Sherlock Holmes is about to graduate from high school in midwestern America. Despite his intelligence, his prospects are bleak due to poverty, an indifferent, alcoholic father and poor choices. One day, at work, he sells a riding crop to a handsome blonde Brit and his life is changed. He doesn't know what hit him - until he does.

This is a story of a journey to love and self-acceptance and explores many themes along the way: drug abuse, grief, coming out, age difference, consent. Lots of sex but so much more.
While this work could be read on its own, we suggest that you read the first part of the series, "Type Three" first. It is very short (about 1,100 words) and describes how John and Sherlock meet, immediately before the events of this work.

Also please check out the beautiful artwork that serves as a cover for this work. It is the second part of this series. Also take a look at the wonderful cover created by the talented allsovacant [here](#).

This story is (very, very) loosely based on the 1986 film 9 1/2 Weeks starring Mickey Rourke and Kim Basinger.

"OSU" refers to The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio

Images of some of the real places in this story, including Rod's Western Palace, Unit 1410 Miranova Place, and The Thirsty Scholar, can be found [here](#).
Dinner

John Watson smiles to himself as he strides out of the shop with the confidence of a taller man and feeling a tingle of excitement. That was enormous fun. It usually takes a little more time than that to sweep someone off their feet, to destroy their equilibrium, read their inner secrets like he reads an x-ray. That boy is practically see-through, the way his white skin flushes pink, his breath coming fast and shallow. He tries to estimate how long it will take before his phone vibrates with a new number. A week? He remembers the fluttering pulse in the boy’s wrist and reconsiders. Two days. Three at the most. Such is his self-assurance that he cancels a Monday night dinner date with a forgettable blonde nurse from the hospital.

The first call comes on Sunday, noon. To the minute. Precise. He likes that in a sub. The call doesn’t connect. He didn’t really expect it to. He doesn’t return the call, though he could. There’s no rush. It’s always better to let them take their time. John will not pressure him. This way there will be no question later about consent. Sherlock has to come to him freely, out of his own desire. The phone rings at four. Precisely. He lets it ring three times, to be sure. He clicks on but stays silent. Sherlock stutters. Already.

“H-hello?”

“Yes? Who’s this?”

“Um, h-hi, it’s, uh, Sherlock? From the tack shop?”


“Um, well...well, I thought, maybe… we could… do something. Like something, like...”

John can see him holding his hand over the microphone, cursing himself for babbling like an idiot.

“Like...”

Sherlock takes a deep breath. “Like dinner.”

Brave. He likes that. Rewards the behavior by taking control. “Excellent. Angelo’s. Six o’clock. And Sherlock?”

“Yes?”

“Trousers. No jeans.” Six o’clock. Soon. Just enough time to let him prepare and simmer, but not enough to lose his nerve.


John clicks off. This is going to be so sweet.

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Sherlock holds the phone to his ear for several seconds after the line is disconnected. He doesn’t quite know what he’s just done, or why. He’s sitting cross-legged on his bed in his tiny bedroom, surrounded by his homework and sheets of paper with musical notes scribbled on them, music he’s composing for his guitar, and he’s just called the man who practically molested him at his job the day before. The blonde man, with the serious blue eyes and the confident manner who had written
his number on Sherlock’s wrist. He surely could have written it on a slip of paper, there were plenty lying about on the check-out counter, but he had written it on Sherlock’s wrist, on his pulse-point, marking him. Claiming him.

Sherlock had committed the numbers on his wrist to memory before washing them away hurriedly in the employee restroom after the man, John, left the shop. He splashed cold water on his face and looked at himself in the mirror. His cheeks were still flushed pink. What the hell just happened? The rest of his shift had been a blur. He couldn’t rid himself of the memory of John’s eyes staring into his, reaching deep inside him, to a place Sherlock never permitted anyone to enter. How did he do it? He remembered the feel of the crop dragging across the front of his jeans, sending shivers up his spine and making his usually brimming mind go momentarily empty.

Now here he was, on his bed, less than twenty-four hours later, and he had actually called the man. He had lain awake most of the night thinking about it. Debating with himself when he should have been studying. He had two final exams this week, AP Chemistry and American Literature. He wouldn’t need to study for Chemistry; he had the highest scores in the class already. American Literature was another story. He had no interest in, or patience for, fiction, but needed the class to graduate. He’d look up the spark-notes for The Scarlet Letter and The Outsiders tonight. His eidetic memory would come in handy.

Back to the problem at hand. What the fuck did I just do? He is going to dinner with a total stranger tonight. A stranger who had outright stated his intention to whip him and fuck him. He left the ball in Sherlock’s court and Sherlock had just returned it. He lost his nerve the first time, clicking off before John picked up. Shaken. He was normally much more in control. The grand master of control in fact, until this man had walked into his life and turned it upside down in the space of a few hours. Perhaps life in the Midwest was not as boring as he thought.

He looks at his watch. Four thirty. He’ll be meeting John at Angelo’s in an hour and a half. He takes a deep breath, trying to collect his thoughts. No jeans. What’s that about? But he feels compelled to comply. He has black slacks he can wear. But he guesses that means a button down...the purple one is his favorite. And it has long sleeves, it would hide his forearms. He pictures John, in his Nike tee shirt and tight jeans. Pictures the riding crop, held easily in John’s hand. He lies back on his bed and closes his eyes. His whole body feels electrified, oversensitive. He unbuttons and unzips his jeans, reaches between his legs, and begins stroking his hardening cock, thinking of John Watson.

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John arrives at five thirty and orders a bottle of red. It’s important to stake out the territory, fill up the space. He sips from his glass slowly, reviewing and savoring his plan for the evening. Once he confirms that the boy knows his mind, it’s not that complicated: he’s as good as in his pocket already. He couldn’t be safer. Or in more danger. John chuckles. He wouldn’t know what hit him. At first.

Sherlock walks through the door at five forty-five. Clever boy, but not clever enough. John lets him converse with Angelo momentarily, then rises to stand, at parade rest, beside their table. Sherlock’s eyes are drawn to him magnetically, and there it is again, that pink flush rising from his neck, bared by the open buttons of his purple shirt. Gorgeous. He watches him point, indicating to Angelo that his party is already here. Angelo smiles knowingly and the blush rises to the tips of Sherlock’s ears. John walks around the table and pulls out the chair for him to sit.

“You’re early. I like that. I like your shirt too. Purple is a good color for you.”

Sherlock picks up the menu, distractedly. “Oh, um, thank you.” He looks down and fastens up one
of the buttons. “I don’t have too many opportunities to wear it.”

“More’s the pity. Shall we order appetizers and then discuss why you’re working in a tack shop? I recommend the baked clams with the arugula salad. How does that sound?”

He closes the menu with relief. “Sounds great.”

John pours wine into Sherlock’s glass.

Sherlock looks up at him and John is taken aback at the color of his eyes. He thinks, How did I not notice them before?

“I’m only eighteen.”

“Mmm, well I don’t think that will be problem here. Angelo’s a good friend. Go ahead. Enjoy.”

Sherlock takes a gulp of wine gratefully. He needs to calm his jangling nerves. He feels it slide smoothly down his throat and into his stomach, before its effects radiate warmly through his body. He rolls his shoulders slightly as he feels the tension in his muscles begin to dissipate.

John smiles as he observes this, and refills Sherlock’s glass.

Angelo glides over to the table and says, “Il solito, dottore?” John loves the rollatini, and Angelo checks to see if he wants the usual. Turning to Sherlock, John asks, “Do you like eggplant?”

Sherlock nods and John takes the menu out of his hand, picks up his own, and turns the two of them over. “Si, grazie, Angelo.”

Italian. The man, John Watson, he corrects himself, speaks Italian? A British accent, speaking Italian. What the hell is he doing here?

To Sherlock he says “The rollatini and linguine with clam sauce. More than enough to share.”

John reaches into the basket of bread and breaks a slice in half. He dips a piece lavishly in the dish of seasoned olive oil and holds it out to Sherlock, the other piece held underneath to catch the drips. “Angelo’s nephew is the family baker. Try it.” He smiles and waits expectantly. Sherlock lifts his hand to take it, but John opens his mouth slightly and lifts his chin and Sherlock mimics the movements, leaning forward to allow John to place the tidbit gently in his mouth. Some oil winds up on Sherlock’s lower lip and his tongue slips out to wipe it off. He reaches for his napkin and dabs to make sure it’s gone. When he looks back at John, he sees him staring directly at that lip, eyes narrowed as if he were angry that Sherlock robbed him of the opportunity to do it himself.

Sherlock feels the flush return and his throat tighten. The bread that he was trying to swallow almost makes him choke as he feels John’s eyes on his lips. He quickly takes a drink of wine, exhaled, and the feeling passes. John’s eyes have moved from his lips and are now back on his eyes. John leans back in his chair and puts one hand to his own lips, dragging his fingers across his mouth in a thoughtful gesture.

“So Sherlock, what’s your story? Why are you working at the tack shop anyway? I don’t figure you as a horsey sort. The riding crop sort, perhaps,” John says with a slight smirk, “but not the horsey sort.”

“Well, there aren’t too many options around here. I’ve been trying to save money to get out of here after I graduate. Also, since my mom died, my Dad’s struggled a bit and so I try to help out... and I have... expenses...”
His face serious now, John says, “Sounds very industrious. And mature. I just hope your expenses include clean works. You’re far too pretty to die young.”

Sherlock looks away quickly, biting his lip. Yesterday, in the shop, John had held his hand palm up to write his phone number. Had he seen the bruises? Before he can think of an answer, a waiter brings the salads, appetizers and two small plates. Sherlock stares. He’s never been to this restaurant. He’s not been to many restaurants besides McDonald’s or maybe Applebee’s on his birthday. He’s never had eggplant before; never even heard of arugula. What the fuck was arugula anyway? His diet consists of fast food, Hamburger Helper, and free school lunches. No breakfast. He’s in way over his head, but what the hell? He may never see this man again, and this is what he’s been hoping for isn’t it? Something bigger, something different from the crippling boredom and fear of the future? His classmates were all ready to get out, get away, or at least change something about their lives. He takes a deep breath. Now or never.

“Why did you… I mean, what did you...I’ve never done anything like this before. I don’t even know why I’m here.”

“You’re here because you need me.” John reaches under the table where he knows Sherlock’s hands are rubbing nervously along his thighs, and takes his hand. Sherlock jumps as he feels John’s fingers slide over his under the table “I can help you if you’ll let me,” John says in a low, soothing voice.

Sherlock takes a deep breath. “What do you want in return?” he asks, his eyes on the table, not meeting John’s gaze.

“I want your obedience.”

Sherlock closes his eyes and swallows, hard. What is it about this man who has just walked into his life? This man who held a riding crop under his chin yesterday and made his cock hard with the promise of what … pain? He wants to smoke a cigarette desperately, or even better, score a hit. Wants to go back to yesterday morning before John Watson walked into the tack shop and fucking overwhelmed him with deep blue eyes, firm voice and soldier’s bearing. But he can’t do any of these things. He won’t. Instead, he raises his glass to his lips and drains it. His eyes meet John’s and he says, “OK.”

John smiles, and his fingers continue to stroke Sherlock’s hand under the table with a slow, reassuring rhythm. He knew it: the way he reacted to John’s aggression yesterday, the need he had seen in his eyes, the track marks on his arms. And he is gorgeous, with his dark, unruly hair nearly reaching the long lashes that frame extraordinary pale eyes. Eyes that seem to be blue, green and grey all at once. He’s too thin but his tall body has beautiful lines. His skin is smooth and white. John’s pulse quickens as he thinks about that white skin, how it would redden and stripe under his hand or the crop.

John squeezes his hand and whispers, “Good boy,” and these words set off a tickling in Sherlock’s groin. Where did that come from? John leans back and in a very different voice, says, “Now, eat. You ought to put on at least twenty pounds.”

The meal continues uneventfully after that, Angelo bringing the eggplant and a plate of pasta, John filling Sherlock’s plate, eating dessert, talking. Sherlock’s cock has calmed down and he realizes he’s had a good time. Good, as in interesting and fun. He’s learns that John is a surgeon who lives in London and visits Ohio most summers to work and teach at the OSU medical school. This summer, he is lecturing on a heart valve replacement technique he has developed. Sherlock learns that he was correct in guessing that John had been in the military. An army doctor in Afghanistan. He finds himself wondering if John still has his uniform and how he might look in it.
John asks him about school, about his friends. He’s so skillful in his questioning that Sherlock speaks more over this dinner than he has in six months. He doesn’t have any real friends, not close ones anyway, since Victor died of an overdose last fall. He has always been comfortable with solitude and although he knows things about people by observing the smallest details, a tan line, a crumb on a shirt, he is lost when it comes to the art of social interaction, never quite knowing the right words, always seeming to rub people the wrong way. But with John, the conversation is easy.

Sherlock’s belly is full and his mind is pleasantly buzzing from wine he’s unaccustomed to. His initial nervousness has subsided to a tiny flutter in his stomach that is not unpleasant. Elbows on the table, he strokes his lower lip with a finger while looking at the man sitting across from him. The very attractive man whose eyes are now focused on Sherlock’s lip and the finger stroking it. He’s flattered to be John’s date (because that’s what this is, a date.) He remembers that this had all started with the most insanely hot experience of his life. And they haven’t even had sex.

John draws his gaze from Sherlock’s lip and signals to the waiter and Sherlock realizes he dreads the end of the evening. What if John is just another sleazy old man who wants to get off and get away? And maybe he thinks the meal is worth a blowjob. He might not even get cash for a fix out of the deal. John again waves, asking for the check. Sherlock looks over, and sees Angelo holding up his hands and looking insulted at the very idea that he would allow the great Doctor Watson to pay for a meal in his establishment. Mama is at home scolding her grandchildren thanks to the “mani miracolose”, the miracle hands that fixed her heart. Refusing to accept payment!

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John resumes the conversation. “So, I’m assuming that this has probably all been a bit out of your comfort zone...” He waits and Sherlock nods. John nods back... “and I want to be sure, and I want you to be sure that this is something you want to try. I’ve come on heavy, because I don’t have much time here. A couple of months at the most. But I haven’t scared you off...?” Sherlock shakes his head. “So, if you’re still on, this is what I’d like you to do.” He reaches inside his bespoke Armani suit and draws out an envelope. As he hands it to Sherlock he says, “Read this and if you’re still keen, fill it out. I’ll come by the shop to pick it up at five on Tuesday unless I hear from you otherwise. Does that work?”

Sherlock nods and John continues. “Good. We’ll go from there. And if you change your mind, that will be fine too. Now, do you need a ride home?”

