


The noise from behind the door increased unbearably - a chorus of screaming, and shouted warnings, of harsh laughter, and what he now recognised as Holmes children crying.

Sherlock watched in objective fascination as his own hand, a child’s hand, reached for the door handle – a metal wheel in the shape of a star. The door which had never before been opened must be opened now. Because someone inside needed help, and through his trepidation and doubt, he remembered that he was made for helping, and that he wasn’t frightened of noise or darkness, or unsolved puzzles.

The door melted at his touch, and left a puddle of liquid silver at his feet.

The room before him was not, as he expected, a cell or a dungeon at all. It was home. It was the nursery. And a tired, frowning red-headed boy aged about twelve sat at a desk, reading, and reciting.
The boy looked up as Sherlock entered, and his face transformed into the widest, most open smile Sherlock had ever seen in his life.

“There you are!” said the boy Mycroft. “I looked for you through my telescope.”

Sherlock heard his voice reply, high and childlike.

“Here I am.”

Boy Mycroft got up, excitedly, and moved towards a large film projector. One of Sherlock’s own bedsheets hung from the wall opposite. His brother flipped a switch and the room fell into blackness, lit only by the images which flickered to life on the makeshift screen. Sherlock sat in front of it up close, cross-legged on the floor with his chin in his hands, and watched.

He watched images of the past, and of Mycroft.

Memories, unstoppable memories, cascaded around him like a waterfall, and became a flood.

Memories of being four with a painful arm, and of Mycroft telling him he was a brave, strong boy, and singing him funny animal songs in a soft, tuneful voice. Of being five, and of Mycroft running with him through fields, telling him this was a game, an escape game, and to be very fast, and very quiet. Of Mycroft, having his arm twisted by a tall, dark monster who never let go; Mycroft being dragged into rooms, his pale face a mask of calm, but his grey eyes wild and darting, telling him to go away. Mycroft kicking doors closed in his face, leaving him hurt and sad on the other side, wondering what he had done wrong not to be allowed in. From behind the closed doors – behind all the closed doors of his life - he heard sounds he wasn’t supposed to hear; hard, hitting sounds; a man’s taunting sneer, a small girl’s cackling laughter, and his big brother’s quiet sobbing.

No-one is allowed near Mycroft except me. Mycroft is only safe with me.

He watched, and recalled an entire childhood of watching - watching Mycroft move in that precise, neat way of his, or as he sat perfectly still, processing his great mounds of learning. Watching Mycroft frown when he slept. Watching Mycroft’s hair glow red in sunlight and go curly in water. Mycroft’s hand holding a pen. Mycroft’s fingers wrapped round a glass. Mycroft’s feet in his slippers by the fire. Mycroft’s face when he listened to music. Mycroft’s lips round a fork; his teeth biting an apple.

Putting Mycroft’s thumb in his mouth to soothe him to sleep after a nightmare, because he was too much of a big boy to suck his own thumb, and this didn’t count.

Watching. Day and night, without being observed.

Mycroft at night, lying in bed under the covers, touching himself. Mycroft with his head thrown back, biting his lip. Mycroft moving so slightly, so slowly and then quickly, and Mycroft hot and bothered for once, not cool and unmoved. Mycroft jolting and tensing, opening his mouth and gasping, and trying not to make a sound. His wry, self-admonishing, sardonic smile when it was over and he fell still once more. His eyes closed in repose. And then that frown.

Sherlock heard old thoughts in the air. Thoughts which had once run across his juvenile brain. Insistent and real.

I want to see that again. I want to observe him, and do what he does. I want to know, I want to understand what that is. And I need to watch Mycroft all the time.

Sherlock’s body responded in sync with the imaginary Mycroft’s. A yearning, throbbing feeling in
his groin grew as he remembered that blissful look on his brother’s youthful face, as it blended with the way it had looked throughout their conversation on the roof. He felt again their proximity on the landing, and in the bed as they drifted off together. In his sleep, he moaned and writhed, trying to deal with the urgent dragging sensation in his lower spine and groin, until one overriding image – that of Mycroft leaning in and kissing him, and their pricks touching – sent stars sparking through him. His body convulsed and pulsed in his sleep, and he panted through the electric aftershocks of such pleasant, such uncomplicated feeling.

Calmness descended and his head cleared a little, until a sound broke through into his liminal awareness. The sound of violins, an oboe, a piano; of crackly gramophone records, and of soft, gentle laughter.

Then there was a loud burst of harsh static. Then words flashing up on the screen. Words that had been used last night. Endearments, nicknames he realised he had heard so many times before.

\emph{Little toughie. Baby boy. Darling. Dearest. Lock.}\n
The room grew darker and the silent pictures returned, so real he felt he was there - a ghost in his own life, watching.

He saw himself aged eight, and he saw Mycroft leaving, and felt a black hole open in the universe all over again. Then he was aged ten, and still Mycroft was returning and leaving, coming and going like the changing of seasons. He saw his empty teenage years, interrupted by Mycroft arriving and leaving, and \emph{leaving} again and again.

He watched in dismay as luggage piled in the hallway, as cars pulled away, with not a single backwards glance or wave goodbye. A noisy dark-haired boy being left and left, by an icy-pale, quiet boy who was almost a man. A man with apparently nothing to stay for. He watched. Pain in his chest. Rage. The clutching, constricting, unremitting ache, as he watched his brother walk away and return a little taller, a little broader, a little colder every year. The same but different.

Clearer still now, the memory of asking. Of asking once, and only once – of begging – to be allowed to leave with him. Or for him to stay, just stay, \emph{just stay}. The memory of being forcibly removed from his brother’s body, of being pushed away with two hands, of being told ‘you may not follow’, and ‘now is not the time’, and ‘I can’t do anything about it, but I’ll see you soon’. He remembered hearing the message, loud and clear, and sharp as a sabre cut – “caring is not an advantage, Sherlock.”

In his half-dreaming, half-remembering state, Sherlock wrenched himself away from the awful things on the screen, away from the pain, and scoured the nursery to find his brother, as he had always done.

But Mycroft was gone, and in his place was John. Decent, sturdy John, sitting on Mycroft's childhood bed, holding baby Rosie in his arms, and shaking his head in exasperation.

“Help me, John,” Sherlock asked, with solemn desperation. “Please help me. What did I know? What do I know?”

John sighed, patiently.

“I’m a GP, not a psychologist.”

“But you know. You know about children and about people, even Holmeses. Especially Holmeses. Tell me.”
“Children know everything, don’t you think? Children know when they are being lied to,” John said, with a doctor’s certainty. “Even the stupid ones.”

“Yes. He is still lying to me,” said Sherlock, trying to think clearly, but missing something, somehow.

“Well, perhaps just not telling the whole truth?” said John, placidly. “What about you?”

“Tell me, John.”

John seemed to ignore him. Sherlock tried again.

“Help me understand it.”

John looked into him with his open, honest green eyes.

“A left child trusts no-one, Sherlock. A left child must grow up to be the one who leaves. They must run and dodge and never, ever be in a position to be left ever again. Left children must not need anything or anyone. They must never see anyone walk away from them. They must turn on their heel first, without a backwards glance or a wave of goodbye. ”

Drugs and lists and petty cruelties, and murders and games. I left you, brother, so you would never walk away from me again.

“And the one who leaves first? What about him? Why does he go?” asked Sherlock, almost pleading now.

John seemed to think about this before answering. “Not because it’s easy, but because it’s hardest. And he thinks hardest is right. And he suffers in silence, like he was taught to.”


“No. Remind me what you know about suffering, Sherlock Holmes,” prompted John, with unbearable kindness.

“A suffering person is a desiring person,” said Sherlock, as though reciting something he’d always known. “A suffering person is a person with unmet need.”

Dream John shrugged and chuckled. “Not so hard, really, is it?”

He shook his head. “Not hard at all, John.”

John tilted his head and smiled. “What’s the bollocks you’re always spouting at me? When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth?”

“That’s the one.”

“Then just bloody solve it, mate,” laughed John, with perfect simplicity.

“Solve what?”


***

Obviously.
Sherlock woke with a start and a gasp, heart racing, wondering for a few panicky seconds where the hell he was. He sat bolt upright, only to find himself alone on Mycroft’s bed, still wrapped in his bedsheets. Mycroft was gone. His chest tightened in fury, and he was aware of a throbbing headache.

Hungover. Bad dreams. Left again. Cold light of day. But yesterday…

He fought the sinking sensation, deciding to analyse rather than let the confused, lonely feeling that had haunted him through the night dictate his waking mood. Because not all of the dreams had been bad, and not all of last night was spent sleeping alone.

Yesterday. Confessions and apologies. Stars, and scars. And a kiss. More than one. Simple comfort, surely. A bonding gesture. Just felt right, because of the hurt. Because of the novelty of talking to each other like that. And the closeness… Biological physical reaction. Can’t be helped.

He rolled over and gradually pulled himself up to sit on the edge of the bed, holding his head and trying to remember the specifics of his nocturnal visions, to differentiate metaphor from fact, to interpret recollections past and present.

Solve it.

As he moved, he realised to his rather appalled surprise that the sheet was wet - sticky and cold with his own semen. He had ejaculated in his sleep, as he often did, because he so often refused to lay a hand on himself.

Oh, God. When did that happen?

Mycroft removing himself from the bed made a little more sense, if he’d witnessed…that. He wondered whether he’d be told to leave, whether even now Mycroft was packing his bags and preparing to shut another door in his face. The thought of it made his heart ache.

He sighed and stood up, cringing with embarrassment and self-admonition. He clutched the sheet, as though it could protect him from something, then chided himself not to be stupid, and cleaned himself up with it. He stuffed it under the bed, and decided to dispose of it later. One for the staff to deal with on their return, he thought, with malicious glee.

As he scanned the room, his eyes alighted on the picture frames on the large mahogany desk. Even though he knew they were there, it almost shocked him to see photos of himself, captured at different ages.

Me. And me. And me again.

He picked up a simple silver frame, containing a picture he automatically recognised - so suddenly, so vividly - that it took his breath away. It showed a scruffy curly-haired urchin boy, in shorts and a jumper, all sulk and scowl. The boy slouched next to a teenaged Mycroft, just emerging from his puppy-fat phase into gangly awkwardness, his posture ramrod straight, with a straight-mouthed look of self-conscious seriousness on his face. He looked like a young civil servant already, dressed in his smart Sunday best. The Holmes brothers stood separately, but for one detail - Mycroft’s hand had reached out, and he was holding the young Sherlock in position, pulling him in by his upper arm, just a split-second before Mummy had clicked the camera shutter closed. The photo captured forever the precise moment before Sherlock had raced away, running as far as his legs could carry him, on the day Mycroft left home.

He suddenly, desperately needed to leave this room, to find Mycroft, whatever kind of mood he was in.
He couldn’t be bothered to go back to his bedroom, so he raided one of the wardrobes, and hastily threw on a pair of casual grey slacks, and a soft, brushed cotton shirt, both a size too big. He ventured out feeling a little more stable, but with an oddly bashful, fluttery sensation in the pit of his stomach.

As he went down the stairs, drawn inevitably by the smell of breakfast, Sherlock steeled himself to face another day in his brother’s company. Or possibly out of it. He wondered what kind of reaction he would be met with. Would Mycroft feel they’d both said too much last night, and disappear behind his wall of ice? Would they simply find themselves unable to look each other in the eye anymore? He wasn’t sure he could cope with either.

*It is all so very deniable. Which of us will deny it first?*

He stood in the hallway, hoping against hope that yesterday was not nothing. He decided he would just have to brazen it out. It was really the only tactic he knew.

Chapter End Notes

Lovely to hear responses. Hope you're having a good time! x
The morning after the night before. Progress, at last.

OK, here we go. Hope you approve. Once again, sorry for the abominable wait! x

In the large downstairs kitchens, Mycroft was apparently preparing for invasion. A small land army could emerge in the surrounding fields, and there would be provisions for all. Sherlock watched fondly from the doorway as Mycroft, in his dressing gown and an incongruous apron, checked the oven, fiddled with the dials, and fussed with pots and pans.

"Are you expecting Bonaparte to advance? Or are we to provide Christmas for the entire county, brother?" called Sherlock, sounding lighter than he felt after his confusing night of lucid dreaming.

Mycroft jumped and looked round, guiltily. His face was pink with the heat of the stove.

"Ah, you’re up…," he said, distractedly. Then took a closer look at his brother. "You’re wearing my clothes?"

He frowned, as though trying to work out whether this was some kind of insulting practical joke.

Sherlock nodded matter-of-factly.

"Yes. I’d rather splatter your things than mine. I can take them off if you want me to."

He bit his lip to shut himself up.

_Splatter. Oh, fabulous word-choice. And offering to strip. Spectacular. Sherlock Holmes, you single-cell organism._

Mycroft blinked and said nothing.

Sherlock hastily diverted. "What are you up to in here?"

"Currently, nursing a bloody burn. Hot oil splash," said Mycroft, holding up a rather swollen looking fingertip.

"Let me see." Sherlock moved across and examined the wound, taking hold of his brother’s digit. He was overcome with the instinct to put it in his mouth, and quickly let him go again.

"It's tiny," he said, dismissively.
Mycroft nodded. “I’ve had worse.”

Evidently, they were back to awkward discombobulation.

"You appear to be making a joint of roast beef for breakfast,” said Sherlock, trying to light upon a neutral topic.

Mycroft tutted. "This is your Christmas dinner, you dolt."

"Don't people usually have turkey?"

"People usually do all sorts of mindlessly inane things. Who in their right mind wants turkey when they can have roast beef?" scoffed Mycroft, entirely correctly.

"Good point. How long have you been at this?" asked Sherlock, feeling a little bolder now it seemed the world hadn’t ended overnight. “I woke up around seven and you were already gone..."

The accusation hung in the air. Mycroft looked away and nodded with brisk efficiency.

"Yes, well... You have to start early to get the preparation done. It doesn't make itself, you know."

Sherlock nodded as if to say ‘fair enough’. Mycroft turned back to his work, but Sherlock was having none of it. He tapped him on the shoulder, forcing his attention back to where it ought to be.

“Good morning,” he said, with deliberate irony.

Mycroft seemed puzzled.

“I beg your pardon?”

Sherlock rolled his eyes.

“Good morning. It’s a thing. People say it. In the morning. I know, I’ve heard them. So, good morning, Mycroft.”

Mycroft seemed to be caught between dubiousness and bafflement. “Right.”

Sherlock tutted and slapped his brother’s arm. “Well, say it back, you mannerless cretin! ‘Right’, what kind of reply is that?!”

“Good morning, brother mine,” said Mycroft, politely humouring him.

Sherlock nodded in satisfaction and gave his brother’s shoulder a little headbutt of affection.

Mycroft’s hand rubbed at his shoulder, dazedly.

“Thanks,” said Sherlock, brightly. “Now, where’s my breakfast?”

“Stop pestering and go and sit down. I'll bring it,” instructed the elder Holmes, sure of himself now he could give useful orders.

"Toast, please! And jam,” demanded Sherlock, with the supreme cheek his brother was eternally grateful for.

"Yes, yes. No backseat driving in my kitchen," Mycroft griped, flicking a tea towel at Sherlock’s retreating form. “Away with you, nuisance."
"Your bacon's burning!"

"Bugger!"

Sherlock laughed as he left Mycroft to his minor culinary disaster, and felt some of his earlier fear melt away. We're still us.

He settled himself back in the dining room, and eventually his brother emerged with a large tray laden with tea, toast, jam, and boiled eggs.

“This is all I could manage, but I’ll go back for more if you want it,” Mycroft said, apologetically, looking mildly frayed around the edges.

Sherlock chuckled. “Think I’ll cope.”

They both smirked as they helped themselves, with Sherlock avoiding the eggs, and Mycroft avoiding the jam, but both enjoying their homemade breakfast in mutual equanimity.

The cliché ‘about last night’ was not uttered. Neither of them made reference to it. Neither seemed able to disrupt the tenuous equilibrium they had found with each other, still so new and fragile; a gossamer thread of connection neither wanted to be the first to break with a clumsy foot or a misplaced word.

It was easier than either man had expected, until Mycroft seemed to realise that some attempt ought to be made to acknowledge that they had indeed passed a night in each other’s company.

"Sleep well?" ventured Mycroft, so very casually between bites.

Sherlock eyed him narrowly from across the table, and spoke with his mouth full, just to be aggravating.

"Mm. Yes. Think so. Must have done. You?"

Mycroft shrugged. "Dead to the world."

Sherlock heard it for the lie it was.

"Hangover?" he asked, challengingly.

"Of a sort," said Mycroft, evenly. Not a lie exactly. He did feel hungover. Hungover from vulnerability, and embarrassment, and fear at having said things he ought not to have said, and done things he ought not to have done. The conversations, so intense and revealing; the way he had let himself fall into Sherlock’s care, and given it back in kind; the comfort of sleeping next to each other. He had so very badly wanted all of it, and now, on the morning after the night before, it seemed wrong somehow, and potentially ruinous.

Sherlock frowned, trying to work out the implications of this comment. "Ah."

"I, er... I only left to see to breakfast, and because I woke early. Not because... I mean, I didn't want to interrupt... And you were...," stumbled Mycroft, his true meaning all-too-easily readable. "Well, asleep."
“I hope I didn’t… disturb you,” said Sherlock, trying not to seem too shamefaced, but needing somehow to apologise for the atrocious faux pas of having had a wet dream in bed next to his brother. But why did that seem no stranger than anything else that had passed last night?

“You always disturb me,” chuckled Mycroft, aridly.

Sherlock looked up suddenly with a hard expression on his face, and a note of anger underlying his tone.

“You should have woken me. Before you left,” he said, hating the petulance in his voice.

Mycroft looked at him with something like tentative hope.

"Should I?"

Sherlock nodded, and Mycroft smiled inwardly at the little crease of a frown that appeared between his brother’s dark eyebrows.

"Yes, you should. Don't do it again."

"Again?" asked Mycroft, carefully, leaning in to make sure he was receiving the correct meaning.

Sherlock nodded, seriously. "Wake me tomorrow. When you wake, just roll over and nudge me."

Mycroft’s shoulders dropped and the corners of his lips turned upwards, minutely.

愠Tomorrow.

"Oh. Yes. I shall, then."

Sherlock’s own mouth twitched into a wry smile.

"So I can do the toast," he said, irreverently.

"As you wish. I'm sure your toast is excellent."

"It isn't, it's awful."

Mycroft snorted and they finished their meal in friendly silence.

After a while, Sherlock tapped impatiently at the table, and received an enquiring tilt of the head from his brother.

“Well?” said Sherlock, with exasperation.

“Well, what?”

“I’m not sitting here all day. Story time, isn’t it? Tell me some tales, like you promised.”

Mycroft sighed, resignedly, but by no means reluctantly. “I did promise, yes. Now? I'm still in my dressing gown!"

“Now,” said Sherlock, brooking no argument, especially not one to do with dressing gowns.

“Here?”

Sherlock shook his head. “Of course not. Back to the library. Where all the words are kept.”
He hopped up and went, leaving Mycroft no choice but to abandon their dirty plates and follow on.

Sherlock playfully babbled as he went. “Stories, for however long it takes, then Christmas, and don’t think I’ve forgotten about your promise to dress down for the occasion, because I may not be able to remember a lot of things, but I do distinctly remember that, brother mine.”

His mood had lifted with his newly asserted control of the situation.

In the library, they resumed their usual seats. Sherlock sat with his arms folded, in a mildly confrontational pose. Mycroft looked askance.

“OK. Go,” said Sherlock, sitting back and steepling his fingers under his chin.

Mycroft huffed in frustration.

“Well, I can’t just start babbling with you glaring at me like that! I don’t really know where to begin… Perhaps you could ask some questions? If you have any? To start off with,” he suggested, wondering - as he so regularly did around his extraordinary brother - how he had ended up on the back foot.

Sherlock contemplated. Where to start with questions? One did occur. A recent one.

“The photos in your room… Some of them… Some were surveillance pictures. Some of them were taken using a telephoto lens. From a distance.” The tacit phrase ‘without my permission’ was clear enough.

Mycroft cringed a little sheepishly.

“Yes. Well, you never did stand still long enough for me to take a proper photograph...”

“You never asked,” said Sherlock, not precisely accusingly, but with a challenge in his voice.

Mycroft shrugged apologetically. “You wouldn't have let me.”

“No, I wouldn't.”

“I'm sorry,” said Mycroft, shaking his head at himself. “It's not on. I know. You can take them away, if it makes you uncomfortable. I don't own the rights to your image.”

“No,” said Sherlock, generously. “I don't want them. I mean, I want you to have them, if you want them…”

“Thank you,” said Mycroft, cautiously. “I didn't used to have photos of anyone. I required familiar faces during my - what I suppose I will dignify with the word 'recovery'. It was advised, actually. So there’s you. Rather a lot of you. And Mummy, and that splendid studio photo of Uncle Rudy dressed as Lord Byron.” He chuckled at the extremely flamboyant picture.

Sherlock asked a question he hadn’t realised he’d wanted to ask. “You have one of Siger. Why?”

Mycroft flinched a little. “So I can face him every day, brother mine. So I don't forget him.”

So I don’t become him.

“That doesn't make any sense,” said Sherlock, disbelieving after all he had heard.

Mycroft smiled wistfully. “Not to you, dearest.”
“Why do you call me that?” said Sherlock, a little sharper than he meant to, raising his finger as though catching the word upon it.

“What…? Dearest?” Mycroft faltered, as though he had been caught out.

“Yes. You haven't before yesterday.”

Mycroft tilted his head, as though trying to work out if that was correct, despite knowing it wasn't.

“Have I not? Oh. I shall stop,” he offered.

“Is it the truth?” asked Sherlock, his face entirely straight and serious.

Mycroft’s eyebrow raised. “What?”

“Am I? Am I that, to you? I mean, is it the correct word?”

Mycroft smiled awkwardly and nodded, looking down at his hands.

“Yes. It is the correct word. You are, to me. Dearest.”

“Then don't stop,” said Sherlock. Mycroft looked up at him, and saw the earnest expression as his luminous brother tried to convey the significance of the term, and what it meant to be the recipient.

“I won’t,” promised Mycroft. He exhaled loudly and clapped his hands together. “Now, what can I tell you about the not-so grisly aspects of childhood?”

Sherlock thought for a moment. “Well, what did we used to do together?”

Mycroft mused upon this rather large question.

“After Eurus was sent away, and we were here, I used to read to you. To keep memories of the East Wind at bay, but also for mutual enjoyment. You used to demand it of me, in fact. Kept kicking me until I put down whatever foolish thing I was about, and sat with you. I may even have done silly voices to amuse you, but I won’t swear to it in case it ever gets out,” said Mycroft, with an unalloyed pleasure that Sherlock delighted to see.

“What kind of things did you read me? Not pirate things, I assume, after…all that?”

“Not afterwards, no. But before, when you were very tiny, I read you Treasure Island, of course. Plenty of classic adventures, tales of heroic deeds, which I curse myself for introducing you to. Arabian Nights, and Grimm’s Fairy Tales, and Hans Christian Andersen. And later, poetry. In the awful aftermath, when you were…distressed, anxious… Poetry calmed you. The rhythms and rhymes. A different kind of music. Sometimes we’d read plays together. You liked Jacobean Revenge tragedies, you little ghoul. You were far too good at soliloquies.”

Sherlock laughed. “Poetry and plays. That’s exactly the sort of thing you would do! I often wondered why I seem to be able to quote lines of verse without knowing where I’ve learned them from.”

“Really? I didn’t know that,” said Mycroft, eminently pleased to hear it, though regretful at not having noticed before.

“What about before… At the Hall?” continued Sherlock. “When we weren’t running and hiding, I mean.”

“Well, on Siger’s down days, we did what most brothers do as children. And adults, come to that.
We annoyed each other. When you were six you painted all my shoes pink. I never discovered why, but I threw one at your head with too much force and it caught you on the temple. You tried so hard not to cry that I felt more guilty than if you had.”

Sherlock chuckled delightedly. Pink shoes. That sounded a marvellous game.

Mycroft tutted at him in mock disapproval, and sifted through his memory for similarly appalling incidents which might again bring that sparkling look of mischief to his brother’s eyes.

“You once put a huge toad in my bed, which you were very upset to find I wasn't horrified by. I'm afraid I returned it to your keeping and you used it in some unspeakable experiment to punish it for not doing its job properly.”

Sherlock shuddered theatrically.

“Ugh, toads. The very pits of nature! But your inaccuracy astounds me. There are no such things as toads. They’re just a particularly ugly species of frog. If you skin a frog and a toad, you’ll find they’re anatomically identical. Believe me, I know.”

Mycroft’s face screwed up in disgust.

“I was very glad when your natural history phrase ended. But then the chemistry craze kicked in and we’d find holes in the furniture, scorch marks in the carpets. You once set fire to my best coat in a bucket, singed your eyebrows off, and I spanked you.”

Sherlock was grateful not to be drinking tea, or else he would have spat it out.

“You did what...?!?” he exclaimed in outrage, going bright red at the very idea.

Mycroft blushed, and snorted a laugh.

“I'm afraid I did. On occasion. Never violently, I hope. Well, I know it wasn’t because you barely batted an eyelid. I tried to stop you bringing yourself to Siger’s attention, because he would have… Well, you know. In my foolish immaturity, I thought I was teaching you a lesson... I suppose I didn’t know any better.”

Mycroft trailed off, wondering at the stern adolescent he had been. Sherlock giggled in spite of himself, squirming at the image and feeling a bit tingly about it.

“You can't have done it well enough. I don't seem to have learned any lessons at all,” he said, only half-joking.

“No, but I didn't take after my sire, did I?” said Mycroft, sardonically. Sherlock grimaced a little at the gallows humour.

Mycroft chuckled at his recollections. “Actually, it never had any effect, you'd just race off rubbing yourself and find some more mischief to get into. I only did it to try and make a point, but that has literally never worked with you, has it?”

“Perhaps you gave up too quickly,” said Sherlock, and could have kicked himself for the mortifying quip.

Mycroft chuckled, coughed, and changed the subject.

“What else? You were once incredibly sick all over me. I have blocked out the circumstances of that,
fortunately, but I recall it was spectacular.”

“Good,” said Sherlock, approvingly.

Mycroft glared at him with a tease in his eyes. “You once ran naked through this house for an entire week, except for a cape you made from my dressing gown.”

Sherlock hid behind his hands. “Oh, dear.”

“Yes, any excuse with you. That was after you spent a week being a cat and would only eat from a bowl on the floor. Mummy was less than impressed with that one. You kept stealing her eyeliners to draw whiskers on. They rather suited you. And then there was the week you decided to be invisible. That was highly stressful.”

Sherlock laughed, then put his hand over his mouth at his brother’s raised eyebrow.

“I don’t see what’s funny about that, young man,” Mycroft said, playing up his despairing big brother role, which of course caused more delicious laughter.

Mycroft continued. “Pranks galore, naturally. I confess to being your enabler in that respect. We once motorised Great Aunt Muriel’s bathchair, and took her for a remote-controlled ride round the North Wing. She must be 206 if she’s a day by now. Poor old girl.”

Sherlock was laughing uncontrollably now, so Mycroft warmed to his theme.

“No remorse at all, you unfeeling swine. Oh, that’s not even the worst of it. We put eels in Horrid Uncle Leighton’s most expensive car. Though actually, that was Rudy’s idea. We rigged a roast chicken with gunpowder and caused it to ‘spontaneously’ combust in the middle of Sunday dinner. Ah, yes, iron filings in the pepper pot, ammonia stink-bombs in the village church hall, rockets made out of plastic bottles full of baking soda and vinegar detonated in the scullery to the great terror of the maids. I enjoyed putting methylene solution into the teapot and watching as everyone’s eye-whites turned blue. Siger’s death unleashed a very immature streak in me, I must say. I regressed ten years.”

“I think you needed to, brother,” giggled Sherlock, wiping his eyes from the very undignified hysteric.

He calmed and they both sat sipping tea, occasionally chuckling to themselves at any and all of these newly-shared experiences.

A sudden thought came into Sherlock’s mind, unbidden. The recitation of childhood activity seemed to be making his trace memories a little more solid, as he hoped it would.

“Did you... Was I swimming, or in water somewhere, and I was hurt...?” he prompted, speculatively. He shook his head, as though to literally shake loose the images.

Mycroft thought for a second and hit upon it. “Yes. You were eight, I think. Waded into the stream at the bottom of the meadow, in your bare feet. Against all advice, naturally. You stepped on a very sharp flint. It opened a gash in your foot, but you were too proud to tell me. I saw blood pooling around your leg and hoisted you out. You fought me, of course, kicked blood everywhere, but then you let me pick you up and take you back to the house. You thought you were too big for crying, too big for someone to bandage you up. You insisted on doing it yourself. I think you'd stopped trusting me by then. Eight years was all I deserved, I supposed.”

“Stopped trusting you?”
“Yes. Because I had… meddled in your mind by then, to help remove Victor, and... And I think you knew I was suspect. That I was exerting some undue influence over you. That I had lied to you about what had happened, effectively. Denied it. Helped you forget the truth.”

“Wasn’t the only thing though, was it? That was the year you left. Maybe I knew it was coming. But you’re right - children do know when they’re being lied to. John told me that,” he said, unable to help himself.

“I… John is quite right. Isn’t he always? About things like that,” said Mycroft, sounding somewhat defeated.

That doleful tone which was sheer anathema to Sherlock was back. He shrugged off his earlier comment, unwilling to rub salt into old wounds any further.

“Or I was just an eight-year-old boy, Mycroft, and didn’t want to be babied.”

Mycroft’s smile didn’t reach his eyes, though he appreciated the kindness of Sherlock’s attempt to relieve him of responsibility.

“Is it babying, to want to heal my brother’s hurts? I don’t know,” he said, rather hopelessly.

Sherlock looked down at his hands. “I thought you were supposed to be telling me happy memories?” he said, quietly. This must not be allowed to drift back into self-loathing and recrimination. Not when they had come so far already.

Mycroft caught his concern and pulled himself together.

“Quite. Do you remember your tenth birthday?” he asked, with curiosity.

Sherlock looked the ceiling as he tried to recall it. “Not particularly.”

“Really?” prompted Mycroft, encouraging his brother to dig deep.

“Tenth birthday...,” Sherlock mused. Then his eyes lit up, as though he’d solved a case. “The boat!”

Mycroft’s own face lit up in return. “Yes!”

“You made me a boat!” breathed Sherlock, sounding to his brother’s ears exactly like his ten-year-old self had sounded when presented with it.

“Well, I had a boat made for you,” Mycroft corrected, flushed with pleasure that it had been remembered at all.

“Not a toy. Why did I think it was a toy?” chuckled Sherlock, shaking his head in amazement. “No, it was a real one, perfect size. One I could really sail.”

Mycroft was grinning a crooked grin now. “We went down to the cottage in Dorset. Mummy let me take the car, though I was only 17. Ever the responsible eldest.”

“We stayed there a while, didn’t we?” asked Sherlock, trying to put the whole experience together from a set of random jigsaw pieces.

“A week by the sea. Just you and I,” said Mycroft, contentedly.

Sherlock sighed, a faraway look on his face. “Yes. Yes, I sailed on the real sea.”
“I'm afraid I followed in your wake on a support boat I'd hired from the coast guard. You didn't like that.”

Sherlock recalled sea air in his face, blowing back his hair – salt, brine and water. A sunny day on the English coast. His heart raced as he felt the speed of knots, the exhilaration of a free run out on the waves. “I didn't mind. I... I liked showing you what I could do,” he confessed, unabashedly.

Mycroft huffed a small, ironic laugh. “I've always known what you could do, Lock. I've loved watching you do it all my life.”

A pause fell, which neither man knew quite how to fill.

“Why would I forget that?” queried Sherlock. “You didn’t continually work upon me to lose memories. I was ten. I ought to have retained most things after the incident, oughtn’t I?”

Mycroft sighed, as though expecting this question. “Not necessarily. I think forgetting is habit-forming. And your brain in particular forms habits rather readily, doesn’t it?”

Sherlock bristled a little, then frowned and nodded, knowing it was the truth.

Mycroft continued to expound his theory. “I set something in motion. Once you were in the subconscious habit of letting things slip away – well, things involving me, anyway – perhaps many more things slid down the drain too. It is all, all of it, my fault. I started it. I encouraged it. You took it on yourself, and you’ve been deleting things ever since.”

“You did what you thought was best,” said Sherlock, brushing away his brother’s guilt, unable to accept it.

“But we both live with the unintended consequences.”

Mycroft fell silent again, examining his hands, picking at a cuticle as he struggled to think of something else to contribute.

“I don’t know about you brother, but I could murder a cup of tea,” said Sherlock, drily, intervening in his brother’s oncoming funk, and his own prickling hurt.

Mycroft saw sense.

“Perhaps so. Biccies?” he asked, quirking an insouciant eyebrow.

Sherlock tutted. “Obviously.”

Mycroft went to get up, but was stopped by his brother’s hand.

“No. I’ll go. I do know how to make tea. John has explained it to me many times. It can’t be that hard, if he’s so good at it. Don’t tell me where the biscuits are. I’ll enjoy rooting them out.”

Mycroft chuckled as Sherlock wafted out of the room, and sat in private contemplation awaiting his return. He pondered what more to say, what more Sherlock needed to know, though he questioned his motives for the things he wanted to tell him.

*The truth is one thing. But how much of it can we bear?*

Sherlock re-entered with the tea tray and did the honours, enjoying the role reversal of being the one to serve and provide for his brother.
“Right. Tell me more. Nice things,” he demanded, eagerly. He sat cross-legged in his chair, like the mop-headed child his brother remember so colourfully.

Mycroft hesitated for a moment and took his great leap of faith.

“You once caught me kissing a boy from the village behind the stables here,” he said, before he could change his mind.

Sherlock’s mouth dropped open.

“What??!”

“Yes. You did,” confirmed Mycroft.

“What... What did I do?” Sherlock could not imagine such a thing, let alone remember it.

Mycroft ran a hand through his hair and chuckled wryly.

“Erm. You stomped right up to the poor lad, folded your arms, and said, ‘Go. Away. He's my brother, not yours!’ Poor little sod ran off, terrified. You were only five.”

“I said that?

Mycroft nodded and crunched a biscuit.

“Healthy,” said Sherlock, almost to himself.

“Mm. I was very upset by it, actually,” Mycroft said, neutrally. “Dreadfully embarrassed. Not on his account, whatever his name was. But because I felt I'd...corrupted you. I couldn't name the feeling at the time, but I had the sense I'd betrayed you in some essential way.”

Sherlock’s heart thumped at this bold turn in the conversation, but he appreciated the intimacy of disclosure, even though the fog of petty jealousy, which was just as strong as when he was five. Stronger.

These subjects simply were not spoken of. Not until these past few days had opened up a window for them. He found he liked it. He very much liked it. Someone to share all the details of your life with, when you could remember them. This, somehow, seemed so easy. So unexpectedly natural - though why should it be unexpected? Brother confiding in brother. The most natural thing in the world.

“I had no idea... So you had your first kiss at twelve? Or was it not your first?!’” he asked, rather impressed at this hitherto unforeseen side of Boy Mycroft.

Mycroft chuckled. “It was my first. It was all very innocent. Sweet, even. But he was a dullard, even though he had very pretty hair.”

“Gentleman prefer blonds?”

“Raven black, actually. When was yours?” asked Mycroft, peering up at him through his pale lashes, and preparing himself for whatever answer came.

“First kiss?” Sherlock said, stupidly. Stumped by the directness of the question.

“The Woman?” asked Mycroft, a little teasingly, but also perfectly sincerely.
Sherlock flushed. “No.”

“John?”

“No! Of course not.”

“You don't deny you've kissed them, just that neither was the first...,” observed Mycroft, fighting the burn in his chest as he said it.

“I do deny I've kissed John Watson in the way you mean. Drunk on a stag-do doesn't count. So he said. The Woman was...experimentation that didn't get very far,” he said, feeling he was pleading against some unspoken, unfounded accusation.

Mycroft grunted, knowingly. “Hmm. Moth to a flame is what that was. Though which of you was which, I wonder?”

Sherlock shifted in his seat. That debacle was not his finest hour. He had let it get out of hand, though he did not regret saving her life. “It was just...curiosity. Data collection. It helped,” he explained, as clearly as he was able.

Mycroft leant on his elbow and gazed at him inquisitively. “In what way?”

“To eliminate women as a subject of chemical enquiry.”

Mycroft exhaled a breath he hadn't realised he'd been holding. “Ah. And?”

“Mycroft, who do you think you're talking to? I'm not like you! I didn't go round falling in love with village boys or whatever else you did. I have never shared a romantic kiss with another human being in my life.”

Mycroft flinched.

Last night. What was that, then? Comfort. That’s what. Sympathy, if not pity. You bloody fool, Holmes.

Sherlock offered more explanation, keen to assuage the doubt in his brother’s eyes, misunderstanding its origin. “I’ve faked it for research. I think I may have promised to marry someone to get access to a crime scene... The details escape me.”

“You've kissed me,” said Mycroft, simply.

Sherlock’s mouth opened and closed as he tried to formulate an adequate response.

Last night. Wasn’t anything as stupid as romance. It was...instinct. It was as necessary as breathing.

“You've kissed me, as a child, I mean,” continued Mycroft, quickly. “You used to slip into my bed late at night when you were feeling spooked or sad, or your head was just too noisy. But you’d never admit it. You'd never say anything to me. Just lie there, fall asleep, curled towards me. In the morning you'd poke me in the ribs, you'd...kiss my cheek or my forehead, very quick little pecks, three at a time, and pat me like a favourite dog - and then flee the room laughing, taking all the blankets with you.”

Mycroft’s voice was somewhere between wistful and amused.

Sherlock looked at his brother, trying to work out what he was really getting at.
“You did say we’d slept…shared a bed before.”

“Yes. But not just sometimes. Most of the time. No matter how many times I carried you back to your own bed. I’d wake up with you next to me. You’d always come and find me.”

“You used to put your thumb or fingers in my mouth…,” muttered Sherlock, wracking his brain for the information in his dream.

“Yes, you were adamant it didn’t count as babyish. You used to bite me terribly in your sleep. And when you were awake too. Tiny monster that you were. All teeth.”

“I used to watch you sleep. I used to think I was your bodyguard. If I was there, bigger monsters couldn’t hurt you,” said Sherlock, quietly confessing the things that had been revealed to him in his Mind Palace.

“I… Is that what it was?” murmured Mycroft, touched, and a little choked.

All these years, he thought he was protecting me from monsters.

“You didn’t mean pecks on the cheek as a child, did you?” asked Sherlock, directly, leaning forward, elbows on his knees, pressing for more now. Because there was more. He could smell it.

Mycroft inhaled and hesitated. “No,” he said, biting his lip.

Sherlock closed his eyes against the difficulty of asking. “What did you mean?”

“I mean… I meant when you were high,” said Mycroft, carefully. “You were 21. You broke into my flat at some ungodly hour, you showed me the list. You threw it in my face. You grabbed me and kissed my mouth like you meant it, and fell asleep on my sofa. In the morning, I went to work and when I came home you’d gone. You deleted that, obviously.”

Sherlock was stunned. But not entirely surprised.

“You didn't delete it. Obviously.” He wondered what that fact meant.

“I shouldn't have left that morning, Sherlock,” said Mycroft, his voice wavering slightly out of his control.

Sherlock cut him off. “Why not? You were always leaving,” he threw out, more bitterly than he had intended. But he couldn't hold back from this sticking point any longer. The pull of it dragged him like a tide. “You left me at the Hall on my own. For school, I know, but still...”

He broke off as his throat constricted, feeling he had to stop himself bursting forth with unhelpful reproaches.

Mycroft sat up a little straight, a puzzled frown creasing his brow.

“School? I didn't go to school, Sherlock. Why would you think that? You didn't go to school, so why would I? What could they teach us?! Besides, I was fifteen. Far too late for school.”

Sherlock looked baffled. “No...? I thought...”

“What?”

“At the time, I imagined 'school' to be worlds above me, and that’s why you’d gone, of course. Because you were so brilliant. I thought they'd not bothered sending me because I was stupid. I
knew the village children were idiots, but I didn't believe the world was so full of goldfish, just as you'd always said. I thought everyone was like you, and Mummy. Until I went to London at 18 and discovered it for myself.”

“No wonder you turned to illicit substances,” said Mycroft, sardonically. "Another failing of mine. To adequately explain the world to you.”

Sherlock huffed. “I thought you went to Eton, to do exams or some such rot! I thought it was ridiculous.”

“Well, that is the cover story, yes. I was in Switzerland. For elementary special ops training. Siger's doing.”

Sherlock gaped. “You... ?!”

Mycroft nodded. “The basics at first. New technologies, data studies, coding, ciphering. I was the youngest apprentice ever taken on by the rather shady consortium that deals with such things. I’d been placed ‘on the list’ before Siger died. Mummy wanted to keep it that way. Continuing the family tradition.”

“You had to go?” challenged Sherlock.

Mycroft hesitated.

“I felt I had to go,” he said, accurately.

“But you could have come back. Couldn’t you?”

“I… I did come back. I visited,” said Mycroft, lamely.

Sherlock snorted churlishly. “Oh, yeah, you visited. Thanks.”

Mycroft frowned. “You didn’t seem to notice much, when I did. When I first came back home you were vaguely unimpressed to see me. But your reaction to me seemed to deteriorate with every visit. By the time you were 15, you loathed the sight of me. You barely stayed in a room with me. Why?”

He pushed, dreading the answer, but asking that dreadful question anyway.

“You left!” said Sherlock, incredulously, his anger rising as he put himself back into that horrible place of unremitting loneliness. “And then you came back all...different. More grown up each time. Infuriating. Remote. Steely and locked up. We were neither of us exactly warm and fuzzy little darlings, but you became stone cold! Barely spoke a word except to admonish me. You were no company for me! You were no fun at all!”

Mycroft winced to hear it, but nodded. “And that bothered you?” he asked, coaxing his livid brother to say more, needing to give him the chance to air it.

“Bothered me? I could have killed you, Mycroft! You looked at me like I was one of them! Like a village idiot. Beneath you. You looked at me like I was disgusting!” he shouted.

Mycroft let his head drop into his hands and he dragged them down his face as he looked back up, disconcerted, and pained. He took a deep breath, his heart fluttering up to his mouth at the words he knew, the words he’d always known he would have to say one day. Words that would finally give the whole game away.
“On the contrary, little brother. I looked at you like you were...the only thing worth looking at. I looked at you like you were beautiful. Because you were. But I very much needed you not to know it.”

Sherlock balked, and his face twitched as though he’d been slapped.

“I don't know what you mean,” he said, sulkily, blocking the words from entering his brain.

Mycroft stood. “You do.”

“Don’t…” Sherlock held up his hand, pleading.

“Don’t stop me telling you. Please,” asked Mycroft, in a small, quiet voice.

Sherlock slumped back in his chair and regarded his shaking brother. Their eyes met, wide and glowing, watery and suddenly full of silent terror.

“I… I always thought you resented me because… Because of what I’d done, you see,” began Mycroft, hesitantly.

“Done? What had you done? The mind wiping stuff?” said Sherlock, raising his voice, feel his own hands shaking now.

Mycroft paced around, gesticulating wildly. “No. You would lie in bed with me, and hold me, and sometimes I would…feel wrong things. I would feel desire. Not for anything specific, but… Your dream last night. Like that,” he said, softly, full of shame.

“Oh,” said Sherlock, flushing at having this mentioned so openly. “Your…adolescent development. It confused you? Confused how you felt about me?” He tried to rationalise it out.

Mycroft stopped pacing, and was looking at him again, distressed but in complete earnest, desperate to rid himself of the words once and for all.

“Oh, brother mine. I have never felt confused about that, not a day in my life. My attachment to you was… Permanent. But I knew I liked boys. I knew it was profoundly wrong, or so it felt back then. And I would lie in bed, feeling those wanting, needing feelings. Feelings I could barely name. I would…become aroused, and do what I needed to do, and… you would watch me. I didn't know it at first, but after a while I knew you were watching, and I couldn’t stop myself doing it. You wouldn’t stop coming to my room, and I couldn’t bear to shut any more doors in your face…”

Sherlock closed his eyes.

“Brother…,” he whispered, imploring him to stop, or perhaps imploring him to further explain. He wasn't sure anymore.

“I never laid a hand on you improperly, I swear it!” exclaimed Mycroft, desperate to be believed. Praying that in this, at least, his brother did not think him a liar.

“I never touched you. Never would have done, even if we weren’t brothers. Because a child cannot consent. There was never any… No mutual exploration. But a brother should not do as I did. Or feel how I felt about you. I was so connected to you, to the very idea of you. So utterly adoring of you, my miracle boy! But you would keep climbing into my bed, and I was of an age where certain physiological events occur, and… I would wake up covered in…semen, next to you. I would wake after rubbing myself in my sleep, or do it when I was awake, and, once - Christ - you woke up and looked at me and asked me what I was doing. You were curious, and sweet. Eventually, you started
to grow and develop feelings of your own, and you would lie next to me, touching yourself as though it were the most natural thing in the world, as though you wanted to share it with me. And I felt like a degraded and degrading monster. I would wake in a frantic state, feeling I’d sullied you. Ruined you with my deviance, like Siger ruined me with violence!”

Sherlock said nothing. Just sat staring at Mycroft as he tortured himself. Mycroft’s chest was heaving with shallow breath and near-panic as he spilled his soul onto the library carpet. His voice was tight and low.

“When I took Redbeard away from you, I took myself with it. As much of it as I could bear to. It is the hardest thing I have ever done. No-one was more appalled to realise that it worked than I, Sherlock. And then I was called to leave for my training, and I went. I thought if I sacrificed my presence in your life, you wouldn’t grow to hate me. But you did. You did! You hated me anyway!”

Mycroft dropped back into his chair, in complete despair.

“All these years I have lived with the idea that if I had just let you be, let you grow as you ought, really and truly helped you deal with the dark traumas of Eurus and Victor, we might have properly known each other as adults. But I was not brave enough for that. Not brave enough for Siger, not brave enough for you. Not clean enough, or good enough, or worthy enough for you! I built my own prison cell, brother mine. It lives in your mind. I locked myself away, so you wouldn’t hate me. But you hated me anyway, and it was hell!

Sherlock sat in silence for what felt like minutes, as his brain processed information his heart could not. He looked up, his face a bloodless mask of sadness and a very old anger.

“Hate you, Mycroft? I thought I did. Because you left me! Because you became…the British bloody Government, not because I sensed some evil in you! Not because you contaminated me with your feelings or your body. Not because I felt disgusted or violated, but because I felt abandoned. Because you bloody told me you didn’t care! Because caring is not… And all that fucking bullshit! I hated that, not you! I have always hated that!”

The dam inside Mycroft burst, and here, in the cold light of day, with neither starlight nor whisky to beguile them, he told his biggest truth.

“’Caring is not an advantage’. God, how that phrase has haunted my life!” He looked at the ceiling, trying to find some composure amid the choking sensation and the onset of devastation. He needed to stay calm just long enough to say this. "Siger taught me that lie. I believed him at first. But I could never rationalise it with you, brother. You were the sticking point. You were the exception that proved the rule. I have repeated that cruel phrase to you many times. To protect you from… Me. And from making the same mistakes as myself. But I concede I have done great harm by it.”

“I never believed it anyway. Not really. You’ve changed your mind about caring, have you?” returned Sherlock, scornfully, testing his brother’s statements.

Please, please.

Mycroft barked a sardonic laugh. “Not at all. Not even slightly.”

Sherlock looked puzzled, and dropped his gaze to the floor, unable to face his brother as he spoke, if he was only going to say hurtful things.

Mycroft took a deep breath, and dropped to his knees, shuffling forwards towards Sherlock. He placed a hand on his brother’s thigh in comfort.
“I need you to understand... I have never finished out loud, in front of another living human, the complete phrase I hear in my head when I say that absurd little epigram. The one I programmed into myself to offset Siger’s dark influence. My deepest secret, brother mine - I rejected his teachings. I have, in truth, always believed that ‘Caring is not an advantage: love is.’”

Sherlock looked up, frowning, concentrating as hard as he knew how, and seeing it all in his brother’s eyes.

_The truth. I do always know when I hear it. You have never believed in anything less than love._

Mycroft continued to try to be understood. Sherlock let him, needing to be completely sure.

“In a way, Siger’s decree was quite correct,” said Mycroft, levelly. “Caring cannot be an advantage, because it isn’t enough, is it?”

“Caring is not adequate, you mean,” said Sherlock, clarifying the point.

“Not adequate for the goldfish. Why should it be adequate for any creature, let alone those of us whose intellects insist upon more? More knowledge, more experience, more information. Caring is lukewarm. It is safe. Why should anyone settle for merely caring, given all it is possible for a human heart to contain? It is like reading only half of a book. You must get to the end to know what it all means.”

Sherlock chuckled faintly. “You have never read only half a book in your life.”

“Indeed. Love is the only true advantage, is it not? The only certain thing. It is the only certainty I have in the world - the only one I have ever had. It is my prime mover, and at the same time, the most dangerous thing I have ever encountered. Coward though I may be, it has terrified me long enough. I have spent my life trying to assert and avoid its power in equal measure, but it is too late in the day to pretend that it works. One cannot live forever in a halfway house. All or nothing, brother. I must have all or nothing.”

Panic gripped Sherlock’s heart all of a sudden, as he sensed a point of no return.

“Shut up. Shut up, now, Mycroft. Whatever you’re saying, you can’t unsay it.”

Mycroft shook his head, refusing the opportunity to fall back on comfortable lies.

_Too late. I am burning it to the ground. Burning it all to ash to see what might be left of us._

“How can’t handle a broken heart’, you once said to me. Always so perceptive, little brother. But I do have the upper hand when it comes to hiding the truth. Liar that I am. You deduced the fact of the broken heart, the fact of my inability to handle it. But not for whom it broke, nor the reason it was impossible to handle. Is impossible.’

“Say it, then! Say it! Fucking tell me the truth!” demanded Sherlock, fraught and shattered.

_Smash it all to pieces, Mycroft._

Mycroft maintained his composure just a little longer, holding himself together through sheer force of will. He pointed a finger at his brother, as though wanting to push the words into him as he knelt at his feet.

He spoke with urgency, and with utter sincerity, his face twisting with emotion.
“Nobody - I swear it, Sherlock, I swear it on my miserable life – nobody loves you more than I do. No creature on this earth is as in love with you as I. Of course I saw that you were - are - beautiful. Of course I wanted you. I don't really know from when. It crept upon me so gradually. It felt inevitable, like breathing. When I returned, and you were an exasperating, haughty, beautiful teenager, who became an equally exasperating, haughty, beautiful man, I wanted you. Your body. But I love your mind more. I love your soul most of all, for it is mine. I love you improperly and obscenely and incestuously. I love you jealously and desperately; and I wish you had shot me dead to spare us both the unspeakable burden of it!” he exclaimed, and felt instantly bodily exhausted.

Sherlock did not move.

There. There it is.

The final elusive fact - click - now fully understood. The missing puzzle piece that made sense of the entire picture. Out loud. Undeniable.

When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth: it's to do with sex. It's to do with love. Solved.

Sherlock looked up and his uniquely refined features crumpled with something like devastation, but laden with need, and with a strange light shining behind his quicksilver eyes. His mouth opened. No sound emerged. He found himself painfully overloaded and short-circuiting.

In one violent move, he flung himself at his brother, near-hysterical with unnameable feeling. Mycroft fell back onto the floor, his breath leaving his body in a gasp at the impact. He nearly hit his head on the leg of the tea table, and Sherlock came with him, clinging to him and shoving at his chest, as though he wished to beat him but couldn’t bring himself to land a blow.

“Do you think I could have done it?!” he howled, gripping Mycroft’s lapels, shaking him and staring into his eyes, so full of agony it hurt both of them. “Do you think I could have shot you dead?! Do you?! Do you think there’d be life for me after that?! ” Sherlock scrambled onto all fours and loomed over his flinching brother, who went limp by instinct and stared up at him, astonished. “You don’t get to leave me that fucking easily! You’re mine. Mine, Mycie!”

Sherlock caught the look of fear that crossed his brother’s face, and saw that it was fear of physical pain not emotional pain that had caused it. He collapsed on top of him and squeezed him tightly, rubbing at his arms, whimpering.

“Sorry, sorry…,” he said, gulping and gasping for air. “Not going to hit you… Never. Sorry-sorry…,” he repeated, as though he were a boy who had painted his brother's shoes pink, or put a toad in his bed, or failed to realise how loved he was.

Mycroft let him be, bringing his hands to his brother’s back to soothe him, shushing and stroking. His hands did not shake now. His own chest wasn’t even hitching. If his eyes were not leaking water, he would not have even realised that he was crying.

“Love me. You love me…” Sherlock was repeating the phrase in a hoarse voice, over and over again, like an incantation.

“Of course I do. Of course I bloody do. Dearest. My dearest boy,” whispered Mycroft fiercely, gripping his brother’s lanky form to him as he writhed above him on the library floor.

“My God, Mycroft,” said Sherlock, coming up on all fours again. His voice was ragged and husky; hot tears fell from his face and dripped onto his brother’s dressing gown.
“What?” breathed Mycroft, not daring to hope for acceptance of this biggest, truest thing.

“You’re an idiot,” said Sherlock, laughing snottily. He wiped his face with the sleeve of his brother’s shirt.

Hurt crossed Mycroft’s face. “You’re…laughing at me? Now?”

Sherlock’s chest hitched up and down as he laughed through tears. He ran his hand down his brother’s cool, pale cheek, smearing water from his face. “Oh, yes, I am laughing at you now. You really, really are the stupid one! You fucking stupid, fucking beautiful moron. You’ve been so busy enjoying torturing yourself, you didn’t even bother to look for it. You see but you do not observe!”

Mycroft frowned. “Observe what?”

“Me.”

Sherlock forced his head down and pressed a frantic, urgent kiss onto his brother’s mouth. Mycroft opened for him and their tongues met as they poured their passion into each other. Hands roamed around their bodies, tangling in each other’s hair, then holding fingers, caressing ears, cheekbones, clavicles. Better than last night. Unequivocally not about sympathy, or pity, guilt or gratitude. They ground into each other with desperation, each feeling the other’s hardness through layers of inappropriate clothing. They were suffused with rightness. Ignited by simple, complicated, fraternal love.

Sherlock broke away. “One of these days we’re going to do that, and it won’t taste of saltwater,” he said, giggling at his audacity and feeling the first new tendrils of hope and relief racing through his bloodstream. He breathed heavily, making a little noise on every exhalation.

Mycroft looked stunned, and momentarily even more terrified than he had before. Terrifying indeed, to be given exactly what one desires. And then he broke, as every last fear he had, every last doubt, every last bit of shame, left his body in great shuddering sobs.

**Better than last night. So much better. Cleansed. Absolved.**

The Holmes brothers, dark and light, clung to each other as though life depended upon it, because it did.

“Brother mine,” whispered Sherlock, possessively, laying his head over Mycroft’s chest, where he knew his S-shaped scar was.

“Lock?” said Mycroft, breathlessly, barely audible in his extremity.

“Yeah?” came the contented little reply.

“Could you… Do you mean…? Can you say the words? Honestly. I don’t mind if – “

“I love you,” said Sherlock instantly, looking up into his brother’s red-rimmed eyes. “Never doubt it. Never deny it. It is a fact, and facts are sacred to a Holmes. And I don’t give a fuck about improper or obscene or any other stupid fucking thing. I think I’ve been waiting for you to come and get me my entire life.”

Mycroft went to speak and found he had no adequate words. To prevent himself reciting poetry, he hit upon the most mundane question he could think of.

“Do you think we ought to get up off the floor?”
“No,” giggled Sherlock. “OK, yes. I think you ought to take me back to bed, is what I think.”

Mycroft gasped and met his brother’s eyes.

“N-now?” he asked, nervously, though with a burning hot look in his eye and the suspicion of a smirk playing at the edges of his kiss-stained lips.

“Now. Later. Whenever. Just soon. Because I think it might be really good, and I don’t know what the fuck I’m doing.”

Sherlock burst into laughter, and Mycroft had no choice but to join him. They lay there, laughing, and kissing, and cuddling like a pair of village idiots on the library carpet for quite some time, before either of them felt able to break the spell.

Chapter End Notes

It would be gorgeous to hear from you. It all keeps me going (well, unless you tell me to stop, that's not so good). x
Chapter Summary

The boys get closer than ever before as they embark upon their new relationship. Complexities arise as they deal with their bodies as well as their minds and emotions.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for waiting! Here is a bit of smut - but the big scene is yet to come, because they have a bit more understanding to do.

Out of all the things Sherlock had heard and said and done in the last few extraordinary days, it was walking up the stairs holding his brother's hand that suddenly struck him as the most incredible thing that had ever happened. For a brief second, he experienced the moment as an outsider, looking down at the view and wondering at its reality. But it was real. They had declared love. They had knocked down a wall and seen each other clearly for the first time since they were children.

They ascended the stairs to Mycroft's bedroom in rapt silence, each man's heart bumping up against his ribcage at this newness. The oddity of it. The absurd inevitability of it.

_My brother loves me. My brother wants me._

Mycroft turned to smile at him with a radiant look; he brought Sherlock's long, delicate hand to his mouth and kissed it with self-conscious gallantry.

When they reach the door of Mycroft's bedroom, Sherlock felt light-headed.

Mycroft kept hold of him, and pulled him into the room where they had lain last night - together, but not quite. The room where Sherlock's subconscious had thrown forth unassailable facts which had thankfully, mercifully, filtered through into his waking brain. And now here they were, the Holmes brothers united, visible to each other in their true forms. No pretence or posturing available to them any longer. In effect, naked.

But what now, Mycroft wondered? How does one go from declaration to action? How does one prove that what one says is the truth - even when that truth is heard and believed? Bonds are built upon deeds, not words. Love flares into existence, carried upon words. But one must tend to the flame through action, or what was the meaning of it? One must, he knew, be a caretaker of love in word and deed combined. But how does a man who has never looked at himself in the mirror except to find fault, reveal himself to the object of his adoration? It was all so easy in theory, in fantasy. In reality, it required yet more bravery and yet more vulnerability.

Both men exhaled shakily as they entered the room, then broke away and stood facing each other, wonderingly.

"Mycroft..."
"Mm?" Mycroft still seemed dazed, and spoke faintly.

"Are you all right?" asked Sherlock, amused by the way his brother looked like he’d been knocked on the head with a brick. In truth, he found it rather flattering, and also reassuring. He wasn’t the only one wondering what the hell had just happened, nor the only one wondering what the hell to do next.

Mycroft smiled self-consciously and shook his head slightly as though to rid himself of his reverie.

"I am. Are you?"

"Yes. Mycroft, I don't really know what...," Sherlock gestured helplessly, a nervous smile on his face. The emotional outpouring mere minutes ago - the fury, the desperation, the sheer, stomach-churning jolt of being told he was loved, and the huge, ecstatic relief at being able to honestly return the words - had left him rather shattered.

"We don't have to do anything at all, if you'd rather not," said Mycroft, hastily. "Me saying all that... Even the physical reaction of it... It doesn't have to lead to anything further, if you don't want that. I would quite understand."

*I would understand. But it would hurt like sheer hell.*

"Would you?!" Sherlock frowned. His heart sank. Mycroft wanted to put him off? Was he too nervous of this? Too ashamed of it still? Waiting for him to express his desires first - or even prepared to martyr his own desire to please him?

Mycroft nodded, seriously. "Yes, I would understand if you didn’t want to take things too far, so to speak. I don’t expect anything. My love for you...it's unconditional. It isn’t dependent on, erm, bodies."

*Especially not my body.*

Sherlock scrutinised his brother and saw that he was skittish, but could not quite discern why.

"Well, my love for you isn’t dependent upon anything. But it doesn’t have to be pure. I was rather hoping it wouldn’t be, actually."

Mycroft swallowed hard at the rather flirtatious little look his brother was giving him.

"It isn't that. I simply mean... It's on your terms. You decide what you're comfortable with, and that is what we shall do."

Sherlock turned this over in his mind.

*Not good enough. Not good enough by half. There are two of us. What do you want, Mycie?*

"I don't believe you," said Sherlock, sharply.

Mycroft flinched.

"Don't believe...?"

Sherlock stepped closer and brought his hands round his brother’s waist. The freedom of being able to do this. The first time of doing a simple thing like holding him. So very casually. Mycroft brought his hands instinctively to Sherlock’s hips, revelling in the solid, sharp feel of them.
"I don’t believe that it’s all on my terms. I thought it was all or nothing for you now?" said Sherlock, searching his brother’s face up close.

Mycroft stammered slightly as he spoke, much to his own irritation.

"I meant that I had to tell it all, or none of it. Throwing the emotional dice, so to speak.” Gambling my heart away. “I’m certainly not giving you an ultimatum. I’ll take whatever you’re prepared to give.”

“That’s not… Right, so I’ll have nothing. We’ll just be in love but never touch, how’s that?” said Sherlock, neutrally.

Mycroft frowned, and look unutterably pained. Sherlock’s heart twisted and he regretted the sarcasm. But it proved his point. He smooth his brother’s brow with his thumbs.

“See? You don’t want me to say that. And I’m not going to. You don’t have to prepare for me to change my mind, or wonder if I only half-mean it. But you can’t put this whole thing on my shoulders. You want this, yes?”

"I... Of course. Completely," said Mycroft, with utter conviction.

"So have it,” said Sherlock, leaning in and kissing Mycroft’s nose, then his cheek, then his neck. The smell of him. All morning-ish, and with a faint trace of tea and toast. “I want it. Or don't you believe me?”

He pulled back, and softened completely at the look of longing his brother cast at him. Eyes wide with wanting and worry.

Sherlock chuckled and shook his head.

“You're very gallant, very chivalrous, and it's lovely and everything. But we're past that, brother mine. You can have exactly what you want of me. Anything. I'm not a child. You can ask, or you can just do. I'll tell you if it gets too much or if I’m not comfortable. But pretty sure that’s not going to happen.”

Mycroft nodded seriously and struggled to express himself in the face of such an open offer.

“I… I find I'm rather at a loss. Can we perhaps not... Can we just...”

“Can I just kiss you again?” asked Sherlock, cupping his brother’s face with one hand.

Mycroft smiled and looked up, letting go of the anxiety and leaning in to Sherlock’s eager touch.

"Yes. You can always just kiss me again."

Mycroft grasped his brother to him, and kissed his lips, running his hands up Sherlock’s long back, astonished at being able to do something he had only ever imagined in his most private moments – when he allowed himself to imagine at all.

Sherlock moaned when their mouths met, and felt, as though for the first time, his prick hardening in his trousers. He pressed against his brother, and swiftly undid the belt of the heavy silk dressing gown. Mycroft, in his pyjamas, gasped and writhed as the layers of clothing between himself and his brother’s body were reduced.

Sherlock broke away for air, flushed in the face, eyes twinkling and dilated.
“I like kissing you. I like doing kissing,” he part-gasped, part-giggled. Because he did, and he wondered how he’d lived this long without having done it.

Mycroft hummed back at him, feeling ten feet tall at bringing that stunned look to Sherlock’s usually composed features, and for making his lips – always lusciously shaped and full of erotic potential – swollen, plump and pink from contact.

“I like ‘doing kissing’ with you too, brother mine,” he rumbled. “You were made for kissing. God, I’ve wanted to kiss you…”

They fell together again more urgently, and kissed, experimenting with all the ways two men could kiss; small pecks to each other’s faces; short, urgent mouth kisses; long, languorous snogs. They licked and sniffed at each other, stroking each other’s faces, then gripping the sides of each other’s heads for dear life.

Sherlock was delighted to discover a spot on Mycroft’s neck that made him whine and shiver; Mycroft, to discover that Lock seemed to go weak and wobbly when his ears were nibbled.

Both soared on the novelty of touch for its own sake, let alone the fact of being able to touch each other at long last. Touch for pleasure; kind, gentle touch. Not a currency Holmeses traditionally dealt in.

They moved hastily to the bed, still attached, reluctant to part for even a second, but desperate for more. They fell onto the bed and ended up facing each other on their sides with their legs entangled. They continued to kiss as though they would never stop, and touched each other everywhere.

Mycroft’s hands were still trembling, but Sherlock’s were steady and sure. Pleasure thrummed through their veins, and each man detected the other’s erratic heartbeat, hammering away in syncopated rhythm to his own.

Sherlock swiftly moved to roll on top of his brother, as they had been on the library floor. He began to frantically unbutton Mycroft’s pyjama top, as though he’d been doing it all his life, and Mycroft was so swept up in passion he momentarily forgot to be self-conscious.

Mycroft’s hands slipped under the shirt his brother had borrowed from his wardrobe, and moaned at the touch of his brother’s bare skin. So smooth, and warm, and instantly addictive.

He laughed as a thought occurred.

“What?” said Sherlock, grinning.

“I was just thinking that I’m actually taking my clothes off, not yours…”

Sherlock laughed as his brother helped him yank the stolen shirt up over his head. Mycroft hadn’t bothered to undo it beyond a few buttons, finding his hands too shaky. It got stuck on Sherlock’s head, and they laughed as they attempted to release him from it. When he was free, he threw it aside, and Mycroft’s breath caught in his throat at Sherlock, bare-chested, with his hair all messed, and his lips all kissed.

Sherlock cast him a fierce grin and pulled apart Mycroft’s pyjama jacket to reveal his scarred chest. And suddenly Mycroft froze and remembered that he had something to worry about.

His brother caught the doubt, and bent his head to the broad expanse of so-tempting flesh. Mycroft inhaled sharply as his brother’s lips made first contact with his bare skin, kissing his chest with reverence.
“Ohh…,” whispered Mycroft. When his brother’s teeth traced across his chest, he whimpered, and when Sherlock licked experimentally at one erect nipple, he whined in an embarrassingly high pitch.

Sherlock only knew that he wanted to do this, and all other information fell out of his head. Acting on instinct, he closed his eyes and flicked his brother’s nipple with his tongue, completely in love with the sounds of Mycroft rapt in pleasure even at this small act. Mycroft panting and gasping as he had his apparently very sensitive body stimulated made his own hips thrust and his cock press into his trousers.

He moved from one rosy nipple to the other, letting his curly hair trail onto his brother’s chest, heightening his responsiveness. He ran his tongue over the scars, as though he would lick them better, and traced the brutal S-shape with his mouth, claiming it for his own, determined to utterly wipe out its original meaning with his devotion.

“No…,” said Mycroft, tensing suddenly, and moving brother’s head away as Sherlock licked his damaged skin. “Please, don’t… Not there.”

“OK. S’all right. It’s all right…” Sherlock pulled away, biting his lip a little guiltily. He moved upwards to kiss and make it up to him.

As he was kissed, Mycroft writhed and ran his fingers through his brother’s hair, where they got caught and pulled. Sherlock’s head jerked up, eyes ablaze.

Mycroft winced. “Sorry…”

“No. I like it,” husked Sherlock, and resumed his task as his brother’s hands caressed him.

Mycroft groaned in sheer disbelief at the sensation of Sherlock’s mouth upon him, and the texture of curls between his fingers. His own need, and an encroaching awareness that he ought to be the one giving pleasure rather than receiving it, made him jittery.

“Wait, wait…,” he panted. He wiggled out of his pyjama top entirely, fighting his self-consciousness, but desperately wanting to participate more actively in this mutual exploration. The urge to tend to his brother was overwhelming - to give and offer himself to the man he had pledged his entire life to.

He pushed his brother down onto his back and moved on top of him.

Sherlock gasped as Mycroft kissed his way from mouth to neck to collarbone, and down to his chest, echoing the treatment he had just given. He let his arms flop to the side, opening himself to his brother’s every ministration. Pleasure sparked through his solar plexus and straight down to his prick as his nipples were tickled and sucked and nibbled. His mouth opened and he moaned in a deep baritone.

“Does that feel good?” asked Mycroft, in a husky voice Sherlock hoped he’d be hearing a lot more of.

“Mm-hm, yeah. God, yeah… Didn’t know… Nipples. No idea, really,” he replied, rather awestruck at the unfamiliarity of it.

Mycroft looked at him quizzically. Sherlock seemed so confident, but claimed inexperience with his own body. He did not seem to have experimented even with himself. And yet here he was, utterly at ease. Hardly a trace of nerves. Improvising freely and letting the transport take him where it would for a change. Ever the virtuoso. Ever the precocious, brilliant boy.

They would have to have a frank discussion about sex, eventually, he supposed. But for now, it was...
just whatever worked. Whatever gave immediate satisfaction. This was solely about affirming all that
had passed in the last 48 hours - though he felt like a clumsy teenager trying to impress his first love.
Which is what he was, he supposed.

“What do you want?” Mycroft whispered, intimately.

“Just you, Mycie,” Sherlock whispered back. “Naked.”

Sherlock shoved at Mycroft’s pyjama bottoms, and watched enthralled as his brother’s erection
sprang free.

“Oh.” Mycroft blushed rather more than he would have liked to at the exposure.

“Don’t be silly,” admonished Sherlock, seeing the insecurity, and determined to erase it. “I’ve
already seen you…”

Mycroft snorted. “Yes, while I was sobbing on the landing. Very attractive. Not sure you were really
looking at…that, though…”

“I saw it. I didn’t look properly, but I wanted to. You’re gorgeous, you know.”

Sherlock grinned happily at the sight before him. Mycroft, all pinkly flushed and flustered; his prick
equally flushed, and generously proportioned, bobbing against gravity.

“Big boy, Mycie…,” he said, winking cheekily.

“Shh! Shut up,” said Mycroft, tutting. He distracted himself from this embarrassing compliment by
fiddling with Sherlock’s trousers buttons.

“May I…?”

“Yes, yes. Make me naked. Let’s be naked together…”

He lifted his hips and Mycroft pulled the trousers off to reveal his brother to his eyes. Sherlock
wasn’t wearing underwear, naturally, and his long prick, full and hard, bobbed up from a patch of
dark hair.

Mycroft closed his eyes ecstatically as his brother’s natural scent drifted up and made his senses spin.

He had always known Lock was beautiful, though he’d tried hard not to really notice the other night,
averting his brain from taking in the full, bare glory of him amid their emotional turmoil. But he
admitted now that Lock was excessively beautiful in every part - smooth, and creamy-skinned, and
lissom - and that his cock was perhaps the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen in his life.