Sherlock takes the envelope and shakes his head. He can take the bus. He doesn’t particularly want John to see where he lives. Not that he’s ashamed of it or anything... John stands up and Angelo comes over to shake his hand vigorously, then actually plants a kiss on it. John bows his head modestly, then turns and gestures to Sherlock as he moves towards the door. Sherlock goes along in his wake. When they get outside, John holds his hand out for another shake. “It was a pleasure Sherlock. I hope to see you soon.” Sherlock opens his mouth to say something, (Goodbye at least you idiot!) but nothing comes out and John quirks his lip in half a smile. When Sherlock returns the handshake, John rubs his thumb over his wrist, gently. He turns and walks toward the parking lot. Sherlock stands rubbing his wrist, his mouth still open.

He is still standing there when John drives away in his Oh my god, is that a Porsche? He feels dazed and unsteady. The cool night breeze makes him shiver as it passes through his thin shirt and raises goosebumps on his skin, where it’s damp from nervous sweat. What the hell? Nothing’s happened and I’m a wreck. He pulls himself together, retrieves a pack of Marlboros from his pocket and lights one as he walks to the bus stop, fingering the envelope in his hand. He pulls deeply on the cigarette and considers his options. It’s only nine. He can take the bus downtown or to the OSU campus and score. Friday had been a payday, so he has enough cash for it without having to blow some disgusting guy in an alley. On the other hand, he has two finals this week and he’s really curious about what’s in the envelope. He decides to go home.
The List

Chapter Summary

Blindfolds sound interesting. Sensory deprivation? Hoods? Too intense, thank you. Crops are an enthusiastic yes, he’s just discovered, and spanking...naked ass over John’s lap? Yeah. Caning and whipping, no. Restraints? A little shiver of pleasure runs through him as he thinks about how it would feel to be helpless before John. Yes for restraints.

Sherlock gets off the bus and walks down the dark street toward the small white Cape Cod house with green shutters where he has lived his entire life. He wonders if his dad will be home. Since his mother died when Sherlock was thirteen, it was hit or miss whether his father would be home at any given time, and if he would be sober if he was.

Life had been reasonably happy before ovarian cancer turned the mother that Sherlock remembered as a smiling, pretty, brunette, who delighted in dancing around the house to country music, and who marveled at the experiments and creations in his basement “laboratory”, into something unrecognizable. A shrunken, shell of a person. At the end, hooked up to so many tubes and doped up on morphine that rendered her barely coherent, she held his hand limply and whispered to him that she loved him and that he was special. Sherlock had cried, great choking sobs shaking his small frame. Then she was gone and everything went to shit. He hasn’t cried since, not even at Victor’s funeral.

Myc, who is seven years older than Sherlock, and already out of the house when their mother died, lives in Washington D.C., working for the government in some capacity that Sherlock does not quite understand. They rarely speak. After the funeral, Sherlock was left alone with his father. Never an affectionate or accessible parent, he withdrew further from his youngest son and started drinking heavily.

Sherlock approaches the house and notes with some relief that his father’s blue 1998 Ford F-150 pickup is not in the driveway. He unlocks the front door, enters the dark, empty house and goes directly to his room, locking the door. Kicking off his shoes, he sits on the side of his bed, holding the envelope in his hand and staring at it while biting his lip. Finally, he opens it, takes out two pieces of paper, one handwritten and one typed, and begins to read the first one, written in a bold, sloping script.

Sherlock,

Before we go any further, we need to discuss your limits. In order for us both to be safe, I need to know what you might be comfortable with. Next to each item on the list, write Y, M or N. Y means that you are in favor, M, that you are open to the idea, and N means no. Your “no” will always mean no. Your “stop” will always mean stop. We will NEVER do anything that you are not completely in agreement with. This is only a place to begin a conversation.

John
Sherlock moves on to the printed sheet of paper.

**Limits**

1. Arm & leg sleeves (armbinder)
2. Belts
3. Blindfolds
4. Bondage
5. Breath control
6. Caning
7. Chastity
8. Collars
9. Corsets
10. Cuffs
11. Exhibitionism
12. Eye contact restrictions
13. Fisting
14. Forced masturbation
15. Gags
16. Hairpulling
17. Handcuffs
18. Harnessing
19. Hoods
20. Immobilization
21. Kneeling
22. Leather
23. Lingerie
24. Lectures (for misbehavior)
25. Mouth bits
26. Nipple clamps
27. Nipple play
28. Orgasm delay or edging
29. Outdoor sex
30. Paddles
31. Pain
32. Piercing
33. Plugs
34. Punishment
35. Restraints
36. Riding crops
37. Rimming
38. Sensory deprivation
39. Serving
40. Shaving
41. Spanking
42. Speech restrictions (when/what)
43. Spreader bars
44. Standing in corner
45. Suspension
46. Swallowing semen
47. Teasing/tickling
48. Vibrators
Wearing symbolic jewelry

Whipping

Shocked, he reads it again. And a third time. He drops it to the bed and, elbows on his knees, steepled his hands in front of his face for a moment before sliding them up to comb through his curls. What the fuck am I getting myself into? This is serious shit. He’d heard about stuff like this. Sure; and to be honest, had thought about it sometimes. Thought about it at night while he jerked himself off. And yesterday in the shop, when John had said those words to him, asking him to choose the crop he wanted to be whipped with as he stood close and looked right into his eyes, there was no question that Sherlock had responded, and that it had excited him. But there is a big difference between having a fantasy and actually acting on it.

He hasn’t had many sexual experiences. Not really. Never with girls, they don’t interest him. And other than Victor, never with boys either, although it’s boys that turn him on. Gay. Another way the Universe has ruined my life. He doesn’t count the blowjobs he gives for cash to get high. They’re necessary business transactions. He grimaces at the thought and pushes it aside.

Victor. In general, he tries not to think too much about Victor, but the memories are pushing their way up from where he keeps them, hidden from his conscious mind and safe in a corner of his brain. He lights a cigarette and lies back on his bed, closing his eyes. Victor moved in three doors down when Sherlock was ten. In the same grade as Sherlock, he was a freckled redhead boy with a quick wit and a wide smile. Sherlock is not sure why they became friends. Victor was outgoing and athletic, while Sherlock was introverted and preferred to play with his chemistry set or LEGO, and doing these things alone suited him fine.

But they had become friends. Victor never seemed to mind Sherlock’s social awkwardness and laughed it off when Sherlock said something insensitive, instead of being offended. He would listen attentively as Sherlock excitedly explained to him, in words that flowed so fast from his brain that it was hard for his mouth to keep up, about his latest experiment, or the details of exactly how a rocket works, from an issue of Scientific American that his mom brought him from the dentist’s office where she worked as a receptionist.

One night, during summer vacation, when Sherlock was sixteen, they “camped out” in Victor’s backyard. They had a small tent, blankets, some weed, and a six pack of Budweiser. Sherlock played his guitar, while Victor lay on his back in the grass outside the tent, looking at the stars. They talked about what they wanted to do after high school. Sherlock wasn’t sure he’d have the grades for a full ride scholarship like Myc and there was no way he could afford college without one. Victor thought he might go into the military, though he knew he’d have to get clean from the heroin they had both started to dabble in if he was going to do that. They drank the beer and passed a joint between them until they were both pleasantly buzzed.

They crawled into the tent, laughing, and Victor switched on his CD player and popped in Californication by The Red Hot Chili Peppers. They lay side by side, listening and sometimes singing along. At one point Victor poked Sherlock in the ribs, and Sherlock retaliated by punching him in the arm. The mock fight escalated into a wrestling match within the small tent and Victor ended up straddling Sherlock’s hips, torso pressed against him, pinning his wrists beside his ears, and the air inside the tent suddenly changed. The inches of space between mouths that had been giggling just seconds ago were filled with electricity. Sherlock could feel Victor’s warm breath on his face. They stayed still and silent in the dark for a moment. And then Sherlock felt Victor’s lips brush lightly against his. Sherlock raised his head, wanting more. In answer, Victor pressed his mouth hard onto Sherlock’s. As Sherlock slid his tongue between Victor’s parted lips, he felt Victor roll his hips, rubbing against him. He groaned as his cock sprang to life, and the heat of arousal and desire radiated through his body. Victor released Sherlock’s wrists and buried his
fingers in Sherlock’s hair and Sherlock brought his hands to the sides of Victor’s face, desperate not to lose contact with his mouth.

Victor finally broke the kiss, leaving Sherlock gasping. He sat up, pulling his tee shirt over his head and reached down to push Sherlock’s up, running his palms up his sides and over his chest before pressing against him once more and grinding his now hard cock into against Sherlock’s through the thin material of their basketball shorts. He sucked Sherlock’s bottom lip into his mouth, biting it. Sherlock ran his hands down the skin of Victor’s back and to his ass, pulling him down as he thrust his hips against him. Their bare chests, slick with sweat, slid against one another as they rocked. Sherlock moaned into Victor’s hair as he came, clinging to him in a tight embrace. Victor’s orgasm followed and he collapsed, body draped limply over Sherlock’s, their fingers twined. They lay there for a long time without speaking, listening to the sound of their panting breath, the crickets, and Anthony Kiedis singing *Scar Tissue*.

Less than a year later, Victor was dead.

Sherlock opens his eyes and stares at the ceiling, blowing out smoke and watching it curl and drift in the light cast by his bedside lamp. He misses Victor, he misses his mom, and he even almost misses Myc. He wants to scream at the Universe that put him in this shitty town. Sherlock doesn’t believe in God. The Universe, or whatever it is, took away the only two people that really cared for him, and left him with a shitty drunk of a father.

Yet now, something interesting has finally happened to him. He thinks of John Watson’s eyes on him at dinner tonight and a shiver runs up his spine. John wants him and this is almost unbelievable. Even more, John had talked with him like an adult, seemed interested in what he had to say. And he has a Porsche!

But the list. Sherlock puts out his cigarette, picks up the papers, and stares at the list of terms. He’ll deal with this tomorrow, it’s a bit more than he can take tonight. He folds the list and puts it back into the envelope. Then he undresses and prepares for bed. It’s finals week so he won’t have to go to school tomorrow but he does need to read the summaries of those books if he wants to pass the stupid lit class.

Under the covers, with the lights off, he tries to sleep, but can’t get John out of his mind. His strong, expressive face, his eyes. Especially his eyes. They bored right into him, into his core, as he called him a “good boy”. And the way he looked in that suit. Sherlock wonders what he looks like underneath that suit, and as he pictures a muscled torso sprinkled with golden curls, he reaches into his boxers.

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A loud bang jars him out of sleep and he looks at the clock. Two thirty a.m. Not again. He locked the door, didn’t he? He’s torn between staying perfectly still and getting up to check the lock. He hears another bang and then his father yells, “Fuck! Sherlock!” Sherlock quickly runs a visual scan of the kitchen through his mind. Perfectly clean and orderly. He gets up and checks the lock, then takes his desk chair and props it under the doorknob for good measure. It’s not his dad’s fault. His life fell apart too. But Sherlock isn’t taking any chances. He gets back into bed and puts his headphones in, hoping that his dad will just fall asleep on the sofa and that morning will come quickly. It doesn’t work out that way. Fifteen minutes later his dad is banging on his door.

“Sherlock! I know you’re in there. I know you hear me. There’s nothing to eat in this house. What the fuck am I supposed to eat? It’s your job, you little faggot. It’s the least you can do. Earn your keep.” There hasn’t been anything to eat in the house for a week because his father hasn’t left him any money. Sherlock took over the shopping when his mother died, but he’ll be damned if he’s
going to use his own money to buy food for his drunk father. He holds his breath and waits. His father bangs a few more times. Sherlock hears him muttering and kicking the hall table, and then quiet. Thank God. It takes another half hour for his heart to stop hammering inside his chest, and another half hour to drift to sleep.

He wakes up three hours later to the vibration of his phone. A text. He picks it up and his pulse quickens when he sees that it’s from John.

JW: I’d like you to do something for me in addition to the list. Consider it a test, a dry run to see how well you follow my instructions. No SparkNotes for your lit final. Read the books. Taking shortcuts is a bad habit.

He wakes back asleep and wakes around two in the afternoon, with a mouth full of sand and a pounding headache. He can’t understand why people drink when they could shoot up. He listens for any sign of his father, but hears nothing. He gingerly takes the chair out of the way and unlocks the door. His dad’s hat is gone, so it’s pretty safe to assume he’s left for work. Sherlock steps out of the room into a disaster area. The hallway table is lying on its side, the glass bowl his mother loved, broken in three places.

While cleaning the mess, Sherlock picks up his father’s pants and ruminates in the pockets. Yes! Seventy bucks! He debates taking the fifty or the twenty and decides his father might forget breaking a twenty but never a fifty. He pockets the bill and tosses his father’s pants down the basement stairs. Laundry can wait till tomorrow. He goes shopping and picks up enough chopped meat for a casserole that ought to last a couple of days, maybe long enough to get some more money out of his father. He spends the the rest of the evening angrily reading the novels he’s put off all semester, poring over John’s list, and jerking off. Whenever he finds his attention straying from The Outsiders he switches to The Scarlet Letter. At least it’s about sex. Who cares about a bunch of antisocial adolescents? That’s exactly what he’s trying to escape from. And when he can’t stand another minute of irrelevant fiction—Fiction! Phony by definition!—he goes back to real life. Or what might be his real life if he has the guts. This incredibly hot, British, heart surgeon wants to fuck him and he’s trying to memorize bullshit about some asshole named Ponyboy. Why is he even reading them? It’s not like John would know if he didn’t. And besides the test isn’t ‘till Wednesday. John’s coming back to the shop on Tuesday. Right. Priorities. He puts Ponyboy aside, midway through.

He’s not quite sure how to approach the list. He’s tempted to put yes for everything. He doesn’t want to take a chance on losing John because he’s scared of nipple clamps. On the other hand, does he really want to sleep with a guy who wants to torture him? No for nipple clamps. Some of the stuff, he’s never heard of and some of it is just plain scary. Plugs. Like electrical plugs? He goes online and feels more nervous than ever. Fisting is out, Jesus. He tries to wipe the image out of his brain. Corsets and lingerie are out. He’s had enough trouble trying to think of himself as a “real man”, whatever the hell that is, even though he’s gay. He’s not going to dress like a woman. Is that my father’s voice in my head? He rules out the extremes. Blindfolds sound interesting. Sensory deprivation? Hoods? Too intense, thank you. Crops are an enthusiastic yes, he’s just discovered, and spanking...naked ass over John’s lap? Yeah. Caning and whipping, no. Restraints? A little shiver of pleasure runs through him as he thinks about how it would feel to be helpless before John. Yes for restraints. Most everything else gets a maybe. If John is serious, he should be able to say no, if he doesn’t like something anyway, right? He might not even show up at the shop. Wouldn’t be the first time Sherlock was disappointed by somebody.

His research leaves him hard and dripping and he makes a deal with himself. Jerk off, and then read until midnight. He slides off his jeans, the list in his left hand. He slips his hand into his boxers and squeezes gently as he scans the items. Once he feels the stiffening, he begins to
consider them one by one.

He pictures himself, on a bed in a room somewhere, face down, naked and blindfolded and John with his shirt sleeves rolled up, collar open. Sherlock straIns to hear him as he walks around the bed. He can feel John’s eyes traveling over every inch of him, and his cock twitches. Next, he imagines John taking his wrist, just the way he did in the shop and fastening a cuff around it.

Sherlock slides his foreskin back and forth over the head of his cock as he imagines a cuff on the other wrist as well.

He can see John pulling his arms above his head and securing them to the rails of the headboard.

He strokes his full length now and begins breathing more quickly.

He feels the riding crop being dragged lightly across his shoulders, then down his spine.

His back arches involuntarily as the scene plays out in his mind.

The crop is now resting on his buttocks, and his body tenses with anticipation of the blow that must surely come.

His hand moves faster over his cock as he thrusts his hips, eyes shut tightly.

The crop is removed and Sherlock waits. And waits. When the blow comes, it is like white hot lighting, intense and shocking. It hurts. It’s glorious.

A cry escapes Sherlock’s lips as he comes, his body shuddering as pleasure and the anticipation of pain converge. He drops the list and clamps his hand over his mouth. The walls are thin and he’s afraid his father will hear him. He hasn’t had an orgasm this strong since... Victor? As it fades and he tries to catch his breath silently, he imagines John’s fingers in his hair, caressing his scalp. Gentle and soothing.

Eventually, he removes his hand from his mouth but it remains open as he breathes heavily, heart still pounding.

Why did that feel so good? What is wrong with me? He dismisses that last question. He’s always felt different from other people, and who cares if he wants to be... what exactly? Possessed? Used, by this intriguing, sexy man? His internet search has confirmed that he’s not that weird: people do, in fact, like this sort of thing. At least some people.

Sherlock removes his wet boxers and uses them to wipe the semen from his stomach. He puts on a fresh pair and brushes his teeth. He doesn’t feel like reading now. He really should but... literature is just so irrelevant! He stares at the books on his nightstand for a full minute before picking up his guitar and notebook and tiptoeing quietly down the hall toward the living room where he can play and write without disturbing his father. He’ll read them in the morning and at work tomorrow. There is plenty of time.

********

Sherlock wakes to the smell of coffee and cigarette smoke. He opens his eyes slowly, squinting in the bright sunshine. As his eyes adjust, he realizes he’s still in the living room, sprawled on the sofa in his boxers. Fuck! What time is it? Raising himself to his elbows he looks at the digital display on the stereo. Ten fifteen and he has to be at work at noon. He groans. There won’t be much time to read.

He walks into the kitchen where his father is sitting at the table with a mug of coffee and an almost
empty bowl of cornflakes. He’s reading the Columbus Dispatch, a cigarette dangling from his lips. He’s tall, like Sherlock, but husky, his dark hair, graying at the temples, is pulled back in a ponytail. His nose is reddened by alcohol abuse and his eyes are blue but sad and dull, not vibrant like his son’s, although perhaps once they had been. He’s wearing blue pants and a matching shirt with “Firestone” embroidered on the pocket and “George” just beneath it. He grunts a greeting to Sherlock without looking up from his paper.

“Dad, didn’t you hear my alarm go off?”

“Yeah, it was annoying. My shift doesn’t start until noon and I didn’t appreciate that fucking thing going off at seven.”

“But you didn’t wake me?”

George Holmes shrugs. “You’re eighteen, you should be more responsible. Like Myc,” he adds.

Sherlock rolls his eyes and bites back a retort as he pours himself a mug of coffee, stirs in two spoonfuls of sugar and sits across from his father. He takes a cigarette from the pack on the table and places it behind his ear, not expecting to linger long enough in the kitchen for a smoke.

“Graduation is in a few weeks,” Sherlock begins, hesitantly.

“Didn’t think you were going to go.”

“Yeah, well, I haven’t decided. Seems kind of pointless,” Sherlock says, unable to say what he feels, that mom would have made him go, that he wants his dad to see him receive his diploma.

“If your mom was alive, she’d want you to go.”

Sherlock looks at his father in surprise. How did he know? He rarely mentions his wife.

“I’ll think about it.”

“Let me know and I’ll try to get off work.”

“OK, sure,” Sherlock says, pleased, but trying to keep his face neutral. “I’ve got to get some studying done before work.”

He takes the coffee to his bedroom and manages to read for twenty minutes.

He has half an hour now before he has to leave for work. Just as he gets up to shower and shave, (Shaving’s on the list. Shaving where?) his phone vibrates again.

JW: Good morning. Have you finished the books?

Sherlock panics just a little.

SH: Yes. They’re not that long.

JW: Good. Bring them with you.

Shit.
The Lie

Chapter Summary

Week one is not starting off well. John catches Sherlock in a lie and he endures the homophobia of his classmates and his own father.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The bus is later than usual, and given the panic he’s under when he leaves, it’s a miracle that Sherlock is only fifteen minutes late. Tiffany, who has the Tuesday morning shift, rolls her eyes at him. “You owe me an hour and forty-five minutes now, Sherly. Fifteen more and you’re going to cover next Tuesday morning.”

She’s right and he owes her for covering for him, so he grits his teeth at the hated nickname and says, “I’ll cover next Tuesday. You deserve it.”

Tiffany pumps her fist and gives him a kiss on the cheek. She sings out, “Bye-bye,” and practically skips out the door. After scanning the shelves for anything that needs restocking, Sherlock takes The Outsiders from his backpack and starts reading furiously. He has a few hours before John shows up, to finish the two books, or at least make it look like he has. Not impossible, given his reading speed. Unfortunately for him, a local equestrian camp brings a herd of squealing middle school girls to the shop on a field trip; a new group, every hour, on the hour. He spends the entire day running in circles, answering inane questions and ringing up purchases, none of which come to more than ten dollars. He grits his teeth and keeps wiping the sweat from his head and neck. By the time he realizes that John is standing by the chaps, watching him while absentmindedly stroking the soft suede, he’s frazzled. As he rings up the last key ring, John makes his way over to the register. When the door closes behind the final camper, John pulls the handkerchief out of his breast pocket, and uses it to blot Sherlock’s forehead, trying not to smile.

Sherlock blushes and John offers it to him. He takes it and rubs the back of his neck, looking down at the floor. “Just--so many--girls!” he says, as if that explains everything. John can’t hold it in any longer and laughs out loud. Sherlock looks up and smiles back at him, then laughs himself. “I’m just going to keep this, cuz you won’t want it back now.”

John says, “I’ve got plenty more, don’t worry. I think that’s the only time one of them has actually been useful.”

Sherlock says, “The least I can do is offer you one of Rod’s Western Palace’s signature bandanas.” He walks over to the display and pulls off a red one, folding it and tucking it into John’s pocket with a flourish. John takes the opportunity to grab his wrist and turn his hand over. With a serious doctor face, he runs his fingertips up Sherlock’s forearm with a practiced ease. Sherlock takes a deep breath and turns over his other arm for inspection. “I didn’t. I wanted to, but I didn’t.”

John’s face softens and quietly, he says, “I’m happy to hear that. Good boy.” Sherlock’s mouth opens with the tiniest gasp and his pupils dilate as John watches. He lets go of Sherlock’s hand, seeing something, and walks behind the counter, where Sherlock has left The Outsiders on top of his backpack, open to page 120, only two thirds of the way through. He picks it up silently, holds it
out in Sherlock’s direction and tilts his head as if he’s waiting for an explanation.

Sherlock swallows and drops his eyes. “I, uh, didn’t really get any sleep last night and, um, I...was kind of planning on being able to read this afternoon. It’s not usually so busy, and...” He trails off and can’t fully meet John’s stern gaze.

“That didn’t work out so well, did it?”

Very quietly, Sherlock says, “No.”

“Did you finish the other book?”

Even more quietly, “No.”

“And the test is tomorrow, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Hmm. I guess I’d better leave you to study in that case. You won’t have enough time to read them, will you?” He puts the book back on the counter. Sherlock stares at the floor and shrugs his shoulders. “You’d best use the notes, then. Wouldn’t want you to fail. I’ll call you tomorrow evening.” He turns and heads toward the door.

Sherlock is confused. “But, can’t we have dinner? Or something? What about the list?” He rushes to his backpack and takes out the envelope, holding it towards him.

John looks at him, mildly surprised, and says, “Priorities.” He walks to the door and opens it, but turns around and says, “Sherlock?” He waits.

Sherlock answers hopefully. “Yes?”

“Don’t lie to me again.” He turns and walks out.

Sherlock, stunned, watches him go. He’s not sure exactly what he’s feeling. Sad and disappointed--John is gone. Angry. At John? At himself. And guilty. He feels guilty for having disappointed this man that he’s barely just met. What’s wrong with me? He walks back to the counter and slams his hand down, grabbing the book and throwing it against the door of the shop.

*******

Sherlock pulls an all-nighter, less worried about passing the exam, than proving to John that he can obey instructions and actually read the books. He almost gets sidetracked considering all the connotations of the word obey, and what it might mean for him, but puts it aside as a distraction. He can focus when he needs to, dammit. The test is at one o’clock. He has some speed stashed in one of his old tennis shoes. Generally not his thing, but good in an emergency. Takes one. Then another. That and three or four bottles of 5-hour energy and he’d fuckin’ nail Ponyboy to the goddamn wall. Who the fuck does John Watson think he is anyway?

Sherlock brings the books with him on the bus and gets to the test with fifteen minutes to spare. He’d almost finished both books and even had time to look over the Spark-notes sample questions. Fucking doctor.

Two hours later he emerges, with a great weight lifted. He’s surprised that the test was actually not as difficult as he was afraid of. Many of the questions were on the parts that he read carefully. Turns out the actual book is better than just the notes. He shakes his head, thinking Fucking Dr.
Watson, again, but smiling this time at having to admit John was right. He feels pretty good about his essay too. It was one of the questions listed on the SparkNotes page. The question about the Robert Frost poem, “Nothing Gold Can Stay”. Loss of innocence, Johnny wanting Ponyboy to make the most of his life, blah, blah, blah. His lit teacher, Mr. Anderson will eat it up. Idiot. Sherlock has no patience for a squishy subject like literature, or people with soft, squishy minds, like Mr. Anderson. He loves facts. Is comforted by the knowledge that two plus two unambiguously equals four, that the atomic mass of radium is, and will always be, 226. Satisfied that he has secured a passing grade, he turns in his paper.

He drops his paper in the box at the front of the room, and gives a self-satisfied smirk to the young English teacher. Mr. Anderson narrows his eyes as he regards Sherlock. He’d always been a difficult student--a smartass, and Philip Anderson is frankly relieved that he’s graduating.

Sherlock is positively vibrating, his relief and the effects of the speed and caffeine rushing through his blood like a river in flood. And now he’s got nothing to do but wait for John to call. All of his anger has dissipated and he can’t wait to tell him that he’s sure he passed and that chemistry is a done deal.

He walks down the hallway filled with chattering students. End of school year excitement is palpable as they talk about graduation parties, vacations and all the ways they are going to enjoy the freedom that summer brings. Head down, smiling, Sherlock pushes past the doors and then outside into the late May sunshine. He walks toward the bike rack, eyes still focused on the ground in front of him, thinking about John.

As he approaches his bike, he looks up and freezes. Giddy anticipation is instantly replaced by a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. Bright pink streamers hang from the handlebars of his bike, the kind favored by ten year old girls. Pink, purple, and yellow plastic butterflies, dozens of them, are attached to his spokes. And, hanging behind the seat, is a handmade cardboard license plate with the word “FAG” written in bold black marker.

Sherlock wheels around, looking back toward the building. There are a few kids walking to the bus lot and others milling about, talking, but none of them are paying attention to him. He hears laughter behind him. Clenching his fists, he turns slowly to face the parking lot. A silver mustang convertible is parked at the curb. Sherlock recognizes Sebastian, “Seb” Wilkes, a popular kid, a jock, who Sherlock had the misfortune of having as a lab partner in biology his junior year. That experience had cemented Seb’s hatred of him and Sherlock has done his best to steer clear of him ever since.

Beside him is his girlfriend Sally Donovan, and in the back seat, two guys that Sherlock recognizes but doesn’t know by name.

“Nice bike, freak!” calls Sally. “Sucked any dicks lately?” asks one of the boys in the back. “Were they as good as Vic’s?” Seb adds, as he guns the engine and the Mustang’s tires squeal as they race off, their whoops and laughter trailing behind. The mention of Victor feels like a knife wound in the gut and Sherlock has to resist the impulse to bend over and clutch his stomach.

He watches them go, hands still balled into fists so tight that his nails dig into his palms. Fucking redneck morons! he wants to scream after them, but doesn’t. No sense in calling more attention to himself. One more day, just one more day and I’ll be done with this fucking place. He exhales the breath he’s been holding and turns to deal with the bike.

Sherlock’s chemistry teacher, Ms. Hudson, hears the yelling and turns to see what’s going on. She understands immediately what’s happened, in the way that only an experienced high school teacher can. Her stomach turns over, not just at Sherlock’s pain, but at the memories of her own
adolescence and the torment she faced as a teenager coming to grips with her own sexuality and facing taunts like “butch” and “lesbo”. She leaves her bag in her car and turns to walk toward Sherlock. The number two chemistry student, and the closest thing to a friend that Sherlock has, Molly Hooper, has also heard the shouting and joins her.

When they reach him, they silently start to remove the cruel decorations. Molly says, “Sherlock, you don’t--” but he cuts her off. “Please. Just—not now.” They continue without speaking and when they finish, Sherlock climbs on the bike. Without looking at them, he says, “Thank you,” and wobbling a little, rides off.

“Why are people so mean?” asks Molly, brushing a tear from her cheek.

“I don’t know dear, I really don’t. I’ve been doing this a long time and it seems some things never change.”

“Why can’t they just leave him alone? He never bothers anybody.”

“I know, and he’s lucky to have a friend like you.”

“I’m not sure he’d call me a friend.”

“You don’t see what I see. Boys sometimes don’t express their feelings, and he’s such an odd-bird…” her voice trails off. “Anyway, he’s lucky to have you whether he knows it or not.”

“Thanks Ms. Hudson. I’ll see you for the exam tomorrow,” Molly says as she stoops to pick up the discarded decorations from the sidewalk.

*******

Sherlock’s phone rings at eight that evening as he is finishing up the dishes from dinner. His dad is in the living room, watching ESPN and working on his fourth Old Milwaukee. Sherlock’s lips quirk up into a lopsided grin. It’s John. He clicks on.

“Hello.”

“Hello, Sherlock.”

Silence.

“I’m...really glad you called. I was a little afraid that…”

“That?”

“That you wouldn’t.”

“Sherlock, I will always, always, keep my word. If we go any further, you need to understand that. If I tell you something, it will be the truth. I will never lie to you and I will never break a promise but that means I need you to be honest with me as well, not to tell me what you think I want to hear, but to tell me the truth. If I can’t trust you, if you can’t trust me, we may as well put an end to it right now. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“Yes what?”