“Oh, God… Fuck. Brother, you are… You are… I love you. Have I said that in the last five
minutes? May I say it every five minutes?” said Mycroft, smiling crookedly at his own absurdity.

Sherlock chuckled, letting his brother look his fill, and threw his arms around his neck.

“Yes. You may. You must. Particularly if it makes you swear. Come here.”

Mycroft lowered himself down and their bare bodies touched completely, with no hint of
tentativeness.

“You’re so warm…,” murmured Sherlock, just saying whatever thoughts crossed his mind. And then
they were kissing again, breathing heavily with tongues entwined.
Mycroft rolled so that they lay on their sides, facing each other. Their legs tangled and their pricks rubbed together. Sherlock’s eyebrows raised and his eyes sprang open at the contact. He rolled his hips and both men hissed through their teeth and groaned simultaneously.

“Just... Just...,” said Sherlock, frantically, not knowing what he even meant anymore. ‘Just don’t stop’, possibly. Just give me more. Just let me love you.

He was painfully, achingly hard - experiencing sexual desire in the moment, not just in dreams, or a hasty self-administered handjob to help him sleep.

It was brain-jangling to discover his sensual appetite, just as he’d discovered an appetite for food since he’d been here. It made sense to him now. Mycroft was the common factor. And was that the reason for his continual suppression of his body all these years, he wondered? Had he known all along that it had something to do with Mycroft, and that was why he had not dared unleash it? Had it been too painful, to have been rejected so often as a child, whilst sensing the physical need between them? Too upsetting to experience desire at all, because he associated it with Mycroft, and with the feeling of something being wrong in the world all the while they were separated in mutual denial.

Desire was possible now, though. It was his. It was theirs.

Sherlock ran his hand along his brother’s flank, and moved a hand round to cup his buttock, noting that it was firm, and lightly downy, and that he never wanted to stop touching it. Mycroft mirrored his movements, completely enraptured with the feel of Lock’s rounded, dewy flesh in his hands.

They shifted closer - closer than they had ever been, in all conceivable ways - and sensation overtook them.

Mycroft gasped as Sherlock began to hump and wiggle against him, and he thrust his hips in return, seeking more delicious friction from his brother’s body. The head of his cock stroked up against the head of Sherlock’s, and he went dizzy as they frotted together, the ache in his groin travelling deep into his belly.

“Oh!” exclaimed Sherlock, sounding surprised. Because it was surprising, really. This heat, this hard-softness, or soft-hardness, or whatever it was. It was astonishing.

Passion was uncontrollable. That much seemed entirely obvious now. Neither man could stop this. It was simply too good, too compelling, too mind-boggling to control.

“Mycie… More, more…,” pleaded Sherlock, gazing deep into his brother’s wide grey eyes.

“I’m… Nearly…,” warned Mycroft, his breath stuttering in his chest, biting desperately at his lip; light-headed with Sherlock in his arms, pushing against him and taking his pleasure.

Sherlock didn’t seem to have heard, and rubbed harder, seeking more contact, more thrilling heat. Just more movement. Just there.

“Nn-no, Lock, don’t, I’m... God!!”

Mycroft’s face tensed suddenly and he contracted with a deep groan, clawing at his brother’s back.

Sherlock felt a flood of warmth on his belly and looked down to see his brother’s engorged prick twitching and spending over him. His mouth opened at the sight, and he looked up again to catch Mycroft’s expression, caught somewhere between joy and devastation.

And then it happened. His head swam and he felt a profound pull in his groin just as Mycroft’s slippery cock nudged at him and slid upwards over his swollen crown. His eyes flew wide as he
shuddered from head to toe, and released himself in pulsing waves with a strained little cry.

Mycroft moaned as he felt his brother’s semen splash onto his abdomen and mingle with his own.

Sherlock’s head span with the wonderful oddness of it - his first orgasm shared with another. With his brother. Perfect. But not enough. Not even slightly. Because there was more, and he wanted every single bit of it.

“Goodness me,” panted Mycroft, sounding a bit regretful, as their bodies stilled and they collapsed against each other in relief.

“Wow.” Sherlock sounded simply impressed, with a huge grin lighting up his face, and a giggle in his throat.

Mycroft smiled ruefully, shaking his head at himself.

“I didn’t…mean for that to… You know it’s supposed to last longer than that?”

Neither made an effort to roll away from each other, and they stay locked in position, sticky and wet, and softly chuckling at each other.

“You’re apologising?! Are you insane?! That was the best thing I’ve ever… Oh, my God, Mycie.”

He pulled his brother closer into a hug as they shivered through their aftershocks together.

“That was not… Not quite what I had in mind. Hardly a careful seduction, eh?” said Mycroft, somewhat sheepishly. Sherlock slapped his arm in reproach.

“Don’t be ridiculous!”

Mycroft snorted ironically, feeling rather high on his own endorphins for once.

“It’s not like you to be so easily pleased.”

“Oh, shut up. You can have another go later,” said Sherlock, with great certainty.

Mycroft huffed with amusement and hugged him closer, then screwed his face up in mild discomfort at the cold mess between them. Sherlock rolled away and flopped over the side of the bed, rummaging underneath it for something. Mycroft gaped at the side of Lock’s bare backside high in the air as he did so, and need stirred again in his gut.

When Sherlock came back up he was triumphantly wielding his bedsheets from the night before. He used it to clean himself and then his brother, patting round his spent cock with care. This act struck Mycroft as far more intimate than what they had just done, and he relished it for its simplicity and kindness, even as he half-wondered why he deserved it.

He was taken unawares by a very large yawn, and blinked rapidly to stop his eyelids drooping. Sherlock flopped next to him and held his face between his hands, examining him with shrewd interest.

“Hmm. Let me see. You got three hours sleep last night. Broken sleep at that. You’re exhausted.”

A flood of happy hormones was shooting through his blood, and tiredness – biological and emotional - hit him too. Now the initial tension had been broken, it seemed safe to properly rest.

“Sleep with me,” said Sherlock, softly.
Mycroft looked up at him in something like wonder, and nodded. Together they got themselves under the duvet and cuddled up again, relishing the feeling of skin on skin. Naked under the covers together. They had never been naked under the covers together.

“If you leave before I wake, I will actually kill you,” warned Sherlock, through a yawn.

Mycroft turned to him, and kissed his forehead. “I won’t. I will never leave you again.”

Sherlock heard it for what it was. An oath he could trust. A vow.

He sighed in contentment, closed his eyes, and they slept a dreamless sleep.

When they woke in the middle of the afternoon, they woke wrapped in each other’s arms. Sherlock blinked back to awareness, looking up automatically as though to confirm his brother’s presence. Mycroft was already alert, and gazing down at him with a question in his misty eyes.

“Don’t say it - yes, I’m still all right!” said Sherlock, with a yawn. “And no, I haven’t changed my mind about this.”

Mycroft rolled his eyes at being so easily deduced.

“Good. Neither have I. It’s just… I don’t want to rush into anything,” he said, a little guardedly.


“I want to learn you,” said Mycroft, stroking his brother’s hair. “Frankly, I want to savour every single thing about this.”

“Me too. But I don’t want you to hold back. I mean, not too slow,” said Sherlock, pecking kisses to the broad expanse of chest beneath him.

Mycroft hummed with contentment. “Definitely not.”

Sherlock looked up, his eyes bright and dancing.

“I want to know you in every possible way. Do you think you can stop worrying about that?”

“I will try. But you know what a neurotic I am these days,” said Mycroft, with arch self-deprecation.

Sherlock wiggled upwards and sprawled across him, propping his chin on his shoulder.

“Ah, Mycie. You just need me to sort you out,” he said, with a toothy grin.

Mycroft purred deep in his chest. “That, dearest boy, is another correct deduction.”

“But first you can sort me out with a simply epic Christmas dinner,” grinned Sherlock, biting at his brother’s shoulder and growling with puppyish glee.

Mycroft swiftly moved to roll atop his brother, straddling his legs.

“Ah ha, hungry again, little glutton?” he said, playfully, prodding at the flat plane of Sherlock’s virtually non-existent belly.

“Yep.” Sherlock laughed and squirmed against the attack. “I need to build up my strength, for later. And so do you.”
Mycroft raised a sardonic eyebrow, delighted by his ability to make his brother laugh, even as he felt a knot of anxiety in his stomach.

“I see. That’s your ulterior motive, is it?”

*God, no pressure then…*

“Nothing ulterior about it,” snorted Sherlock, lying back and smirking contentedly.

Mycroft’s face took on a sudden fierce cast. He leaned down and their lips met once again in a deep kiss.

“My Lock.”

“Mm. Changed my mind. Don’t want to ever get out of bed,” said Sherlock, between nips and licks to his brother’s neck.

“Then let’s not.”

They stayed put, revelling in the feeling of holding each other, getting hard all over again. Mycroft barely stopped to wonder how his body was capable of it. Sherlock was simply magic and cast an unbreakable spell over him.

Mycroft kissed down his brother’s lithe body, and moved down and down, nibbling at his hipbones, laving at his inner thighs, working his way around his groin - everywhere but his brother’s straining erection.

He looked up and caught the wide-eyed look of astonishment on his brother’s flushed face. His mouth was open, eyes black with anticipation and desire.

“I want to taste you, Sherlock…,” he said, in a low voice. If it sounded like a confession, that was because it was. A confession he had never dared articulate, like all the others he had made.

After a lifetime of things he did not want - of deadening tedium, and denial, and power which left him cold and empty - Mycroft resolved to seize upon these moments, to at least state what he truly wanted, in the new and frightening hope that his wishes might be fulfilled.

“Will you let me?” he asked, softly.

“I…Yes,” breathed Sherlock, barely audibly. “Please.”

Mycroft let his brother’s pheromonal scent flood his senses as he nuzzled at his soft balls, feeling completely overwhelmed by the need to pleasure him; to make his beloved boy shake, and moan, and come.

“You smell so good…,” he said, hoarsely.

*Sweet and spicy and complex. Immediately identifiable. I would know you anywhere by smell alone.*

Sherlock could hardly believe how good it felt to be teased simply by the ghosting of breath. Proximity alone was enough to make him quiver and arch his back, and for his cock to twitch upwards, longing for touch.

He exclaimed with a helpless cry as Mycroft kissed gently up his shaft, swirling his tongue around it with a look of intense, concentrated passion creasing his brow.
Sherlock’s eyes fluttered open and closed, not knowing whether to lay back and revel in pure feeling, or to look down at his brother’s flushed, damp-face as he worshipped him with his mouth. He settled upon watching through half-closed eyelids, focusing in on the hot press of lips and little puffs of air that sent shivers down his thighs. His legs shook and he brought one knee up by instinct.

Mycroft hooked his arm around his brother’s thigh, holding it firmly in place, and shifted himself up on his knees. With his other hand, he gripped the base of Sherlock’s aching cock, and took the head, nacreous pink and swollen, between his lips, licking at the little dart beneath the crown. Precome was already leaking from the slit and he tasted the salt tang of his brother’s intimate flesh as though it were a gift.

His own body thrilled at the sound of his brother's stunned gasps when he opened his mouth entirely and slid down with deliberate, agonising slowness. Sherlock was more than a perfect mouthful. But, for him, Sherlock was simply more than the perfect in all things.

“Your mouth, your mouth, oh, my brother…,” Sherlock was whispering, over and over, before he became lost in incoherent wails of pleasure.

Mycroft groaned as he sucked, which sent a deep vibration through Sherlock’s body and set off a continual feedback loop of outrageous, primal noise.

Without warning, Sherlock felt himself hit the back of Mycroft’s throat. His head jerked up as he was swallowed around, and his mouth fell open in an ‘oh’ of silent amazement as he was stimulated so deeply, more than he thought possible. His higher functions seemed to shut down in favour of pure physical drive.

He was watching every moment now, turned on beyond rational thought at the sight of his hard cock sliding in and out of his brother’s mouth, and at Mycroft’s pinkened cheeks hollowing as he suctioned and pulled pleasure from him.

The sound of it was simply obscene, and the hot slickness of being so thoroughly engulfed made Sherlock’s lower abdomen tense and his toes pull back. He couldn’t keep up with it, this almost-panicky feeling. Couldn’t quite identify it, except that it was infuriating and glorious; more intense, more consistent than the urgent friction of their earlier thrusting.

Sensory overload pushed him towards climax and all awareness was reduced down to the melting heat of his throbbing cock.

“Myc…My…I’m…”

He tapped urgently at his brother’s sweat-soaked shoulder, trying to warn him of his impending release, in case he wasn’t supposed to do this - because maybe Mycroft wouldn’t want to actually swallow him. But Mycroft ignored him.

Sherlock felt his brother’s finger snake underneath his balls to stroke with tantalising firmness at his perineum. Pleasure was suddenly all-encompassing. He cried out wildly, and his hips stuttered upwards, head slamming back into the pillow automatically.

“Fuck! Oh, fuck, oh… Love you. Love you!”

No other words would do.

Blood rushed in his ears; his whole body spasmed and clenched as his brother sucked and stroked him to his finish. Just the knowledge that he was coming in his brother’s mouth - coming because Mycroft was making him – caused him to pulse again and again, with a dizzying head rush and a
white light behind his eyes. Mycroft took it all, swallowing him down with care and pride, and complete devotion.

They stayed put, and rode out Sherlock’s little post-orgasmic judders together, until he giggled and squirmed at the too-muchness of it. Mycroft released him with a wet smacking sound, and rubbed his face along Sherlock’s damp inner thighs to wipe residual spit and semen from his chin. Sherlock grinned down at him, delighted by the unexpectedness of such a lovely, filthy act.

“Come here…,” he ordered in a gravelly tone, pulling at Mycroft’s arm until they were wrapped in an embrace once more. Mycroft covered them with the sheet, and their panting breaths fell into sync.

“Well, that was…new,” giggled Sherlock, completely unable to find adequate description at this point.

*Where did he learn how to do that?! Don’t really want to know, but I suppose I’ll have to ask eventually.*

Mycroft snorted and squeezed him fondly. “It was”

Sherlock went in for a kiss, and Mycroft pulled away with a minutely embarrassed frown.

“Want to taste myself on you,” said Sherlock with a dirty little chuckle, pulling his brother towards him with a hand on his hot cheek.

He pressed their mouths together, and explored their combined flavours, lapping at his tongue with animalistic joy. When they broke apart, Mycroft looked rather stunned.

Sherlock twisted and rose onto his knees, whipping the sheet away with a flourish.

“Your turn! Or, rather, my turn…”

His face lit up with eagerness to return the pleasure he had been given, impatient to explore every facet of his brother’s body, to see what he could make it do.

Mycroft stopped him with a firm hand, a brief startled look in his eyes. His legs curled upwards instinctively, and he pulled at the sheet to cover himself.

“Not…not now, Lock, hm? Some of us need a little more recovery time. The perils of middle-age,” he said, with a forced joking tone.

Sherlock frowned, knowing he was being fobbed off, but not quite sure why. He fought down the childish flare of ‘not fair’ that ran through him, and felt, irrationally, like sulking until he got what he wanted.

*He doesn’t want me too close. Doesn’t trust me with his body, or think I can give him what he needs. Is it that? Or he thinks he should just…service me with nothing in return? Is this not mutual?*

Sherlock shrugged, and tried to remain cavalier. He moved further down his brother’s body, kissing at his stomach, slipping the sheet lower as he went.

“Doesn’t feel like you need any recovery time, brother… And I’m a very quick learner - didn’t you say so yourself?”

Mycroft hummed, and gripped his brother’s curly hair to pull him back up for a cuddle, distracting him from pursuing his purpose.
“Aren’t you just? But we’ve been here quite a while. And dinner beckons, dearest. After all, I have to feed you something other than, erm…”

Sherlock snorted at his brother’s hesitancy to say something disgusting.

“You,” he finished, teasingly, in lieu of anything more graphic. He felt he’d probably scandalised him enough for one afternoon. He would give him a break before attempting it again this evening.

“Quite. I should like to wine and dine you a little. If that is acceptable to you?” Mycroft asked, tentatively.

Sherlock smirked. “Ah, it’s soppy romance you’re after, is it?”

_This is romance already, Mycie. You don’t have to perform it for me._

“Is the idea abhorrent to you?”

Mycroft’s voice was a little uncertain, with an underlying tone of disappointment. It was obviously important to him not to be refused, and Sherlock could not bring himself to deny his brother anything, especially not caring gestures or the demonstration of his love.

“Of course not,” said Sherlock, shaking his head. “If it will please you to cater for me, I suppose I ought not to complain about it.”

_Anything that makes you happy. But I don’t need to be catered for. I only need to share with you._

“What is romance for us, do you think?” he asked, with a curious inflection, almost challengingly.

Mycroft sighed expansively as he considered the question.

“Let’s discover together, shall we?” he said, gently.

Sherlock grinned. “I suppose we’ll have to, now we’ve come this far. But you dress down for it, Mycroft Holmes. Leave the costumes in the wardrobe,” he said, meaningfully.

Eventually they rose, parting with a languorous kiss and an agreement to reconvene in a few hours. Both men needed a shower and a bit of breathing space to gather their wits; time to spruce themselves up for what felt like an eccentric but significant first date. Their first evening together as lovers as well as brothers. And after that, Sherlock hoped, perhaps another first. Though he was increasingly certain that he was not the only one experiencing firsts left, right and centre.

Mycroft went downstairs to work away at his preparations for dinner, thinking deeply to himself. Sherlock disappeared upstairs to plan a little romance of his own, contemplating the night ahead of him.

_You are not quite relaxed. You are holding back. I will not allow it, brother. You will take your pleasures freely from me. It's my turn to look after you._
Chapter Summary

Pure romance. And sex.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for bearing with me while I got this done! There is still more to come, but hopefully this chapter scratches an itch.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When everything was as he wished it to be in the kitchen and dining room, Mycroft turned his attention to his ablutions and wondered what on earth he was supposed to wear. Dressed down, Sherlock had insisted. When he re-entered his bedroom, he discovered the decision had been made for him. A pair of black jeans were folded neatly on the bed, along with a black t-shirt vest, both two sizes too small at least. He sighed disconsolately.

When he wears this sort of thing he looks like a demi-god. I am going to look like a midlife crisis personified. How very apt.

When he shook the jeans out, he realised they were riddled with fashionable rips and strategic holes.

Correction. A midlife crisis who has recently been savaged by some kind of large cat.

Still, a Holmes’s word was his bond, and he had promised to do this for his brother’s amusement. And, he sincerely hoped, for his pleasure. He showered, scrubbed and shaved, then donned the outfit, feeling ten types of ridiculous.

Hardly a flattering outline. But I suppose he knows what lies underneath now. No going back.

He sighed at himself in the full length mirror, desperate to change into something sensible and not so dreadfully revealing. The jeans were skin-tight, and he could imagine no other reaction than gales of humiliating laughter at his appearance. He realised he didn’t have any appropriate footwear and would have to go barefoot. And what to do with his hair? He wanted to slick it back to stop it going completely mad at the front, but supposed that would be cheating on this silly little bargain. He ran his fingers through it hopelessly, then smeared a bit of wax in to curb its worst excesses.

How am I supposed to face him like this? How am I supposed to convince him to let me touch him, and… Why did I think I could do this? What right have I to want him, or be the one who… If he changes his mind… When he changes his mind…

He stopped his thoughts in their tracks.

Don’t think of it now. We are here now. If all I get is one night, I want it. Just one night to make thousands of empty past nights meaningful. One night to live on for all the future nights of my life. It
would be enough.

From the corner of his eye, he caught a dark, cruel, sepia glare burning out from a gold photo frame. A glare that said everything you do is wrong. A glare that said you are a waste, you are a disappointment. You are a disgrace.

He looked away and shook himself back to composure, fighting down the voice of that old, familiar demon.

No. Not now. Not tonight. I only want tonight. I only want him.

***

Upstairs, Sherlock was preparing himself for what felt like the night of his life. He thrilled at the possibilities ahead – new knowledge carried on a tidal wave of new sensation. Or so he hoped. He had thoroughly cleaned and spruced himself in anticipation of intimacy unlike any other he had experienced. He almost blushed at it, and had been on the verge of over-excited for hours. His head span at their recent explorations – of being brought to orgasm twice, once in his brother’s mouth - and his thoughts raced at the pleasures still to come. Those he could bestow as well as receive.

None of this felt wrong. Absolutely none of it.

He gave a thought to his little plan, and smirked at himself in the mirror.

Yes, very clever. I am curating my own deflowering. It’s ridiculous, but at least he’ll understand how much I want it. Want him. You are going to understand that, Mycroft Holmes, you stubborn idiot, if it’s the last thing I do.

He donned the full three-piece tuxedo he had liberated from his brother’s wardrobe, going so far as to procure a black bowtie and every Mycroftian accessory he could lay his hands on; cufflinks and collar studs. He couldn’t recall ever having worn a waistcoat before. He didn’t really think it suited him, not in the way it suited his brother. His chest was not quite broad enough. But still, he supposed he could just about pull it off. He brushed his hair into the neatest side-parting the curls would allow for, pulling his fringe away from his face.

The reflection looking back at him was not himself, but some odd alternate universe version of his brother, or a Victorian politician, which was near enough the same thing. He frowned at himself as though about to tell himself off. Then his face broke into a sunny grin and he laughed out loud at the image he presented – stern, fastidious, and controlled. The anti-Sherlock. It was rather fun.

He hoped the sartorial reversal would shake them loose from their well-worn, traditional roles, even superficially. It seemed appropriate, and it added piquancy to an already intriguing circumstance.

He’s got to like me in this, hasn’t he? Or maybe hate it and want to rip it all off the second he sees me...

When he was satisfied that he was as perfect as he was going to get – and smelling delicious – he hastened to the ground floor, taking the stairs two at a time. He stopped himself in the hallway and took a deep breath.

This is it. Dinner and seduction. Dinner with my brother. Then sex with my brother. Oh, God. Stop jumping ahead. Calm down or you’ll send him running. I am suave, and smooth, and...out of my depth. Just talk to him. It’s only Mycroft. No. Not quite the same anymore. He’s my Mycroft now.

When Sherlock entered the dining room, his mouth dropped open. The entire room was resplendent
in candlelight. Candelabra adorned every available surface, and the room glowed with soft light and warmth. The fire was lit, and silhouetted against it, leaning on the marble mantelpiece, was a dark figure Sherlock both did and did not recognise. The man turned and both Holmes brothers stared at each other with stunned expressions, looking more goldfish-like than either of them were comfortable with.

Mycroft, in close-fitting black, hair flopping forward, looked to his brother’s eyes like…

What would you call that? Sex vampire. Sex angel. Sex something.

Mycroft saw a matinee idol. An impossible black-and-white dream.


They approached each other in silence, caught ambivalently between self-consciousness, overt desire, and fond appreciation that the other had gone to all this effort.

Mycroft was the first to compose himself, determined to be debonair and feign the confidence he did not quite feel.

“Well, well,” he said, archly. “What a bizarre little Saturnalia this is, brother mine.”

He smiled hungrily, and ran the back of his fingers down Sherlock’s lapels.

“Isn’t it just?” replied Sherlock, smirking now, and slipping a finger inside a tear in the fabric on Mycroft’s upper thigh, to stroke at the pale, exposed skin.

“You look ravishing,” hummed Mycroft, leaning in towards him, His eyes fluttered closed momentarily as he inhaled his brother’s scent.

Sherlock closed the distance to kiss him, and they clung together for a few moments, feeling each other’s familiar yet unfamiliar presence, as though to reassure themselves of who they really were.

Sherlock pulled back, chuckling warmly. “And you look…”

“Ridiculous?”

“Shut up. You look… I don’t have a word for it. It’s really more of a sound. It’s something like hhharrrrrrgh. You are a magnificent scruff, brother. Though I wish those skinny jeans didn’t fit you so well, really. Let’s try and bust you out of them with roast potatoes.”

Mycroft rolled his eyes tolerantly.

“Yes, if you insist. Take a seat. Everything is ready,” he said, indicating the silver cloches and place settings on the table. At the centre was a large joint of beef which he began to carve with precision.

Sherlock sat, leaning on his elbows, watching his brother with fascination.

They sat at a right angle, within touching distance of each other. Mycroft poured wine for them both, and Sherlock began lifting lids, letting the delicious smells of dinner waft up to fill his olfactory system. He sighed with approval as his appetite sprang to life once again.

“May I say, I love what you’ve done to the place?” Sherlock said, with chivalrous charm.

Mycroft huffed a little laugh, trying to underplay his obvious delight at the praise.
“You enjoy my attempt at soppy romance after all, do you?”

“I do,” said Sherlock, amiably. “You could save a fortune on electric bills if you did this all the time. I much prefer it.”

“Have you any idea how long it took to light this many bloody candles?! It would become a full time occupation. No wonder people in the past had vast armies of servants. It would have taken six people just to light the rooms.”

Sherlock laughed. “Don’t spoil the illusion that it all happens automatically, please! I suppose we’d best be careful blowing them all out, we might suffocate from carbon monoxide.”

“Ever the optimist.”

Mycroft placed some slices of meat on his brother’s plate, then served himself.

Sherlock raised his wine glass, and they clinked glasses together, offering no verbal toast.

>To us.
>To tonight.

“So, I am you and you are me, is that it?” said Mycroft, indicating their attire.

Sherlock considered this.

“Hmm. Maybe. ‘Sit up straight. Stop slouching. Why aren’t you wearing shoes, you silly boy?’” he said, sternly, frowning theatrically.

Mycroft snorted contemptuously and slouched in his seat.

“Oh, do shut up. Who cares about shoes, you pompous prig? How booooring.”

Sherlock ignored the minor feeling of guilt at having used those words almost verbatim at one time or another. Mycroft caught his eye and gave him a knowing wink. No offence meant or taken in either direction.

They giggled and drank some more, peaceably enjoying each other’s company as they set about their fine repast.

Sherlock continued the game, unable to resist.

“Sherlock, I love you,” he said, performing Mycroft’s ardent declaration with a trademark arched eyebrow.

Mycroft smiled lightly.

“Yes,” he agreed.

“Now you,” prompted Sherlock.

Mycroft did not miss a beat. “Sherlock, I love you.”

“No, wilful idiot! Play properly.”

Mycroft sighed.
“Mycroft…I love you,” he replied softly.

“Hmm, interesting, brother mine. Why?” said Sherlock, with a challenging gleam in his eye.

Mycroft stared unblinkingly at his brother. His thin mouth opened and closed as he contemplated the answer.

“I… Because…”

Sherlock tutted.

“Honestly, you make it so difficult. Why do you love Mycroft, Sherlock Holmes? Answer,” he demanded, with playful frustration and just enough genuine seriousness to cause Mycroft to think a little more deeply.

“Because I… Because you are my elder brother, and you…are clever…”

He paused for thought. Sherlock snorted.

“Obviously. More.”

“Because…” Mycroft grimaced uncomfortably but Sherlock glared at him disapprovingly, daring him to give up and risk courting his wrath.

“I love you, Mycroft,” said Mycroft, awkwardly, as though deducing a particularly difficult case, “because you are not quite as cold and heartless as I thought you were. Because you have learned a little wisdom. Because you can be quite witty, sometimes... Erm... Because you trusted me with your secrets. For your protection of me as a child. And I...you are devoted to me, and make me feel... What?”

Sherlock was looking at him, rather appalled.

“Is that what you think of me? That I only love you because of things you do for me? Because of things like protection and devotion?! Because you’re my wise elder brother?”

Mycroft frowned, confused, and wondering what he’d gotten wrong. He went to speak and was cut off by his brother, who seemed rather unexpectedly insulted.

“All wrong! Well, not wrong, just not...quite right.”

“Well, I don’t know what you want to hear.”

Sherlock scowled at the defensiveness.

“I want to hear that you understand why I love you!” he burst out. “Clever, wise, witty, yes, all of the above. And yes, of course protective, devoted. But... Gorgeous, Mycroft!”

Sherlock almost laughed at the disbelieving look he received, even as it dented him.

“Kind, and honourable, and dignified, and strong,” he continued, ignoring his brother’s granite-faced resistance. “Bloody brave, and passionate, underneath all that starch - which I also love, by the way. All kinds of complex, never boring... But not modest, because modesty is not a virtue. And... Sexy! Do you understand that? Sexy,” he finished, emphatically.

Mycroft looked down at this hands, unable to fully take in the words.
Sherlock’s heart clenched at his brother’s obvious discomfort. He had a sudden flash of John shaking his head at him.

*You can’t change his mind in one night, you arrogant prat.*

He sighed.

“Oh, brother. I don’t mean to embarrass you. I do like how you embarrass, though... I like everything about you. I will make you believe it.”

He nodded. Convincing only himself, but determined nevertheless.

*I will make you bloody believe it.*

Mycroft shook himself a little, smiling ruefully, but not wanting to ruin the atmosphere by falling into another mortifying funk.

“I will try my best to let you. How’s that?” he offered, hopefully.

Sherlock nodded.

“Fine. I can’t ask more than that.”

They fell to their plates once more, letting the moment settle, each feeling a little raw and overexposed.

“You don’t seriously wear these damn things, do you?” said Mycroft, after a while, wriggling in his tight trousers. “They’re obscene, not to mention extremely uncomfortable.”

Sherlock chuckled, relieved they seemed to be back on more jovial footing.

“In truth? I’ve worn them a few times for cases, when I’ve needed to blend in with certain circles. Circles you’d thoroughly disapprove of, naturally. And you wouldn’t be wrong either. The top is just an undershirt. I don’t make a habit of wearing the ensemble. To be honest, I only brought the jeans to annoy you.”

Mycroft choked a little on his food. “Ha! I knew it. You have failed utterly. I am very un-annoyed.”

“Good. Speaking of which, how can you bear to wear this get-up?! It takes forever to put it all on. Absurd in the extreme.”

Mycroft rolled his eyes, knowing he was being affectionately taunted.

“I wear it because one is supposed to wear it, when one is called upon to attend functions more tedious than you can possibly imagine. It is a uniform amongst my sort. I only wish I could stun a room in it, like you can, dearest.”

Sherlock attempted to disguise his pleasure at the compliment.

“Oh, stop talking rot.”

“Never. You were made for eveningwear. What a shame you’re such a slovenly anarchist.” said Mycroft, with an audacious wink.
“What a shame you are such an uptight conformist,” retorted Sherlock. He winced a little. “I don’t mean that, you know. I love your style. The way you carry yourself. I love how clothes look on you – is that shallow? I love you naked more though,” he added, wanting to make that fact perfectly clear.

Mycroft paused mid-bite.

“You…have only seen that a few times,” he said, casually brushing it off.

Sherlock scoffed another roast potato. “Pfft, a few times is all it takes. I’m already addicted to it.”

Mycroft raised an eyebrow. “Yes, well, perhaps the less said about that the better.”

“I disagree. The more said about it the better. In fact, I never want to stop talking about it. I find I’m unable to imagine life without you in the nude.”

“Are you flirting with me?”

Sherlock grinned. “Always. I think I am always flirting with you. I’m addicted to that too.”

Mycroft, not for the first time this weekend, found himself lost for a sensible response.

They ate in companionable silence, and finished the wine between them. When they were replete, they sat back, fuzzy round the edges and mellow.

“Have you finished stuffing yourself?” asked Mycroft, with excessive politeness.

“I think so. I don’t want anything else. Not food anyway.”

Mycroft licked his lips, distracted by the sultry tone and the come-hither look being cast at him by the angel in black tie - all long lashes, piercing cheekbones and suggestive eyebrows.

He cleared his throat and stood, keeping his eyes fixed on his brother.

Sherlock almost forgot to breathe as Mycroft practically prowled towards him. He felt bizarrely like swooning.

“Hello, you uptight conformist,” said Mycroft, with playful Sherlockian cheek. He leaned down and placed a firm kiss upon his brother’s plush lips.

Sherlock opened his mouth to meet him, and they worked their tongues around each other.

“Be you. I like you better,” husked Sherlock, when they broke away.

Mycroft smiled wistfully. “All right. But I think I prefer being you.”

“Don’t say that,” said Sherlock in deadly earnest.

“What, the idea of making love to yourself doesn’t appeal?”

“I’m not a complete narcissist. It’s you I want to make love to. Or rather…,” he hinted.

Mycroft looked at him seriously.

“You’re sure?”

Sherlock tutted.
“If you ask me that one more time I am going to have to… I have no idea what I shall do, but it will be messy, and irreversible.”

Mycroft laughed despite himself, grateful that the wine had loosened his inhibitions.

“If we do what I think you’re suggesting, that will also be…”

“Messy and irreversible. Yes. Good,” declared Sherlock, pleased at his brother’s more relaxed state.

He stood, and they loped towards the stairs, chuckling and pushing each other with a sudden burst of mutual giddiness. When they reached the first landing, Sherlock pulled his brother back from heading towards his bedroom.

Mycroft looked at him enquiringly.

“No. Not in there. Follow me,” smirked Sherlock, with supreme smugness.

They ascended until they reached the staircase leading to the roof.

“But… Oh.”

Mycroft held his breath as they entered the attic sanctuary where they had already shared so much casual intimacy.

Sherlock had been busy. The furniture had been cleared away to the sides of the room. The large mattress and the bedclothes from his guest room now occupied the space beneath the skylight window. He had built them a sort of nest – lit solely by the moon and stars in the cloudless sky.

“Sherlock,” breathed Mycroft, rather awestruck.

He pulled his brother into an embrace, though it felt a little odd, kissing a man in a full evening suit whilst attired in such a shabby ensemble himself. It put him on the back foot, which was presumably where Sherlock had wanted him. He felt he was being deliberately disarmed, and, on reflection, saw that it was no bad thing at all.

“Here,” murmured Mycroft.

“Yes. Here.”

It touched Mycroft’s heart that his brother had given such consideration to this; that he had instinctively known they required this room, high above ground, to consummate their new relationship. This space which was almost sacred to him, where he could breathe a little easier, head in the clouds.

But a niggling feeling broke through Mycroft’s awareness; a scab that itched to be picked. He pulled away, and stroked Sherlock’s cheek.

“I think we ought to discuss… What do you expect?” he asked, hesitantly.

Sherlock snorted playfully and kissed his brother’s fingers.

“That’s quite a question. I don’t expect anything. I just want. You.”

"But you, in your own words, don't know what you're doing," said Mycroft, with an uncertain shrug.
Oh, so that’s it. The corruption angle. We’ll soon disabuse you of that, big brother.

"I don't, but I know how I feel. And I know that I want to know what I'm doing. Very much."

He resumed kissing Mycroft’s neck, and Mycroft pulled back a little once more, looking into his eyes a little awkwardly.

"Brother, what makes you think I know what I'm doing?"

"Don't you?" Sherlock asked, searching his face for answers.

"Hardly at all," confessed Mycroft.

"You've...," Sherlock broke off with a laugh. “God, we must use actual words here. Have you had sex before, Mycroft? I mean, before, when you…sucked me…”

All these new phrases coming out of my mouth these days...

Mycroft almost choked at the question, though he’d known it was coming.

“I have never performed that particular act before,” he said, self-consciously. “Though I have given much thought to it. Obviously."

Sherlock turned to him with raised eyebrows. “Seriously? So…neither of us…?”