“Yes I understand. And I’ll be honest from now on. I don’t...I don’t want it to end.”
“Good boy, I don’t either. So, how was it and when is the next exam?”

Sherlock feels a warmth in his chest that he hasn’t felt since--well, he really doesn’t want to think about it. “I think I did OK. I’m kind of glad you made me read those ridiculous books. Tomorrow is chemistry but that’s already a wrap.”

John can feel the smile in his voice and it makes him smile as well. “I’ll bet. If those equations I saw you balancing are any predictor, I agree with you.”

“Oh, those won’t be on the test. They were some things Ms. Hudson gave me for fun.”

They talk and talk, John, once again managing to draw conversation out of Sherlock without him noticing, and even making him laugh out loud. Sherlock can’t remember the last time he laughed.

“So,” John says finally. “Saturday. Let’s meet Saturday. My place. I’ll send a car for you. Seven sharp.”

“Sure, seven.”

“Bring the list.”

“Yeah, the list, sure.”

“Goodbye, Sherlock.”

“Goodbye, John.”

Sherlock ends the call and leans against the countertop, staring at the phone. This is really going to happen. Something. Something is going to happen.

“Who the hell is John?”

Sherlock looks up to see his father standing in the doorway to the kitchen.

He feels his face flush but tries to sound normal. “Someone from school.”

“You boyfriend?” his dad says derisively, slurring his words a bit.

“Dad, please. Just, don’t...”

His father walks to the refrigerator, takes out another beer and cracks it open.

“I pay the rent here, I buy the food, so I’ll say whatever the fuck I want,” his father says, taking a swig. Your mother always coddled you, maybe that’s why you turned out to be a... Jesus, Sherlock, a son of mine, taking it up the ass.”

“Dad stop it, I’ve never... Just shut up!” Sherlock says angrily as he stalks from the kitchen to his room, puts the chair under the doorknob and paces back and forth a few times in the small space between his desk and the door. Then he sits on edge of his bed and picks up a framed photo from his bedside table. A pretty woman in a white sundress and curly headed boy in an orange T-shirt smile out from the picture. She’s standing behind him with her arms wrapped tightly around his shoulders. Her hair is blowing in the breeze and the waves of Lake Erie are visible behind them. It was taken when Sherlock was eleven on a rare weekend trip to the lake. Before she got sick. He thinks he can remember how it felt to be hugged against her soft body. He’s not sure it’s a real memory or one he constructed from looking at the picture. It doesn’t matter. He traces a finger across her face and whispers, “Mom, it’s not your fault.”
He closes his eyes. *Oh God, wouldn’t it be nice to slip into the warm, floating place right now?* He doesn’t have any smack at the moment but he could probably get some and be back by eleven. *No. No. NO.* John would know somehow, he’s sure of it, and he wouldn’t be happy. His desire to please John is greater than the urge to get high and make it all go away for a few hours. He puts the photo back, sets his alarm, and then lies on his bed, staring at the ceiling, until sleep finally comes.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was a bit short, but Chapter 4 is shaping up to be much longer. You can expect Sherlock to suffer the consequences of his lie to John. Or maybe enjoy them?
Chapter Summary

“You know that I wouldn’t have been upset if you hadn’t been able to read the books. But I was angry with you for lying. You knew that. But here you are, apologizing. Why did you apologize? Why not let it pass, hope that we could just forget about it?”

Sherlock shrugs. “I feel bad about it. Isn’t that why people apologize?”

“Not quite. They apologize because they want to feel better. Do you want to feel better, Sherlock? Because I can help you with that.”

25. Explain using crystal-field theory why octahedral cobalt (II) complexes exhibit different magnetic properties.

Got this! Sherlock thinks, as he reads the last question on his chemistry final. Confidently, he writes out the formulas that demonstrate two possible 3d electron populations of cobalt(II) in an octahedral environment.

He puts down his pencil and looks up. As usual, he’s the first one done. He glances over at Molly who is still working and she turns her head, giving him a smile. He takes his paper to the front of the room and hands it to Ms. Hudson. She accepts it and says, “Can you stay until everyone else is done Sherlock? I’d like to talk to you.” He nods and walks into the hall to wait.

Now that school is really and truly over, he’s free to let his mind go where it wants. He uses his phone to continue the research that John’s list prompted, a shiver running over him at the new connotations for vocabulary words he thought he understood: dominant, submissive, contract; and ones he’s never heard of: safeword, subdrop, sadomasochism. He doesn’t notice students straggling out, commiserating over the test that barely engaged him. Molly, anxious and meticulous, is one of the last. She slides down the wall to sit beside him.

“Hard, wasn’t it?”

“Molly. You could have done it in your sleep.”

“But that last question--”

“Stop it. I’ll be number one and you’ll be number two, as usual.”

“Well, Sherlock, no one can accuse you of being modest.”

He looks stricken for a moment, worried he’s been a jerk, again, but she punches him playfully on the shoulder.

“You’re right as usual. You always are. I’m going to miss you.”

Now he looks confused. “Why?”

She laughs at him. “Because you’re my friend, you idiot. I swear, you are the stupidest genius that
ever existed.”

He laughs back and then asks, “Is that a contradiction or an oxymoron? I don’t do English.”

She laughs again, but then, he says, seriously, “I wanted to say thank you. You know, for the other day. And everything else. For being my friend.”

“Don’t say thank you for that, Sherlock. I did that for myself.” She leans over and kisses his cheek. As she gets up and walks away, she says, “I’ll see you at graduation.”

“I might not go,” he calls back.

“You better…”

The last students leave the classroom, followed by Ms. Hudson. She frowns. “Did I hear you say you might not go to graduation?”

“I’m not sure. I mean, what’s the point?”

“Well young man, you may consider it my last assignment. You will show up. And the point is picking up the scholarship check.”

Now he’s really confused. “Scholarship? For what? I barely passed. If I passed! They haven’t graded English yet.”

“You are my best student and I’m going to hate to see you go, you and Molly both. You have a gift Sherlock, and I don’t want to see you waste it—I won’t let you. I didn’t tell you about it, but I submitted your name for a chemistry scholarship and you won! It’s not much, $2,000 a year if you keep your grades up, but it will help. Have you even applied to any colleges?”

Sherlock says nothing and looks at his shoes.

“Sherlock!”

Finally he looks up. “It just seemed like a waste of time. I figured I’d end up being disappointed.”

Ms. Hudson looks at him with pursed lips and shakes her head. “For such a brilliant kid, you are an idiot.”

Sherlock’s eyes widen. That’s the second time in ten minutes. Once from his only friend and now from his favorite teacher. Have they been comparing notes?

“I wish you had come to me. There is always a way, Sherlock. Always. Use that big brain of yours. You have the raw materials. What you lack is discipline. I think you only put effort into things that excite you, and that’s natural—but you need to look at the bigger picture, the end game, and realize that to get there you’re going to have to do things you don’t like. And I’m telling you that you are coming to graduation because I’ll be the one handing you your diploma and the scholarship and I know you wouldn’t want to disappoint me.”

“Thank you,” Sherlock says quietly, looking down again. “For the scholarship and for... yesterday.”

Her eyes soften, and she reaches out to touch his arm. “You’re welcome dear. I’m sorry that happened to you.”

“I’m kind of used to it by now.”
“I never got used to it. You know I’m…”

“Yes, obviously.”

“Oh, I forgot who I was talking to,” she says, smiling. “You never miss a thing.”

“Supposedly, I have a big brain,” he says, smiling back.

“Well, if you ever want to talk -- about anything, please call me. Tell me your number now.” She puts it into her phone and calls him to make sure he has hers as well.

“OK, I will.”

She sighs, fairly sure he won’t.

“See you June second in your cap and gown?”

“Yes, Ms. Hudson.” He gives her an obligatory teenage eye roll. Then more quietly, “I won’t let you down.”

********

He has to go back to school on Friday, for his grades, so he doesn’t completely relax. He works Thursday afternoon and picks up some pot afterwards, so by the time he gets home, he doesn’t even care that his father is passed out on the sofa, meaning he didn’t go to work. Not a good sign. Could be the beginning of a spiral, just in time for him to miss graduation. But whatever. Mrs. Hudson will be there and Saturday he’ll see John. Maybe he should ask him to come. Everyone is entitled to four tickets and it’s not like he has anybody else who’s coming. He texted Myc about it, but he hasn’t heard back from him. Typical.

Friday he wakes up twitching, thinking about that English exam grade and nervous (excited?) about the date with John. He smokes the last of the pot, just a puff, to calm down and leaves for school. The grades are handed out and some kids start celebrating and some groaning about having to go to summer school. Sherlock gets his envelope and scans down the list. Math, A-, History, B, Chemistry, A+, and at the bottom, English, B-. He reads down the list one more time, just to be sure, but there it is: B-. He must have aced the exam, because his grades for the rest of the semester were for shit. He catches Molly’s eye and waves the report over his head with a huge grin and she makes her way over to him. She gives him a big hug. “I knew you’d make it.”

“I wasn’t so sure myself. But there it is.” He shows it to her. “And Hudders got me a scholarship. Just a little one.” He looks down and blushes.

Molly lights the hallway with her grin. “I told you you were a genius!”

They talk for a while, comparing notes on their grades and Sherlock says, “Do you want to go get a soda or something? Celebrate?”

She links arms with him and says, “My treat.” On the way out they pass Ms. Hudson and she asks, “English?”

Sherlock replies, “B-, if you can believe it.”

“I never doubted. See you at graduation.” She gives them a cheery wave.
After their soda, Sherlock heads home and finally texts John.

SH: I passed.

His phone rings immediately. It’s John. When Sherlock picks up, he hears hospital sounds, beeping, a loudspeaker.

“Hey! Sherlock! I only have a minute, I’m about to go in to surgery, but I just wanted to tell you how proud I am of you.”

Sherlock has to keep himself from wriggling with pleasure. “Thanks. I’m pretty proud myself. Oh! And Ms. Hudson, my chem teacher? She got me a scholarship, it’s not very big or anything, but I didn’t even know she was trying.”

“That’s fantastic! So we’ll have lots to celebrate tomorrow night. Now I really have to go, but I’ll send the car for you at seven, right?”

“Seven, yeah. Can’t wait.”

“Won’t be long. Bye.”

“Bye.”

********

Sherlock stays up as late as he can, hoping to have as little time as possible to wait for Saturday night. He is both sad and happy he has no more pot. He wanted to kill the anxiety, but savor the anticipation as well. He has his usual shift at the shop and is distracted enough, until John texts.

JW: Wear that purple shirt.

He had been planning on it. It’s the only decent one he has. But somehow the request makes him breathe a little faster.

SH: OK.

He gets home at five, hoping his father is out so that he can get ready in peace. He takes a very long shower and considers jerking off, afraid he might embarrass himself by showing up with a hard-on, but then decides against it. He wanted to be fresh and ready, just in case something happens. Something’s going to happen, right? He invited me to his place.

He looks at the clock. Six forty-five. Dad’s still not home. Thank God. He’s pacing in the living room, cigarette dangling from his lips. Nervous. He has the envelope with the list and he hopes his answers will be acceptable. He walks into the bathroom and looks at himself in the mirror, thinking he looks OK. He’s wearing dark skinny jeans and the shirt that John requested, he’s even ironed it. Does he look sexy? He’s too thin and his hair is out of control. He pouts his lips at the mirror - then laughs at himself. What the fuck Sherlock?

There is the sound of a car outside. This is it. He puts out his cigarette and runs his fingers through his hair. Pops a mint in his mouth.

A black sedan is in the driveway. Sherlock locks the door behind him and walks toward it. The driver gets out.

“Mr. Holmes?”
“Um. Yes, that’s me.”

“Allow me,” says the driver as he opens the rear door of the car.

“Thank you,” says Sherlock, getting into the back seat and trying to act like this is something he does every day.

As they drive in silence towards downtown, Sherlock feels the butterflies in his stomach multiply. There is no turning back now is there? He checks again that the list is in his back pocket.

“Do you work for John.... for Dr. Watson?”

“Sometimes.”

“Do you pick up other people too?”

The driver meets his eyes in the rearview mirror and shrugs. “I’m paid to drive, not talk. You should ask him.”

Are there other boys? Maybe girls? Stop thinking! Breathe.

Finally they pull up to a high-rise building just on the edge of downtown and overlooking the Scioto River. The driver gets out and opens the door for Sherlock.

“Just give the concierge your name, you’re expected.”

“Okay, thanks,” says Sherlock, walking towards the sliding doors and looking up in awe at the luxurious building. He enters the lobby and walks to the desk where a pleasant looking woman is standing.

“May I help you?” she offers.

“I’m Sherlock Holmes. I’m visiting Dr. Watson,” Sherlock says, as nonchalantly as possible.

The woman consults a piece of paper on the desk.

“Yes of course, Mr. Holmes, go right up, #1410, fourteenth floor.” She gestures towards the elevators.

********

Sherlock stands outside of #1410, heart pounding, trying to get himself under control before knocking. Here goes. He knocks.

After a few seconds, the door opens and John Watson is standing there. He is wearing jeans and a lightweight V-neck sweater, in a color that reminds Sherlock of oatmeal and that sets off his dark blue eyes. He’s barefoot. And hot as hell. His face lights up with a smile as he greets Sherlock with a handshake.

“Sherlock, I’m glad you’re here, please come in.”

Sherlock steps through the door into an expensively appointed room with a fireplace, a leather sofa and a wall of windows overlooking the river. He’s never been in a place like this before.
“Is this yours?” he asks, looking around in amazement.

“Just for the summer.”

“It’s nice.”

“Yes,” says John with a laugh, “It is. Come, have a seat.” John walks to the sofa and sits down, patting the space next to him. Sherlock sits obediently. He looks around and on the mantel he sees the riding crop, placed as casually as a vase of tulips. He straightens a bit and looks at John whose expression is blank.

“Are you nervous?”

“A little.”

“That’s appropriate. Does anyone know where you are?”

“No, why?” Sherlock is a little more nervous now.

John looks at him a little disapprovingly. “I forget how young you are. It’s not safe. Always let someone know where you’re going to be and what time they should expect you home if you’re going to meet someone you don’t know.”

“I don’t really have anybody like that. I’m kind of...a loner.”

John looks at him for a little while and nods slowly. “Right. Well, we agree we’ll just have to trust each other. Just don’t trust anyone else.”

Sherlock’s eyes keep drifting back to the mantel. “Um, do you have anything... to drink,” asks Sherlock, wanting something to take the edge off.

“No alcohol, I want your mind clear tonight. I’ll need your consent and I don’t want there to be any doubt.”

“Oh. Oh....Right,” Sherlock says. “Maybe some water though.”

“Mouth a little dry?” John smirks.

The joke actually serves to relax Sherlock a little and he huffs out a laugh. “Yes, actually.”

John brings out a bottle of Pellegrino and two flutes between his fingers. “It’s not champagne, but we can pretend. It is a celebration, after all.” John pops the bottle open and fills the glasses. He passes one to Sherlock and holds his own glass up to him. Sherlock grins and they clink them together gently. They each take a sip. John gives him a half smile.