"I have. Once." He held up one finger.

"Once?!” exclaimed Sherlock, genuinely surprised, not bothering to conceal his delight at the fact that the number was as low as it could possibly be without being zero.

Mycroft misread him.

"Don't mock," he said, quietly.

"How could I? I haven't done anything!" laughed Sherlock, trying to shake his brother from his sheepish demeanour.

"Nothing? At all?" said Mycroft, trying to keep the relief out of his voice as he fact-checked.

Sherlock shrugged unapologetically.

“I’m not ignorant, simply inexperienced. I know enough about people to know all the possible variations… I’ve seen pornography. It’s all very anthropologically interesting, but I can’t say it ever did anything for me. At least, not the dreck John seems to like. All big tits in wet t-shirts. Very odd.”

“Hardly my cup of tea either,” said Mycroft, dryly.

Sherlock smirked.

“No, indeed. I have not been in the habit of familiarising myself with…myself, let alone anyone else. You know that.”

There was still a question in Mycroft’s eyes, an unanswered doubt.

We're still dancing round each other. Enough of this. It's stupid.

Sherlock took his brother’s upper arms in his hands, to force him to look and listen.
“Right, I'm going to tell you this once and for all, and then you are going to stop worrying about it. The Woman. There was a professional transaction. One. Of sensation - not sex, not love - of sensation. Money changed hands, Mycroft. An experiment in physical pain, because it fascinated me, because it helped me deal with my mind. It wasn’t exactly... She thrashed my arse, all right? Once.”

Mycroft frowned and looked down, struggling to hear it, and flushing despite himself. Sherlock saw the hurt, saw the jealousy, and pushed on regardless, hoping that he wasn’t destroying his chances by confessing this.

“I know it makes you… cringe to think of. It wasn’t huge amounts of fun, to be honest. But it was interesting, in its way. New data. She wanted me, I think. She tried to make me want her, but realised fairly swiftly that was not going to happen. She was, ironically, very kind to me, very understanding, which I did not know how to deal with. There was mutual nudity, though it felt like some kind of official costume more than anything else. I got hard during the session - because of the sensation, not who was delivering it. She told me to, erm, masturbate in front of her, and I started to and then it just... went. Nothing. I wasn't even embarrassed, because I never felt the need to impress her or make her want me. And... She was a woman, Mycroft! Of course I couldn't have sex with her!”

Sherlock sighed as though relieved of a burden.

“Now,” he said, seriously, “you tell me, as honestly as you've told me everything else, about sex and you.”

Mycroft inhaled shakily, trying to process information he had already suspected. In some way, it was a relief not to have to imagine the unknown anymore, though he felt irritated by his own irrational envy. All his past taunting over Sherlock’s notional virginity had been his way of checking, of reassuring himself that no-one had defiled his brother, that no-one had touched him. He was jealous, had always been jealous, and loathed himself perpetually for that weakness. At the time, there had been no possibility of having access to Sherlock’s body, nor his emotions - but he could not stand the idea of anyone else having it.

He tried to remind himself that he had it now. More than he’d dared dream of, here in this present moment. But still, primal possessiveness roiled in his blood at the thought of anyone having seen his brother vulnerable; of anyone but himself sharing intimacy of any kind with him.

His heart sank at the idea that he would not be able to give Sherlock what She gave him. But he knew he could not give full thought to that issue now. There were only so many cans of worms one could open at a time. That bridge would be crossed, but not now.

Sherlock was looking at him expectantly.

Mycroft lowered himself to the mattress, pulling his brother down with him. They lay on their backs, looking up at the black night, then fell into a loose embrace, and both felt instantly more grounded. Mycroft stroked Sherlock’s hair as he explained himself. Sherlock let him speak it to the sky, sparing him his inquisitive gaze.

“When I was 21, I was sent to Cambridge undercover, soon after my training. Ostensibly to complete a PhD, but in reality to flush out undercover ex-KGB sleepers. There was a young man - a fellow student, a proper one - who expressed an interest in me. His name was Hugh. He had dark hair and nice manners. He was handsome, I could see that. In a conventional, symmetrical way. He was a rower, so that seemed like a good thing. I had decided to try and be normal, partly to make myself less conspicuous, and partly to try and... get over you. Is there a more futile occupation, I wonder?”

Sherlock huffed quietly, and nuzzled at his brother’s chest in thanks for the compliment, even as his
entire being loathed and abominated ‘Hugh’, and fervently hoped no good had come of him.

“We got a little bit drunk at dinner one night,” continued Mycroft, in a tight, tentative voice.
“We...had sex. It was consensual. It was awkward, in a fumbling-in-the-dark sort of way. It was rather upsetting somehow. I had hoped it would be revelatory, or make me feel better. It only made me feel hollow and very lonely. And it made me miss you so much it hurt. I knew then I was completely irredeemable. That my obsession with you was never going to end.”

Sherlock’s brow creased at the tangible sadness of 21-year-old Mycroft, and he wished he could travel back in time to save him from it. And eviscerate the man who got to his brother first.

"Were you the, erm, giver, so to speak, or the receiver?” he asked rigidly. “I don't know the right terms for these things, forgive me…"

It seemed important to know.

Mycroft went a little hot and huffed a small, ironic laugh. To be speaking of this was uncomfortable enough. What were a few more details?

"I ‘gave’ it. He wanted it the other way around, but he could see I wasn't ready for that. He was very nice about it... Seemed to enjoy himself. Strange expressions, aren’t they? Giving, receiving. To me it felt like being taken from. Like being used. But then, I was giving nothing to him. Nothing of my true self. Regardless of how it happened, it was always going to feel like that. Lack of mutual feeling is the most abject pain.”

Sherlock’s heart ached to hear it, even as he felt grateful, and guilty, that Mycroft had reserved something for him alone.

Lack of mutual feeling. That is your fear. And thus it is mine. Our mutual fear - that the other doesn’t understand, doesn’t reciprocate - is how I know we are the same. We are as mutual as it gets, brother.

“What happened after that?”

Mycroft sighed philosophically.

“Oh, I continued to see him for a time. But I couldn’t… I couldn’t be with him physically. I couldn’t really let him see me…touch me… It felt appallingly wrong. So I ended it, and he called me all the names under the sun. It baffled me that he seemed to hate me so much over something as trivial as sex. I realise now how untrivial it is. He said I was cold. Unfeeling. All the rest. I suppose he was right.”

When I find him, I will have him slowly poisoned...

“I closed off that part of my life thereafter. Because no-one could ever satisfy me and it was pointless searching for anyone who could ever make me truly feel anything. Yet more reason to abandon sentiment, you know. Because everyone in the world is stupid but you. Everyone in the world is dull and ugly and utterly meaningless to me but you. I hope I have made that clear."

Mycroft placed a soft kiss to the top of his brother’s uncharacteristically sleek head, with its neat side-parting.

Sherlock nodded, and looked up with limpid eyes.

“You have. I hope I have made myself clear. That I desire only you.”
“I… I can’t quite believe… I'm not…,” Mycroft began to protest, feeling a bubbling anxiety in his chest.

Sherlock interrupted him, his voice raising in frustration.


He grabbed Mycroft’s hand and held it to his groin, his erection jumped under the touch and he almost moaned. Mycroft did not remove his hand, but left it there, motionless for now. He looked down at himself with an apologetic air, struggling to explain something.

_The rips in my jeans, the scars on my body, the torn fabric of my mind..._

“Damaged goods, brother mine,” was all he could manage to say.

Sherlock shifted up his brother’s body. He pressed his erection into the half-exposed thigh beneath, and held the worried face between his hands.

“Everyone on Earth is damaged goods, Mycroft,” he said, forcefully. “You're not special in that. But you are special to me. You’re in me already! You turn me on. Always have. You literally turned me on, brought me to life - intellectually, mentally. Made my brain fizz.”

Mycroft grimaced. “And I turned you off emotionally. Shut you down when it suited me.”

“Not fully,” insisted Sherlock, shaking his head. “You did that to yourself.”

“Not fully, as it happens,” came the wistful reply.

“Then can we find new ways of turning each other on, hmm? This way.”

Sherlock thrust his hips, feeling the warm, tingling drag of his cock along his brother’s leg through their clothes. Mycroft’s breathing was a little heavier now, but still he seemed diffident.

“Just because I told you a sob story, doesn’t mean… I don't want comforting.”

Sherlock looked down at him with fond exasperation.

“You need it. So do I. Why can’t we comfort each other? Why can’t sex be comfort and love, and everything else too? You have suffered enough, my brother. Enough for both of us. It has to end.”

Mycroft tilted his head almost comically, as though this thought had never occurred to him before.

Sherlock placed another, longer kiss to his brother’s lips, and this time it was returned with more certainty.

“Show me,” urged Sherlock. “Be the first to show me what I want, what I like.”

Mycroft opened his mouth to retort, but was interrupted by a low chuckle.

“Too late to protest. I've chosen you, Mycroft. You’re it.”

Sherlock, biting his lower lip, turned a heated, come-hither look onto him, and spoke huskily into the shell of his ear.

“I want you to touch me so much. I can’t stop thinking about it.”
Mycroft moaned in spite of himself, and his hips jerked upwards. He desperately plunged his mouth onto Sherlock’s, ravishing him with renewed passion. They rolled until Sherlock lay beneath him, breathless and aching.

“I want you to fuck me,” babbled Sherlock, ”and let me fuck you, and do everything, anything you want...!”

Between gasps and kisses, and frantic clutches of shaky hands, Mycroft managed a coherent sentence.

“Yes. God, yes. Don’t care if I’m going to hell,” he said, feeling a barrier come down within him.

_Tonight. Now._

"The mind is its own place and in itself, can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven," purred Sherlock, as his brother began to undress him.

Mycroft quirked an eyebrow at him as he removed the layers of eveningwear.

“Quite true. You quote Milton now, do you?”

“Apparently,” grinned Sherlock, reveling in his near-nakedness. “Wonder where I learned it. Lucifer is the most interesting character in Paradise Lost, don’t you think?”

Mycroft kissed his way down his brother’s bare torso, luminously pale under the skylight.

“Bringer of light,” he mused, as he kissed. “The angel who falls from the heavens for daring to challenge the authority of God. Also an astronomer’s name for the morning star, or Venus. A planet named for the Goddess of Love. Hmm. Sex. Love. Rebellion against stricture. Have we hit upon some universal mystery, little brother?”

Sherlock lifted his hips as his trousers were stripped from him.

“Only what humans have known since the dawn of time, Mycie: that the Devil has all the fun. Let’s Fall together, you and I,” he said, running his hand through his brother’s messy forelock with a teasing grin.

Mycroft stopped suddenly, his expression shifting from playful and sardonic, to profoundly sincere.

“I don’t want to fall, brother mine. I want to jump.”

He threw himself down and Sherlock gasped at the sheer unalloyed joy of Mycroft, uninhibited at last. Hot kisses were lavished over him, and his prick was stimulated on his brother’s clothed body.

“Off. Naked, now,” he gasped, tugging at the vest until it slid up over his brother’s head. He laughed as Mycroft attempted to wriggle out of his tight trousers, and they fell about as they eventually managed to disengage his feet from them.

When the giggling died down, Mycroft realised he was displaying himself unabashedly.

“Can you cope?” he said, indicating his form, a half-smile about his lips.

“Gorgeous, beautiful...”

Sherlock rolled over him and lost himself in the pleasure of looking, smelling, tasting, touching his brother uncensored, hearing their shared whimpers and moans in the air. He was ecstatic at being
given this precious access; wild with the paradoxical novelty and familiarity of his brother's body, and overwhelmed by the alchemical rightness of it.

He nosed all round his brother's clavicle, then under his ears, licking, biting at his throat as Mycroft keened in amazement. He pushed his way down, under his arm, into his armpit, inhaling the clean, masculine scent of him; linen and saline. He nibbled across his chest, flicking teasingly at his taught, peaked nipples, eliciting a distinct 'ooohh' that rumbled through his brother's chest and vibrated through his skull.

Desire pooled in his lower spine. His hips automatically canted forwards, seeking friction, seeking more. He rutted against his brother's leg as he explored, until he felt Mycroft's hands gripping his hair, grasping at him as he moved his head this way and that, pulling against him with just the right amount of resistance.

He nuzzled into his brother's damp groin, mouthing at the trail of hair at the very top of the public bone; at the soft skin in the join between pelvis and leg; at the soft velvet of his balls; and, finally, at the hard, jutting swell of his large, leaking cock. He breathed him in again and looked his fill, stupefied by it. A marvel. Thick, and sculpted, and just so...appealing. So artistic. He opened his mouth around the prominent, delicious-looking head, and Mycroft wailed as though he'd been burned.

Sherlock sucked at it gently, working his tongue around it, recalling everything that felt good when the positions had been reversed, cataloguing every sound Mycroft made and storing it in his long term memory so he would never, ever forget it. Licking at the fraenulum made Mycroft whine and jolt. Alternating with harder and softer pressure had a dramatic effect, the contrast keeping pleasure from becoming predictable. Twirling his tongue made him giggle and writhe, and lavish licks up and down drew a continuous moan.

He experimented with taking him deeper into his throat, gagging slightly until he was able to override the reflex for a few brief seconds. Mycroft made a high-pitched sound that made Sherlock resolve to become a very well-practiced expert at it. World class, in fact. He would be perfect at it, so that Mycroft would never become bored of it or want anyone else to do it.

When Mycroft felt he could not hold out against this agonising, dizzying pleasure any longer, he gently pushed his brother's head away, and lay back panting unevenly.

“Good?” husked Sherlock, a tiny bit of nervousness showing in his eyes.

Mycroft looked down with sheer incredulity.

“Good?! You have no right to be so good at that,” he chuckled between gasps.

Sherlock shrugged, delighted at the praise.

“Just seeing what works. Learning you.”

“Always so quick on the uptake.”

Mycroft urged his brother towards him and kissed him, tasting himself on those pouting lips, almost appalled by how much it turned him on. He moved until he was looming over Sherlock once more; an adoring look on his face, eyes dilated with desire.

“I want to do something... Trust me?” he whispered.

“Always.”
“Turn over.”

Sherlock turned, and Mycroft almost gasped at the way the light from above fell across his brother’s slim, sinuous form, highlighting the jut of his shoulder blade, the dip of his spine, and the soft, rolling swell of his bottom. Sherlock illuminated in lambent twilight; a sight to defeat even the most skilled of artists.

He straddled him, trembling at being permitted access to his bare flesh. He knew he would never be able to take this for granted. This would always feel miraculous.

He gently kissed his brother’s neck, brushing dark curls out of the way, then kissed along his shoulders, and down the long back which was typical of the Holmes genome.

Goosebumps raised on Sherlock’s skin as his brother’s warm, wet mouth worked its way down his spine with maddening slowness. His blood thrilled at the attention, the care which was lavished upon him, and the erotic potential of those fine lips, those pearly teeth which nibbled at his flesh and moved lower still.

He chuckled and hissed as Mycroft bit at one bottom cheek, and he bounced his forehead on his folded arms, squirming at the way it sent a prickling, tingling feeling up his back.

“Mycrof!” he protested weakly, giggling as the plumpest part of his bottom was bitten and then latched onto. Mycroft had grabbed a mouthful of flesh and was sucking hard upon it, causing him to gasp at the unexpected pleasure-pain. That was a new idea. Love-biting to the edge of agony. He hardened further still, and humped the mattress until his brother released him with a loud, suctioning pop.

He felt Mycroft’s smirk against him, and laughed at the little growl which met his ears.

“I have always wanted to do that,” admitted Mycroft, chuckling at his own absurdity.

“Not only that, surely?” giggled Sherlock, already loving the sensation of the bruise adorning his skin.

“No, as it happens…,” said Mycroft, low and throaty. “Want to make you ready. Want to do this.”

Sherlock barely had time to register that before his brother’s mouth was kissing at his backside again, this time more languidly, his tongue flickering out to caress his skin. He hummed even as he felt mildly embarrassed at being tended to like this. It was undoubtedly erotic, but some anxious corner of his mind worried about the unusual proximity.

Mycrof inhaled deeply and breathed out deliberately, causing his brother to shudder and moan. All Sherlock’s nerve-endings were enlivened, waking up after so long in hibernation. New neural pathways were being created in his brain as he accepted pleasure, accepted lust, and new sensory drive.

And then he felt a newer sensation still – Mycroft’s hands gently cupping the soft globes of his bottom and parting his cheeks, to reveal his most intimate flesh.

Mycroft moaned low in his chest.

A perfect, inviting rose.

“What are you…,” Sherlock murmured, turning his head lazily round.
Mycroft shushed him and kneaded his buttocks, massaging him back to relaxation. Sherlock bit his lip in combined trepidation and anticipation at the susurrating breath puffing over his cleft. He felt more exposed - more vulnerable than he had ever felt - and he was torn between pulling away by instinct and holding still to see where this went.

“Lock… I want to kiss you,” whispered Mycroft, rubbing his cheek against his brother’s smooth bottom.

The rough scraping of his day-old stubble only added to Sherlock’s heightened sensory haze. He nodded absently, tuning in to all the new feelings and rather overlooking the actual words being spoken.

Then he felt his cheeks being spread further, the sudden closeness of Mycroft’s hot breath, and the unmistakable press of moistened lips to his anus.

“Oh, fuck!” he groaned, eyebrows shooting to his hairline, mouth dropping open in astonishment. “Oh, my God, Mycroft!”

Mycroft chuckled against him, nosing at him with predatorial intent.

"Have I actually managed to shock you?” he husked, voice dark and dangerous.

"No. Yes! Shock me some more;” gasped Sherlock, still aghast at what he was allowing to happen.

He twitched and flinched as Mycroft’s tongue snaked out again and licked him there, running low from the very base of his balls up to his hole. Open-mouthed kisses were lavished upon his most sensitive flesh, and the tongue swirled round his rim, then probed inside him by degrees, going further and impossibly further. His hips lifted by instinct, pulling him upwards. He heard an uncanny noise, and realised it was the combined sound of his own hoarse cries and Mycroft’s low, bestial grunting. The deep sound penetrated into him as much as the questing tongue, and his prick leaked into the bedclothes as he was brought to the edge of lunacy by complete, and completely new, pleasure.

Mycroft was gasping compliments between hot, intimate kisses, his usual eloquence reduced to the basest kind of erotic exclamation.

“Oh God, oh God, you smell so good, you taste so, so…” His voice cracked with passion, almost as though he might cry, before he plunged his face back to his task, half-delirious on pheromones. Sherlock’s soft, virgin hole twitched under his mouth, and he bestowed his gentle ministrations, tickling and teasing, daring to show his brother just how much he wanted to consume him.

Sherlock’s head span at the incomprehensibility of the sensation; something he could not recall ever even imagining before. For all his stated confidence that he knew what he was getting into, evidently he had not watched the right kind of pornography, nor had the right kind of wet dreams for all these years. Because this... This was unbelievable. This was obscenity. Beautiful, inexpressible obscenity. A more apt expression of lust, and of purely loving trust, he could not imagine. His brother was licking him, devouring his opening greedily and wantonly, practically snogging him there with all the enthusiasm with which he had kissed his mouth. His entire being electrified at the very thought of Mycroft completely lost in this forbidden act; this sinful, wondrous, act of pure debauchery.

Sherlock thought he might die from it – from Mycroft, and from sexual pleasure, and from love. He loved Mycroft more with every filthy sin he committed, and for every obscene thing they would ever do together. He loved Mycroft with his entire mind, and his entire body.
“Please!” Sherlock thrust his hips, feeling the urgent need for penetration, so alien a desire but suddenly completely right. He could finish from this alone, but he didn’t want to. He wanted to come speared on his brother’s cock. “Please, please, I don’t… I want…”

Mycroft persisted, temporarily unable to intuit his brother while he was hedonistically indulging in his flesh.

Sherlock pressed himself flat to the bed and Mycroft took the hint.

“Now-now-now…” Sherlock was moaning into the mattress like a drunkard.

Mycroft turned his brother’s lax body over, and wiped spit from his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Oh, brother mine,” he breathed, stunned by Sherlock’s receptiveness. “Didn’t want to stop.”

Sherlock writhed and pushing his hips up, cock quivering into the air. He spread his legs and pulled his knees up. He felt open and ready, craving more. He smiled up at his brother with saucy intent.

“No. Never stop. Want you inside me.”

Mycroft felt almost faint. He pressed his brother’s knees up to his chest and circled a finger round his wet entrance, acting instinctively, barely recalling how he had done this before. It was irrelevant now. There was only Sherlock, and only tonight.

Sherlock’s eyes were screwed closed in ecstasy as his hole was teased on his brother’s fingertip.

Mycroft moved away with a reluctant air, unwilling to break the spell. “We’ll need something… I’ll go and…”

“No need.” Sherlock reached under the pillows and produced a pot of Vaseline, liberated from the bathroom cabinet.

Mycroft looked disbelievingly as Sherlock chucked it at him with a rakish wink.

“How presumptuous of you,” he quipped, oozing ironic disapproval to counterpoint his brother’s barefaced cheek.

Sherlock giggled with delight at his big brother’s willingness to play with him.

“How do you want me?” he said, spreading his arms out above him in open invitation.

“Oh, God, don’t ask things like that or I’ll never make it. Stay there, so I can see your face, and... It’ll be easier.”

Mycroft leaned down for a kiss, and then opened the Vaseline, dipping two fingers inside and warming the viscous substance between them.

Sherlock bit his lip and forced himself to breathe evenly, even as his heart thumped in his chest and his pulse raced in his neck. Mycroft caught the skittish look and stroked his thigh, petting him calm.

Sherlock could see he was in an equally restive state, but was forcing himself to assume control.

“Beautiful boy…,” intoned Mycroft, as he brought one hand up to stroke at his brother’s long, straining prick, and the other hand lower, to insinuate a slick finger up and down his perineum. Sherlock gasped and pulled his knees up further, offering himself to his lover’s touch.

The questing fingertip slipped carefully into his entrance and he whimpered as it pressed in by a few
degrees, up to the first knuckle. He quivered at the intrusion, and his inner muscles tensed, and then relaxed as he adjusted to the odd sensation. Mycroft read his brother’s expression, and judged him to be coping. Then he pushed in more, breathing heavily through his nose as he controlled every primal instinct to simply plunge in and take. He was almost horrified by his own wanting, and slowed to make sure he was in no danger of getting carried away.

Sherlock nodded frantically, urging him for more. More stretch, more depth.

Mycroft pushed his finger in further, feeling Sherlock’s muscle give way to him in two stages, until he was lodged inside the tight little passage. His vision swam as his brain registered the magnitude of what he was doing. Entering Sherlock; breaking through to smooth the way for his cock.

“All right? Mm?”

“Yeah, yeah,” said Sherlock, face half-twisted into a focused, ecstatic grin. “More, please…”

Mycroft pulled out slowly, scooped more lubricant, then started again, this time moving his finger in and out with steady, careful movements. When Sherlock was writhing and spreading his knees wider apart, he placed his middle finger alongside the first and pushed more firmly upwards.

Sherlock groaned louder, eyes flying open at the fuller feeling. The stretch of it was tolerable and he relaxed into it, letting Mycroft’s long, dextrous fingers push his need higher.

Mycroft’s face was a mask of frowning concentration as he crooked his two fingers upwards, seeking the nub within his brother’s body, searching for the anatomical centre of his pleasure. He found it, and Sherlock cried out at the sudden jolt of ‘yes’ that hit his bloodstream. His spine arched and his lower abdominals contracted at the unimaginable pleasure from deep inside his arse. His lower back ached with it, this new feeling - one that he’d known about theoretically but, it seemed, never truly believed in until now.

“Oh, God!” he exclaimed, as Mycroft stroked him inside again. His hips moved to forced more contact, his whole body flinching and jerking like a fish out of water.

Mycroft could barely stop himself from crowing with joy, with actual God-honest smugness, because he could do this. He could get this reaction from this beautiful man. He could give pleasure. Sherlock's first. Their first.

He leaned closer, pulling his brother in with one arm hooked around his leg, while the other splayed off to the side; he fucked him on his fingers, preparing him for more.

Sherlock was moaning with every stroke, eyes screwed shut as he chased his new addiction. He was begging quietly under his breath, seemingly unaware that his inner monologue was malfunctioning.

Mycroft slid his fingers out.

“Breathe in, sweetheart. Just a bit more, yes?”

“Please, please, oh, yes, please…”

Sherlock inhaled as Mycroft brought three fingers to his loosened hole.

“Breathe out…,” instructed Mycroft gently, as he breached him wider than ever.

“Fuck!” hissed Sherlock, as his breath left his body, and he seemed to be spread impossibly open. A mildly panicky feeling rose in his chest at the unknown extent of this sensation. The slight bruising
burn of it made him wince, but then the feeling of too-muchness tampered down to a manageable ache which ran right through him and made his prick twitch and drip with precome.

Mycroft pressed his brother's hips gently down where they had lifted up on instinct, as though to move away from the tantalising pleasure-pain.

“Sssh… Breathe with me. Do you want to stop?”

“Are you fucking joking?!” hissed Sherlock, appalled at the suggestion.

Mycroft emitted a gravelly laugh, and he moved his fingers slightly apart, scissoring wider to get him where he needed him to be.

“I should say, do you need to stop? We can stop here if you…”

“No! More,” Sherlock insisted. He raised an impish eyebrow, which reassured Mycroft that he was perfectly all right. “Take my innocence,” he said, giggling with endorphin-induced glee. “Take my virginity, brother. It’s yours.”

Mycroft snorted, undercutting his intention to appear suave and sophisticated.

“You are the very devil, Sherlock Holmes. I fear we have corrupted each other.”

“Oh, yes. We have. Let’s do a proper job of it, hm?!”

Mycroft hastened to prepare himself, rubbing warmed Vaseline onto his already-wet prick, mingling lubricant with his natural fluid. When he was slick, and harder than he could ever recall being in his entire life, he manoeuvred them so Sherlock’s legs were over his shoulders, and positioned their long bodies together so his groin met the spread cheeks of his brother’s backside.

He added more of the jellylike substance to the puckered aperture, noting with adoration how it twitched and pulsated at his touch.

With one hand, he guided the tip of his member to it, and Sherlock let out a tiny whimpering sound at the first touch of flesh upon flesh.

“I’ll be so careful… So careful…” Mycroft promised, as he pushed forward, sinking his swollen head inside. His brain span in madness. Hot, tight, wet. Sherlock was lubricious and unresisting, blooming open for him and urging him on with high-pitched whines.

Brothers in love; so desperate to satisfy and be satisfied.

“Oh, Mycroft!” breathed Sherlock, throwing his head back and gasping as he was pierced deeper. He winced when it became a bit more challenging, his muscles clamping slightly at the unfamiliar intrusion into his most intimate part.

“How’s that? All right?” Mycroft panted harshly, desperate to be completely taken inside, but terrified of hurting his partner.

“Mm-hm. More. All of it. Want all of you.”

Sherlock could think of nothing but that he wanted to be opened up and branded from the inside. But it was an intimidating prospect still, and it took some effort to control his breathing. Penetration was odd, he reflected. It was paradoxical; welcome and also worrying; because it was new, because it was so completely personal, so dependent on trust, and thus utterly terrifying. He wanted it, and he
feared it - it was exquisite and agonising and glorious all at once. He felt dizzy, almost disorientated as his body caught up with his mind, until they both agreed that it was everything they needed.

“Ow... Just hang on a bit...,” he said, between gritted teeth, trying to adjust to Mycroft’s girth as it stretched him. He had a brief absurd fancy that he might just rip apart, and dismissed it immediately before it could prevent him tapping into the animal enjoyment of it.

“Breathe, dearest,” panted Mycroft, sweating and straining as he repositioned himself with his hand, and added more grease to the base of his prick. “Think... you’re supposed to push down on me...”

Sherlock winced, but nodded and bore down from within, and then it was easier.

“Mm-hm...”

“Opening for me... darling, you’re...”

Sherlock’s arse blossomed wider, until Mycroft found the precise angle, and slid home as though he’d been doing it all his life.

Oh!

The Holmes brothers locked eyes the instant the connection was made. An imaginary spark flew between them as they completed a perfect circuit, body to body.

They groaned simultaneously, both staring at each other with awestruck shock.

Mycroft - completely engulfed, tightly gripped, surrounded by pressure and heat.

Sherlock - full, and spread apart, and coming undone at the seams.

Mycroft gave an experimental thrust, a tiny, gentle one. Sherlock gasped at it. He did it again, to the same effect. Then Sherlock pushed his hips down and groaned deep in his chest, nodding frantically.

Mycroft took the permission to heart. Unable to hold back any longer, he moved back and forth, stimulating his prick inside his brother’s body, fucking his love into him with deep, solid strokes. Giving and giving.

“Oh, God, my Lock. So hot. Oh, my... Tight...”

Sherlock squeaked a bit, unable to disguise the temporary difficulty of taking. But he loved the challenge of it immediately. The tension of the near-pain, the on-the-edge-of-pure-joy feeling, like being at the top of a rollercoaster, terrified and excited by the drop. The good-hurt, good-burn of it. And the fact it was Mycroft giving it to him.

“Hurting you?” ground out Mycroft, thrusting more slowly with careful rolls of his hips.

He admitted a thrill of arousal at the sight of Sherlock taking this discomfort for him; he was turned on by that stricken little look, by the high, desperate sounds he was pulling from him. He felt shamefully powerful, knowing he was creating a physical-mental challenge for this wondrous, complex, stunning creature beneath him. And he felt immediate guilt, momentarily thrown from enjoyment by a crucial, cruel little doubt.

Is this sadism? Am I enjoying his pain?

“Not hurting,” gasped Sherlock, as though answering the unspoken thought, not just the out-loud question. “Feels so full... Won’t break. Move! Move in me...,” he demanded in a hot whisper, biting
down on his lip at the riot of sensation thrumming through his gut.

Mycroft moved his hips faster now, pushing his cock in harder and sweating with the effort. Sherlock contracted his stomach and thrust up to meet him, pressing his heels into his brother’s shoulder blades for better control and deeper access. He had not believed this would come naturally to him, as people seemed to say sex came naturally to everyone. But it did.

They both shifted position, almost accidentally, and suddenly Sherlock was crying out as his prostate was stimulated again, pushed by the head of his brother’s prick.

“There?” gasped Mycroft, leaning heavily on his hands to thrust at the spongy flesh, teasing it and turning it on.

Sherlock was folded in on himself, trembling with tension. “Yes! There, there! Oh, my God.”

Mycroft’s head fell back and his back arched, and he fucked his brother with everything last ounce of his strength, feeling muscles working that had not worked for years, if ever; feeling pleasure like he had never known. And certainty, and confidence, and complete fulfilment.

He confronted his own inevitable addiction. Once would not be enough, after all. He would always crave more. He was insatiable for his brother, and he knew deep in his heart that he could not live without this dark magic. Could not live without Sherlock in body and soul ever again.

He looked down and saw the cloudless sky reflected in wide, sparkling blue eyes containing the infinite universe.

Brother. Mine.

And Sherlock gazed up at him madly, as though he were an apparition. Mycroft, outlined against the moon and bathed in silver light. A glowing archangel.

Brother. Mine.

Their souls flowed together harmoniously until they could barely tell where one began and the other ended. They moved together in perfect synchronicity, reading each other, balancing each other. Dancing. Fizzling sparks of desire shot through them; each man’s groin fired with throbbing heat; stomachs clenched in anticipation of release; solar plexuses heavy and heaving.

It was too much. Immense. Insurmountable. Yet they climbed higher and higher still, following the upward terrain of pleasure until there was nowhere left to go. They teetered on the edge, and Mycroft read the need in his brother’s eyes before he could articulate it. He grasped at Sherlock’s engorged penis, stripping it with a slippery hand in time with the slippery thrusts below, driving him towards climax.

Sherlock’s face, flushed and damp with sweat, contorted in an astonished expression; a fraught rictus of desperation as they scaled new heights of unimaginable joy together.

“Yes, yes. Fuck me! Gonna come, gonna come…,” he gabbled.

His hands grasped at his brother’s back, sliding and fluttering as his body spasmed. His wet channel clenched down upon the invading hardness, forcing it further in, clutching at it as though to seal it inside himself.

“Yes. Give it to me,” urged Mycroft, voice hoarse and broken with want.
And then Sherlock fell utterly silent. His head flew back, his mouth opened in an inaudible scream, and his body twisted as he came from somewhere deep within, shuddering himself to pieces. The intensity took him entirely by surprise. Unlike anything in the universe. Unreal. Unlimited.

His vision went black round the edges as his prick jolted and spurted a flood of semen over Mycroft’s hot fist. It gushed over his abdomen, spattering over his smooth pectorals, and even higher. Mycroft watched with heartfelt delight as some of it landed in his brother’s hair, which was now wildly curly from their exertions.

Mycroft grunted as his prick was almost excruciatingly compressed, and he rode out Sherlock’s orgasm, pushing deeper than ever to wrench it all from him.

His balls were tight and drawn up with pressure as the sensitive ridge of his prick was over-stimulated; his tip was hotter than he could stand, melting with pleasure. He looked down at his debauched boy, his Lock, covered in spunk, and wide-eyed with astonishment at the capabilities of his own body.

He was gazing up as if Mycroft were the answer to a riddle. As if he were the only answer he would ever need.

“Oh, there you are. There you are, Mycie,” he crooned, sounding dazed and faint, as he stared deep into his brother’s dilated, lunar-grey eyes. “Come inside me. Oh, please…”

“Yes. Christ…I’m… Coming, oh... Coming in you…”

“Yes. Yes, you are, brother mine…,” he whispered, with inexplicable reverence.

And then Mycroft was peaking, and falling. Jumping off the highest point of no return. His body contracted uncontrollably, and he was coming, grunting with every pulse, forcing his essence deep into his brother’s gut until he was completely empty. Spent. Done. All his love injected. All his passion howled to the moon.

Mycroft’s hips stayed locked until their bodies stilled, the tiny jerking aftershocks the only movement left to them. His muscles ached and he felt like he’d travelled a thousand miles without leaving the bed. Sherlock seemed to be somewhere else entirely. Orbiting the planet.

Panting heavily, he pulled away as gently as he could. Sherlock whined as their bodies lost contact, hissing through his teeth at the residual pain as they disengaged from each other.

Sherlock flopped back, replete and stunned. His body felt alive, zinging with adrenaline; although his backside felt raw, and tingly, and completely, wonderfully used.

He clapped his hands to his forehead, wanting to shout his joy to the heavens.

“Oh, fuck!” he called to the transparent ceiling above. High as the stars themselves. Awash with happy light. “Oh, fucking hell!”

He laughed wildly and pulled his brother down into a sweaty hug, completely hysterical. It was infectious and Mycroft caught it.

“Yes. Fuck, fuck, fuck,” he said through a wicked grin, feeling like an adolescent discovering the word for the first time, let alone the act itself.

“I love you. I love you,” Sherlock was chanting, prompting Mycroft to join in the chorus he had waited to hear forever.
“I love you. I love you.”

They collapsed into a cuddly heap. As Sherlock rolled to the side to place his head on his brother’s chest, he felt a warm flood descend from his backside, coating the backs of thighs, and he screwed his face up in comic disgust.

Mycroft took the hint, and rummaged for tissues by the side of the mattress, cleaning them both up carefully.

They giggled, as lovers giggle when they must deal with the inelegant realities of sex - of fluid, and hormones, and sweat, and sweet, salty, stickiness. So beautifully human. So miraculously animal. Evidence of love. Evidence of a permanent exchange. Gifts given and received, bodies given and taken. Opened up and sealed shut.

The air around them was a miasma of sex. They reeked of it.

Mycroft pulled the covers over them as they relaxed into their afterglow, overseen by the Pleiades, by Orion, and the Dog Star.

“I might have known you’d be noisy...,” chuckled Mycroft, nuzzling into Lock’s sweaty, semen-stained hair.

Sherlock snorted through a deep yawn.

“Noisy? I’ll bring your roof down when you do that again.”

“You think I’ll live long enough to do that again?!”

Sherlock slapped at him weakly.

"You’d better. I adore it. I love it. I want it all the time!"

"Ha, the novelty will wear off," said Mycroft, sardonically.

Sherlock caught the half-jest and refuted it.

"No. I never want to stop doing that with you."

"You say that now, because you're overwhelmed."

"It's better than being merely whelmed, don't you think? I.. I didn't know what it was, before.”

Sherlock sounded utterly starstruck. “Didn't care to know.”

Mycroft smiled. "And now you do?"

"Now... How could anyone live without it, Mycroft?" he asked, genuinely wondering at his former ignorance.

"You tell me," came the chuckling reply.

Silence fell, punctuated by steady, contented breathing, and, somewhere outside, an owl, and the whistling wind through the surrounding oak trees.

“Should be wrong. This,” muttered Mycroft, dozily.

Should it?
“It isn’t though,” whispered Sherlock, kissing his brother’s chest.

_The rightest feeling in the world._

“No. S’perfect,” agreed Mycroft, barely audible now.

“Mmm. You are.”

“You.”

Sherlock’s hand lifted to his brother’s cheek and he stroked it lightly.

“Sleep, my love.”

“My love.”

_My Sherlock. The stars and my Sherlock._

They fell together for the second time that night. Into sleep and each other’s dreams.

Chapter End Notes

I adore you all for reading. xx
Chapter Summary

The morning after the night before, a major turning point for them both. The boys are overcome by everything that has happened so far, and issues come pouring out. Lots of angst, until some healing begins.

Chapter Notes

Forgive me for taking them to the dark places, but they had to go there to get out the other side.

Mycroft woke, blinking against the pale winter sunlight filtering down through the ceiling, the fuzzy whiteness filling his field of vision as he emerged to consciousness. For a few seconds he could not recall where he was, but a glance to the side, where Sherlock lay curled towards him, his face a serene, pale mask of repose, brought the phenomenon of last night flooding back in a rush of vivid colour.

How they had sweated and writhed together; how they had moved and merged into one. He had wondered how a man who has never given himself to another could give, and now he had the answer. Freely. Honestly.

Blindly? Naively?

He smiled when his brother snuffled and shifted in his sleep, his long upturned nose wrinkling as though tickled by an invisible feather. Mycroft shifted inexorably closer to him, careful not to wake him, content to gaze upon him in the early morning silence.

How many more mornings like this?

Sherlock rolled onto his back, still asleep. One long arm flopped over his eyes, instinctively shielding them from the light above. The line of him, the lean flawlessness of him. It stopped Mycroft’s breath. Of course not an angel. Of course a mortal man, but he wondered if he could really tell the difference. Blood of his blood. Flesh of his flesh. Flesh he had partaken of so vigorously by the light of the moon, with all the words he wanted to hear and say strewn about them like stardust.

Last night. It had been as close to perfection as anything he had known. Beyond imagining. So utterly, dangerously right. So mutual. And how simple it had seemed, in the enchanted evening. How easy and certain. Exactly like the sort of thing you’d bargain away your soul for, and to hell with the devil’s claim. Exactly like hubris, carrying nemesis in its wake.

The sudden possibility that this simply could not work hit him like a train at full speed, and in an instant he was terrified. Not that Sherlock would reject him now. Not in this moment. But at some future moment? When he realised he had taken on someone who could not give him everything he needed.
When Sherlock broke even further through his own physical reticence, he would have options, out there in the world of other people. Now that Sherlock had had his long-suppressed desire returned to him, he would see Mycroft for what he was. An ageing husk, who no longer knew how to keep a lid on his feelings, whose body was a wreckage. A jealous, needy, self-pitying groundling, in love with a bright, shooting star.

Hyperion to a satyr. The novelty will wear off.

To be disappointing to his brother, now or later, would be to be heartbroken all over again. To see him unsatisfied, yearning for more than he could give, would finish him. The pain of Sherlock leaving would, he knew, be death. But worse still would be the pain of having him stay, only to be let down.

Would it have been better to have left all that he had said unsaid? Better not to have reached for this at all? Perhaps not. But he saw how high he had climbed, and he feared the inevitable drop.

Doubt and certainty vied for primacy in his body, a confused concoction which settled like poison in his stomach, agonising and acidic.

He could not tear himself away now. That much he knew. So he vowed only that he would make his brother as happy as he could, for as long as he could, until their time was done, to offset the abominable selfishness that kept him longing for something he didn’t deserve. Beyond that, there was nothing.

Sherlock stirred and groaned, stretching his arms in the air and yawning to life. He grinned into space as he remembered where they were, and what had happened. He span over and pulled his brother into an embrace, barely registering the perturbed look upon his brow.

He only knew that Mycroft had not gone. Mycroft had taken him, and stayed in his bed.

“Good morning,” he rumbled, sighing with contentment at the warmth of his brother’s soft skin. He leaned in for a kiss, and Mycroft clasped at his back, pulling him closer.

Sherlock felt as though he would never stop smiling. His face seemed permanently stretched into a wide grin. It was still infectious, and Mycroft could not help but return it, drawing a veil over his earlier horrific thoughts.

“How are you feeling?” Mycroft asked.

Sherlock looked off to the side as though considering it.

“Mm. Like something’s missing… Oh, yes, it’s my purity. Ha.”

He nudged his brother and giggled absurdly, still high on post-orgasmic hormones, it seemed.

Mycroft grimaced with mock-disapproval.

“Oh, for goodness’ sake.”

Sherlock leaned up on his elbow to regard him, raking his fingers idly down his brother’s scarred chest as he spoke with an air of delightful suggestiveness.

“In truth, I can still feel where you’ve been. I can feel you inside me. It’s quite the buzz, I can tell you. Aches wonderfully.”
Mycroft snorted with mild embarrassment, and Sherlock traced the pink flush at his throat with a loose hand.

“I am unburdened by virginity, brother! I feel lighter. I feel…satisfied, and still ravenous because of that same satisfaction. Rather like smoking. And other substances we won’t refer to.”

He flopped back with a contented sigh.

“Very Wildean of you,” said Mycroft, dryly.

“If you had injected me with your come sooner, I may never have picked up a needle, brother.”

Mycroft slapped at his backside in outrage at this utterly distasteful statement, eliciting only proud giggles and squeals of pleasure. Sherlock settled against him as he tutted in amused disgruntlement.

“But seriously, brother mine - what an interesting set of paradoxes this lovemaking business brings to light,” said Sherlock, yawning slightly. “I feel renewed, yet more myself than I ever have.”

“Hm. Well, I am pleased the experience has expanded your mind as well as your...”

Mycroft pursed his lips and raised an eyebrow in a little display of camp innuendo which made Sherlock laugh uproariously, and roll on top of him.

“I adore it when you’re vulgar!”

“I am never vulgar,” said Mycroft, playing at hauteur.

Sherlock lay heavily on him and kissed him teasingly. Mycroft felt his brother's hardness upon his thigh, and his own responded in kind.

“Yes, you are,” riposted Sherlock, humping against him slightly. “You are very vulgar now. How are you feeling?”

Mycroft stroked his hands up and down his brother’s back, and exhaled a somewhat shaky breath.

“I am feeling… Lucky,” he said, truthfully.

Undeserving, overwhelmed, overjoyed, petrified.

Sherlock made a disgusted face.

“Lucky?! Ugh, how ghastly. Do better.”

“I am feeling… I am just feeling.” Mycroft shrugged, and smiled wryly up at his brother’s taunting expression.

“Mm. All right. Well, I’ll say it, even if you won’t. I am happy, brother. Fuck, wait!”

Sherlock tensed suddenly, pulling upright as though on high alert. He seemed to be listening out for something with grave concern.

Mycroft frowned.

“What?”

Sherlock shook his head, and breathed a theatrical sigh of relief.
“No, no, the sky has not fallen in. It seems it might be safe to utter the word out loud after all.”

Mycroft pounced upon him again, making his brother howl as he was tickled and pinched for the teasing.

“You know me too well. Happy,” said Mycroft, contemplatively, when they lay still once more. “Yes. Of course I am happy.”

It was impossible to deny, even if it wasn’t the complete truth. Happiness, more-than-happiness, existed in him, even if he didn’t know what to do with it and mourned its absence in advance.

Sherlock’s expression shifted mercurially from mischievous to earnest, and he leaned down for another kiss. They rolled together, moaning slightly at each other’s body heat, thrusting lazily and revelling in their morning-after sensations. Mycroft lost himself in a haze of pleasure once more, gradually feeling more solid, and less up in the air the longer he held his brother in his arms. This was better. If he could keep this, if he could never leave this room, he would never worry again.

When they broke away, he saw desire in Sherlock’s face, and felt the damp evidence of it against him.

“Thank you for being my first,” said Sherlock, heatedly. “Would you care to be my second as well?”

Mycroft chuckled in spite of himself.

“Darling, I will be however many you wish me to be. I’m only sorry that....”

Sherlock frowned tolerantly. “What are you apologising for now, dear idiot?”

“I’m sorry you weren’t my first too,” said Mycroft, quietly, stroking his arm.

Sherlock looked at him all-too-knowingly.

More guilt for you, Mycie. Dear me. Still, it is early days for us. You will learn.

“Don’t be ridiculous, brother. What if we’d both been hopelessly inexperienced? At least one of us is functional.”

Mycroft raised a sardonic eyebrow.

“Sherlock, neither of us is functional.”

“No, we’re weirdos,” he chuckled, delighted and rather proud.

“Undoubtedly.”

“The world needs weirdos.”

“Someone should really tell them.”

Mycroft’s face fell a little.

“I do regret that I can’t say you were my first, Lock. My God, I wanted to say that so much,” he said, his voice tightening at the end.

Sherlock placed a hand upon his brother’s cheek and gazed down at him with fondness.
“Mycie. Mycie, stop. It doesn’t matter as much as you think it does. But… I mean, you have never… Well, I don’t know how you feel about it. Do you hate the idea? Of me giving to you. Because that would be a first, wouldn’t it? We could have that.”

Mycroft blinked. “Yes… I hadn’t even… Yes.”

“Do you want to, with me?” whispered Sherlock, stroking him gently.

Mycroft did all he could to bite down the helpless groan that sprang to his throat.

“I find it hard to think of anything I want more in the world. But perhaps…”

“Not at this precise moment?” finished Sherlock, perceptively. “All right. When you’re ready. Don’t overthink it. I am keen for experience, brother mine.”

Mycroft smiled gratefully. “As am I. I shall do my best to supply it.”

“But for now…I really do think something ought to be done… About this.”

Sherlock fell back and whipped the duvet off to expose their mutual nakedness. Mycroft tutted at him and fought to retrieve the covers, shivering at the sudden draught.

“It won’t last if you let all the cold air in! Though I admit, it is troublesome,” he said, placing his hand to the base of his thick morning erection, smirking provocatively.

Sherlock huddled next to him and wrapped them both in the duvet, pulling it over their heads to make a tent. He hooked a leg around his brother’s.

“Looks it,” he husked. “So is this.” He glanced down and gripped at his own prick.

“What do you want, dearest?”

“Show me how you touch it,” whispered Sherlock, hotly. “Show me. I want to know. How hard you squeeze it, and how fast. When you slow down, when you go gently. What your fingers do and where. Show me. I want to watch you, as I used to watch you experimenting on yourself. It thrilled me.”

Mycroft’s heart pounded at his brother’s intense entreaty. Sherlock demanding that he perform for him. His prick twitched against his belly at the very thought and he squeezed himself, biting his lip at his own sensitivity.

“Thrilled you? Did it?”

Sherlock moved down his brother’s body to look his fill, loving the intimacy of the cocoon-like covering, closing them in and concealing them from the cold light of day.

“God, yes,” he said, sincerely. “I think you appeared in a great number of my dreams, doing it. Your masturbatory explorations were the cause of my teenaged nocturnal emissions.”

Mycroft tutted with fond despair.

“You're determined to shock me white-haired, aren't you?” he reprimanded.

Sherlock smirked. “No, I much prefer your natural red. Show me,” he said, placing his hand upon Mycroft’s as it rested on his erect penis.
Mycroft could barely bring himself to blush at the scrutiny. It was too exciting an offer to refuse.

“You too. Show me,” he said, sliding his hand upwards and beginning to firmly stroke himself.

Sherlock’s hand followed the movements as Mycroft masturbated himself.

“Um. I don’t really do it. I mean, rarely. Not for pleasure so much as practicality. I let it happen in my sleep, when it happens at all.”

Mycroft breathed through his nose and his eyes fluttered as his desire began to slowly build.

“That was then. Could you try for me? Touch yourself for me…,” he pleaded, panting harder as he worked his hand over his leaking tip.

Sherlock groaned and nodded, laying sidelong next to Mycroft as he pleasured himself.

“No, no,” said Mycroft, dazedly, “Here. Above me.”

Sherlock moved hastily to straddle his brother’s thighs, bringing the bedclothes with him. The duvet slid half off his body, but neither man cared as they gazed upon each other in self-imposed extremity. Mycroft held his free hand up, and Sherlock took it, interlacing their fingers. With his other hand he slowly stripped his cock in time with his brother’s movements.

They held each other’s gaze as they performed, a little shyness entering their faces as moments of self-consciousness hit throughout this latest unfamiliar familiarity.

They were huffing and straining together, connected at the hand, arms moving, touching themselves until it felt like they were touching each other. Their pale faces flushed with heat, and the chill of the room ebbed away as they exerted themselves.

Sherlock took in every new sight, noting all the data available to him: how Mycroft liked to tease at the ridge where his shaft met his crown; how he started out slow and worked his way to faster motion, and used his thumb to coax droplets from his slit. How he sometimes pinched at the head of his cock with finger and thumb, focusing all his attention on his frenulum, and how his palm slipped over his glans afterwards. Sherlock matched him stroke for stroke, falling into rhythm, copying him as though to learn how it was done.

Mycroft was panting hard, turned on beyond reason by the sight of his brother’s emulation, and the hungry, faraway look on his face as he granted himself this rare pleasure.

He felt crisis approaching, and his hand moved faster, rubbing frictively just at the right spot, until he could no longer hold back.

“Yes,” he gasped, in warning. “Now, I’m…now!” His body pulled upwards as he contracted with a small cry; orgasm washed through him, making his legs shake and his toes pull back. His cock pulsed and spent over his hand, spattering his jerking stomach in thick white streaks.

Sherlock held his hand in a vicelike grip, eyes dilated wide at the sight of Mycroft, moaning and coming over himself. He let himself follow, and groaned loudly that he was coming, coming… Pleasure engulfed him entirely and he juddered as his prick twitched in his hand. Blood rushed in his ears and his semen rained hotly upon his brother’s belly. Their combined essence mingled, painted across his brother’s pinkened skin in messy abstract.

They recovered their breath, glancing at each other with flirtatious, conspiratorial grins.
“Another first,” yawned Sherlock, with faux casualness. He flopped down beside his brother and chuckled low in his chest.

Mycroft joined him in the afterglow, wondering at his brother’s former physical deprivation. Wondering partly at his own.

“You’re made for pleasure, Lock,” he said, in a man-of-the-world sort of way. “You are a little sensualist at heart. Disguised as a monk.”

Sherlock turned to him with a playful scowl.

“And you’re an ascetic disguised as an aesthete.”

“Very clever.”

“I am, yes.”

“Clever enough to find the tissues?”

Sherlock rolled his eyes and rummaged around to find the box they had discarded last night.

They cleaned themselves up, and lay spooning and kissing until they dozed off again.

When they woke later in the morning, they showered together, finding themselves unable to part. Their shared euphoria, even with the underlying fear lodged deep within Mycroft’s breast, was irresistible. It bound them to each other magnetically. They washed each other with care, tending to each other, acting upon deep, visceral instinct; they lingered under the warm water and revelled in their warm, wet flesh; every touch across hard plane or soft curve a benediction.

If their bond had been close the night before, now they had become inseparable, and could not bear to be out of each other’s sight.

They breakfasted together, casting knowing looks across the table, as couples who have romped disgracefully the night before are wont to do.

“What would you like to do today?” asked Mycroft.

“I should like to take you to bed and roger you senseless. To return the favour, you understand.”

Mycroft choked on his tea.

“It wasn’t a favour,” he said, rather avoiding the main point.

“Well, to reciprocate, then. To give you the pleasure you gave me. I want you to have it.”

“Mm. And failing that in the immediate present?”

Sherlock caught the reticence.

“Anything you like.”

“A walk round the grounds?”

Sherlock shrugged.

“All right. It looks like very unpromising weather for a walk, but I suppose fresh air would blow
away some cobwebs."

“Good for the mind, a bracing walk.”

“If you say so. But then I want warming up. I want to lounge on a chaise with your hand in my hair, while you listen to the gramophone and I read some old medieval nonsense from the library. And then I want you in bed, and I don’t much care who does what, as long as we do something.”

“I see soppy romance has taken root.”

“You planted it deep inside me when you deflowered me, brother.”

Mycroft set down his teacup with a clink.

“Your metaphors are simply disgusting.”

“Aren’t they?” grinned Sherlock, with a cheeky wink. "You reap what you sow."

They cleared away their breakfast things, then wrapped themselves in coats and scarves, woollen gloves and galoshes, ready to take the air.

Outside the ground was solid with frost, and the slate-grey sky weighted down with undropped precipitation. The air was fiercely dry-cold, enough to pinch at their faces and cause them to hunker down inside their pulled up collars.

They walked briskly to warm up, looking around to check for overseers. There were none. The grounds were secluded, offering complete privacy in the bleak magic of a midwinter afternoon. Sherlock slipped his gloved hand in Mycroft’s, and they slowed their pace, indulging in an act so normal and yet so alien to them.

“Would you curse me for a fool if I told you I liked holding your hand?” asked Mycroft, wryly.

“Yes, yes, I certainly would.”

“I like holding your hand, Lock.”

“You’re a fool and I curse you.”

“Thank you.”

Companionable silence fell, and the gentle trudging sent them both into a meditative state. Sherlock mused idly on all that had passed in the last few days, and a question appeared in his mind out of nowhere. One he needed an answer to, though he hesitated to say the words. Yet their entire agreement, the entire point of these days were to leave no stone unturned between them. He took a breath and spoke, wincing inwardly at what he was about to say.

“May I asked you something? About Sherrinford?”

The word fell like a lead weight. He felt his brother flinch through his fingers.

“I understand if you’d rather not. I’m sorry to bring it up. It just…it crossed my mind. It’s this infernal cold air. One cannot have such thoughts in high summer.”

Mycroft sighed heavily and shook his head.

“No. Ask. You must ask. Anything you want to know, you must ask.”
“She said…” He failed to name their sister, as though to do so would be to summon her from the grave.

“When she saw me, she said, ‘You’ve had sex’.”

Mycroft looked across to him curiously.

“Yes. She did.”

Sherlock’s forehead creased with a small frown. “But I hadn’t.”

“No. I didn’t know that at the time,” said Mycroft, as though that explained something.

"Why did she say that to me?"

Mycroft’s voice was grim.

"She didn’t say it to you. It was meant for my ears. A taunt. She knew what was happening between us before I did."

Sherlock ducked his head. Of course she did. He was the only oblivious Holmes sibling.

“She knew how I felt,” continued Mycroft, as they strolled along hand in hand. He owed his brother as much truth as he could give, but he still resented speaking of this in a picturesque pastoral scene, on what he had hoped would be a romantic walk.

“She knew what I wanted from you. She knew everything, except who to be jealous of, I think. She couldn’t decide if she wanted my attention or yours. She used the information of my love for you to get what she wanted in the facility. I can’t blame her for that. It was all the ammunition she really had, but it was enough to secure our - my - fate.”

He took a breath and his voice became distant.

“Five minutes alone with that man…or else the world discovers what there is to be discovered. Just five minutes, or a message goes out, and you would be taken from me. I was stupid enough to give her what she wanted. But it wasn’t a choice, with your life in the balance. Either way, however she imagined it turning out, she only wanted one brother, not two. Either you would be dead, and I would forever be in hell. Or you would kill me for her.”

“I wouldn’t have.”

Mycroft glanced sidelong, ever grateful for that statement.

“If you had… She would have opened your memories like an oyster. She would have given you all of it, all too late, and twisted it to suit her ends. You would have been her creature forever. But at least you would have stayed alive. So I made my decision, hoping for the best worst outcome. Perhaps that was selfish. After all, I would have been put out of my misery, and you would have been left to be tormented by her…”

Sherlock halted instantly, pulling on his brother’s hand.

“Stop. Selfish? Can’t do right for doing wrong, can you? You are not a good judge of your own character, Mycroft, and I forbid you from attempting it. It was an impossible puzzle with no right answer.”

“Perhaps. Please do forbid me that. I should like to live without my own judgement.”
“None of it matters now,” said Sherlock, firmly. "None of what you feared came to pass. Here we are, brother. Alive and well, and walking together. Our sister is gone. As Siger is gone,” he added, meaningfully.

Mycroft’s jaw clenched momentarily.

“The dead are never gone,” he said, a sharpness in his tone.

“Not if you continue to hold bloody séances for them,” Sherlock muttered.

“What do you mean by that?” Mycroft’s voice was terse now. “That I ought not to think upon them at all? That their words and deeds are so easily erased?”

Fuck.

Sherlock bristled with irritation at the tone, even as he regretted stepping into this minefield. They walked on.

“No. I agree that they cast long shadows from the past. But if you dwell in shadows for too long, you obscure the future. I have no taste for fatalistic endings. Samarra be damned.”

“You can still think that, can you?” said Mycroft, a hint of sarcasm, bitter as the whistling wind, underlying it.

“I can and I do,” said Sherlock with defiance.

“Tell that to John Watson.”

Mycroft bit his tongue as he said it, horrified, as the conversation spiralled out of his control, propelled by a confusion of feelings, conscious and unconscious.

A bright spark of anger ignited in Sherlock’s chest and he stopped short.

“I already have! And he’s moved on, though he’s suffered as much as any of us. You are the only one I have yet to convince. Or are you really going to throw away so much progress just to indulge your comforting pessimism? And it’s not just your own future you obscure - it’s mine now too.”

“Is it? Is that what you intend, a future?” said Mycroft, before he could stop himself. “Or will you walk out of here the moment something more exciting happens? How long before you tire of this new addiction? How long before you find a longer-lasting high?”

Sherlock looked like he’d been slapped, and Mycroft felt sick to his stomach.

“Oh, my God,” said Sherlock, quivering with quiet rage. “You are really trying, aren’t you? I’ll give you that. You really are trying to ruin this. It barely took you a day.”

He spun on his heel and stormed to the house. Mycroft followed under a pall, utterly disoriented by the turn of mood. How haphazardly they’d careened from glowing affection to petulant snappishness, and on to wounding words, as though the suddenness of their transition from brothers to lovers had made them more volatile than ever.

Things seemed so much less certain than they had last night, and it was deeply unsettling. He foresaw the collapse of it all and despaired.

As he walked back in through the kitchen entrance, laden with gloom, Sherlock accosted him immediately, unable to leave things half-said now. He was riled and ready for conflict, ready to say
every single thing, to test this love to see if it was true after all and not just a delusion.

"What is it, Mycroft. Hm? You uttered the curse word ‘happy’ and now revenge is upon you? You have to chip away at it already? Am I simply not good enough for you after all? Or is it because I offered to bugger you. Is that what’s got you so upset? You don’t want to reverse a lifetime’s worth of power over me for the sake of a quick fuck?! Do you find it degrading? Do you think you’ve degraded me already by taking what I wanted to give you?"

"Don’t be absurd! Not good enough for me? How could you say that?"

“So what then? What else can one logically conclude?” challenged Sherlock.

Mycroft struggled to find words. "Emotions aren't logical!" he burst out.

Sherlock stepped towards him, pointing accusingly.

"Exactly! From your own mouth. Emotions are not logical. They should not keep you from things you truly want. If you truly want me, nothing should hold you back. And you are holding back, even after last night, aren't you?"

Mycroft ran a hand through his hair and grimaced awkwardly.

"It's... It's all holding me back. I can't...not hear him!” he exclaimed.

Sherlock closed his eyes wearily.

"Siger. Jesus Christ."

“I’m sorry,” offered Mycroft, in a clipped tone.

Sherlock folded his arms, unimpressed. “I know you are. What can’t you stop hearing, Mycroft? I thought we were done with him.”

“Done? I don’t know what it would take to be done with him. I don’t know how to unhear him, brother. The things he would say to me...”

“You don’t have to listen.”

“He is loud! In my head. He was so certain about the things he said. You can’t expect me to have undone them all, just because I love you! He got to me before you did. How could I not be convinced by everything he told me?! Useless, stupid, fat nancyboy; effeminate, spineless, limp-wristed little Mummy's boy, what a waste, what a disappointment,” he spat, in a voice not his own.

"Those things aren't real, they aren't true! What brand of masculinity do you aspire to, Mycroft? Let us both be limp-wristed little Mummy's boys together. To hell with it. It's not to our shame. We can both kill a man at ten paces. Though perhaps we ought to be more ashamed of that than we are. As for the rest, it is simply sadism, turned masochism inside your head. Stop believing it!"

Mycroft slumped into a chair at the kitchen table, leaning on his elbows, grasping his head in both hands.

"I just... It is so hard, so hard to deprogramme."

"So you just let him win now, do you?!" demanded Sherlock, impatient and pained to see his brother so defeated again.
“Of course not. I know it’s irrational,” he replied, defensive and brittle.

Sherlock sighed and sat down, his expression softening.

“Not irrational, exactly. Wrong. But based on something real enough. Cruelty is real enough.”

Mycroft nodded, and they fell back in their seats, their voices lowered and less histrionic.

"I know why he said it all. Shame. Grief. To add to his general instability. Siger lost someone, you know.”

Sherlock tilted his head in curiosity and Mycroft nodded his confirmation.

“A young man from the service, during the war. A more-than friend. I can’t imagine it, personally, but all indications point to him loving the man. Romantically. Sexually. Or at least, he was infatuated. Siger, loving someone other than himself. It is hard to comprehend.”

Sherlock found it impossible.

"You don't think he loved Mummy?"

Mycroft shrugged.

"He worshipped her for a goddess. Used her as a talisman, perhaps. Even saw her as a mother for himself, hence his horror of us and our need of her."

"What happened to this young more-than friend?" asked Sherlock, picking at his nails for something to do, to avoid the anguish of going over the past with the brother who seemed not to be able to escape it.

"Bombed to pieces in the Café de Paris in 1941,” said Mycroft, blandly. “I only discovered that a few years ago. There were letters. Very ardent letters. Nothing too explicit, but clear enough.”

"Ah."

"Perhaps it tipped him over the edge. I don't know. Of course he would transfer his pain to me. The pain of grief, and the self-loathing for his proclivities in the first place. Life was hard enough back then, for men of his persuasion, or whatever leanings he had. Clever and condemned. Deviant, and doomed."

"Is that what you think we are?"

Mycroft was caught out by the question.

“I… I don’t know. I hope not.”

Sherlock shook his head dejectedly. “Hope. But such little faith. It still is hard, for men of ‘our persuasion’, isn't it? Despite the changing social mores. People cope."

"Our persuasion? Brothers?” scoffed Mycroft, bitterly. “Our persuasion will never be subject to a paradigm shift. The love that really dare not speak its name, and never will."

Sherlock looked sharply at him. "What of it? I only wish to speak it to you. What do we care?"

“No, I know,” conceded Mycroft. “I do not care for anyone’s opinion but yours.”
“You seem to care rather too much for Siger’s opinion.”

“I…”

Mycroft huffed and sighed expansively, trying to formulate some adequate response. Sherlock cut him off.

“What would Uncle Rudy make of it, do you think?” he asked, changing tack. Because there was more to the Holmes lineage than doomed deviation, and he wished to remind his brother of the Uncle that made him smile, and demonstrate to him that pain was not inevitable. A flicker of affection crossed Mycroft’s face, and he relaxed just a tiny bit.

“Oh, Rudy. Rudy would… We could never tell him, just in case he blurted it out in the foyer of some grand hotel on the continent. Though I suppose no-one would pay him any heed, really.”

“I say tell him,” said Sherlock, breezily. “It would be hilarious. Give the old boy a thrill in his final act. We could double date with him and his teenage boyfriend.”

“I daresay he would find it easy to adjust to, libertine that he is.” Mycroft gave a wistful little chuckle.

“Well, you did say naughtiness ran in the family. How could he possibly be related to our sire?” wondered Sherlock aloud.

Mycroft's face fell to seriousness and he nodded to himself. "Siger and Rudy. Two sides of the same coin. Brothers of a certain persuasion. Though I am certain they were not embroiled as we are."

That did not bear thinking about.

"I imagine not,” said Sherlock, seeing a little more clearly what was at the heart of his brother’s turmoil. “But they are... what? Opposites?"

Or fairground mirrors?

Mycroft looked up at the ceiling and swallowed.

"Rudy had all the lightness, Siger all the darkness."

The inference was plain.

Is that what you see when you look at us?

Sherlock shook his head with certainty, to correct the false logic before it could take hold.

"They aren’t us, Mycroft. You do know that, don’t you? Neither of us is wholly dark or light. It is not as simplistic as your fears might wish you to believe. We are not opposites of each other, nor are we versions of those who came before us. I am not Rudy, you are not Siger. We forge our own path. Nature loads the gun, but nurture pulls the trigger, brother. We are not our family. We are of them, yes. But we are not them, nor destined to become them.”

"Are we not?" said Mycroft, with a cynical, defeatist expression which Sherlock wanted to smack from his face.

Sherlock bristled, and his jaw clenched in irritation. He felt utterly sabotaged, and the injustice of it roiled in his blood. To see Mycroft reduced to this again, when mere hours ago he had laughed and writhed in his arms, and howled out his joy - it pierced his heart like a bullet.
"If you choose to, Mycroft, you will become whoever makes you most miserable," he said, flatly.

Mycroft froze.

“That’s an appalling thing to say.”

Sherlock laughed, a hollow sound. “It is. And yet you say it so often to yourself, don’t you?”

Mycroft slammed the table with his fist. “Do not try to deduce me, brother mine!”

“I don’t need to,” sneered Sherlock. “You’ve told me everything already.”

“Oh yes, and you’ve told me everything too, haven’t you? About what you like and what I can’t give you!”

Sherlock looked at him with angry bafflement. “What?”

“I can’t give you pain, Sherlock,” he said, voice laden with bitterness and resentment.

"What?" breathed Sherlock, stunned at this out-of-the-blue statement.

Mycroft’s voice croaked as he spoke, and he leaned back in his chair, shaking his head, fighting sudden tears.

“Sexually. I can’t do it.”

“Why are you saying this now? Did I ever say you had to?”

"It’s part of you," said Mycroft, matter-of-factly.

"And? I won’t impose it on you. I would never force you to do something you hated. Especially not something that...might trigger something for you..."

Mycroft laughed humourlessly.

"So, what, you’ll go and pay for it? You’ll find The Woman and let her have that part of you? I’d rather you walk out than share a single inch of you with anyone! I’m a selfish bastard, I know. I can’t see how I can give you what you need, but I don’t want you having it from anyone else, not ever!"

Sherlock was appalled, not only for himself. He felt every insecurity, every wave of hurt emanating from his brother. But, above all, he was frankly insulted.

"Is that why you’re finding reasons… It is about sex after all? Don't do this. I won't do anything with anyone else. Why would I want to?! I don’t want anyone else and I never will. Mycroft, you’re making this all so much more complicated than it has to be. We haven't even talked about it properly. We haven't discussed anything. We’ve barely been together five minutes! We'll resolve it somehow."

But Mycroft was not in the mood to be consoled or comforted with sense. He was flying away with his darkest imaginings and his worst fears.

"It's irreconcilable!" he all but wailed. “I am pathologically averse to causing you pain, because... And you are simply wired in a way that means it is essential to you.”

Sherlock processed every word. There were grains of truth. But grains of truth were not the whole truth. He went to speak, but Mycroft cut him off, ranting now, driving himself into a frenzy.
“I love you so bloody much, so much that I can’t have you living your life only partially fulfilled because of my limitations! Perhaps this is it, the ultimate cruelty. Our punishment for this...incest, for this aberrant love. It is that we shall never fully satisfy each other - you're too beautiful for me and you need stimulation that makes me feel sick. Not because I think you’re sick, I don't mean that. But I can't be Siger! I can't enjoy hurting you!” he shouted, pushing himself away from the table with a violent shove, and standing away from it as though from a venomous snake.

Too beautiful for you?

Sherlock felt the infuriating prickling of tears behind his eyes, and the heavy, constricting sensation of grief in his throat. Mycroft, in so much agony, because of him, because of lies.

"You see, we agree after all. Of course you can’t be Siger – because you are not him! We are not talking about the same thing, anyway. Pain is not violence. You never will be, never could be violent. It’s not in you. I’m not asking you to be anyone other than yourself,” he said, almost pleadingly.

Mycroft was standing adrift in the middle of the room, his hands clenching and unclenching, a desperate, lost expression on his face.

“Nor I you. And so there will always be part of you unsatisfied by me. Or perhaps you will hate me all over again for yet another failure to meet your needs,” he said, with a despair so complete it felt fatal.

Sherlock held his hands up, shaking his head frantically, his stomach lurching with nausea.

“You're making too much of it. You don't understand – “

“I can’t hurt you to please you,” said Mycroft, blankly.

Sherlock glared at him in rage. To not even be given a chance to explain, to be misunderstood, to have assumptions made, and facts twisted to suit a dark agenda, was simply intolerable, and it filled him with sharp, fierce ire. He hated it all. Hated the complexity of this, hated emotions, hated the fear in his brother’s eyes, hated Siger above all hatreds. He hated everything but Mycroft, who nevertheless seemed determined to sink the ship and go down with it.

Home truths. He had been brought here for home truths. Perhaps it was time for his brother to hear a few.

Sherlock stood slowly, almost menacingly.

“You won't hurt me for consensual pleasure, despite understanding nothing about that at all. Oh, but you’ll hurt me with this nonsense, won’t you?” he said, dripping with irony. “You won’t even listen to me explain what my needs actually are. No, you know best, Mycroft. Arrogant – in that alone you are like Siger. We both are! Likeness is not sameness. But by all means, believe that you are our father. By all means, believe every word he told you, or believe that you will morph into him. Let him be the arbiter of your life. Live in his shadow. Decide that I am beyond your reach, and full of light, too fucking beautiful, or whatever rubbish you want to think! I’m not perfect. I am a man. I am destructible like you. So, please, do decide to destroy us. Decide to go mad, if that will satisfy your need to be proved right!”

Silence fell.