“First things first. The list?”

Sherlock reaches into his back pocket, retrieves it, and hands it to John. John scans it while Sherlock watches nervously, then places it on the coffee table.

“Is that okay?”

“Perfectly okay,” says John, looking into Sherlock’s eyes. *This boy is so bloody gorgeous and I can’t wait to have him.*

“Again, if we go further, I’ll want you to sign something…a contract. But let’s just consider
tonight a little experiment, to see if you really want this.”

“What exactly is this?” asks Sherlock.

“I told you. It could be the beginning of some kind of relationship. I’ve been quite honest. I want your obedience. I want you to submit to me, to give yourself over to me; to let me use you how I see fit—within your limits. I’d like to start finding out what those limits might be. Do you understand that?” John asks, placing a finger underneath Sherlock’s chin and lifting it so that Sherlock is looking into his eyes.

“Yes.”

“Good boy. There’s at least some part of you that wants this, because here you are.”

John moves the finger from under Sherlock’s chin and traces it along his jawline, then across his cheek just to the corner of his mouth. Sherlock parts his lips slightly at the touch, never breaking eye contact as John’s finger moves across his lips, feather-light. Sherlock extends his tongue to touch John’s finger as it slides past. On the second pass, the fingertip slips between his lips and he draws it in, catching it between his teeth and swirling his tongue around the pad, feeling the ridges, tasting John’s skin, sucking.

John is looking at him intently, his own lips parted. After a moment, he pulls his finger from Sherlock’s mouth and grasps his chin lightly. Sherlock wonders if John is about to kiss him. He desperately wants John to kiss him and he leans forward a bit. Instead, John quirks his lip up in a half smile, cocks his head, and whispers, “You definitely want this,” before letting go of Sherlock’s chin.

“You hungry?” John asks, standing up and walking toward the kitchen, leaving Sherlock on the sofa, confused and disappointed, still leaning in for the missing kiss.

“Um, no,” Sherlock says, recovering.

John brings out a plate of cheese, fruit, and bread anyway.

“Tell me about your grades and this scholarship.”

John sits across from him and they chat about the news from school, the use of chemical dispersants to combat oil spills, and new avenues for stopping calcific aortic valve disease for a while until Sherlock forgets his anxiety. He eats without noticing.

When the conversation slows, Sherlock spins his glass between his fingers and clears his throat. He looks down at his feet and says, “I wanted to apologize.” He takes a deep breath. “I’m sorry I lied. To you. About the books.”

“I appreciate your telling me, Sherlock. Can I ask why you did? Why didn’t you just say that you hadn’t read them?”

Sherlock looked at him puzzled. Wasn’t it obvious? He looked down again. “I didn’t want you to be disappointed.”

“You wanted me to be pleased with you, didn’t you?”

Sherlock looks back at him and swallows. “Yeah.”

“You know that I wouldn’t have been upset if you hadn’t been able to read the books. But I was
angry with you for lying. You knew that. But here you are, apologizing. Why did you apologize? Why not let it pass, hope that we could just forget about it?”

Sherlock shrugs. “I feel bad about it. Isn’t that why people apologize?”

“Not quite. They apologize because they want to feel better. Do you want to feel better, Sherlock? Because I can help you with that.”

Sherlock whispers, “Yes. I want to feel better.”

“Good boy. Come here. Come, stand here.” John points to a spot in front of him. Sherlock rises and moves to the spot. He’s breathing quickly, his mouth open. “I’m going to ask you for colors starting now. If you’re comfortable and you want to continue, your color is green. Green is a yes. If you want to slow down or take a break your color is yellow. Yellow is a maybe, or I’m not sure. And if you want me to stop, completely, if you want to tell me no, guess what your color is.”

“I’m guessing red?”

“Clever boy. We’ll practice. Punishment is on the list. Spanking is on the list. You agreed to both of them, yes?”

Sherlock nods, but John says, “No. When I ask you a question, I want to hear your answer. Try again. Did you agree to spanking? And to being punished?”

Sherlock’s closes his eyes and says, “Yes.”

“Better. Next time, you’ll say ‘Yes, Sir.’ Understood?”

“Yes.”

John waits and when Sherlock opens his eyes, John tilts his head and smiles at him. Sherlock blushes and says, “Yes, Sir.”

“Should I punish you for lying?”

In a whisper, he says, “Yes, Sir.”

“Good boy. Now. You’re going to lower your trousers and your pants and I’m going to lay you across my lap and I’m going to spank that delicious arse of yours. And when I’m finished, you’re going to feel better. And after that, I’m going to make you feel even better still. Are you alright with that? Do you agree?”

Sherlock finds himself speaking without thinking. “Yes, Sir.”

“Tell me your color.”

Sherlock puffs out, “Green.”

“Very good.” He stands up and touches Sherlock’s cheek with his fingertips. “That’s my good boy.” He waits. And then Sherlock, hypnotized, unfastens his belt, and sighs as the pressure on his rapidly swelling cock is relieved. He unbuttons and unzips his jeans, John’s hand still on his cheek as he pushes them down over his hips. They are tight, so he has to shimmy a bit. When they are around his thighs, he hooks this thumbs in the waistband of his boxers and pushes them down too. Now he’s standing there in front of John with his hard cock standing straight out just beneath his shirt, his jeans halfway down his thighs. John could proceed right now with the punishment, but he
wants to see. Has to see, more of this exquisite boy. Feeling his own erection growing, he begins unbuttoning Sherlock’s shirt. This process seems to take an eternity, each button undone revealing more and more smooth, white skin. Sherlock stands motionless and lets John push it off his shoulders, his breath ragged, and his eyes half lidded. Finally, the purple shirt drops to the floor, and Sherlock feels more naked than ever before in his life.

John lets his eyes drift over Sherlock’s long, pale body. He licks his lower lip unconsciously. Sitting down on the sofa, he reaches for Sherlock’s hand. Silently, Sherlock lowers himself over John’s lap. John spreads his knees, careful not to allow any contact with the boy’s cock. Sherlock is still, but his heart is pounding so hard, he is certain John can hear it. He rests his forehead on crossed arms, his nose touching the smooth leather of the sofa and waits.

He expects a blow and is surprised when instead he feels John’s left hand rest lightly on his buttock, fingers stroking slowly, sending shivers through his body and he can’t help but shift and twist, trying to increase the pressure.

“Why are you getting this spanking, Sherlock?”

It’s excruciating, but Sherlock answers, “Because I lied.”

A tap on his ass and he yelps. John repeats, “Because I lied…”

Sherlock quickly says, “Sir! Because I lied, Sir.”

“That’s right.” John’s right hand rests on Sherlock’s lower back, holding him in place. The left moves to the back of his thigh, fingertips moving from where his jeans end, up and up, and trailing along the crack of his ass, making him squirm. The touch soothes and electrifies. He exhales into the leather. His embarrassment wars with his arousal and he marvels that it’s possible to feel both at the same time.

“Oh!” The first hard slap of John’s hand on his tender skin is shocking and he gasps. The muscles that had relaxed under the gentle caress go rigid again. The second slap is harder but John has mercifully chosen a different spot. Pain blooms on Sherlock’s ass and radiates through his thighs and stomach and when it reaches his cock it is transformed into something different, something...more like pleasure. Before he can process this, John strikes him again. Sherlock’s mouth is open now and he hears himself moan. That was three. John hadn’t told him how many to expect. He should have asked. It would have been weirdly comforting to know. Another blow--four. His ass is burning and he feels his dripping erection suspended, his hips thrusting into agonizing emptiness between John’s thighs. Five. His eyes squeeze shut so hard that multi-colored specks dance behind his eyelids. Several seconds pass. Six. John varies the rhythm of his strokes so that Sherlock can’t anticipate them and it sends his mind whirling, trying to grasp onto something. He’s panting now, on the verge of hyperventilating. The pain is growing. Seven. Eight. Nine. He hears the sound of John’s open hand making contact with his body, but in a moment, his perception shifts, and sound of number ten seems to come from a long way away. Sherlock’s mind quiets and he stops counting as his body relaxes over John’s lap. He feels almost serene, the pain a new sensation that soothes, rather than agitates.

He doesn’t know how many blows follow, but eventually he is aware that they have stopped. The fog in his brain clears slowly and he feels John’s hand in his hair, alternately combing it with his fingers and massaging his scalp. The sensation is exquisite. He doesn’t want to move or even open his eyes. He just wants to stay this way. He sighs and moves his head against John’s touch.

“Coming back now are you?” John asks quietly.
Sherlock hums, a sound that surprises him, and he turns his head. John helps him sit up and Sherlock hisses when his ass brushes against John’s jeans. He shifts until he finds a tolerable position and looks down to see that his erection hasn’t flagged at all. John says, “The beginning of that spanking was a punishment. You’re forgiven now. Do you feel better?”

Sherlock tries to focus and identify how he feels. He feels good. He feels lighter. Relieved. He nods his head, but then remembers. “Yes, Sir. I feel better.” John reaches up and wipes something off his face. Sherlock realizes there is another tear threatening to spill onto his cheek. He blinks and John wipes it with his thumb as it runs down.

“Then it would be polite to say thank you for the spanking.” The word makes Sherlock squirm until the pain freezes him.

“Thank you, Sir.”

Leadingly, John says, “For…?”

Saying the word is even harder than hearing it and he whispers, “The spanking.”

“Good boy. I promised I would make you feel even better, you beautiful thing. Can I kiss you?” Sherlock nods and John lets the transgression pass. He purses his lips slightly and just brushes them over Sherlock’s. He moves to his cheeks and then down along his jawline and back to his lips, so light and feathery, it tickles and brings up goosebumps on Sherlock’s arms. John strokes them up and down then runs his fingers, first over one nipple and then the other. Sherlock’s head falls back and John takes advantage, licking right up and over the artery in his neck. Sherlock groans and feels his cock throbbing. He reaches for it, but John gently pushes his hand away. “It’s mine. No touching.” He whispers into Sherlock’s ear, “Tell me your color.” He cups his hand around Sherlock’s balls and rolls them gently. Sherlock groans again and looks down to watch.

John lets go and growls, “Color.”

“Green, god, please, green.” John scoops them up again. Sherlock feels his own fingers twitch, wanting to take himself in hand and feels shocked that he restrains himself. His hand has turned against him—or perhaps he’s remembered that word. Obedience. So old-fashioned. He knows what it means. He’s just never heard it used before. But now? It’s what John wants. So that’s what Sherlock gives him. He obeys. He doesn’t touch. Instead, he grips John’s shirt in one fist, his own jeans in the other and lets him have his way.

John reaches behind him and rummages between the back of the couch and the cushion he’s sitting on. He brings out a small bottle and snicks up the cap, pouring something into his hand. Then he wraps his fingers around Sherlock’s cock, and it’s warm and slick and a distant part of him thinks, What is that? I have got to get some of that. John squeezes and twists and slides and Sherlock is so hard, he knows he’s not going to last long but he’s past caring. John’s speed and pressure increase and Sherlock is dripping pre-come and it’s mixing with the magic lotion John is using. John lifts his other hand and uses his fingers to brush over Sherlock’s nipples. He pinches them gently and Sherlock arches into the touch.

John starts a running commentary, “Look at you, look how ready you are. So beautiful, so sexy. Perfect, the way you move for me. You’re ripe and luscious, I want to eat you…” The words are pouring over Sherlock, bathing him, filling an emptiness he didn’t know was there. “You’re going to feel so good. No one else gets to see it. No one else gets to make you feel so good, you gorgeous boy. My sweet boy. Let go for me, I want you to come. Come all over yourself, over my hand. Come, Sherlock.”
As John says his name, Sherlock thinks, \textit{Yes, Sir}, but shouts out loud and does just what John told him to.

John watches as come spurts from Sherlock’s cock, striping his stomach, and dripping onto John’s hand. His eyes go to Sherlock’s face, smiling as he sees how utterly wrecked he looks. He waits. When the aftershocks of Sherlock’s orgasm have subsided and his eyes open, John puts his arm around his shoulders and pulls him close for a proper kiss.

John’s lips pressed against his is the perfect culmination of what Sherlock has experienced tonight. This simple kiss. Tenderness after the violence of the spanking. John’s tongue slips between his lips and Sherlock meets it with his own. He feels peaceful and protected in John’s arms. His dad, the hateful kids at school, all recede to irrelevance with the sensation of John’s soft mouth. He is spent and wants nothing but to be held and kissed, then realizes suddenly that John might be expecting something of him. He places a hand on the bulge in John’s jeans.

“No, not tonight, love. If you are a good boy maybe next time. Tonight was for you,” breathes John into his mouth. Sherlock’s brain stutters. \textit{Love}. They spend a few minutes just kissing gently. Sherlock touches John’s face, learning the contours. He feels so warm and safe and he realizes it’s the same feeling he’s chasing when he craves heroin. The thought startles him a little and he pulls away to look intently into John’s eyes.

John looks back at him, then his forehead wrinkles. “What? What is it? What’s wrong? What’s your color?”

Sherlock says, “Nothing’s wrong, green. Green. I just don’t...get it. Why me? I’m a loser. And you’re… a doctor. You’re rich. You’re hot. You could have anybody you want.”

John clenches his teeth. “First rule. No more tearing yourself down. If I hear you or even think you’re bashing yourself, you’ll have earned a punishment. You are not a loser. And if you stick around, I’ll prove it to you.”

Sherlock settles back with his cheek on John’s shoulder and says, “Hell, I’m not going anywhere.”

John holds the gangly boy and lets him doze for a little while, until his shoulder starts to ache. He shifts and it works to wake Sherlock up.

“Oh, god. I think I drooled on your shirt.”

John chuckles. “Don’t worry about that. You left a bigger mess on my hand.”

Sherlock’s face turns pink and he says, “Oh, god. I’m sorry, let me clean it up.” He awkwardly unwinds himself from John’s lap, wincing as his ass slides over the sofa. He starts to pull up his jeans, but John grabs his wrist and stops him.

“Not yet. I want to see what I’ve done to you. Sherlock’s face is now red and he turns around slowly, facing away from John. His ass is pink, with a few fingerprints standing out distinctly on his otherwise white skin. John wipes his hands on a napkin, then spreads them both across the still-warm cheeks. Sherlock’s cock twitches and his head drops back just a little bit at the intimacy of the touch.

“Mmmm, lovely. You’ll be a little sore tomorrow. We’ll have to see if you like it or not.” He turns Sherlock around and cleans him off, gently.

Sherlock asks in a very small voice, “Can I get dressed now? Sir?”
John smirks just a bit and says, “If you’d like. Hungry yet?”

Pulling up his jeans carefully, Sherlock says, “Now I’m starving.”

John laughs and says, “Good. You’re too thin. I’ll make you a sandwich.

*******

John pours himself a glass of wine as he watches Sherlock eat, standing at the breakfast bar because it hurts too much to sit.