Mycroft looked unutterably shocked. "Sherlock...,” he began, falteringly, looking as though an ice bucket had been poured down his neck. “Sherlock- ”
Sherlock wheeled upon him, turning suddenly with fierce intensity burning through his eyes. Mycroft flinched and stepped back.

"No! You decide, Mycroft! You are either mine, or you are Siger's. You cannot be both. I love you more than he ever did, more than anyone ever will. I am not going anywhere until you push me. But push hard, brother. Push very fucking hard, and forever. I am not leaving you for the sake of a dead man's cruelty. You'll have to leave me. Again. But make it good. Make it hurt so much that neither of us ever wants to see each other again. Why not? Indulge your addiction to suffering. It's what you deserve. Isn't it? Is it what I deserve too? Which of us likes pain the most, brother, really?"

Mycroft was aghast. He had never seen his brother so incandescent with rage, and it burned so bright it was hard to look at directly.

"Sherlock, don’t..." He stepped forwards, hand outstretched to try and touch him, but Sherlock shook him off with an aggressive shrug and made for the door. He turned as he reached it, and spoke through gritted teeth, trying desperately to control his shaking voice and his erratic breathing.

“You speak,” he said, slowly, deliberately, “as though falsehoods are certainties. As though fears are facts. You doubt everything, especially yourself – but how dare you doubt me?!" His voice raised beyond his control now.

“To hell with your doubt! It is of no use to you, or me, or us. Decide what you deserve, Mycroft, and…and fuck off if you can’t let me love you!” he shouted, voice cracking with unshed tears. He bounded out before they could fall, slamming the door almost off its hinges.

Mycroft’s stomach contracted as though he’d been punched in the gut.

“You’re the one leaving me at this very second!” he shouted after him, his whole body straining with hurt fury, and blind panic, despite the actual words his brother had said. His brain spun at the rapid onset of this catastrophic exchange, and he was left only with self-loathing, and words he did not mean, and devastation as he saw everything he loved in the world running away from him.

“Were you looking for a pretext all this time?!” he howled at his brother’s retreating back. “How clever of you to blame me for it! Don’t walk away from me, Sherlock - run! Yes, you run. Spell it out for the satellite tracker: 'fuck off, Mycroft!’"

He could barely breathe against the tightness of his chest, and the vertigo from the dizzying welter of emotion throbbing through his head. His cracked voice dropped to a dull murmur, and he spoke aloud to an empty room, heartsick and hollow.

“Go and find someone normal. Go and find someone whole.”

He collapsed into a chair and wept alone.

Sherlock raced outside, tears streaming, blown from his face by the wind. His throat was tight, made worse by the freezing air, and he ran, ran towards nothing, away from all that the house contained, purging his pain and rage through movement, until his muscles burned with lactic acid and he tasted iron in his spit. The tips of his ears ached with cold, and he felt burnt by the whipping wind.

Droplets of rain began to fall, soaking through his thin jumper. The rain became hailstones, hard, freezing bullets which stung his skin and ricocheted off him to the frozen earth. He welcomed the bracing pain of it, but after a while it became too much, and he headed towards the nearest shelter - the large, ramshackle stable block at the end of the meadow.

He huddled inside it, sinking down to sit on a dry-ish patch of floor strewn with old straw, shivering
with cold and with horror. He sobbed into the silence, feeling like an abandoned and helpless child, though for how long he could not tell. When he calmed, he fully realised where he was.

The stables. A memory sprang to life unbidden. A memory touched upon briefly during an earlier conversation with his brother; it was now alive in front of his eyes, in greater detail than had been previously explained. He saw it before him.

Mycroft, twelve and pudgy, kissing a village boy on the lips, all nerves and tentativeness, and not knowing what to do with his hands. The redhead leaned forward from the waist while the unknown, scrappy-looking boy slouched against the wall.

Sherlock saw himself - a livid and tiny whirlwind, five years old with flying curls, barrelling in and shoving them apart.

“Go away! He’s my brother, not yours!” he shouted with his arms folded, just as Mycroft had told him he’d done.

The dark-haired stranger from the village, eleven or twelve - though to little Sherlock he seemed impossibly grown up – looked down at him with a confused look, then a mocking sneer.

“Tell the stupid baby to run away,” the lad said to Mycroft, rolling his eyes.

Boy Mycroft, still shocked by the sudden interruption, stepped back and frowned thoughtfully, as though noticing the boy he’d been kissing for the first time, wondering what he saw in him.


The first time Sherlock had heard the words.

The dark-haired stranger from the village, eleven or twelve - though to little Sherlock he seemed impossibly grown up – looked down at him with a confused look, then a mocking sneer.

“Tell the stupid baby to run away,” the lad said to Mycroft, rolling his eyes.

Boy Mycroft, still shocked by the sudden interruption, stepped back and frowned thoughtfully, as though noticing the boy he’d been kissing for the first time, wondering what he saw in him.


The first time Sherlock had heard the words.

The boy looked daggers at Mycroft. “I’ll tell what you did!”

Mycroft snorted disdainfully. “No, you won’t. But if you do, I’ll tell them you started it, and my father will kill you,” he said, just convincingly enough.

The boy blenched and ran.

Mycroft turned to the small boy at this side, when the other had fled.

“It’s all right,” he said, picking him up with a groan, and kissing his chubby cheek. “I’m sorry. I was just...being silly. Please don’t ever use the words I just used, Sherlock. They are very rude and you must never say them.”

Little Sherlock scowled at him, with a piercing blue look, his babyish mouth pulled down at the corners and wobbly.

“Do you want to play with other boys more than me?” he whispered, chest hitching.

Mycroft blinked awkwardly, taken aback. Then he sighed through a small, reassuring smile, and hugged his brother closer.

“No,” he said, shaking his head definitely. “Not at all. It’s just you, isn’t it? Just you and me.”

The small child head-butted him in confirmation, and let himself be carried back to the house, secure in his brother’s grip.

The vision faded from Sherlock’s mind’s eye, and he was left with only the need to return. Because
of course he couldn’t run. Not this time, or any time.

He had run so many times, to expel the hurt of being left. And Mycroft had not wanted to leave him at all. He had always wanted to carry him safely away.

Mycroft - drawn inexorably to sabotage the goodness they had begun to forge - expected disaster, because no-one had ever told him he didn't deserve it. He had pushed them both towards it to fulfil his own prophecies of doom, though it was the last thing he wanted.

Both of them expected to leave and be left, in the endless pattern of their lives. But what if they could find a way of staying? If they could stand their ground, and risk it all. Regardless of the dreadful possibilities of disaster – what if they could see the escape hatch and choose not to go through it this time? Might they stand to face down the terrors of loneliness together? Sex was a miracle, but love was work. And Holmeses knew how to work.

Sherlock shook himself and brushed himself down decisively, turning over his racing thoughts.

If one person breaks the habit of a lifetime, doesn’t everyone also break it? If you break the expectation of a behaviour, other people break their habitual reactions, and break their reliance upon the same old vicious cycles. When one thing changes, everything changes. It is philosophically impossible for it to be otherwise.

_I am not going to run, brother mine. I am going to stand my ground. And you are going to see me do it. Then it’s up to you what happens. But I am not frightened of you leaving me. It is not possible. I am not leaveable. And neither are you. I am not frightened of your darkness. Or your pain. Or your limitations. Push me as hard as you like. I will always come back for more._

He picked himself up from the floor and walked back to the house. He calculated he had been gone for over an hour. It was already growing dark, the short December day receding away, taking his earlier misery with it, leaving calmness behind.

He found Mycroft slumped by the fire in the library, staring disconsolately into the flames, as though reading bleak portents within them. He looked almost small, diminished by ineffable sadness. But Sherlock was undisturbed by the image he presented, knowing it was temporary and restorable.

The door creaked as he entered, and Mycroft turned, stricken, to face him. The look of shattered relief on his features told Sherlock everything he needed to know.

He approached, unblinking, the merest suspicion of a twitch across his cheekbones as he took in the sorry sight of his most beloved elder brother - a little whisky-soaked and puffy-eyed, collar loosened haphazardly, shoulders slumped in defeat - waiting to be completely broken. Neither man seemed to breathe as Sherlock knelt carefully before him, and took his brother’s slim hands in his own to gently kiss them. He looked up at the stone-grey irises, pooled in bloodshot white, and spoke his vow; a remembered passage of verse, hummed into his own ear in the nursery, in the library at Musgrave Hall, in the darkness of cold winter nights.

_“Doubt thou the stars are fire,” he murmured, his soft baritone rumbling in his brother’s ears. “Doubt that the sun doth move…”_

Mycroft buckled, his body crumpling forward as he sobbed uncontrollably. _“Doubt truth to be a liar…,” _he choked out, continuing the chant but barely able to articulate it.

Sherlock pressed his forehead hard against his brother’s, and held him as he broke.

_“But never doubt I love,” _he said, fiercely, and finally. Mycroft nodded against his little brother's
chest, clutching at him desperately, lavishing his neck with fervent, possessive kisses.

They clung together, as though to save each other from drowning.

“Never. I will never doubt you. I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry…,” gasped Mycroft through heaving sobs, over and over.

“Ssh. It’s all right. I love you. It is all going to be all right.”

“I love you. Everything I have. Brother. I won’t destroy it! Please, please don’t…”


They held each other by the fire, unspeaking for a long time. They huddled together, stroking each other in comfort, letting the flames return feeling to their numbed hearts.

_Fire, cleansing and pure, to fight against the chill… Heat of passion out of a cold, cold past…_

And just as suddenly as all memories seemed to occur to him these days, as suddenly as words poured forth from him, Sherlock knew what needed to be done next.

“Come with me,” he beckoned, pulling his puzzled brother from his chair and dragging him up. Mycroft allowed himself to be led, unresisting, up the stairs to his bedroom.

He looked askance, about to protest that perhaps this wasn’t quite the moment for a sexual reunion, though later would be lovely, when he was less snotty and exhausted… Sherlock caught the meaning in his look and smirked.

He moved swiftly across to the dressing table, snatched up the gold-framed sepia photograph of Siger Holmes, and held it towards his brother.

Mycroft flinched, wondering what on earth he intended by it. His eyes flicked to the granite-hard face in the photograph, but the familiar jolt of self-loathing somehow did not come. He heard no harsh voice in his head, only a loving one in the room.

“This man,” said Sherlock, with a kind of forceful mania, “did not deserve you. I am taking you from him. This man has no power here, or anywhere.”

Mycroft opened his mouth, but no reply came, and he stood at a loss. Sherlock grinned madly at him, and whisked them out of the room, leading his brother by the hand again, up the attic stairs. They charged through the room and out onto the balcony.

The earlier hail had turned to sleet, which was turning now to the first fresh flakes of snow.

Sherlock thrust the frame into Mycroft’s hands.

“Be rid of him, brother mine,” he said, urgently. “Cast him to the wilderness, where he belongs. Say thank you for giving me existence, for giving me Sherlock, thank you for teaching me what not to be, if you must. But let him be gone, Mycroft. Banish him. And not for my sake.”

“It would be a symbol only,” began Mycroft, balking slightly at his brother’s intensity.

Sherlock, his eyes alight with piercing kindness, leaned in and kissed his brother’s thin mouth, stroking down his pale cheek with the backs of his fingers.

“Symbols represent real things,” he said, with a shrug, and stepped back to give him the floor.
Mycroft’s knuckles stood out whiter than white as he gripped the photo frame; the expression on his face one of abjectness, and melancholy, and conflicted contemplation - but underneath all of that, a nascent hope; a green shoot of faith in its infancy.

The Holmes brothers stood in silence, breathing heavily as the snow fell around them, dusting them with thick, cold flecks of pure white. For some while, Mycroft seemed to be in deep debate with himself, motionless, staring down at the picture in his hands - until he looked up, a grimace of fury ghosting across his face, his lips compressed with determination.

“All our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death…,” he muttered under his breath.

And then, with a jolt of sudden energy, he charged wildly to the balustrade, and flung the photo frame into the inky night, whipping it away from himself like a Frisbee. His whole body leaned into the throw. With a bestial shout of effort - and pain, and triumph - he cast it out, watching it fly from view, hearing it clatter and smash somewhere in the darkness below.

*Hell is a cold place, father. Let the snow cover you. It was not me who was made of ice.*

Sherlock simply stood with both hands upon his head, clutching at his hair as though he’d witnessed some impossible feat, feeling a shout of joy desperate to burst from his lungs, though he made not a sound.

Mycroft turned to him with the suspicion of a smile playing at the edges of his mouth, and a wide-eyed look of exhilaration.

“Come back into the warmth with me, dearest,” he said, with impeccable calm. “Let’s go back to bed.”

“Yes. Bed. Just you and me.”

*And we shall talk about pain and pleasure, and all the ways we will love each other as equals. Starting from here.*
Warm water

Chapter Summary

The brothers reconnect in the aftermath of their dramatic evening. A bath, another first, discourses on pleasure and pain, and discoveries about both. *now with slightly improved grammar!*

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the delay, sweet ones. This story takes me bloody ages and sends me into a tailspin of doubt!

- The song referenced ('In The Bath') is another by wondrous witty 1950s duo Flanders and Swann, who Mycroft refers to in Chapter 4. Classic gentle English humour beloved of Uncle Rudy... :) x

Sherlock sat on the makeshift mattress under the skylight where they had first joined, beckoning his brother over with a gentle smile. Mycroft paused and stood regarding him fondly. To Sherlock’s surprise he shook his head.

“Not here, Lock. I thought we might go back to my – our – bedroom.”

Sherlock understood perfectly.

“Do you feel you’ve exorcised it now?” he asked, hopping up and falling into his brother’s arms for a kiss. They held each other close, reaffirming connection after their recent separation and distress.

Mycroft inhaled deeply as he nuzzled into Sherlock’s soft neck, noting that he smelled of sweat, and woodland, and snow. Any residual pent-up nastiness – that which had not been flung from the roof along with Siger’s image - fled his circulatory system at the touch. His shoulders seemed to drop by inches as he collapsed into his brother.

“In a way, perhaps I do feel I have detoxified it. I should like to take you to my own everyday bed, as my lover. It may be delusional but I feel we shall not be overlooked by him anymore.”

Sherlock patted his brother’s cheek and pressed their foreheads together.

“Not delusional. Symbolic, as you said. It matters.”

“Thank you for coming back,” whispered Mycroft, clutching him suddenly.

Sherlock huffed a small chuckle, closing his eyes as he was held.

“Thank you for not barricading the doors.”

“That I shall never do.”
“Nor shall I run.”

Mycroft heaved a loud self-conscious sigh. The sound held within it relief, and a smile.

“Let’s go and make up, dearest. I’m given to understand ‘making up’ lovemaking is particularly satisfying.”

He pulled Sherlock along by the hand, taking the lead.

Sherlock smirked. “Let’s find out. But… we’ll come back up here, won’t we?” he asked, with a tinge of anxiety.

Mycroft turned to look at him.

“Of course,” he said, kindly. “This is my favourite place in the house. Above the world. I just feel the need to be a little more earthbound tonight.”

“Less up in the air?”

“Apropos as always.”

They descended the stairs, still reeling from the mania of highs and lows that had passed between them. Each man became gradually aware of his own bodily exhaustion as the comedown hit; and each became aware that they were in less than mint condition.

They entered Mycroft’s bedroom, and sank down onto the bed with twin groans. They cuddled into each other but neither had the wherewithal to initiate further contact, despite their yearning to reconnect more deeply. They simply rested against each other, stroking each other’s hair, soothing themselves back to equilibrium. The sense that they had been tossed upon an ocean storm and come out of the other side into calmer waters dawned upon them. Though they were yet to fully get their bearings, they at least had a fighting chance of navigating from here.

As was his habit these days, Sherlock picked the direction of travel. A very good idea had struck. He tapped his brother’s arm and sprang up with a sudden burst of renewed energy.

“Stay there. I shan’t be a moment.”

Mycroft shook himself out of his dozing state and leaned up on his elbows.

“Hm? What are you thinking of?”

“Something nice,” grinned Sherlock, as he left the room, waving at him to stay put.

Mycroft lay back and gazed up at the ceiling. Recovering. He examined his internal state with laser focus, sifting, as an archaeologist sifts, through layers. He felt…lighter. Bruised, yes. But calm. There was clarity where before all had been confusion. And there was quietude. Perhaps not silence – there was never silence. But blessed quietude where before there had been riotous noise, and voices, and alarms going off inside him. Was it possible to feel empty and full at the same time? Empty but not hollow. Not blank but cleansed, rather.

I am a veritable palimpsest. A manuscript page erased of its old text to make way for the new; bearing visible traces of an earlier form, but rewritten with fresh ink. With new words.

For the time being at least, he no longer felt paralysed or leaden, or suspended in amber. His feet felt as though they could move again; that they would go where he directed them to go. They would
carry him towards something he had chosen for himself. He would not step inside his brother’s footprints, nor trail after them. He would walk alongside.

As if summoned by these thoughts, Sherlock stuck his head round the door, curls bobbing loosely over his face. He was naked.

“Clothes off, please,” he ordered.

Mycroft rolled over to face him properly.

“Another cunning little scheme?”

“Yes. Togs off now, and no backchat.”

Mycroft chuckled.

“With pleasure. These are rather sticking to me.”

He removed his rumpled trousers and shirt, peeling them off with distaste at the well-worn, sweaty state they were in. Snow-damp and saturated with tiredness.

He stood naked and unabashed, without even reaching for his robe. Sherlock grinned at him with delight and held out his hand.

“Come with me.”

Mycroft rolled his eyes in mock-weariness.

“Oh, for heaven's sake, what now?”

Sherlock dragged him down the hallway and up the stairs to the floor where his guest room was. He pushed the door to Mycroft’s second favourite room in the house.

“Bathtime, brother,” he announced, triumphantly.

The enormous freestanding bath was overfull and deliciously scented with the spiced bath oil Mycroft liked to use. No bubbles, no candles, no rose petals. Just a steaming tub of water to wash away the cares of the day, or longer.

Mycroft groaned with happiness at the sight and pulled his brother in for a grateful kiss.

Sherlock patted him on the bottom with a mischievous smirk, then padded over the black-and-white tiled floor to the bath. He tested the water temperature with his toe, grimacing a little at the heat. But he sank his foot in and adjusted to it, stepping in with both feet.

Mycroft watched the lithe body sink by degrees against the smooth end of the oversized tub. Sherlock held his breath and disappeared beneath the surface to fully submerge himself. Water sloshed over the sides. When he resurfaced, spluttering, he was pink with heat and sleek as an otter.

He ran his hands through his wet hair, making the curls spring back to life, and turned to face his brother with flashing eyes.

“I’ve run through a field today. I’ve cried and come more in 72 hours than I have in decades. I’m shattered and I smell revolting. You likewise are a wreckage of stale whisky and even staler worry, and you have lately performed feats of heroics, from the erotic to the emotional. So we are going to have a soak together. You do so love a good wallow, after all. Hop in.”
Mycroft did not even bother to remonstrate about ‘heroics’ or even about the silly amount of water used and displaced everywhere. He simply came forward and stepped in, facing his brother, grimacing slightly at the heat.

“Oh, you’re such a help to a very old man,” he groaned, as he lowered himself down.

Sherlock held up a hand.

“Stuff and nonsense. Into the water with you. And turn around. You don’t deserve the tap end.”

Mycroft snorted and turned his back. Sherlock winced slightly at the deep cigar burn scar just above his buttocks, still not quite used to seeing the evidence of past violence upon him. When Mycroft turned to peer over his shoulder with a knowing look, Sherlock merely placed both hands flat upon his bare bottom and caressed him with an ironic though encouraging little smile.

Mycroft huffed as he was guided down to settle carefully between Sherlock’s long legs. More water splashed out of the bath, but neither bather cared.

Mycroft leaned back gently so as not to squash his brother’s delicate parts and let himself be embraced from behind. He moaned with pleasure as water and arms enveloped him, warming him inside and out.

Sherlock’s hands came up to stroke at him, raking through his chest hair, lightly brushing over his nipples. The oil in the water made the skin slippery and softer than ever beneath questing fingertips.

In return Mycroft stroked up and down his brother’s long thighs with a repetitive soothing motion. He felt the semi-hardness at his back and his own member twitched to life in response.

Steam swirled into the air above them, hazing the soft electric light of the bathroom. They sat in relaxed silence, punctured only by gentle sloshing and the occasional sigh of contentment. They luxuriated in sensation. In proximity and warmth.

Sherlock’s deep voice broke the spell, reverberating louder than he intended in the tiled acoustic.

“Oh, I find such simple pleasure when I’ve had a tiring day…,” he recited, recalling one of Uncle Rudy’s old records. He refused to sing, but the reference was caught immediately.

“In the bath. In the bath,” finished Mycroft, chuckling in spite of himself. “How on earth have you remembered that?!!”

“I remember everything, brother mine,” teased Sherlock, kissing his temple and running his fingers through the damp, thin hair at his forehead - darker and wavier now for being wet. “May I say it was very wise of you to purchase the largest bath tub in the Western hemisphere? Almost as though you planned to share it with me one day.”

“I hadn’t planned that, but I am very glad two men over six feet tall can fit in it. Can this become a regular habit, please? I feel I may become addicted to it.”

Sherlock hummed with interest.

“Ah, that word again, dear brother. How we seem to enjoy throwing it around.”

Mycroft could have bitten his tongue at this presumably unwelcome echo of their earlier troubles.

“I…”
“You are not an addiction for me,” interrupted Sherlock, seriously and decisively, pre-empting the discussion. “You mustn’t think it or fear it. For all I may have likened my love for you to that. It is simply a metaphor. You are not temporary. I do not require bigger and bigger highs from you, or anyone else.”

“Ah, but no metaphor is simply a metaphor.”

Sherlock slapped the water in mild reproof.

“Don’t be difficult. I am saying that as much as I crave your presence - physically, sentimentally, and all the rest - I am not using you to hurt myself, nor am I going to seek beyond what you give me. You are necessary to me, yes. But not an addiction. You are a found treasure, Mycroft. Something to be kept and guarded. Not given up or rehabilitated from.”

Mycroft paused to let these words seep into him. He ducked his head and brought his brother’s slim hand to his mouth to kiss it.

“You always were searching for buried treasure.”

Sherlock leaned in, turning his brother’s head towards him to meet his limpid gaze.

“How stupid of me not to have simply dug for it where I stood,” he said, and placed a tender kiss upon his lips.

Mycroft kissed back and pulled away sighing wryly.

“You mustn’t indulge me, dear. It isn’t good for me.”

Sherlock snorted.

“What do you know of indulgence, Mycroft? Self-indulgence? Well, perhaps a little, of late. But we shall turn your head to better things. I wasn’t joking when I said you are an ascetic disguised as an aesthete. I intend to work upon you until you behave far more like a pampered pet than you are comfortable with.”

“So that I might become fat and indolent?” teased Mycroft. “So that you cut an even more dashing figure beside me by comparison?”

Sherlock tilted his head as though considering it.

“More so I can keep you confined to your bed and play with you whenever I like.”

Mycroft chuckled and leaned back with a yawn.

“That’s your plan for healing my wounds, is it?”

“Perhaps not quite,” admitted Sherlock. “Here is my plan for healing your wounds, as much as I dare say they can be healed: you are to be pleasured, dear brother.” He held up a hand, staving off a protest which hadn’t been made. “No, don’t argue with me. I’m sorry, you have no say in the matter.”

Mycroft grinned at the ceiling as he listened to his brother speak, sharing in the honeyed amusement of his tone.

“I have been thinking about it and I have my strategy all worked out. What do you like, I ask myself? You like bathing. You like delicious things. You like to smell divine and look even better.
fabrics and art and a finely-cut suit. You like silly old songs, and uproarious, scurrilous tales. You like loud Beethoven, and romance of the soppy variety as well as with a capital R. You like astronomy, and philosophy, and literature, and elegant equations. You like sex – oh, you really do like sex. And you like me. Most of all, you like me. Therefore, I conclude: you are to have all of these things and anything else that will please you. Now and for the rest of your days."

Mycroft closed his eyes and nodded, inhaling the sweet smell of the bath oil and his brother. The vision Sherlock had set before him – of how he was viewed by him – made him feel simultaneously flattered and self-conscious. He smiled wistfully, though not without belief that the prescription his brother had decided upon would go some way to making life a better prospect than it had seemed three days ago. Still, he could not resist his natural inclination to keep on the right side of caution, and of realism.

"That sounds… It sounds wonderful. But pleasure won't cure me of a bad past, dearest," he said gently, not wanting to knock his brother’s much-needed optimism.

Sherlock replied as though he had expected exactly this response.

"It couldn't possibly hurt though, could it? No, don't answer that.” He wiggled to sit up a little further, pulling his brother with him before they both sank below the waterline. “There is no cure for a bad past,” he said, matter-of-factly. “Or bad experiences. There is only accommodation, for all I can tell. Nobody gets over anything. Not really. They assimilate. They adjust. They learn. You have not yet mastered pleasure, but I have every confidence in your intelligence to believe you will add it to your already prodigious talents."

Mycroft conceded his agreement at one thing at least.

"We do learn, us Holmeses. It is possibly our only survival instinct. It is what we are here for."

"For all our limitations, we do learn. So,” said Sherlock with finality, “you must learn to accept pleasure, in whatever form it is offered. And you must ask for it, and take it, and take it for granted."

“I shall try. I shall let you pleasure me, brother. But you already know that my greatest pleasure is pleasuring you.”

Sherlock smirked.

“Between us we shall work out how best to please each other. I believe we have come very far already. If last night was anything to go by. And this morning...”

He pinched his brother’s nipple and ran his hand down to his prick with light, playful strokes. Mycroft hummed and let himself be touched.

“I dare not disagree with you, sage that you are. But…” He broke off, almost laughing at his own contrarian need to counter any argument put forth. “I feel I am always offering contradictions. I don’t mean to. I just mean that...you cannot erase my scars.”

Sherlock’s hand stopped moving and he kissed his brother’s neck, wrapping both arms around him securely.

"I cannot. Scars are permanent, aren’t they? But they are not just signs of damage. They are evidence of a healing process. A different type of skin altogether, formed with cells from your body. They are not simply a sign of something that was done to you. But of something you have done in response.”

“Sometimes think of them as a map, marking out the terrain of a life lived,” Mycroft mused aloud.
“You would not be you without them,” said Sherlock, low and earnest in the shell of his ear. “I don’t want you without your scars, Mycie. I love you because of them.”

Mycroft closed his eyes. When he spoke, his voice was hoarse.

“Sherlock.”

“Hmm?”

“It is wonderful of you to want to save me from myself,” he said, smiling through the onset of tears, which he held back with an exasperated sniff and a frustrated chuckle at his own lachrymosity.

Sherlock huffed a fond sigh as he patted his brother’s stomach.

“No, Mycroft. I’m not offering to be your salvation. I can’t presume it. And it wouldn’t work if I tried.”

“Good. I have never wanted that. You can’t banish my demons. And I can’t banish yours. But brother… Your demons are mine also. I take them for my own. I offer you mine in exchange.”

He tipped his head back. Sherlock stroked his forehead, kissing it reverently.

“I’ve already taken them. And as for salvation… We have spent our lives saving others, out there in the wicked world. And trying to save each other - from our father, from monsters in all shapes, from addictions... Hoping to save ourselves in the process, I suppose.”


“No-one can save anyone but themselves, in the end,” said Mycroft, twisting round to face him, displacing more water onto the floor. He placed his palm flat on his brother’s flushed cheek, stroking at his plump lips with his thumb. Sherlock kissed at the pad of it.

“Your life is not your own,” he muttered, frowning vaguely as phrases came back to him through the steam. “Keep your hands off it...”

Mycroft nodded as though he knew something they had never spoken of.

“It belongs to the people who love you. Keep your hands on them. And never let go.”

Sherlock brought his palm up to lay flat upon Mycroft’s where it held his face. Their fingers linked as they captured each other’s mouths. They held each other in silence until the heat of the water dissipated and coolness crept across their skin.

Mycroft tapped on his brother’s knobbly knees. “Lets get out. I think that’s enough steeping, don’t you? I feel like a used teabag.”

Sherlock shivered and goose bumps raised over his body as he noticed how cold he was.

“Brr, good idea. It’s freezing and my fingers are like prunes.”

Mycroft examined his brother’s fingers in front of his face.

“Hm. So they are. And mine have run out of patience with not being able to touch you properly.”

He sat forwards and began to push himself up, trying not to plunge back in and squash his brother.
Sherlock frowned, deep in thought.

“Mm. It’s probably not possible to have a decent fuck in the bath, is it?”

Mycroft was caught off guard and almost fell back down again as laughter made his muscles weak.

“I think it may be more logistical trouble than it’s worth, Lock. But next time perhaps I shall bathe you and we’ll see what can be done with soapy hands. That would give me an inordinate amount of pleasure. You are duty bound to permit me.”

Sherlock grinned and pushed helpfully at his brother’s broad back.

Mycroft heaved himself up with a groan, holding the sides as he rather awkwardly extracted himself.

Sherlock followed, feeling the welcome pull of gravity upon him once again.

Mycroft wrapped himself in a soft white towel, and held another out. Sherlock let himself be wrapped into it like a child being hugged dry. He let his older brother tuck his wet hair behind his ears and he let him kiss him, and lead him away saying “don’t slip”.

“No, wait!” exclaimed Sherlock suddenly, pulling back. He tiptoed carefully across the wet floor and picked up the small bottle of bath oil. He waved it with cheerful suggestiveness at his brother, who gave him a thrillingly seductive glare in return.

They re-entered the bedroom, shivering a little as the chill of the evening air - inadequately heated by old, creaking radiators - hit their recently warmed skin. Shucking off their towels they dove for the bed, scurrying under the duvet and huddling together to keep warm. They rubbed their hands briskly over each other, creating friction for functional purposes only. When their body temperatures settled to a bearable level the touches changed. Shivers and wiggles became writhing. Hands caressed and rubbed for sensation’s sake alone.

Mycroft shook himself dramatically as he frisked and petted his brother’s still-damp skin.

“Brr! Oh, God, this house is beset by drafts!”

“Shall I light the fire?”

“No, don’t you dare lift the covers. We’ll just have to warm each other. Besides, we’ve already risked a conflagration letting all those candles in the dining room burn out last night!”

“Hmm, that wasn’t the only thing burning last night.”

Mycroft pulled back to glare at his giggling brother very sternly.

“What a vile innuendo.”

“Yes,” smirked Sherlock, unapologetically. “Absolutely beneath me.”

“That’s not the only thing absolutely beneath you…,” Mycroft said, squeezing his bottom.

“Oh, touché, Mycie!” giggled Sherlock, rolling on top of him. “You’re quite correct. Look, there you are.”

“Yes, here I am.”

Sherlock leaned down on all fours and kissed him deeply, their tongues intertwining.
Mycroft reached up to touch him, latching on to his hips and thrusting his own upwards until their pricks rubbed together.

They groaned delightedly at being in contact like this again, urging each other to hardness, their flesh still a little slippery from the residue of bath oil. Soaking in hot water had made their nerve-endings all the more sensitive; their haptic senses deliciously heightened. Desire tingled down their bodies, making them quiver and keen.

Mycroft brought his knees up on either side of Sherlock’s hips and wrapped his legs round to press his brother’s backside in with his heels.

The movement forced Sherlock forwards. His shaft rubbed up between Mycroft's spread buttocks, nudging at his balls. Mycroft pushed his backside into the touch, grasping his brother’s back in barely-disguised desperation.

Sherlock was exhilarated by this overt display of arousal for him, and by the confident insistence with not a hint of tentativeness about it.

“Do you want me to – “


Sherlock dove for another kiss and pressed himself in again, losing himself in his brother’s familiar spicy scent.

Mycroft spread his legs further apart, opening himself completely. The swollen head of Sherlock’s cock nudged almost accidentally at his hole, and he tensed slightly at the new feeling, and the new idea. He had never craved penetration for its own sake, but he saw that it might very well become essential.

Sherlock broke away from the kiss, panting, sensing nerves from his brother but not anxiety. Nerves he shared and channelled into passion. He kissed his way down Mycroft’s flushed throat, down his chest and stomach to settle between his legs, kissing and licking at the head of his hard prick. He tasted precome on his tongue, and heard his brother’s moans, higher-pitched than he had heard before.

When Mycroft seemed quite gone with arousal, Sherlock changed tack and suddenly forced his brother’s knees up towards his chest, rocking his hips up to expose his backside. Before Mycroft could so much as squeak, Sherlock plunged his mouth to the puckered ring of muscle set between his cheeks and tongued it with abandon.

Mycroft sounded utterly scandalised and his voice cried out in a strangulated tone. He held his thighs back as Sherlock ground his face against him, testing out this new pleasure for them both. Another something which Sherlock had learned last night and was now keen to experiment with in return.

When he re-emerged above the covers Mycroft was wild-eyed with pleasure. His mouth was open in an ‘oh’ of surprise, but he failed to articulate any words at all.

Sherlock nodded with proprietorial satisfaction and reached for the bottle of oil on the bedside table.
Pouring some out into his hand he coated his fingers, then kneeled up and ran a slippery trail down his brother’s writhing body, over his nipples, skirting round his belly button and down to his spit-soaked opening.

Their eyes locked in deep intent, and Sherlock bit his lip as he carefully circled his brother’s entrance with an oiled finger.

“Yes?”

“Yes, yes!” hissed Mycroft, hotly, overwhelmed already by the unassailable presence of Sherlock—all charisma and confidence, and obvious, touching care. Last night he had been the one to lavish attentions upon his little brother’s body. He had been the one to demonstrate and teach and push. Tonight he was content to be moved; relieved to give himself up to experimentation and command.

Sherlock nodded and pressed his finger inside, whining in the back of his throat as the muscle gave way to his ministrations and clutched at him. He slid in further until his whole finger was surrounded by silky heat and pressure.

Mycroft’s face crumpled in acute, concentrated longing.

They both whimpered as Sherlock moved in and out, mimicking what Mycroft had done to him before.

“So ready for me, Mycie…,” groaned Sherlock. “Going to open you, like you opened me…”

“First…,” panted Mycroft, “Time. Again!”

They chuckled breathlessly together.

“Tell me if it’s uncomfortable.”

“It’s not. No. It’s -”

His expression contorted as Sherlock crooked his finger, pressing up and back to strike the very core of pleasure.

Mycroft whined with need and gripped at his brother’s shoulders, riding out the shudders racing up from his arse. His eyes squeezed shut at the dizzying, unexpected intensity of the touch. This, this was what he had given Sherlock last night. This was what he had done to him. And now it was being returned, being gifted back because Sherlock wanted to give it. Sherlock wanted him to know it.

There is no giving without taking. No taking without giving.

Sherlock added a second finger to the first and scissored them. Mycroft took to it like a natural, gasping at the stretch entirely undistressed. He rocked back on both fingers, jerking his hips upwards for better purchase. Sherlock plunged in harder, half-wondering whether it might be too much.

It wasn’t. Mycroft took it, his face straining, biting down on his lower lip as they moved together in synchronicity.

By the time Sherlock’s third finger penetrated him Mycroft was moaning open-mouthed to the ceiling, completely in thrall to his own desire, and in thrall to the man—the real, un-angelic man—giving it to him.
Sherlock gazed down at the staggering sight of Mycroft letting himself be pleasured, succumbing so utterly to his own body. Giving in to Sherlock’s adoration for it.