*This is working out well,* he thinks. Sherlock will sign, he’s sure of it now.

“My car will take you home,” John says, when Sherlock has finished.

“Oh,” Sherlock says, a little surprised. He was hoping John would ask him to stay.

John takes an envelope out of a drawer and hands it to him. He begins walking him to the door.

“A contract. I want you to read it carefully and call me if you have any questions. I’d like to see you again next Saturday if you’re still on board.”

Sherlock takes the envelope and nods. Seeing John’s narrowed eyes, he quickly says “Yes, Sir. Still on board.”

When they get to the door, John abruptly presses Sherlock against it, face-first, gripping his arms firmly and pinning him there with his body. Sherlock inhales sharply in surprise at the realization that John is stronger than he looks, but doesn’t resist. John’s hips grind and Sherlock moans when he feels the hard cock against his sore ass. He doesn’t know whether to push back or rub himself on the door.

“In that case, I have some rules for you this week and I expect you to follow them,” John says in a low, hoarse voice, and Sherlock can feel his breath, hot against his neck. “Firstly, you’re going to start taking care of yourself, mentally and physically. That means no more cutting yourself down. No smoking. I can smell the stink of it on your shirt and taste it in your mouth. And no drugs. No pot, no pills, no cocaine, no heroin. None. That shit stops today. If you’re having trouble, you call me. Doesn’t matter what time. You need help, you call me. Secondly, if you’re in, you’re in all the way. That means you belong to me and this is mine. Hands off.” He reaches around Sherlock and places his hand over his crotch, squeezing gently. “No touching. No wanking.”

“Wha..”

“Jerking off. No masturbating without my permission. And same instructions. You need help, call. Are we clear?” Another squeeze and Sherlock groans.

“Yes, Sir.”

“Right then.”

John releases Sherlock and turns him around. “I’ll text you tomorrow to make sure you’re ok. The car should be downstairs.” He kisses Sherlock fiercely, sucking his bottom lip between his teeth and leaving it swollen. Sherlock gasps when he’s released and John walks him out to the elevator, his hand on Sherlock’s aching bottom. He presses the button for the lobby and leans his head against the door when it closes, still a bit off kilter.
Sherlock rides back home in silence. The driver had looked at him sympathetically when he grimaced and shifted in the back seat, trying to find a position that didn’t torment his burning ass. He knows, he thinks, embarrassed. And as he remembers lying across John's lap, his cock stirs again. He shifts on the seat and thinks, *Oh, god. I like it. I’m fucked.*
Sherlock decides that he wants to become involved with John, but is having trouble following the rules.

Have you noticed all of the role reversals in this work so far? There are many. John's the posh one, Angelo owes him favors, and more. In this chapter in particular, Mike Stamford's interaction with John and Sherlock. John confounds Sherlock rather than the other way around.

Sherlock wakes up sore in places that he’s never been sore before. His ass aches in an unfamiliar but not unpleasant way. He rubs the muscles and groans as he remembers what happened last night. His lip is swollen and he runs the tip of his tongue over it, wondering how it looks and happy he doesn’t have to go out at all today. If he’s lucky, he won’t even have to see his father. He stretches and his morning erection jumps to life under the sheet. He smiles lazily and reaches down to take care of it, but his arm freezes. *I’m not allowed.* Paradoxically, the thought stiffens him a little bit more and he sits up in the bed clutching the sheets in both hands. Not sure what to do, he looks down at himself in frustration. He sits there, arguing internally over whether or not John would know, or what he might owe him and he realizes that this is what John has been talking about when he uses the word “obedience.” And Sherlock agreed! He said he wanted it, that he was still on board. He thinks hard and looks deep to see if that’s still true. What is he willing to give up to keep this… *Arrangement? Relationship? Agreement?* Apparently, a hell of a lot, because after deciding that rutting against the sheets would violate the spirit, if not the letter of the law, he gets up and heads to the bathroom for a shower. Cold.

He puts his tight pants back on, hoping they’ll keep him contained and picks up his phone on the way to the kitchen. His father has left him coffee, thank god, and he reaches for his cigarettes--

“Shit!” He throws the whole pack onto the counter. He slams himself down in his seat and pops right back up again at the pain in his backside. “Fuck.” He snatches his phone up angrily, ready to write a blistering text to the man who’s ruined his day already, but sees he’s been beaten to it.

*JW: How is it going this morning?*

*SH: It sucks. I was about to call you.*
His phone rings and the first thing he hears is John chuckling. He tries very hard not to whine, but suspects that he fails. “Why are you laughing? This is hard.”

John chokes back another giggle and says, “I expect it is. You’re, what, eighteen? I was always hard when I was eighteen.”

“OK, that wasn’t even a little bit funny. I don’t know if I can do it all at once. Give up everything at the same time.”

John considers. “Remember, don’t sell yourself short. You’re stronger than you think. But maybe we can help with the cigarettes. How long have you been smoking? And how many a day?”

Sherlock thinks, then answers, “Four years, half a pack a day.”

“Yeah, you’re right, you could use some help with that. Why don’t you come to the clinic at the hospital? Are you working tomorrow? I’ll set you up with an appointment with Doctor Stamford so you can get some nicotine patches. While you’re there, you can get your tests done.”

“What tests?”

“Sherlock, if we’re going to play the way I want to, we have to be sure we’re both clean. Blood and urine. The results will be back by Saturday and I’ll show you mine then too.”

Sherlock mutters under his breath, “What happened to trust?”

“That’s one.”

“One what?”

“One stroke of the paddle for disrespect. You’ll be keeping a tally from now on, for your spanking at the end of the week. More than a dozen means the crop. Don’t worry about anything else yet.”

The wave of arousal that washes over Sherlock almost drops him into the kitchen chair again, but he catches himself at the last second.

“Are you there?”

“Yes.” Sherlock looks down the hallway to make sure his father isn’t around. “Yes, Sir.”

“Good boy. The drugs are non-negotiable and I’m afraid there’s nothing to be done about the other. The pleasures of your body belong to me now. Your cock, your arse, every orgasm, they’re mine.” Sherlock’s mouth is open and his hand has dropped to his crotch without him noticing. John whispers, “I’ll make you feel so good Sherlock. You’re going to lose your mind. You’ll be begging for it, but you’ll only get it when I say so. If you behave. If you’re good. So be good for me, Sherlock, yeah?”

He’s breathing hard. “Yeah, I mean, Yes, Sir.” He moans a little and notices his hand. “Shit.”

“You forgot, didn’t you? That’s another. I recommend cold showers. And lots of exercise. I’ll text you with an appointment time. Gotta go.”

Sherlock takes a deep breath to say goodbye, but John’s already clicked off. Deciding to try the exercise route, he packs up his guitar, throws the envelope John gave him in the case, and heads off on his bike. Ouch! He’s forgotten to take his smarting ass into account, but figures he can manage. There’s a hiking trail about three miles outside of town where he’ll be able to relax, read the
Sherlock turns off the main road to the trail. It’s Sunday so there are a fair amount of bikers and runners enjoying the early summer weather. A few hundred yards in he takes his bike off the paved trail into the woods, bouncing over the uneven ground, trying desperately to keep his ass off the bike seat. He finds the spot he’s looking for, a secluded patch of grass next to a creek with a big rock near the edge of the water. He’s not the only one who knows about this place. There is graffiti painted on the rock. “Suzie loves Matt”, “Brian was here” etc. But no one else is here now.

Sherlock leans his bike against a tree and takes his guitar and the envelope out of the case. He doesn’t want to open the envelope just yet, a little afraid of what it will say. Afraid of what he hopes it will say? He sits gingerly in the grass with his back to the rock. The late morning sun is shining through the lush foliage and dapples the ground around him as the faint gurgle of the creek and occasional chirping of birds provide a soundtrack for his thoughts. It’s so peaceful here.

He picks up his guitar and tucks it under his arm, closing his eyes as he feels the sun on his face. This isn’t his first guitar. The first one had been a birthday present from his parents, the last ever from his mom, when Sherlock was twelve. His mom could read music, used to play the piano, though they didn’t have one, and helped him learn to play. After the basics, he taught himself and worked summers to buy this guitar, a used Martin dreadnought. It’s his prize possession and he tunes it while thinking about the envelope that sits in the grass next to him. Lazily playing a blues scale he considers. Do I really want do this? He thinks about last night and how safe it felt to be curled against John on the sofa, how amazing it felt to have John’s hand on his dick, and most interestingly, how it felt to be exposed and helpless when he was over John’s lap. He switches abruptly to Jimi Hendrix’s “Purple Haze,” plays the opening notes and chords with intensity, and opens his eyes. Yes.

Setting aside his guitar, he picks up the envelope and holds it in both hands, staring at it intently. Then he opens it with resolve and begins to read the contract.

Contract of Dominance and Submission

This contract is to establish the duties, rights and obligations of both SH, the Submissive, and JW (Sir), the Dominant. From the date of signing, this contract will be in full effect until either party chooses to terminate or alter the agreement. The Dominant and the Submissive agree and acknowledge that everything that occurs under the terms of this contract will be consensual, and subject to the agreed limits.

Rights, Duties, and Obligations ~ Dr. John H. Watson (Sir), Dominant

1. I promise to care for and protect SH. I will help, teach, guide and discipline him. All decisions I make will be with his well-being in mind.
2. I will help him find pleasure in submission and obedience. I will set rules for SH and I will make sure that he knows when he has pleased me. I will reward and punish him for his efforts and failures.
3. I will listen to his opinions and thoughts with respect and consider them.
4. I will be available by phone at all times. If I am unable to answer I will call as soon as possible.
5. I will respect SH’s safewords.
6. While this contract is in effect, I will have no other sexual partners.

Right, Duties, and Obligations ~ Sherlock Holmes (SH), Submissive

1. I will serve, obey and please Sir in all things. This will include sexual activities, excluding those marked “N” on the attached list. Subject to the agreed terms, I will accept without argument, his guidance and punishment. I acknowledge that his decisions will be made with the utmost care and thoughtfulness for my well-being mentally, physically and emotionally.
2. I will treat Sir with respect at all times, and will address him as “Sir” in private.
3. I will use my safewords.
4. I am to give myself freely to Sir. I am to be open and honest, trusting the ability of Sir to help me feel safe in expressing myself.
5. I will take care of my mental and physical health. Physical health includes no tobacco or illicit drugs in any form. Mental health includes hurtful self-criticism.
6. I will not engage in any sexual behavior without permission. This includes masturbation.
7. I will be available by phone at all times. If I am unable to answer I must call as soon as possible.

___________________________________
Dr. John H. Watson (Sir) - Dominant

___________________________________
Sherlock Holmes (SH) - Submissive

Honestly, it’s not as bad as he was fearing. He likes the sound of “care for and protect.” He’s already felt that, even while his ass was on fire. He figures that’s where that safe feeling comes from: being cared for. “Discipline.” Weird word. Isn’t that the same as punishment? Why is it in there twice? He stumbles over a few phrases, like “any sexual behavior.” Maybe he should ask for some clarification on that. “Serve?” What’s included in that? They’ve talked about most of this already and he can quit anytime he wants right? What does he have to lose? Not a damn thing. He flips to the attached limits list and reviews his answers. His previous no’s are still no’s. Mouth bits? Seriously, who does that?

Sex, that is, anal sex, isn’t on the list. Is that because it’s just assumed? He hasn’t done that before. He and Victor never got that far, only blowjobs and grinding. Never even talked about it. The unspoken understanding was if they did “that” it would make them really gay, not just...whatever it is they were. Friends who sucked each other’s dicks? Sherlock is sorry he never told Victor how he truly felt about him. That he loved him, although he’s fairly sure he knew. Stop thinking about Vic. He’s gone. Not coming back. Ever.

Sex? Yeah, John wants that, he’d said so that first day in the shop, and if it were on the list there would be a “Y” next to it. He can’t help but visualize being fucked by John and this makes him hard again. The frustration is not just that he wants to jack off, it’s that he could! There’s nothing actually stopping him. The idea that he’s doing this to himself, just because John wants him to. Obedience. He’s not sure how he’ll make it until the weekend. It’s going to be miserable, maybe impossible. He squirms and that hurts his ass. He hates it. And he loves it. He loves the reminder. Shit. He’s going to sign the contract. That’s decided. He takes a deep breath. Best to turn his mind
to something that won’t make him horny. He tucks the contract back into the envelope and picks
his up his guitar.

He plays and writes until early afternoon, when his stomach reminds him that he’d only had coffee
this morning and no lunch. He’s about to get back on his bike and start for home when his phone
vibrates. He sees with a spark of excitement that it’s from John.

**JW:** How are you doing?

**SH:** OK. Horrible actually. My ass hurts and my dick is hard.

**JW:** Perfect then.

**SH:** I read the contract.

**JW:** And?

**SH:** Still on board.

**JW:** Good, but make sure you think about it carefully. You’ve got the rest of the
week. I’ve made you an appointment with Dr. Stamford at OSU’s student clinic
tomorrow at ten. Can you get there?

**SH:** Yes—I don’t work until one.

**JW:** Where are you now?

**SH:** In the woods playing guitar.

**JW:** Were you thinking about me?

**SH:** Yes, damn you.

**JW:** Good boy. But you forgot Rule Number Two.

Sherlock had already forgotten Rule Number Two.

**SH:** Sorry. Am I in trouble?

**JW:** Not at all. Just add another two to the tally.

**JW:** Ten o’clock tomorrow. If I can get away, I’ll meet you.

That’s four. Sherlock shivers a little, already knowing his mouth is going to get his ass into a lot of
trouble. He never has been able to control the inner smart aleck that pays no attention to his
instructions. He has a suspicion that John might turn out to be the brat tamer he’s needed all these years. He rubs his rear end unconsciously and sighs as he mounts his bike.

*******

Sherlock wakes up at eight and grits his teeth against the ache of his raging hard-on. He speaks very sternly to it and heads for another cold shower. When he shows up at the clinic, he finds the door locked and when he rings the bell, Dr. Mike Stamford himself lets him in. He’s a stocky, dark-haired man with an open, smiling face. He holds his hand out to Sherlock.

“Hi. Sherlock, is it?”

“Yeah, that’s me.”

“Well, John must like you a lot. He hardly ever pulls strings for anybody.”

Sherlock feels the blush rise up from his neck. “Um, we just met actually. I think he just felt sorry for me or something.”

Stamford frowns and shakes his head. “No, he thinks you’ve got a lot of potential. Said you remind him of himself actually. Late bloomer, are you?”

The blush makes it all the way up to the tips of his ears and he shrugs because he’s afraid he’ll squeak if he tries to answer.

The doctor smiles at him and holds the door to the office open, ushering him inside.

“So he’s recommending a full blood and urine work-up, TB test, and vaccine updates. Those are all requirements for working at the hospital. But even if we can’t swing it, you’ll need them for college anyway.”

“Um, I don’t know if I’ll be able to get into college now. It’s kind of late.”