“Oh, God, Mycroft. You have no idea how beautiful you are. No idea!” he hissed, fiercely.

Mycroft gazed at him as though seeing him for the first time.

_Impertection is beautiful. It is interesting. Why did I think you were looking for anything else? Neither of us is perfect. We are enough for each other._

Sherlock withdrew his fingers swiftly and Mycroft winced a little at the sudden loss. Sherlock patted him in apology, then reached for the oil again.

Mycroft took it from him, slicking his hand and bringing it to his brother’s hot, heavy erection. He let his knees fall together to one side so that his spine twisted slightly.

“Like this,” he husked.

Sherlock nodded wordlessly and almost frantically guided his slippery prick to the lax entrance, pushing Mycroft’s knees further up for better access.

He pressed himself forwards, seeking the correct angle, memorising every response - everything that worked and everything that slightly missed the mark. The plummy head of his cock pushed until the hot opening accepted it. His brother whimpered at the new intrusion - larger and a little more intimidating than just fingers.

“Keep going,” he urged, voice tight with tension. “Put it all in.”

Sherlock sighed loudly as he leaned in further, keeping a hand at the very base of his long prick to stop it slipping out or bending too flexibly at the resistance.

Mycroft rumbled in his chest as the next few inches sank in. With one arm thrown out to the side and the other braced against his brother he let himself be invaded by degrees.

Then Sherlock thrust once more up to the hilt, and in one movement neither Holmes was virgin in any way.

“Do you see? Do you feel how it is?”

Mycroft saw. He felt. And it was easy. So easy that he wondered why he’d ever worried about it. His brother fit him and he fit his brother. One organism split into two bodies. It was natural. It was so, so easy. And now they were completely themselves, in an ordinary bed on an ordinary night.

_Fuck me._

Sherlock read the thought and did as his brother wanted. He moved slowly, working his body steadily, checking every last response, calculating every outward sign of Mycroft’s experience. The twitches across his brow, the speed of his pulse, the trajectories and angles which made him react, made him thrust and arch; how his legs shook, what made his abdomen contract, and his toes curl and flex.

Sherlock raced through his evidence category by category, indexing Mycroft completely. The strength of his clenching jaw; the key and tenor of his voice as it ranged up and down in arpeggios of approval; the minute difference between something which made his fingers clasp and something which made them scratch and claw.
Turning inwards he reflected how different the giving was from the taking. He was clenched upon in tight silky heat, and he was a pioneer of his brother’s body, marking the territory of it for his own. He felt possessive rather than possessed, and he understood at once the compulsion to do this - the absolute necessity which Mycroft had felt with him last night. He understood what it was to claim and own, to tread the line between selfishness and consideration; to be simultaneously focused on two peoples’ pleasure, and take responsibility for both. In that moment he could not say which he preferred, fucking or being fucked. Both were essential when both were mutual.

We understand each other at last.

Mycroft felt beautifully violated as they rocked together in unison. Not a thought of guilt or uncertainty entered his head as he gave himself up. Every thrust made him anew, piecing a little of him back together. Every movement pushed the past a little further away from the present, and defined what existed for them in the here and now.

He writhed, and the movement of his body compelled him to some other great want.

“Can I… I’d like to, on my front, just to see…,” he mumbled raggedly.

Sherlock helped him over without pulling out. He lunged forwards, pressing Mycroft’s face into the pillows, and resumed fucking him from behind.

Mycroft raised his backside higher and his face flushed at the wantonness of the position. Although he couldn’t see Lock’s expression, he could feel him in a new way entirely. There was a bestial nature to it, a submission he had not known he needed. It was thrilling, the trust it implied. The way his body was shoved and worshipped - the way his brother galloped him into the mattress and made his prick rub against it. His hand reached out towards nothing, and Sherlock reached for it, gripping it in his own, anchoring his brother as he rode him.

When Mycroft finally came – moaning in loud gratitude, overcome almost to the edge of tears and calling his brother’s name - he felt reconstructed.

Moments later Sherlock emitted a guttural groan and emptied himself inside, filling his extraordinary lover with everything he had. Flooding him.

Different to last night. Not better or worse. Different for different circumstances.

They stayed locked together for a long time, neither man willing or able to release each other in the immediate aftermath. Eventually, however, Mycroft’s need for oxygen put paid to any romantic notions about sleeping like this, one on top of the other. They rolled apart, laughing softly at themselves as was fast becoming their pattern.

When they had cleaned themselves up and grappled each other back into a tight embrace, with Mycroft’s head resting on Sherlock’s toned chest, the older man spoke again.

“I really… I really didn’t think I would enjoy that as much as I did,” he confessed, making Sherlock chuckle at the rather stupefied tone.

“Being vigorously deflowered?”

Mycroft tutted and slapped at him. It was egregiously unfair to be tormented so soon after such a significant moment. He was utterly glad of it.

“You are a dreadful boy. You know that, don’t you?” he chided, failing to hide his amusement.
“I thought I was rather good, actually. From the way you wailed at me…”

Mycroft snorted and waved an airy hand.

“I have nothing to compare it to. I shall let you know next time.” He looked up. “Seriously, Lock. I don’t mean I enjoyed it more than last night, exactly. But certainly not less. I thought perhaps one would be an either/or type of person.”

He seemed rather puzzled by the discovery.

Sherlock kissed the top of his brother’s finely-textured auburn hair, still sticking up madly from friction and static.

“There is no sense in ascribing roles. We seem to enjoy fucking each other in any combination. We are equals. Does this surprise you?” he teased.

“Equals. And equivalents, also.”

“Is the word we are blushingly dancing round ‘soulmates’, Mycroft?”

Mycroft grunted in disapprobation. “What a ghastly word! Though I approve of the metaphysical turn in the conversation. Soulmates – ugh, no, it’s beyond the pale, I’m afraid.”

“Think of a better description, then.”

Mycroft shook his head in mock disappointment.

“You soppy fool, Sherlock Holmes. Really, it’s quite shocking.”

Sherlock clipped him round the ear playfully.

“Shut up!”

“Shut up? You asked me to think of a word! Which do you want me to do? Hm?”

“You’re insufferable when you’re happy. I almost prefer you depressed,” sniffed Sherlock, tugging at his brother’s hair to teach him a lesson.

Mycroft was unfazed.

“Tough luck, dear,” he said, dryly. He clucked his tongue and hummed in contemplation. “No. I reject soulmates. I think… We are… Kindred. Aren’t we? Symbiotic. We are simply relatives, brother. In all of the nuanced meaning of the word. Including the astrophysical, of course,” he said with unbearable superiority, just to be aggravating.

Sherlock glared down at him with narrowed eyes.

“Pleased with yourself, are you?”

Mycroft oozed smugness for his brother’s entertainment. “Always,” he said. "You did prescribe me a lifelong course of pleasure. I can’t help it if some of it is self-pleasure…”

“I regret saying that. It’s causing me intense mental pain!”

Mycroft snorted good-naturedly.
“I thought you liked pain?”

Sherlock hummed at the way his brother was able to steer a conversation. Ever the expert in negotiation.

“Hmm. Very sneaky. All right. Are you sure you’re ready to listen to me? Really listen to me, about pain?”

“Yes,” said Mycroft, gently and humbly now. “We must speak of it. I will listen, rather than just hear.”

“Good.”

Mycroft rolled around to rest on his front, leaning on Sherlock to meet him face to face.

“Pain is not violence you said. I can comprehend that. It is something that…turns you on.”

Mycroft was matter-of-fact about it now, where before he had been hysterical. His brain-fog had lifted. He could think clearly.

Sherlock placed a finger gently over his lips.

“Be quiet and let me explain. What I mean by physical pain, strategically applied, is not what you mean by it. We have been at crossed purposes. Certain types of pain heightens my awareness. It translates into pleasure for me. I feel no need to analyse that physical response. It simply exists. I don't care why.”

"I understand that it's about endorphins and adrenaline and dopamine..."

“Of course. Physiologically, it is. Psychologically speaking, who can say what it’s about? There are many theories, none worth a damn in the end. Because even if it were tied in to some childhood issue, even if it were a way for my deepest brain to make something horrible feel better - it doesn’t matter. It is what it is. Does it matter to you?”

“I… Perhaps not,” said Mycroft, turning it over in his mind. "Though it hits home for me, naturally."

“Do you believe it makes me a bad or sick person, wanting it?”

The elder Holmes shook his head sincerely.

“No. I know enough of human foibles and preferences to know that much. I work with politicians, for God’s sake. Do you think I am shocked by the idea of people being beaten for pleasure? Though many of them are truly awful people, it must be said…”

“You’re a very sophisticated man of the world and I’m terribly impressed.”

Mycroft rolled his eyes at the habitual sarcasm.

“Horrid child.”

Sherlock ignored him.

“Politicians aside, you see by extension that it doesn't make anyone who gives careful, consensual, considered pain to someone a bad person either. Nor a cruel one.”

“Yes.” Mycroft frowned uncomfortably. “Though I question my ability to be that person.”
“I don’t want you to be any kind of person but yourself. I have said as much. It must be very hard for someone who has only ever associated pain with...all the appalling things which have happened to you. I'm not going to insist that you take a cane to me, or coerce you to act against your feelings. I'm not going to impose anything upon you, or set off your panic by making you experiment. I would protect you from pain – mine and yours. How’s that for irony?”

“Hurting you is my nightmare,” confessed Mycroft, as though this were news.

Sherlock corrected him instantly.

“No. Harming me is your nightmare. And vice versa. I dread causing you harm. I will try so hard never to cause you any pain at all. I can't promise that I won’t hurt your feelings sometimes, because I'm going to fuck things up at some point. Often, I imagine.”

“We both are, I’m sure. Lovers always do, so I am told.”

“They also get through it, those who want to. So I am told. They move forward. That is a truth about lovers. And families.”

“Pain is a truth of yours, brother mine.”

Sherlock nodded. Because it was. But the nature of that truth was not simplistic.

“It is a foible. I barely understood it as an erotic outlet until relatively recently. Not fully. But now, with you… I confess, I want you to understand it. Share in it, if at all possible.”

Mycroft inhaled, steeling himself to ask the next question.

“What are you asking for, from me?”

Sherlock shook his head fondly.

“Not what you fear. Nothing at all, if that’s what you decide. I am a selfish creature but I’m not going to beg you to beat me, or scream at you for refusing. I’m not going to make you feel guilty for your honest reactions. I will be very angry if you go along with anything just to please me.”

Mycroft closed his eyes and nodded.

“I will try. That’s all I can promise. I accept it as part of you and I will try to think of it with an unprejudiced mind. In return, I ask that you...stay honest with me. Tell me when you need it. I can handle what I know.”

Sherlock kissed his hand.

“I will tell you everything. I expect the same bargain, brother. And not just about sex. Tell me when things become too much. If even the thought of something makes you unhappy.”

Mycroft looked up with sudden vehemence.

“I could not cope with you lying to me about it. I beg you, please do not hide any part of yourself from me. Even the parts that I find difficult. If you ever needed it from someone else… I would rather know than find out.”

Sherlock met his gaze with a fiery little glint in his eyes.

“I don’t want anything from someone else. I never will. Stop trying to get me to confess something
He kissed him to calm the turmoil he sensed bubbling up.

"Do you want to know a secret?" he whispered in a confidential tone.

Mycroft could see that he was being teased a little and arched an eyebrow in response.

"Can we cope with more secrets?"

Sherlock grinned amiably.

"I think we could manage this one. The great secret of all this – it ought not to be taken so seriously. A bit of sensation. A bit of a physical challenge. It offers release to me. And pleasure. And fun. That was another reason I could never fully engage with The Woman. It was all so serious, so onerous. It wasn't any fun, let alone erotic. They are linked, you realise?"

Mycroft shoved at him.

"Yes, thank you, I do realise that. But… I suppose I am unaccustomed to 'fun'. And the erotic."

"You've managed all right these last few days, haven't you?" giggled Sherlock.

Mycroft's face clouded over.

"What if I can't ever do anything?" he asked quietly and rather guiltily.

Sherlock merely snorted.

"I've lived without it this long. I can continue to do so. I'll put clothes pegs on my nipples or something, if the desperate need for agony strikes."

Mycroft pinched his thigh.

"Ridiculous."

"Yes, I am. It is. It is completely ridiculous! At its best, it should be fun for the giver and receiver. I am not out for a bad time, brother. Nor to give you one. I'm not so far gone into hedonism that I need damaging. I am not into suffering. Or punishment, necessarily. Though I'm not averse to playing at that. I merely desire a short sharp shock every now and then. And I don't think you're as averse as you think."

Mycroft frowned in mild concern.

"What makes you think that?"

Sherlock smirked at him.

"I saw your face when you fucked me last night. You loved it. You loved that it pushed me, physically. You loved that it hurt, just a little bit. And you felt it earlier when I… did that to you. You understand it already. That's partly why you fear it."

"No, I...," protested Mycroft, though it sounded weak to his own ears.

"Yes. You responded to my good hurt. You were careful with me. And that is a wonderful thing indeed. I don't require you to be quite so careful. I don't believe you want to be careful. I believe you
"I do not quite trust myself," he admitted.

Sherlock ran his hand across the high, creased forehead.

"I know. But you will. Who is more responsible than you?"

"You're always chiding me for being too responsible!"

"Mm. Sometimes. I think you can afford to dress down for me, Mycroft," Sherlock said, with a winsome grin. "I think you would like to."

Mycroft snorted and ran a hand across his head in self-deprecating amusement.

"Let my remaining hair down."

Sherlock giggled delightedly and snuggled in to him. Their mood relaxed now they had reached some kind of compromise to see things from each other’s point of view.

"Oh, do. Do let your hair down! Let Siger down, let Mummy down. Let yourself down, brother. Let it all down. Play with me, just as you used to."

"Very grown up games now though, eh?"

"Only partially. Much of it is just as immature as it ought to be. Pain for fun. Sensation for fun. Sin and sex for fun. We’re already up to our necks in it."

Mycroft gave a rather naughty smirk.

“Well, I have never purported myself to be a paragon of virtue…”

Sherlock laughed in gleeful agreement.

“No-one who fucks their brother as passionately as you could be, dear. No-one who enjoys sucking and licking…”

Mycroft spluttered with embarrassment at that, but with an obvious pride which enchanted Sherlock.

“You don’t have to fear your darker side, Mycie. Not around me especially!” he insisted. “It exists within you, just as mine does. You’re allowed it. Everyone is. It’s about using it responsibly, surely? Playing with it safely, for mutual pleasure. I don’t want servicing or novelty thrills. I want mutual.”
The word rang out like bell. Mycroft sighed wistfully and closed his eyes in fond recollection.

“Mutual. Yes. As I believe it used to be with us. As children. Before…everything. Mutual adoration. I used to absolutely trust it.”

Sherlock ran a finger down his brother’s long nose and tapped it lightly.

“Then remember it, quickly. Come out and play with me, big brother. You said yourself when Siger died you became immature. Full of mischief. That you should have liked time and space to learn more about yourself, instead of being funnelled into adult life so rapidly and forcefully. You have paid your dues. You have worked hard enough at being someone else. Isn’t it time you allowed yourself to play?”

“I wonder whether I am capable of play anymore.”

"One way to find out. My suspicion is that you are a very naughty boy indeed,” Sherlock said, in a low, taunting voice.

Mycroft chuckled in spite of himself, reacting to the seductive tone on instinct. He pursed his lips and smouldered back at his infuriatingly all-too-aware brother.

"Oh, you think so, do you?"

Sherlock nodded definitely.

"I do. Not as bad as me, of course. But..."

Mycroft came up onto all fours and leant to whisper hotly into the shell of Sherlock’s ear.

"I only ever wanted to play with you, brother mine."

Sherlock shivered at the potential of that hot whisper.

“The feeling is mutual,” he breathed.

Mycroft clocked the dilating of the mercurial blue eyes and the quickening of breath. Something was being asked of him. He deduced it in a trice.

Do something. Try something.

With an unwavering hand he reached out and grasped his brother’s hair, pulling it gently at first. Sherlock’s eyes widened in mild shock.

Mycroft licked his lips and wrapped the soft curls tighter into his fist. He yanked on them as he leaned down to suck at his brother’s long, white neck.

Sherlock cried out in exhilaration – and in sheer automatic reaction to the sharp zing which shot from his head and through his body to gather in his groin. Shivers of pleasure raced through him at the feel of teeth over his jugular, only just barely biting - but there. His follicles burned as his brother tugged at his head a little bit harder, increasing the resistance by the tiniest degree. He arched up, on fire for Mycroft, electrified by his attention, by the acknowledgement that it was not impossible to have this.

“Oh! Oh, God…,” he whimpered. Mycroft roughly shook him by a handful of hair.

Just as Sherlock felt himself beginning to fully harden and peak, he was let go. He fell back, red-
faced and open-mouthed with wanting.

Mycroft tilted his head with cool curiosity, performing it outrageously, but with a genuine query underlying his grey gaze.

“Fascinating reaction, brother mine. What would it be like if I did this, I wonder…?”

He raked his nails down Sherlock’s pale chest, leaving pink lines in his wake, and then pinched one erect nipple tightly between his fingers.

Sherlock practically squealed.

“Oh, shit!” he groaned, as the sharp thrill shot through his chest. His cock twitched and throbbed between his legs, and he humped the air.

Mycroft let go instantly.

“Was that fun?” he enquired, in a deep, ironic tone. Somehow Sherlock could not recall his brother’s light baritone rumble having such sensual power before, though it had always been one of his most seductive features.

“Yes!” he breathed, rubbing at his own peaked nipple in deliberate provocation.

Mycroft broke his cool, sensual façade with a self-deprecating half-smile.

“So I see. Tell me, little brother… Would that be enough for you? If that's all it was?”

Sherlock nodded a little more frantically than he intended to.

“If that’s all you enjoy, absolutely. When we fuck. That. You could do things like that…”

Sherlock had the distinct feeling he was babbling, and that he was being tested.

“But you imagine other things?” challenged Mycroft. “Don’t you?”

“I do. But it’s not only about what I imagine…”

“Do you want me to… thrash you?” he asked hesitantly, scrutinising his brother’s face for the truth. He could not imagine ever being comfortable with it, and he needed confirmation of specific requirements in the heat of the moment.

Sherlock rolled his eyes in mock exasperation.


He smirked wickedly and rolled over onto his front.

Mycroft gazed down upon soft, naked flesh. The dent of sinuous spine, and the pale, pert globes, pushed up ever so slightly towards him.

“You imagine me doing… this?” he asked, raising his hand and letting it fall flatly onto one smooth, rounded bottom cheek. It wobbled and flinched under his palm.

Sherlock gasped. He had hoped rather than believed that Mycroft would do even so much as tap him. His prick responded out of all proportion to the stimulation. The very notion of the lightest slap,
hardly anything at all, went straight to his leaking cock. Because it came from Mycroft. Because his big brother was joining the game.

“Again?” husked Mycroft, a hint of tentativeness in his voice, in case he was getting it wrong. In case he was making a fool of himself.

Sherlock nodded and dipped his back in wordless supplication, lifting his hips off the mattress.

Mycroft raised his hand higher this time and brought it down with more deliberate force, although it was still a relatively gentle glancing blow.

Though the noise of the impact was minimal it resounded like a ricochet in their ears.

Sherlock made a tiny yipping noise as though he’d been stung by an insect. He looked back over his shoulder, biting his lip in provocation, curls falling into his eyes as he met his brother’s curious, lust-filled gaze.

“Ow…,” he said, pronouncing the sound slowly and deliberately. His bowlike lips caressed the exclamation as it was formed between them. Then he grinned like a contented cat. “Oh, Mycie,” he groaned theatrically, in no pain at all. “Ow.”

Mycroft snorted at the tease, breaking the palpable tension quite consciously before he lost control of himself.

"Liked that, did you?"

Sherlock nodded, still with his backside turned up. He leaned onto his hand and kicked his feet up to rub at this brother’s calves.

"Mm. You liked it too. It’s not as though you haven’t done it before, is it? When I was a boy. As you said yourself, I’d just race off rubbing myself. That's all this is, Mycroft. A grown-up childish game of cat and mouse. Just naughtiness and retaliation. Let me have it."

He wiggled his bottom and lay his chin upon his folded arms.

Mycroft smacked him once more, a harder blow which made Sherlock throw his head back and gasp. He gripped the pillow either side of his head.

“Please!”

He braced himself for another, but nothing happened.

Mycroft paused and patted his brother’s bottom affectionately, not wanting to go any further tonight. He needed time to process. Time to think.

“Perhaps that is enough for now?” he ventured.

Sherlock sighed as though dreadfully put upon and rolled over. He grabbed his brother down into a reassuring cuddle, the purpose of which was not lost on Mycroft. He was being comforted, and congratulated, and thanked.

“It’s always all right,” said Sherlock, happily. “You have a good think about it, if you need to.” His tone darkened and he chuckled shrewdly. “But you enjoyed that. Spanking me. And it hurt so nicely, Mycie. I’m just a tiny bit warm from your hand - yet I remain unharmed and undamaged.” He leered downwards. "I'm fucking hard. And so are you."
He rolled onto his side with a smug smile and left his brother breathing heavily, unable to contradict or argue.

As Sherlock fell asleep, content and satisfied, Mycroft spooned up behind him and stayed awake, thinking and thinking - still erect from what had occurred, with his brother’s gasps of excitement echoing in his head. He was smiling too as he inhaled their unique, combined pheromonal profile. He felt warmed to his core. It radiated outwards from him. He imagined a glow of light heating his blood, like lava flowing through his veins. Heat enhanced by Sherlock’s body temperature; and by the tingle of power in the palm of his hand.
In which the brothers experiment with the concept of anticipation, power, and 'fun'. Seeds of the future are planted.

With apologies to Oscar Wilde (though not many).

A scene I had in mind from the very beginning, but which took a while to get them to!

Sherlock woke next to his brother for the third morning in a row. Not just next to. Tangled up in. Mycroft snored gently beside him, one arm thrown over him, not yet restored to consciousness.

He checked the clock on the dresser. Gone 10am. They had slept in, and slept well.

*The third day. Two days after Christmas. Something about today. What is today?*

It was on the periphery of his mind, but the answer was momentarily obscured.

Mycroft stirred, sparing him the agony of not knowing.

“Mm, good morning,” rumbled the elder man, yawning himself awake.

Sherlock leaned in to kiss him, adoring the bleary-eyed discomposure of his brother's sleep-rumpled state. He felt as though he would never tire of their waking up as lovers.

“And to you. Sleep well?”

Mycroft yawned deeply.

“Like the dead.”

“No dreams?”

“None. Neither good nor bad. I think that is what is known as ‘switching off’.”

“I hate to think I have switched you off, brother,” smirked Sherlock, capturing his mouth again. “I thought I turned you on?”

“It’s too early for banter, dear,” Mycroft grumbled, grabbing him into an inescapable hold.

Sherlock sighed and wiggled contentedly in the iron grip, happily pinned.

“It isn’t too early actually. It’s rather late. Sex is making us slug-a-beds.”
“Marvellous,” said Mycroft, closing his eyes again and spooning against his brother’s long form. “Let us never leave.”

Sherlock paused as the answer to his earlier pondering came to him. That was what was odd about today. His heart jolted at the realisation. He bit his lip.

“I was supposed to go back to London today,” he said, reluctant to articulate it, as though to even say the word ‘London’ was to break the spell of these unexpected, enchanted days. Sherlock noted his own phrasing with interest.

‘London’. Not ‘home’. But then, London is home. No, Mycroft is home. Mycroft is London. Isn’t he?

He felt Mycroft tense behind him, then sigh quietly. A weary sound.

Mycroft rested his forehead on his brother’s naked back. His chest tightening as the unsayable was said. London. Going back.

“Of course,” he said, neutrally. “It’s today. I had… I confess I had quite forgotten. Lost all track of time.”

Sherlock huffed an ironic little sound, without turning round to meet his eye.

“Quite unlike you.”

Indeed it was. Most unlike. Tension shimmered between them.

Mycroft struggled to know how to respond. At a loss as to how to ask for what he wanted. The request he desperately hoped would not be refused.

“Do you…”

Sherlock heard the unasked question – which was in itself an answer to his own unasked question. He put them both out of their misery.

“There is no need to ask whether I wish to leave today as planned. Of course not. Plans are out of the window. I have nothing important to get back for.”

“I see,” said Mycroft, shortly.

And if you did? Where then would you go, brother mine?

Sherlock heard that question too.

“I would rather be here than anywhere, Mycroft.”

He frowned to himself.

But would you rather be here than London? Who is running the country?

Mycroft breathed a sigh of audible relief.

“Good. Good.”

Don’t leave. Not yet.

“Could you… Would you be able to stay until the New Year, at least?” he ventured hopefully,
making the offer as generous and gallant as it could sound.

Or forever?

Sherlock smiled and twisted round to peck his brother’s large nose, taking in the habitual frown creasing the patch of skin between his anxious eyebrows. He rubbed at it with light fingertips to banish it.

“Yes. I’d like to.”

And after that?

Neither was up to the task of broaching the next inevitable step in the train of thought, or of thinking beyond five days. That bridge would have to be crossed when they came to it. As they would do, all too soon. That was what New Years were for. New beginnings. Or old endings. Janus the two-faced god, approaching again, looking simultaneously forward and back with his four sharp eyes.

They would wait until the close of the year before they discussed how to enter the next one.

Until then, they had extended time. Unlooked-for time. A week of freedom. Of exploration and habituation. A week of waking up together in this house. A week to see if they could live together for a whole week.

And longer? Perhaps even longer. Who could say after only three days of waking in each other’s arms?

Sherlock span round fully to take his brother’s face in his hands, and kissed him deeply once more, licking at his lips with delicate strokes. He smiled reassuringly, forcing his wistfulness down.

Mycroft read the determination to temporarily put aside the terrifying future. He was not up to facing it either. He smiled back, and ran a thumb across his brother’s full lips.

“I can still feel what you did to me last night,” he husked wickedly, seeking refuge in sex. Which was, he reflected, a very satisfactory refuge indeed.

Sherlock chuckled with delight at the proffered change of subject.

“And I…can still feel your hand upon me,” he said, bringing his brother’s hands round to cup at his backside.

They undulated towards each other, lying on their sides until their bodies clashed. They fell together in an urgent embrace, sliding their naked forms against each other beneath the soft sheets, grasping for the now-almost-familiar feeling of each other’s contours. Tapered fingers gripped edges and curves, caressing plump flesh and taut sinew. Their mouths devoured each other.

Mycroft sucked at his brother’s long neck, rubbing his closed eyelids up against the barely-there stubble beneath the finely chiselled jaw.

Sherlock brought his leg up between Mycroft’s, rubbing at him with his thigh, causing a deep, welcoming groan to reverberate through his chest.

They adjusted positions quickly and instinctively, until their bare cocks met. It was fast becoming a ritual, this mutual rubbing and rutting in the light of day.

They worked their hips in rhythm until they sensed themselves on the precipice. And Mycroft, head
full of last night, had a sudden wonderful idea.

He smoothly rolled himself atop his supine brother with considerable force, trapping him beneath and pinning his wrists to the bed.

Sherlock stared up rather breathlessly, and humped up with frantic movements. Mycroft smirked, shifting his hips away to prevent him making contact, then lunged down to bite at his brother’s neck. A helpless predicament for the boy.

“Be still,” he commanded, looming above in triumph.

Apart from the shudder which rattled through him, Sherlock stopped moving.

Mycroft’s eyes flashed with thrilling fire at being instantaneously obeyed. It was a novel sensation.

Sherlock’s hands opened and closed, testing the strength of the iron grip. His mouth fell partway open and he was panting all the while his cock throbbed at being prematurely halted. He glared up with wide, marginally uncertain eyes, eager for Mycroft’s next gambit.

“What would you like to do today?” asked Mycroft, as casually as if they were sitting in the library perusing the newspapers.

“You are unbelievable…,” hissed Sherlock, playing at scandalised though he was utterly intrigued by this sudden display of assertiveness.

“Aren’t I just? Answer. What would you like to do today?”

Sherlock tried to thrust upwards to test his brother’s resolve, and was pressed down more firmly - even a little viciously.

*Very promising indeed. A new game.*

Sherlock went limp and tried to calm his racing heartbeat.

“I don’t know,” he said, affecting boredom. “Don’t care.”

“Well, are you sick of being confined to the house?” Mycroft asked, conversationally. “We could attempt another walk? A less ill-fated one this time, I promise. Or a bracing jog round the grounds?”

Sherlock considered this appalling proposition and shrugged, attempting to override the ache in his groin with insouciant playacting. He looked down briefly and smirked at the sight of Mycroft’s morning erection, pink and quivering above his stomach. This denial would never last. Surely.

“Perhaps a walk,” he said, dismissively. But then he hit upon a genuine unfulfilled desire. “Actually… I would rather like to go and tinker in my laboratory. Since you went to the trouble of building it. Would you mind?”

Mycroft smiled with transparent pleasure.

“Not at all. I’m glad you wish to use it. A bit of strategic time apart, you think?”

He thrust down, just a tiny bit, kissing the heads of their pricks together.

A telltale gasp caught in Sherlock’s throat.

“Well, a bit of ordinary activity couldn’t hurt,” he replied, manfully attempting to play on.
“A sound notion, I should think. We ought to attempt some semblance of normality. Or rather, test our new normal. I shall install myself in the library, and see to the… Oh, Lord!”

Mycroft’s head jerked upwards suddenly and he relinquished his hold. Sherlock frowned, perturbed.

“What? What, for heaven’s sake?!” he said in dismay, as his brother let go of his wrists. Just when things were getting interesting.

“The staff!” he exclaimed, rolling off to one side. “They’re due back today! At midday, to be precise. I only gave them three days off, because… Well, I wasn’t counting on you still being here, obviously.”

He winced in frustration.

Sherlock tutted, irritated to have reality intrude upon them so rudely.

“Oh, Mycie, really, can’t you put them off?! Just until New Year.”

Mycroft nodded and kissed him quickly, before scrambling up for his dressing gown.

“I certainly will. If you think I’m going to refrain from touching you when and wherever I please just to maintain appearances, you are mistaken. I am not about to hide in my own house,” he muttered, looking back at Sherlock with a fond if wry smile.

Sherlock returned it, disguising the unbidden concern which surfaced.

*But we will have to hide in our own lives. If this is to continue. We will have to hide in the real world. Or else avoid it entirely.*

He shook off the thought, placing it firmly in the file marked ‘Not Now.’

Mycroft made his way to the door, awkwardly pressing his erection down between his legs, muttering irritably to himself.

Sherlock snorted at him and lay back, flaunting himself openly, just to be a tease.

Mycroft made the error of glancing back and almost whined in defeat. He was severely tempted to jump back into bed, but he told himself he was made of sterner stuff than that and resolved to deal with business first.

“I’ll call each of them now,” he said, eyes somewhat glazed as Sherlock yawned and stretched. “Hopefully no-one will be on their way just yet…”

“That’s the spirit, brother. Pay them off until January the first.”

Sherlock ran his hands through his hair, adoring the gulp Mycroft could not disguise.

“I shall. But you realise the kitchen is an absolute desecration, don’t you?” he replied, with a sternness which was rather impressive in the face of such provocation. “You will have to help me set it to rights. You’ll have to help me round the house this week.”

That did it.

Sherlock sat up in indignation.

“Oh, will I?”
“You will if you want feeding.”

“I can see to myself,” he scoffed, waving a hand as though to dismiss him.

Mycroft cast him a heated glare and stepped back towards the bed, gazing down at him hawkishly.

“In so many ways. Yet past experience suggests that you often choose not to. Up you get, indolent boy. Help me perform my tedious domestic chores, eat your breakfast, then off to the lab with you.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes and smirked with his customary insolence.

“Yes, dear. In a minute.”

He reached for his cock and began stroking himself.

Mycroft scowled. Quick as a flash he leaned down and secured his brother’s thin wrist in his hand, holding it away from the straining erection. Sherlock reached out with his other hand, only to have that captured too.

Mycroft kept him in a firm hold, forcing Sherlock’s body to pull up off the bed. The younger man engaged his abdominal muscles, so that he half-lay, half-sat, and appeared to be almost levitating above the mattress.

“Stop that at once,” Mycroft breathed in a low, dark voice, directly into the hot shell of his ear. “I forbid it.”

Sherlock chuckled and shivered. He turned his head into Mycroft’s cheek.

“Do you?” he whispered, hotly.

Mycroft nodded slowly and turned so that their mouths almost touched. His tongue poked out, barely millimetres away from Sherlock’s pouting lips.

“Absolutely,” he whispered in return. Then, in his normal voice: “Get dressed and come downstairs.”

He gave his brother a shake, but didn’t immediately let go of his wrists.

Sherlock affected a sulk and thrashed a little, to see if he could dislodge the grip, or force it tighter.

“Bossy.”

“Elder brother’s prerogative.

He suddenly let go and Sherlock flopped back down onto the mattress with a soft ‘oof’.

Mycroft smirked.

“Why don’t you attempt to behave yourself for me, hm? Just for today.”

Sherlock licked thoughtfully at the slight burn round his wrists, then suckled on his fingers in outrageous flirtation.

“I can’t guarantee good behaviour, Mycie,” he said, batting his lashes. “Not at all.” He rolled over onto his stomach with a haughty toss of the head, just for good measure.
“How fortunate that I never expect it from you. Come on, get up,” he said, poking at Sherlock’s exposed side. He let his finger glance away to pull the sheet down and expose the smooth bare backside beneath.

Sherlock pushed back into a catlike stretch, showing off his lax, lithe form. He rolled over again, giving his brother an eyeful from the front, and reached out to try to coax him.

“Oh, call the stupid people in minute. Come back to bed, Mycroft. Don’t you want me to help you deal with more pressing matters…?” he taunted, running his hand up between his brother’s legs.

Mycroft’s eyes closed in pleasure, then narrowed at the dirty tactics. He stepped away, failing entirely to mask his reluctance. But the game was on now. Baby brother would not win so easily.

He ran a hand over his head to smooth his hair, and looked coolly down at his writhing, tormenting lover.

“No,” he said, simply. “Anticipation, brother mine. An aphrodisiac, I understand.”

Sherlock whined in the back of his throat and scowled.

“Who told you that?! You aren’t serious?”

“Perfectly.” He smiled pleasantly. “See you downstairs.”

His expression suddenly shifted to one of deadly intent.

“If you touch yourself before I touch you,” he husked, “you lose. You will wait for it. Until I am ready.”

“Mycroft!” Sherlock whined with a performative sulk.

The elder Holmes tutted and shook his head with infuriating condescension.

“It’s disgraceful that a mere three days is all it has taken to turn you into a complete libertine. I blame myself.”

“You’ll give in before I do,” retorted Sherlock, with more certainty than he felt.

Mycroft raised an icy brow.

“We’ll have to see, won’t we? Up with you, layabout.”

And with that he gritted his teeth and swept from the room before he could change his mind. Or laugh.

Sherlock gaped after him, then flopped back onto the pillows, rock hard and giggling.

Downstairs in the hallway Mycroft made his phone calls, offering money left, right and centre to stave off intrusion for another week. Then he made another call, to a contact he had had in mind for a very long time. To this person he spoke in hushed, private tones.

“Yes. Yes, do send me the details by email. Thank you,” he said, before hanging up.

Satisfied that business was concluded, he made his way to the kitchen, still in his dressing gown, to begin clearing away the multitude of crockery left piled on every surface. The uplift in his romantic life had taken its toll on his domestic one.
Halfway through the task Sherlock emerged, washed and dressed in a simple pair of black trousers and a casual long-sleeved sweater, also black.

“You look like a burglar on the prowl.”

“Oh, shut up. I am on the prowl, actually. For toasted bread and the finest preserves.”

Mycroft threw a teatowel at him and it landed on his shoulder.

“Dry this lot first. I’ll see to the toast. Ah, but first, the all-important ceremonial boiling of the kettle…”

Sherlock smirked and complied without fuss, and they spent a companionable time completing their respective tasks.

When they had breakfasted - in relative silence and a deliciously strained atmosphere of unresolved sexual tension - Mycroft rose from the table to go and see to his own ablutions.

Before he reached the dining room door, Sherlock called out to him.

“I don’t suppose you have a gym hidden somewhere in this house?”

“Nothing to quite dignify that description. There is a treadmill, a static bicycle, a few weights in the room adjoining the games room. I actually prefer to run outdoors when I can stir myself to motion. Looking to burn off some energy, brother mine?” he smiled, knowingly.

Sherlock gave nothing away.

“I could do with a workout. Unless you can think of any better way for me to get my daily exercise?” he enquired, with unconvincing innocence.

Mycroft scoffed.

“A very poor attempt. Pitiful, in fact.”

“Frigid,” accused Sherlock, with an amused snort.

“Practically Antarctic, dear,” he replied as he wafted from the room.

Sherlock finished his tea and repaired to the laboratory, desperate for something to take his mind off his unruly prick and his uncontrollably obscene imagination.

Anticipation was indeed an aphrodisiac, but it was also a pain in the balls. He realised it had indeed only taken three days for him to expect – to need – release. Though not just any old squandering release. Not an efficient rub-off or a wet dream. Slow, indulgent, deliberate release at his brother’s hands, or mouth, or beautifully tight….

He shook himself in frustration.

*No. Concentrate. You’ve gone decades without it before. Hold firm. Oh, God, not ‘hold firm’. Why is everything suddenly dirty when you’re not allowed to be dirty…? I think I’ve got priapism. Go down, go down… No, not ‘go down’! Argh. I shall be revenged, Mycroft Holmes.*

He grumbled inwardly, cursing his lack of willpower, and trotted down the cellar stairs to his lab, intent on spending a few hours losing himself in chemistry rather than biology.
After putting the house to rights as far as he could, Mycroft settled himself in the library, noting on his way that the red ‘occupied’ light was shining outside the laboratory. He smiled to himself at the idea of Sherlock actually bothering to put it on.

The house was beautifully quiet, but he felt at something of a loss now. How on earth had he been amusing himself for all these months alone? He’d done a lot of pottering about and petty activity. He’d done jam-making. Jam-making! Had it really come to that? It had. That, and mooning about in his observatory. And wasting so much time.

How quickly he’d adapted to his brother’s constant company here. How unthinkable that he should be without it.

A pang of something which he vaguely identified as loneliness hit him. No, not loneliness. Yearning. Missing him already.

Pull yourself together, Holmes. He’s only downstairs. You can entertain yourself for a few hours without needing to see him. Or torment him. Or grab him and make him… Make him make those little noises. Smell his neck, and pin his wrists like he wants you to. Don’t give in. Make him come to you. Come for you. Oh, God, you’re a lost cause.

He inhaled and focused on a host of unpleasant images, visualising a number of senior Cabinet ministers in the nude to dispel his erotic trance.

It was sensible to spend time apart, he told himself. It would not do to become smothering, nor to be smothered. That kind of arrangement couldn’t last. They were, after all, two independent souls, for all the intensity of their connection. Both long since adapted to being lone wolves.

They required time to gather their wits, to enjoy their own space, with the knowledge that they could reconvene at any time - and that when they did it would be by free choice. That was the way forward. If there were indeed a way forward. If he might be permitted to play the long game...

Mycroft Holmes was skilled at the long game. He played for keeps and would do everything in his power not to throw away his chances.

He perused his bookshelves in search of something to get lost in. Some abstruse tome? He hardly had the patience for it today. Some light reading, then. He selected a number of slim volumes, then placed a record on the player. Chopin, this time. Bright and beautiful, but nothing to stir the passion.

He reclined on the chaise longue under the large window to make the most of the natural light. The snow had settled overnight, and the pale winter sun reflected off the white surface of the surrounding fields.

He selected his reading material and lay back in comfort.

The clock ticked and chimed. The hours passed. Eventually, the Holmes brothers, cocooned in their private realms, came to the end of their need for solitude.

Just when Mycroft was contemplating going to check, spurred by the sudden irrational fear that perhaps Sherlock had poisoned himself, a curly head peered around the doorway.

Mycroft’s heart jolted at the sight, as though it had been days since he’d last laid eyes upon him. He maintained a cool façade.
“Finished tinkering?”

Sherlock entered breezily, though his chest ached at the sight his brother made - laid out like a Roman on the antique couch. He looked simply edible in loose, grey herringbone trousers and a dark blue cashmere jumper. Hair so neat. Brow so furrowed.

“I have finished testing the equipment.”

“Any world-changing discoveries today?”

“None. But I can report that the laboratory is magnificent and that I love you.”

Mycroft looked up, unable to disguise his beaming smile at that. Sherlock returned it and slithered onto the couch to claim a lingering kiss. Both became hard on contact.

Mycroft suppressed a moan.

So, that’s your move, is it, brother mine? Sweet and soft. A beaux stratagem.

He lay down his book and readjusted position to sit up at the high end of the chaise. He spread his legs so that Sherlock could settle between him with his back to his chest.

“Thank you on both counts,” he returned, quietly. “I love you also, though I care less for the laboratory.”

Sherlock elegantly draped himself over his brother’s body, sinking down to rest the back of his head on his solar plexus. His outer leg splayed wide, and he kept his foot on the floor to support himself.

Mycroft brought one hand up to play with his brother’s hair from behind, while the other rubbed at his bicep. He leaned in and kissed the back of Sherlock’s ear, breathing him in, reminding himself of that ineffable scent. His eyes closed in bliss.

“Comfy?” he rumbled.

Sherlock nodded, and bounced his head back.

“Comfy. What were you reading?”

Sherlock sat up slightly and searched for the discarded volume. He found it sandwiched between Mycroft’s thigh and the furniture.

Mycroft cleared his throat awkwardly.

“Don’t laugh… Or rather, do. The Importance of Being Earnest.”

“Ha, so I see! Auditioning for Lady Bracknell again? I’ve always thought you’d do well in the local am-dram society. Do you do Gilbert and Sullivan too?”

Mycroft snorted and was rather thankful that Sherlock could not see the pink blush heating his face.

“Hardly. I just happened across it.”

Sherlock slapped his brother’s thigh with the book.

“Here. Read with me.”
“Not really?!”
“Yes, why not?”

_Because I will feel like an idiot!_

Mycroft shrugged.

“Where from?”

Sherlock flicked through it and found a scene.

“Here. Where she interviews him, the main one.”

Mycroft rolled his eyes.

“I’m not doing a voice.”

“Just a little voice?” giggled Sherlock, unable to help himself.

“No!”

Sherlock heard the amusement in his brother’s voice.

“Killjoy.”

“Do you wish me to read or don’t you?” scolded Mycroft with a tut.

“I really do!”

Sherlock schooled his features and settled back, feeling the telltale bouncing of Mycroft’s stomach behind him.

Mycroft composed himself to stop chuckling. He held the playtext out in front of them, resting it on Sherlock’s chest.

“She asks him – ‘Do you smoke?’”

Sherlock read his lines with gusto.

“‘I must admit I smoke,’” he said, nodding seriously.

“I am glad to hear it,” recited Mycroft, in a voice very slightly tinged with the tones of an Edwardian aunt. “‘A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is.’ Aren’t there just?” he interrupted himself with a snort, before snapping back into character. “‘How old are you?’”

“‘Twenty-nine,’” replied Sherlock. Then, _sotto voce_, “Nearer to forty, give or take. But don’t tell anyone.”

Mycroft hummed approvingly. “A very good age to be married at. I have always been of opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know?”

Sherlock, as Jack Worthing, shrugged. “I know nothing, Lady Bracknell.”

“I am pleased to hear it,” said Lady Bracknell, her voice far richer and more stentorian now. “I do
not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square."

Mycroft broke off with an appreciative chuckle. “There, that’s fabulous, isn’t it?”

Sherlock span round to look at him, eager to capture the sight of a richly entertained, rather extroverted Mycroft.

“It is, and you deliver it with such conviction, dear. Skip to the bit where he says he has a country house.”

Mycroft flipped the page. “Oh, yes, she asks which side of Belgravia Square he lives on, and he answers, and she says… ‘The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. However, that could easily be altered.’”

Sherlock grinned at the line.

“‘Do you mean the fashion, or the side?’”

“‘Both, if necessary!’”

The collapsed into laughter at Mycroft’s dowager tones. Sherlock kicked his feet in glee and let himself be grabbed and tousled.

They wiped hysterical tears from their eyes, then started up again, the laughter ebbing and flowing between them so naturally.

Mycroft sighed happily and sat back, stomach aching from the exertion. A few residual little huffs erupted every now and then.

“Oh, dear, how silly. It’s all right, I don’t intend to read the whole play out loud. I think that’s enough.”

Sherlock snorted. “Good, you’re far too much of a stage hog for my liking.”

Mycroft clipped him lightly round the ear.

“Merely a walk-on role, I assure you.”

“You? I think not. Though Stage Manager is your more natural part.”

Mycroft snorted at that and leaned back in contentment.

“Once upon a time, perhaps.”

“Oh, you will be so again, brother.”

Mycroft said nothing in reply, keeping his counsel.

“I can’t remember laughing this much with you,” said Sherlock, wonderingly. “Ever before.”

Laughter was a new currency. Like sex. Sherlock knew he could laugh with John. Even giggle with him, like a boy. But to do so with Mycroft held new and special meaning.
Mycroft shrugged. “I am not much given to laughter.”

“You are,” corrected Sherlock. “You just haven't been accustomed to it. There has not been much to laugh about.”

“I had my moments when we were children, I believe.”

Sherlock turned in his brother’s arms.

“I like reading with you,” he said.

The earnestness with which he said it touched Mycroft’s heart.

“So do I,” he agreed with warmth. “But I draw the line at bedtime stories.”

“No, you don’t,” smirked Sherlock. “I’ll have you doing pirate tales by the end of the week.”

“I’m sure you could persuade me. Or nag me until I give in.”

The book fell to the floor as they kissed. A kiss full of gentle, burgeoning tenderness.

Sherlock lay back when they finally broke away, sinking down lower still. He closed his eyes as the music from the record player, and the soft, soothing strokes of his brother’s fingers through his hair helped him drift into a kind of half-waking state. For some time Mycroft petted him as though he were a large lap cat, until eventually Sherlock began to fidget.

The mantle clock chimed three.

Sherlock yawned.

“Bored now.”

Mycroft tutted, determined not to succumb.

“I’ll make us a late lunch in a while. Go back to the lab, if you like. Or watch a film?”

Sherlock huffed.

“Tedious.”

“Then select another book. There are plenty to keep you occupied. You haven’t read them all, despite what you might tell me.”

“Stupid books,” came the petulant, childish reply.

Mycroft frowned with deep disapproval.

“Sherlock Holmes, I will not have blasphemy in this house.”

Sherlock flung himself off the chaise, momentarily compressing his brother’s stomach rather painfully.

He scowled at the bookshelves and casements as though they personally offended him.

Mycroft examined him with narrowed eyes.

“What a load of tat you have here,” Sherlock said in disgust, flicking the shelves with his fingers.

“No, don’t open that, those are the rare editions!” exclaimed Mycroft, sitting up in alarm as Sherlock unlocked a special cabinet.

“What, these dog-eared old things?”

“Those are rare and expensive. Heirlooms, brother. No touching.”

Sherlock’s nose wrinkled in disgust.

“You’re very keen on that phrase today, aren’t you? No touching. No touching. You forbid it.”

He ran his hand over the spine of every book, making sure to spread his palm evenly across them, as though wiping grease onto the soft leather. He turned smugly and aimed a killing ‘so there’ look at his brother.

Mycroft had gone very still. His brow had lowered by inches and his lips had set into a firm, thin line.

“Sherlock... Are you being provoking?” he said in a low, foreboding tone, tapping his fingers on his thigh as though calculating his next three or four moves.

Sherlock tilted his head and put his hands on his hips, gazing into the air.

“Hmm. Provoking? I don’t know, am I?”

“You are,” confirmed Mycroft, raising a chilly eyebrow.

“Then that is probably what I intended,” replied Sherlock, pleasantly. “Come back to bed with me.”

It was worth a try.

Mycroft chuckled hollowly.

“You can’t win like that, dear boy.”

Sherlock looked at him pityingly.

Oh, brother mine. If you cannot be seduced with my best behaviour, you must be induced with my worst.

He selected a book. An old-looking one.

“Don’t you... Sherlock! That’s Chaucer!”

Mycroft paled, his face falling into a mask of horror as Sherlock raised the calf-skin bound manuscript - so beautifully edged with hand-painted gilding - and flung it high into the air.

It thumped down painfully onto the wooden floor. Mycroft flinched as though it had hit him in the face.

Sherlock shrugged carelessly, holding an insincere finger to his lips.

“Whoops. Sorry, Chaucer.”

Mycroft was speechless.
So Sherlock flung another book – over his shoulder and across the room this time.

Mycroft winced as it clattered down, landing spine-upwards with its pages crushed. It physically hurt to look at.


Mycroft rose shakily to his feet and pointed, his face transformed from shocked white to livid pink.

“You little philistine!”

Sherlock laughed in his face, twirled on his heel, and bowled Wordsworth overarm.

Mycroft could bear no more.

“You will pay for this, brother mine,” he promised through clenched teeth. He took a threatening step.

Sherlock planted his feet, radiating self-satisfaction.

“Oh, I do hope so.”

Mycroft moved as though to take another step, but halted all of a sudden. He went to say something, and Sherlock could read the decision-making process at work.

Mycroft issued a grim smile. He clicked his fingers and pointed to the floor in front of him.

“Come here immediately.”

Sherlock shook his head imperceptibly, a faint grin quirking his lips at the corners.

“No.”

His brother beckoned.


Sherlock appeared to consider the offer, licking his lower lips as he did so.

“Mm… I think not, actually,” he said, folding his arms stubbornly, holding his ground.

“Oh, you do like to get yourself into trouble, don’t you, Lock. Hm?” Mycroft chuckled darkly. “You do so like it.”

The air was thick with palpable tension now. It buzzed around them, making their hearts pound furiously in their chests. Each could see the pulse working in the other’s neck, hear their fast breathing, and discern the sheen of sweat at their temples as the temperature in the library shifted inexorably upwards.

Sherlock took a step backwards, testing the water. Mycroft advanced a small, calm step towards him. And stopped.

Sherlock’s eyes flicked to the door across the room to his right, and he made his move.

“Au revoir!”
The game was on.

He bolted for the exit, knowing full well that Mycroft had no intention of actually chasing him down.

Mycroft, playing his role to perfection, merely walked casually to the door and out into the hallway, just in time to catch a scurrying blur racing up the stairs like a dervish. He spoke as though to himself at his normal volume, in a level, bored tone.

“I shall find you, Lock. I always do.”

“Never! Too slow, too old!” Sherlock shouted back, and dove for the main bedroom, a wild grin on his face, eyes flashing with excitement.

He snatched up his brother’s dressing gown from behind the door, gathered up supplies from the bedside table, and ran back out again. From below he could hear Mycroft slowly ascending the stairs with a deliberately heavy tread.

He slithered out of his clothes, shedding them everywhere as he ran ahead.

He bounded into the games room, then through the connecting door to the small home gym. As he had suspected, there was a door leading out into another corridor which completed a circuit back to the main landing. He slowed down, hearing the telltale creak of his brother’s footsteps pacing patiently behind him. He suppressed the giggles bubbling up in his chest as he tiptoed round, now behind his brother’s path. He slunk as quietly as possibly up the next flight of stairs.

He felt like a wild, fancy-free urchin running his big brother amok.

Mycroft was letting him. He could of course tell exactly where Sherlock was. But this was a game of cat and mouse, not hide and seek.

Sherlock paused on the second landing upstairs, listening closely for signs of his hunter. None came. He edged his way along the bannister, peering down to see if he could catch a glimpse. Goosebumps raised on his flesh and he shuddered deliciously as he selected a bolthole in which to conceal himself. When he had completed his circuit of the first floor, Mycroft slowly ascended the second set of stairs, ears pricked for giveaway signs. There were none for the moment. He paused on the upper floor corridor, deducing which of the many doors his brother was hiding behind, quickly calculating his thought process. Surely he wasn’t going to disappoint him with an obvious move like cowering under the guest bed?

The floorboards creaked under his feet, and he moved on, knocking on the wood panelling with his knuckles.

“Oh, come out, come out, wherever you are…,” he said, in an eerie sing-song voice.

With all the speed of a mechanised rabbit at a greyhound race, Sherlock launched himself from the door to Mycroft’s left, and streaked past him, naked except for a dressing gown tied round his neck by the arms. It flapped behind him like a cape. And now Mycroft remembered the game exactly, and pictured Lock doing this, all of five years old, shooting round this house squealing like a banshee.

How much more intriguing was the game now they were old enough to appreciate its potential.

He caught a tantalising glimpse of his brother’s bare bottom wobbling down the stairs.
Sherlock turned on the landing below to look up at him cheekily. He mimed twirling a moustache, like the villain in a silent film, then gave a theatrical laugh of mocking triumph and fled away again, zig-zagging and double-backing all round the house, making his path as unpredictable and infuriating as possible.

“Too slow, too lazy. Too boring to catch me!”

At this, Mycroft gave chase. Proper chase. He grunted in outrage and thundered down the stairs, aggravated and exhilarated in equal measure to find himself being led a merry dance.

“There’s no escaping me, you little caped hellhound!”

Sherlock was too nimble for him. He escaped onto the ground floor, running a lap of it just for fun before he sought refuge in the boot room. When he was sure Mycroft had reached the hallway and turned left into the dining room, he snuck out and turned right, confident that his brother was somewhere way behind him. He fled down the corridor giggling with glee, and almost bumped into the very smug, very stern-looking master of the Grange.

“Shit!”

His own sparkling blue eyes widened as they met two glinting pools of grey.

“Oh, indeed, brother mine,” husked Mycroft, victorious.

Sherlock frowned, deducing how on earth he’d been cut off. Then it hit him.

“Servant’s passageways connecting the rooms. Hidden in the walls!”

“Yes. You really ought to have foreseen that.”

“Bugger!”

Sherlock squealed as he was captured by the ear. His body dipped as Mycroft pulled him along. They rounded a very familiar corner.

He twisted and kicked but succeeded only in causing himself more agony, so he settled for yelling his protest, enjoying the sharp reverberation of his cries in the once-silent space.

Mycroft dragged him back into the library. Trapped at last.

The elder Holmes transferred his grip from ear to flyaway curls.

“Apologise for making a mess of my books,” he demanded, pulling Sherlock up to meet his eye.

Sherlock winced and grinned simultaneously, which was a rather odd sensation.

“Shan’t, Mycie! Not sorry!”

Mycroft’s head tilted to one side in bemusement.

“Aren’t you? Shall I make you sorry?” he wondered aloud.

Sherlock lashed out with flailing arms, which his brother skilfully avoided.

“No! Let me go, you’re being horrible!”
He was on a roll now, thrashing around, revelling in instinctive immaturity - feeling the burn in his scalp and generally having a high time. And he was hard. Hard and aching, and desperate for Mycroft to finish what he had started this morning. No. Last night.

Mycroft plunged his mouth towards him in a passionate, breath-taking kiss, pressing his own rampant erection up against him.

“I am,” he panted hotly. “I am most horrible.”

He dragged Sherlock over to the chaise longue, and hauled him down across his knee, trapping the lanky, writhing body tightly against him, with one arm securing his waist, and one leg wrapped round his calves. He flipped the dressing gown up and over his brother’s head, revealing the full extent of the naked back, bottom and legs frantically wiggling against him.

Sherlock put up as good as struggle as seemed appropriate, kicking out to test his brother’s resolve. All the blood seemed to rush to his head. Though on reflection, perhaps not quite all of it. A considerable amount remained pooled further south.

“Mm! Let me go, Mycroft. You’re overreacting!”

“I never overreact! I am moderation itself!” he proclaimed, in a tone not completely dissimilar to Lady Bracknell.

Sherlock giggled hysterically, and then the sound was cut-off by a mighty smack – the sound of Mycroft’s… No, not hand. Book! The slim volume of Wilde they had read together. The hardback cover descended onto his exposed backside with considerable force. Rather shocking force.

At fucking last!

Sherlock’s head jerked up and he gasped at the sting. He blushed despite himself.

“Mycroft!” he exclaimed from somewhere under the dressing gown cape. “You can’t spank me with Earnest!”

“I think you’ll find, you rotten boy,” proclaimed Mycroft, the pleasure in his voice all too obvious, “that I can.”

He walloped down upon the beautifully soft and bouncy target in his lap. Again and again his arm rose and fell, each thrilling blow punctuated by a litany of playful accusations.

“Is this your idea of fun? You bad, awful, naughty, maddening…”

Sherlock’s eyes closed in bliss as he was soundly and willingly punished for his escapade. His cock leaked copiously as it rubbed against his brother’s wool trousers, and he gripped Mycroft’s bony ankle with both hands to anchor himself. The friction against his groin set his head spinning. He panted loudly every time his body was thrust forward.

“Oh, fuck…,” he moaned, his voice sounding distant and needy to his own ears. His vision swam as grateful tears of pleasure-pain sprang to his eyes. “Yes-yes…”

“Ghastly, monstrous, beastly behaviour! Serve you right. Vandal! Scamp!”

Sherlock rocked his hips as he was spanked. Mycroft threw to book to one side to use his hand instead. Every nerve ending in Sherlock’s body seemed to come alive, like a zap of electricity conveyed from flesh to flesh. From his brother’s palm to his rear end, to his aching shaft.
The sensation was too good, too much - so close to satisfaction and so far from it too. He chased the feeling as the good hurt, the good burn thrummed through his blood, pressing the button in his brain which turned everything up higher, made everything clearer and better… Above him, his brother’s controlling hand, and below, sturdy thighs and thick hardness pressing against his stomach. In his ears, the rasping sound of heavy breathing and a stream of tantalising vocabulary. It was dizzying.

“Please, please!”

“Naughty little Lock...”

Mycroft gathered pace, watching in a daze as he turned pale flesh from pink to bright red; watching himself from above as he mastered the lithe form - this responsive, desiring man who trusted him, and wanted him, and was so utterly turned on because of him. Lock was begging him for release. Begging him. And he was thanking him too, in sounds rather than words. Thank you for the gift of spontaneity; for your care, and your insight into the good, good hurt.

Sherlock was panting raggedly, voice high with need and almost broken under the strain. So nearly there…

“Going to… I’m going to…!”

He frotted harder, grunting with desperation.

Mycroft stilled his hand after one final, extra-hard spank. He planted his palm on his brother’s hot cheeks and held it there, pressing in the soreness, pushing the pliant body back and forth over his knee.

He felt almost overwhelmed by Sherlock’s pleasure and hastened to make way for it, loosening his hold and letting the long legs free for better purchase, allowing him to rut with harder and faster rhythmic jerks.

And suddenly Sherlock was crying out and shuddering apart.

Mycroft felt warmth gush against his thigh.

Sherlock’s legs juddered, and his spine flexed into an arch as he came with a loud, protracted wail. He whimpered himself empty.

The orgasm left him weak. Drained. His prick, spent and sensitive, rubbed against rough wool as he writhed out the very last contractions of pleasure. Tiny lightning bolts of aftershock made him quiver and jolt, and he giggled at the randomness of the sensation before flopping contentedly in place. He rested over his brother’s knee - perfectly secure and perfectly balanced.

When the room stopped spinning, Sherlock realised there was silence.

Is something wrong?

He looked over his shoulder with a tinge of concern.

“Mycie…?”

Mycroft looked stunned. Like he’d been told something profoundly scandalous and couldn’t formulate an adequate response. His eyes were glazed, staring out at nothing; his brow mildly furrowed in bafflement.
“Are you all right? Mycroft?”

Mycroft looked down at him, as though noticing him for the first time. He shook his head abruptly and opened his mouth.

“I… You’ve lost your cape,” he said hoarsely, seeing his dressing gown piled on the floor. Then, to Sherlock’s delight and profound relief, the perplexed face broke into a broad, bashful smile.

Sherlock returned the look with complete understanding, and they gazed at each other like a pair of goldfish for a while.

Then Mycroft’s expression shifted to one of glowering intensity, and Sherlock wondered who was really the most mercurial member of the family.

“Get up,” he ordered, pulling at Sherlock with gentle but efficient movements. “Slowly. Don’t faint.”

Sherlock bit his lip and obeyed with a groan, raising himself to an upright sitting position on the couch. He hissed slightly as his bottom made contact with the fabric, and that was all kinds of thrilling in itself.

Mycroft stood and inspected the wet patch on his trousers.

“Look what you’ve done,” he muttered softly, clicking his tongue at the mess.

Sherlock caught the tone. He looked coquettishly up through his lashes.

“Sorry, brother. I couldn’t help it.”

“I think you ought to…” Mycroft checked in briefly and received a miniscule nod of affirmation. “Clean it up for me. Lick it up,” he said, more certainly.

Sherlock nodded with faux contrition, and knelt at his brother’s feet. He ran his tongue over the semen-streaked fabric adorning his thigh, tasting woollen strands and the odd sea-foam tang of his own fluid. He lapped at it sensuously, and brought his hands to slowly undo the fly button and draw the trousers down Mycroft’s legs.

Mycroft obligingly stepped out of them, and stripped his jumper off over his head, causing his hair to stand on end.

Sherlock looked up at him with deep affection, then burrowed into his groin, nuzzling at the front of his bulging undershorts, inhaling and mouthing at him through the thin cotton. He dipped his fingers into the waistband and pulled, loving how Mycroft’s large prick caught on the fabric and sprang back against the flat of his abdomen with a slap.

He knelt submissively before it, indulging in his new performance.

Mycroft’s hands tangled up in his curls again. He pulled at them harshly. Sherlock’s head was forced up and back until they locked eyes.

Sherlock smirked at the command on the tip of his brother’s tongue.

“Don’t ask nicely, Mycroft,” he said, huskily.

Mycroft glared.

“Do it!” he hissed, unable to hide the urgency of the demand. Unable and unwilling to conceal his
Sherlock’s eyes fluttered briefly closed. He moaned and plunged his face forwards, rubbing his cheek against his brother’s groin, licking at his balls, covering himself in the light, spicy musk of his body. He opened his mouth eagerly and captured the crown of the swollen cock between his lips. He sucked and pushed down over the prominent ridge, letting taste and scent fill his senses.

Mycroft groaned as he was nursed upon. His tip throbbed when Sherlock’s tongue played with it, swirling around his length and tickling at the dripping slit. Sherlock brought one hand to the base of his shaft and used it to enhance the sensation, masturbating and sucking at the same time to cover every inch.

Mycroft’s head fell back and he thrust experimentally into the willing heat, seeing if it would take him a tiny bit deeper.

All too soon he was on the edge. He pulled away, causing Sherlock to whine and slurp, with spit and precome covering his chin.

Sherlock pouted up at him. Mycroft grinned wickedly, and pulled him up by the hair. It was fast becoming his favourite method of leverage.

With a hasty flourish he span Sherlock round to face the chaise, seeing through the window that white daylight was turning to dusk before their very eyes. He said nothing; simply pushed Sherlock between the shoulder blades until he collapsed gracefully forwards, kneeling up on the couch with his legs spread.

“Cape pocket, dear,” said the low, taunting baritone.

Mycroft snorted and rummaged in the dressing gown, coming up with the inevitable Vaseline.

He quickly lubricated himself, feeling the tingle and ache where his brother’s mouth had been. He tried to maintain a hold on his tenuous self-control.

Without another word he stepped forwards and spread Sherlock’s sore-looking cheeks with both hands, gazing at the puckered aperture between with hungry eyes. A new frontier. From behind. On all fours.

Sherlock’s head dropped low and he pushed his backside out further, leaning his forearms on the back of the chaise.

Mycroft circled a greased finger round the exposed hole, pressing his finger in past the first ring of muscle, and then out and in again past the second, until his whole digit was firmly lodged inside.

Sherlock breathed evenly and deliberately as he was penetrated, adjusting to it with relative ease. His orgasm had loosened him, and he was still orbiting Cloud Nine.

Mycroft pulled out, added more lubricant and pressed in again, rumbling soothing, appreciative noises.

“Mycroft?”

“Mm?”

“Not too much.”
‘No?’

‘No. I want it…rougher. This time. If you can.’


He stepped closer, leaning his long body over his brother’s bent back. He placed one hand on his hip, the other on the base of his own hardness. Slowly he pushed at the slippery opening, feeling the upturned cheeks part for him until the suctioning pressure of the elastic little rosebud welcomed him back in.

Without finesse, without a thought to the niceties his brother obviously had no need for in this moment, he slid in up to the hilt in one firm stroke.

Sherlock moaned as he was taken. He nodded. And Mycroft acted.

He fucked him with no slow build up, no foreplay, save for the orgasm he’d already given him. He ceased attempting to be skilful or refined. He let himself go. He let himself be.

Sherlock’s hands gripped the back of the chaise, knuckles standing out white as he was haphazardly used. He felt Mycroft’s fingers grasp at his hips, then rake down his back; the neat manicure turning to vicious claws. He let himself be thrown forwards, and bent lower to be pummelled with merciless speed and force. The itchy, nearly-satisfied feeling was back, and he focused in on every bruising thrust, bracing himself to give better resistance.

His cries descended into uncreative obscenity. He offered praise. He offered encouragement, and curses, and sweet, filthy affirmations.

Mycroft’s hips slapped against heated flesh as he rode, delivering a rough, frantic fuck, squeezed in delicious tight heat. He was leaning heavily over Sherlock now, his chest slip-sliding over the smooth bare back, pushing him down with his bodyweight so that he opened wider. He reached round to pinch harshly at his brother’s peaked nipples. The corresponding agonised wail spurred his hips to fuck harder.

Noises emanated from him - from both of them - that he’d never heard before. Bestial grunts and low, wanton growls. He heard a stranger’s voice telling Sherlock that he was so tight, so hot inside; that it was so good and it was going to make him come.

Full and stretched, almost completely unprepared, Sherlock believed every word.

Mycroft groaned continuously, and suddenly shifted angle to push upwards, seeking the nub that would wring more pleasure out of the already spent body beneath him. When he found it, Sherlock’s keening climbed in pitch and volume as his nerve-centre was battered on every stroke.

He bore down from within, sending sparks flying through both of them.

Interrogations tumbled out as Mycroft raced to climax.

“Wanted it…like this? Is it enough?”

“God, yes!”

“Is that the truth?”

“Always truth for you. Always!”
Mycroft pressed and held himself still up against Sherlock’s arse. He pulled out and slammed back in.

“Anything you want,” he ground out in a gruff rasp. “Anything you need. God, look what it does to you… What it does to me…”

Sherlock gasped a sharp breath. A powerful shudder wracked his body and he came a second impossible time, though barely anything spurted from his cock.

“Yes, yes, spill for me again,” crooned Mycroft, lost in heady sensation until he couldn’t stand it anymore. Before he could cry out his stomach contracted, and he was up on his toes, melting his orgasm into his brother’s hot, pulsating channel. He almost lost his balance at the force of it. Nearly blacked out at the headrush. His mouth fell open in a silent howl.

When he had completed, when his muscles ceased jumping, he slumped heavily onto Sherlock’s back, wheezing with exhaustion. They stayed locked together until he softened completely and slipped out.

They collapsed onto the chaise in a heap, heaving for breath, tittering at the state of themselves. They were sticky with sweat and semen, blinking back to full consciousness.

“We’re in the library…,” mumbled Sherlock, like he had only just realised.

Mycroft’s face fell at the devastation they had wrought.

“Lock, get up. The upholstery! It’s original William Morris!”

Sherlock chuckled madly and flopped firmly onto his back.

“Bugger William Morris. I am not moving.”

A chuckle escaped him. Then another. And they were off giggling together again. Because of fun, and rough, satisfying sex.

Mycroft groaned as he heaved himself into a sitting position.

“Oh, my knees!”

“You knees?!”

“We’re too old for anything other than missionary, surely,” griped the elder Holmes. “Men of my age ought to copulate in bed and nowhere else.”

“Speak for yourself. Next time, the snooker table. I’ll let you pot the pink, darling.”

“Spare me your revolting quips, I beg you.”

“Never. They shall be your life’s torment.”

Mycroft found a handkerchief in his discarded trouser pocket, and attempted to mop up the worst of the mess.

“Go and pick up those books you destroyed,” he grumbled through a yawn. “I am truly vexed about that, you know. You will pay to have them repaired.”

Sherlock snorted with recalcitrant disgust.
“Whatever. Look, they’re fine!”

Mycroft scowled at the sad, dog-eared copy of Tennyson, now utterly devalued. Still, he reflected, he had never really cared much for Tennyson.

Sherlock tutted and collected the other books from the floor, including a slightly bent copy of Oscar Wilde’s best play.

He reshelved them with a smug smile, and turned to face his naked and now impeccably clean lover.

“Mycie… I think I win.”

Mycroft looked blank.

“Win?”

“Yes. You touched me before I touched you.”

Mycroft rolled his eyes tolerantly.

“Ah ha. No, you stooped to provoking me before I deigned to engage. You pushed this little encounter. Running around in the buff with my dressing gown round your neck. Most undignified. Very pretty, though.”

“Perhaps it was a draw,” shrugged Sherlock.

Mycroft consider the proposition. A unique outcome between Holmes brothers. Two winners, no losers.

He nodded curiously.

“Neither of us seem to have had the patience for erotic anticipation.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s not even teatime. Barely lasted the day. How is your backside, by the way?”

“Ruined!” exclaimed Sherlock, clutching at it theatrically, miming tears. “Bruised! Sore. I can barely walk. I demand to be carried back to bed! I demand to be brought supper on a silver tray.”

He threw himself back down to straddle Mycroft on the couch. His brother soothed the site of his hurt with cool hands.

“Oh, really? Well, perhaps I can do better than that,” he said, suavely. “How about some kind of rudimentary winter picnic. In the roof garden.”

Sherlock’s face lit up.

“There’s that Royal Society brain of yours swinging into action. Yes, please.”

Mycroft smiled pleasantly.

“But not until you admit that I am the victor.”

Sherlock pecked him on the nose.

“Pathetic. But, fine. I’m too hungry to argue the point. It is most unusual.”
Mycroft tugged his brother’s ear.

“As you would say, dear brother: whatever.”

End Notes

Please do stay for a chat below, darling readers. I do very very much hope you're enjoying it. X

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