Stamford laughs out loud. “If John says you’re going, you’re gonna go, believe me. He said you’d probably enjoy working in one of the labs, that you’re a budding chemist.”

Sherlock wrinkles up his forehead. “Sorry, what are you talking about, one of the labs?”

“He didn’t tell you? One thing you need to know about Dr. Watson. Once he takes you under his wing, you’re never going to escape. He’s got three departments trying to find you a job at the hospital.”

Sherlock is speechless. John knows what a fuck-up he is, he knows about the drugs. He probably knows how Sherlock has been paying for them, and he’s trying to get him a job at the hospital? Is he insane?

Mike is smirking at his open mouth. “Step on the scale.” The exam proceeds.

As the stethoscope is pressed up against his back, Sherlock gets a text alert, and Mike smirks again. “That him?” Sherlock nods.
JW: Still here?
SH: Yeah.
JW: I’ll be there in five.

“Like I said, kid, you’ll never get out from under.”

He pees in a jar and listens to how he needs to improve his diet and gain some weight, but when the time comes for the blood drawing, Mike turns very serious. “Let’s see your veins. John said they weren’t that bad. I’m not even going to lecture you about it. But you should know, we’ve had a big increase in deaths from dirty heroin.” He jerks his chin at Sherlock to roll up his sleeve. He hums as he taps on the inside of Sherlock’s elbow.

“He said you’re through with it. You’re through with it, right? Because if you’re not, even if it doesn’t kill you, he will. He doesn’t fool around, kid.”

“I kind of got that.”

John shows up a little out of breath and grills Mike on what he’s done. He approves grudgingly.

“Thanks, Mike. I owe you one.”

“Good. How about a beer on Wednesday?”

“Done.”

Sherlock walks out with a prescription for nicotine patches and a brochure about nutrition which he drops in a trash can on his way out of the office.

When they get outside, John checks his watch and says to Sherlock, “I’ve got time for coffee. You?”

They head to the hospital cafeteria and John loads Sherlock’s tray up with eggs, bacon, toast and a muffin.

Sherlock says, “Dr. Stamford said you were trying to get me a job at the hospital.”

John puts his mug down and sighs. “Mike’s got a big heart, but he’s also got a big mouth. Nothing may come of it and I didn’t want to get your hopes up.”

Sherlock wants to ask about the other people John’s taken under his wing, but doesn’t have the nerve.

Instead he says, “I graduate in two weeks. It’s a Saturday...” and leaves it hang there between them, reluctant to ask.

“Yeah?”

“I’ve got four tickets...”

“Oh course I’ll go.” John reaches out and places his hand over Sherlock’s.

“I’d like that,” Sherlock says, head down, looking up at John through dark lashes. _Those eyes are going to do me in_, thinks John. _And that arse. Won’t be long now. A week, maybe two?_ He needs to be sure that Sherlock knows what he wants. John knows what _he_ wants but he is a patient man. His
military training has instilled discipline and self-control. But still. The thought of having this luscious boy is intoxicating. It’s not just his unique beauty, which is undeniable, but his intellect, raw and uncultivated. He’s special. He is worth saving.

“I’d like to take you and your father out to celebrate afterwards. Have you ever been to Lindeys?”

Sherlock tries to imagine John and his father in the same room. Too awful to think about. He can barely imagine them in the same town. “Maybe that’s not such a good idea. There’s a slim chance that my brother might show up, although I haven’t heard from him yet. That would be too much.”

John watches him for a while, considering. “Maybe just you and me, then. We’ll wait till Sunday. Better.”

Sherlock thinks about his purple shirt. “I don’t really have anything… I mean, you have to wear a suit, right? With a tie?”

John’s smile makes all kinds of lines form around his mouth and on his cheeks. Sherlock has trouble paying attention to what he’s saying.

“…suit, just a jacket and tie.”

Sherlock draws out his, “Yeeeeeaaaaah, about that…”

John cocks his head at him. “What? Tell me.”

“That purple shirt? That’s it in terms of my ‘wardrobe’.” He uses finger quotes.

John stares for a moment, then asks, “What are you wearing to graduation?”

“Doesn’t matter. Cap and gown, remember?” He watches John’s jaw clench and idly wonders what it would be like to have that look directed at him for breaking one of the Contract rules. He realizes John’s speaking again.

“…gift. I have a tailor in town who owes me a favor. Quadruple bypass. If we drop by on Saturday, I’m sure he can alter something to fit you. There are always pieces left behind by people who don’t come back.” And even if I have to pay to have it made from scratch, it’ll be worth it to see those long legs and round arse in a bespoke suit.

Sherlock feels a little bowled over. He buys most of his clothes at the thrift store, underwear and socks at Target. Isn’t he supposed to say no to that kind of gift? Then he remembers his naked ass squirming over John’s lap and figures that most social niceties will not be applying to this situation. “I feel a little weird about it…but if you think it’s OK--”

“Did you forget my portion of the contract? The part where it says care for and help? The part about your well-being? Obedience and submission are difficult Sherlock. Not for the weak or faint of heart. They’re a huge gift to a Dom--Dominant. They’re priceless. Material things?” He snorts. “Besides, at least 80% of that suit is for me. I can’t wait to see you in it. And then take you out of it.”

Sherlock shifts in his chair, trying to make room in his suddenly too tight pants. He swallows thickly.

“And Rule 1 in your portion: serve, obey, and please. It would please me very much to have you accept this gift. Understood?”
Sherlock stares into those stern blue eyes. He looks around, but no one is paying any attention to them. He whispers, “Yes, Sir.”

“Good boy.”

John drains his coffee cup and looks at his watch. “I’ve got to get back. Don’t forget to pick up the patches.” Sherlock feels like he’s on another planet as he watches John’s back disappear.

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The rest of the week is excruciating and Sherlock feels like Saturday will never come. With no school and no studying, he picks up as many hours as he can at the shop but that still leaves the evenings during which he has nothing to do but think of John and fume about how fucking miserable he is without cigarettes and cut off from his dick. My own dick! He shakes his head. He tries to write music but can’t concentrate. He pulls up Ms. Hudson’s number on his phone once or twice and considers calling her to ask about applying somewhere, but thinks it’s probably too late for fall semester anyway and he doesn’t call. He tries watching television, but it’s all so unbelievably stupid.

Not smoking is really tough. He’s got a patch on his shoulder and it does help. His anxiety and headaches have lessened a bit, but the patch is a sterile and unsatisfying delivery system for the drug. The ritual is missing. The click of the lighter, the feeling of the first drag as it hits the bloodstream, the taste and the feel of it between his lips. He finds that during the times he would normally smoke, in the morning while drinking coffee, on breaks at work, and sitting in his room in the evening, his left hand is in constant motion, drumming the table, tugging at his curls.

He calls John a few times, and he talks him through the craving, while reminding him that it’s a bad idea to smoke while wearing the patch.

John’s no drug rule is actually a little easier than he was expecting. He’s never been a daily user, careful not to get too hopelessly addicted. He’d seen what it did to Victor and he doesn’t have a death wish. Plus, he can’t afford it. Drugs for him, particularly heroin, are sometimes an escape from pain but most of the time he does them because it just fucking feels good. Better than good. Better than anything. Heroin makes him feel like the person he wants to be. It’s a lie of course, but for a few hours at least, it’s nice to believe it. And he doesn’t want to spend his money. Or earn any extra. At least not the way he did before.

The no drug rule is manageable so far, the no smoking rule is sucking big time, but the no touching rule is driving him completely out of his mind. With no relief, he is in an almost constant state of arousal. He can’t stop thinking about John. When he wakes up each morning, he’s invariably hard. A cold shower takes care of that. Temporarily. When he’s at work he sees the display of riding crops and thinks of the one that now sits on John’s mantel and wonders when he’s going to feel its sting. He can’t take a cold shower at work and it’s downright embarrassing to have a boner while waiting on customers. But nights are the absolute worst. He wants to obey, wants to please John, prove to him that he can do this. That he is worthy of John’s attention. He wants this desperately. But this is also the very thought that makes him hard. It’s exasperating and he gets very little sleep while trying to analyze it all.

By Thursday night he’s a wreck. He’s put on an extra patch and is feeling rather drunk and dizzy. Probably shouldn’t do that. He’s in bed staring at the ceiling, lying on his hands. Only one more night . He wonders what’s going to happen Saturday. John will let him come, surely. He wonders if he will get to return the favor this time and as he closes his eyes he reaches up to grab two fistfuls of hair. Don’t do this Sherlock, don’t go there, but it’s too late. One hand moves down to his dick
and the other cups his balls, just like John did.

_In his mind’s eye he’s over John’s lap again but John is naked this time. Sherlock can feel the warm skin of his thighs against his stomach. Sherlock endures the sting of the four strokes of the paddle he has earned. His dick is rock hard and throbbing. When it’s over, Sherlock slides to the floor between John’s legs, kneeling there. John’s penis is standing straight up against his belly as he leans back into the sofa cushions and Sherlock’s mouth waters at the sight of it. John nods his permission and he bends to take him, feeling John’s erection slide past his lips and down his throat._

“Oh fuck! Oh fucking fuck!” Sherlock pants just before he explodes in orgasm. His body shudders violently, back arching off the bed. _Oh no, no, no. Oh shit_. He has violated Rule six. That was definitely sexual behavior. The evidence is all over his hand. This is bad. The other screw-ups were really accidental. He’s working on respect, and he didn’t even realize he was touching himself the last time. But this? He could have stopped the fantasy. He just didn’t. He didn’t want to. And now he has a decision to make. Technically, he hasn’t signed the contract yet. He plans to. Does that make him accountable? He feels an awful squirming somewhere around where his conscience probably is and he wipes his hand on the sheets and picks up his phone before he loses his nerve.
Well Suited

Chapter Summary

Sherlock gets fitted for a suit for graduation. The contract is signed, and John delivers the punishment Sherlock has earned this week.

"Sherlock gazes at himself in the mirror. He sees a tall, thin figure with a mop of dark hair. He hasn’t worn a suit since his mother’s funeral. He was a boy then. He thinks he looks older than eighteen, and he feels like a man."

Chapter Notes

Make sure to check out the gorgeous art cover that has been added as Part 2 of this series.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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**SH:** I messed up.

**JW:** What happened?

**SH:** I wanted to stop, but it just happened. It was an accident.

**JW:** What, Exactly. Happened.

**SH:** I jerked off.

**JW:** LOL. Of course you did. I’m surprised it took so long. What exactly were you thinking about when “it just happened”?

Sherlock pauses, embarrassed, before responding.

**SH:** Sucking you.
JW: LOL again. But still no excuse. :)

JW: No drugs? No cigarettes?

SH: No. I’d have to do those on purpose. And I won’t. I’m pretty sure. The cigarettes...I’m pretty sure.

JW: Let me rephrase. No drugs. No cigarettes. Don’t worry about the other. You’ve earned three more, but that’s something we can work on. Plan on four o’clock for Saturday. Call if you need me.

Seven. The sting of his spanking had passed quickly, but the ache lasted like a memory in his muscles. He misses the way it reminded him of John. But now he has earned seven strokes of the paddle for Saturday. The fear-anticipation is making it hard for him to concentrate and he is more constantly aroused than he can ever remember. Less than two days away. He can do this. He can obey and not earn any more. He will please John and then maybe John will hold him again. Call him a good boy. He’s not quite sure why, but that will make it all worthwhile.

Cold shower, bike to the shop, work, bike some more, play guitar, he stays as busy as he possibly can and the time still drips by like an icicle melting in the snow. He’s hungrier than usual, he thinks because of all the exercise maybe burning calories from trying to keep my hand off my dick, and finds himself spending his own money for food. His father hasn’t been home for a few days. Sherlock hasn’t gotten any calls from the Sheriff’s office so he’s probably not in jail. Except for the money situation, he’s relieved by his absence. Probably staying with one of his girlfriends. He resists texting Mycroft, but after the third night of pb and j, he breaks down.

SH: Haven’t heard from you re graduation. Any idea?

MH: It’s looking good. Anything could change last minute, though.

SH: I know. Could you put some credit on the supermarket account? No school, no breakfast or lunch.

The phone rings.

Fuck.

SH: Can’t talk. Will call later. Supermarket?

MH: ARE YOU ALRIGHT? DO YOU NEED HELP?

SH: I’M FUCKING FINE! Just the supermarket account, ok?

MH: Doing it now. CALL ME AFTER 9.

Asshole.

Sherlock goes shopping and buys as many cans and as much dry food as he thinks he can carry on
his bike: soup, chili, fruit, spaghetti, anything he can hide in the chest in his room, away from his father’s eyes. He doesn’t call Myc back.

Finally, Friday night arrives and Sherlock goes to sleep early, but wakes at six in a sticky puddle. He hasn’t had a wet dream since he was fourteen. It’s still just as embarrassing. But mostly he’s upset because the only thing he can remember about it is swallowing around John’s cock as he comes down his throat. He feels cheated somehow. He texts John, partly just to be safe, and partly as an excuse to make contact.

*SH:* Had a wet dream. Am I in trouble?

*JW:* LOL. Did you do it on purpose?

*SH:* : )

*JW:* Obedience is about the choices you make. Our tests came back. We’re both clean health wise. Yours was positive for THC (pot), but I expect the next test to be perfect.

Sherlock hadn’t been worried. Much. He’d never shared needles but hadn’t always used condoms when earning the money for fresh ones. Swallowing was often part of the deal. Pretty safe, they told him. Still... He takes a deep breath in relief.

*SH:* : ) Yes, Sir.


Sherlock takes the bus to the address John gave him in downtown Columbus. He’s standing in front of Greenfield Clothiers, a small shop in the heart of the business district, a neighborhood Sherlock has never had reason to visit.

As he gazes into the window, he feels a sense of excitement. It’s fancy, and expensive looking. The mannequins in the shop window look sophisticated; the way Sherlock imagines himself in his deepest hidden fantasies. He wants to look like that; wants John to see him like that.

He opens the door to Greenfield Clothiers and steps inside. It’s all rich wood paneling and leather furniture inside. A place he’d get kicked out of on his own. A bell signals his entrance. Immediately he sees John and another man standing near a display of ties, deep in conversation.

John turns when he sees Sherlock.

“Sherlock!” And the smile he gives him is better than Christmas.

“Hi.” Sherlock tries to play it cool, but his face splits wide open.

“Come in, let me introduce you to Martin Greenfield.”

Martin Greenfield is a dapper, silver-haired man, impeccably dressed in grey plaid trousers, a
matching vest, and a lavender shirt and tie.

“Sherlock! John has told me so much about you,” says the man in a thick accent, shaking Sherlock’s hand. “I hear you have an important life-event coming up, young man, and need something special to wear.”

“So everyone keeps telling me.”

“Graduation is important! Now you are moving on in your life and becoming a man. A special suit is in order. Come here, let me look.”

Martin takes Sherlock by the shoulders, spins him and looks him up and down.

“This one is made for a suit!” He exclaims. “It will be a pleasure!”

He turns to John. “What do you have in mind?”

“Whatever you have that can be ready by next Saturday.”

Martin considers, still studying Sherlock. “Dark blue, I think. And with his slim lines, he could carry off the sharkskin. I’ve been saving it for the right someone. Yes.” He turns and walks through the doors leading to the back of the shop.

John drapes his arm around Sherlock’s shoulder, “Hey, good to see you. We’ve got some things to talk about today, right?”

_The contract._

“I’ve got it with me. I’m going to sign it.”

“Good boy. I’m really happy to hear that. I was hoping you would.”

Martin returns with a suit over his arm.

“I think this one will fit him with just minor alterations. Go, take him to try it on.”

“Can you let us have a few shirts in different colors as well? I love him in purple.” John winks while Martin sets off, picking out five or six shirts in different colors. “The fitting room is in the back,” says Martin, handing the suit to John and the shirts to Sherlock.

They walk to the dressing room, and John pulls the curtain closed behind them. He sits in the chair that’s been left there, crossing his legs.

“I’d like to watch you.”

Sherlock feels a definite tingling in his groin. “Yes, Sir.”

John smiles approvingly.

Sherlock toes off his sneakers and pulls down his jeans, shimmying a little to get them over his hips. He’s wearing a Pink Floyd T-shirt and he leaves that on.

John rises to hand him the trousers and he puts them on. A little loose in the waist, maybe two inches, but the length is about right. John holds up the jacket and Sherlock puts one arm in, and then the other. John tugs the lapels and then takes a step back to look at Sherlock. He gives a nod and smiles.
“You look incredible.”

Sherlock smiles back at him, a little shyly.

“Good enough to eat. Come here.” John pulls Sherlock close and kisses him, cupping his ass with his hands. Sherlock begins to grow hard immediately and John hums in appreciation.

“You see? There’s the payoff for being in chastity for almost a week.” He lowers himself to his knees and reaches for the waistband of the shimmering trousers. “I bet I can get you off before Martin comes to check on us. You were such a good boy, to call me after you broke the rule. That’s what Rule four is about. Open and honest. I will always reward you for being honest with me.”

He pushes Sherlock to lean on the wall of the dressing room opposite the mirror. He undoes the button and then the zipper and lets the trousers fall to the floor. Sherlock sees his mouth drop open in the mirror. He’s so erect the head of his cock is peeping over the top of the waistband of his boxers.

John licks his lips. “I’m changing my bet. It’s not going to take that long.”

He pulls the straining waistband away from Sherlock’s hips and slides the boxers down as far as his knees. Sherlock is trapped and he is torn between looking at himself, half naked, in the mirror, the blood rising to his cheeks, and watching John place soft, brushing kisses up and down the skin of his swollen cock. He’s afraid that John is right. He’s not going to last at all and when John opens his lips and slides softly over the head, Sherlock covers his mouth with the back of his wrist because he’s afraid of the sounds he’s not sure he can stifle. Sherlock is long and narrow everywhere and even at his deepest, John has to use his hand at the base to cover every inch of him. Sherlock tilts his head back because he’s sure that if he looks at what’s happening he’ll go off like a rocket.

And then they hear Martin approaching. “How does it look, John? Does he need a belt?”

Sherlock looks down, terrified they’re going to get caught but John looks up at him, mouth full of cock, with a wicked smirk in his eyes and tilts his head a tiny bit towards the curtain. Sherlock takes a breath and clears his throat. “Yes, Mr. Greenfield, they’re a little loose.”

“All right, I’ll have to look. You’re too skinny, young man.”

John begins a double motion and, between his mouth and hand, Sherlock comes quickly, gasping as quietly as he can. John presses against his knees to keep him upright and swallows every last bit of evidence. He has the trousers pulled back up and is kissing Sherlock when Martin sticks his hand through the curtain with the belt. John slips it through the loops, gives Sherlock a once-over, pulls the curtain back and says, “What do you think, Martin? Will it work?”

The tailor says, “Bring him out here so I can see all of him.”

Sherlock and John walk out of the dressing room and Sherlock is certain that Mr. Greenfield knows exactly what has just happened although he gives no indication of it. He directs Sherlock to stand on a platform in front of a three-way mirror and to put on a pair of dress shoes.

Sherlock gazes at himself in the mirror. He sees a tall, thin figure with a mop of dark hair. He hasn’t worn a suit since his mother’s funeral. He was a boy then. He thinks he looks older than eighteen, and he feels like a man.

Mr. Greenfield has a tape measure around his neck and is holding a pincushion.
“Normally we would take thirty measurements to make sure the suit is perfect. But, I understand you need it quickly. I think we can make do.” He sits on a low stool at Sherlock’s feet and begins working on the hem.

“John says you’re eighteen. I came to America when I was not much younger than you,” remarks the tailor. “I was just sixteen.”

“Where did you come from?” Sherlock asks. He had been wondering about the accent.

“Poland, just after the end of the war.”

“World War II?”

Martin smiles at the question. As if there could be another answer. “Yes.”

“We learned about that in history class.”

“I lived it.” Mr. Greenfield is silent a moment as he continues to mark and pin the hem of the trousers. “I was in Auschwitz.”

Sherlock’s eyes grow wide. Auschwitz was a faraway place to be read about in books, a question on an exam. Not a thing that touches the present or his life.

“Wow. I mean, that’s…”

“Yes… I lost my whole family. My parents, my brother and my sisters. I was the only one who lived.”


Sherlock falters for a minute, then says, “I’m sorry.”

“Thank you. It is a burden on my heart, a constant sorrow, but I carry on. Not a day goes by that I don’t think of my family.” He is kneeling now, working on the sleeves of the jacket. They will need to be let down to fit Sherlock’s long arms.

“Are you close with your family?” Mr. Greenfield asks.

“No, not really. My mom died when I was thirteen. I live with my dad. My brother works in Washington D.C. and I don’t talk to him much. We don’t really get along.”

“Young man, family is everything. It is precious. I didn’t get along with my older brother Juri, but I would give anything to see him again. You should talk to your brother. You will do this for me, eh?”

“Um, okay. I mean, I’ll try.”

Martin holds out his hand and John helps pull him back to his feet. Mr. Greenfield is behind Sherlock now, pulling in the sides of the jacket and holding them between his fingers.

“John, I think I must take this in. It will be more work but it should be just right. You like it?”

John nods approvingly at the slim silhouette. Sherlock looks stunning. As Martin turns him around, the color of the suit changes from gray to navy blue and it makes it even harder for John to take his eyes from him.
“He’s going to be needing more suits, Martin. He has several events coming up, some interviews, and I want him in something different each time. Keep a tuxedo in mind as well.”

“I was hoping you would say that. It’s a pleasure to fit a shape like his. I’ll have my boy keep an eye out for things that we might be able to alter for him. But only if you let him pose for the website with one I make from scratch.”

“How’s that sound, Sherlock?”

More suits. Interviews. Sherlock is having trouble keeping up. He realizes that it’s become a pattern. And that he’s enjoying it. He blushes and his face opens again in a boyish smile. “Whatever you say, John.”

John and Martin both smile back. Martin says to John, “You didn’t tell me he was clever, too.”

“Oh, he’s quite remarkable.”

Sherlock tries on the shirts and John picks out two white ones, a purple in a shade lighter than the one he owns, and a dark and a light blue. He and Martin discuss fittings, ties and other details, while Sherlock dresses. When he comes out of the dressing room, Martin is alone, waiting for him. He looks at Sherlock, seriously this time, and speaks quietly. “Sherlock, listen to an old man. You know it wasn’t just the Jews that the monster tried to exterminate. He sent a hundred thousand of us to the camps.” He makes a circle with his finger, including Sherlock and himself, then points at him. “Never be ashamed of who you are. Life is unpredictable.” He is clapping Sherlock on the shoulder now. “Do what makes you happy. Dr. Watson is a good man and you can trust him.”

Sherlock looks deeply into the eyes of the survivor in front of him and stands up a little straighter. He nods and says, “I do. Thank you.”

They rejoin John up front and agree that Sherlock will return on Monday, and then Wednesday for a final fitting. They all shake hands and Sherlock carries a bundle of shirts out with him as they leave.

“We’ll go back to my place for dinner,” John says, checking his watch as they walk toward his charcoal Porsche 911 convertible parked at the curb. “You like shrimp?”

“Yes, Sir.”

John smiles to himself. He’s a natural.

They get into the car and Sherlock looks, awestruck, at the sleek two-toned black and red interior. He feels like pinching himself to make sure this has not all been a dream.

John notices his expression.

“You like it?”

“It’s beautiful.”

“When we get you properly dressed and maybe a haircut, you are going to look right at home in it.”

“I like my hair,” Sherlock pouts.

John raises an eyebrow at him. “Oh believe me, I like it too, but let’s get the fringe out of your eyes so I can see them properly. They’re amazing and I want to be able to look at them when I’m inside
John guns the engine and speeds away from the curb.

Sherlock swallows hard and can think of no reply.

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John moves around his kitchen the way Sherlock imagines he moves in the operating room; smoothly, confidently, and with economy of motion. Everything he needs is within reach and he handles it all: the water-boiling, shrimp peeling, timer-setting. He refuses Sherlock’s help.

“Cooking for you is caring for you. My first responsibility, remember?”

Dinner is ready, table is set, and candles are lit in half an hour. It’s delicious, so much so that the butterflies in his stomach don’t interfere with Sherlock’s appetite at all. They chat about Mike and Martin and Sherlock thinks, not only has he gotten himself a boyfriend? dom? sugar daddy? he might be gaining a social circle. That otherworldly feeling isn’t going away.

“So why don’t you get along with your brother?”

Sherlock makes a face. “He’s kind of a jerk.”

“How so?”

“He was always better than me in school, at almost everything really. He never missed an opportunity to remind of it either, even when I was little. My dad always compared me to him and I hated it. I still hate it.”

“A little sibling rivalry then?”

“I guess so. Plus, he’s older. Tries to tell me what to do all the time. After he fucking left.”

“Maybe you need someone to tell you what to do, hmm?”

Sherlock scowls at him, but John laughs.

“He just likes to push my buttons. I think it makes him happy in some perverted way,” Sherlock says as he twirls pasta around his fork. “Anyway, you might get to meet him next week, then you can see for yourself what an asshole he is.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

There’s tiramisu for dessert and Sherlock decides it’s his new favorite food. They watch the sunset from the balcony, standing at the railing and watching the sun sink toward the horizon, its last rays sparkling on the river below. Soon, the night sky is illuminated only by the thousands of city lights, and it is spectacular. They are holding hands and it feels so right. It feels romantic. Sherlock realizes that he never expected romance, has never considered that it could be part of his life. It feels good. His thoughts are interrupted when John says, “Let’s take care of the formalities.” Still holding Sherlock’s hand, he pulls him into the living room, where they sit on the sofa. There’s a pen and a folder on the coffee table and Sherlock is pretty sure he knows what’s in it. John confirms his suspicion. “You’ve read it. Are you prepared to sign? I already have.”

Sherlock takes a deep breath and nods.
“It’s always open to negotiation, but is there anything you want to add or change before you sign? Any questions?”

Sherlock asks about “sexual behavior”, no rubbing against the sheets, and a couple of other details. John is patient and reassuring, pleased that Sherlock is taking the occasion seriously. Finally Sherlock says, “I’m ready.” John hands him the pen and he puts his signature on the dotted line. John pulls him over to straddle his hips and takes hold of his face with two hands. The kiss has a gravity to it and it leaves them staring into one another’s eyes with a new intimacy. It’s simultaneously comfortable and full of promise.

John says, “Business before pleasure.” He stands up, easily lifting Sherlock off his lap. Sherlock know he doesn’t weigh much, but Damn, he’s stronger than he looks. John takes his hand again and tugs him around the sofa and down a hallway. There is a chair outside the door of what Sherlock assumes is the bedroom.

John confirms. “This is the bedroom and this chair is for your clothes. From now on, you’re to take them off before you enter. I’ll wait for you inside.” John closes the door behind him. Sherlock is frozen in place for a moment, then looks behind him, checking to see whether he’s standing in full view of the window, the way he thinks he is. His cock tingles. He is. He tells himself that no one could possibly see in. They’re fourteen floors up. It doesn’t keep him from worrying that he’s about to flash his ass at half of Ohio. Obey.

He slides his tee shirt over his head for the second time today. He folds it, just because he figures John would like it better than him just leaving it in a pile. He doesn’t notice that the man and his wishes have slipped into his head. Socks, belt, then jeans, and even though he could slip his boxers off at the same time, he stalls, trying to keep one more layer between his skin and whoever might be looking in. He turns so that one hip is to the window and the other is towards the door. His gaze moves from one to the other, but then focuses on the door, remembering the prize waiting behind it. The boxers drop and he turns the doorknob.

John is waiting for him, seated on a low-backed wooden chair, still dressed. Sherlock closes the door behind him and stands there not sure what to do, or where to put his hands. John solves the problem by holding out his hand and saying, “Come, beautiful boy, I want you to kneel here in front of me.” When Sherlock reaches him, John points to the carpet and Sherlock folds himself down so he’s sitting on his heels, his feet stretched flat. “That’s it. Now, hands behind your back and take hold of your elbows. Like that.”

As Sherlock grips he feels his back straighten and he looks down at his chest, his nipples hardening under the scrutiny. John touches him under his chin with one finger. “Unless I say otherwise, I expect you to have your eyes on me.” Sherlock latches on to his eyes like a lifeline and feels less like he’s drifting away. He takes a deep breath and John smiles softly at him, so pleased with Sherlock’s responses and eager to let him know. “You’re doing so well. You’re being so good for me. You’re my good boy.” Warmth spreads through Sherlock’s chest and he can’t help closing his eyes. Good boy. It feels as good as he remembers.

“Remember, eyes open.”

It comes automatically now. “Yes, Sir.”

“That’s it. Very good.”

“We’re going to get your punishment out of the way and then we’ll have three or four hours to play.” Sherlock’s face drops at the news. He was hoping tonight would be the first night they’d spend together. John sees his disappointment and cups his cheek with his hand. “Not yet, beautiful
boy. Soon.”

Beautiful. John keeps calling him beautiful. And good. No one has spoken this way to him in a very long time. You are special Sherlock. The voice of his mother echoes in a distant part of his consciousness and the warmth spreads a little further.

“Why are you being punished Sherlock?”

“Because I broke the rules, Sir.”

“Which rules?”

“Um, Number two, respect and Number six.”

John waits and Sherlock’s eyes flit sideways, because it’s so much harder to say when he’s looking at him.

“I, um, I jerked off.”

“And do you remember what your punishment is?”

“Seven strokes, Sir.” He is finding it harder and harder to breathe and his voice is shaky.

John stands up and reaches his hand out for Sherlock’s. “Go to the chest of drawers and bring me the leather paddle in the top drawer on the left.” There is ingenious efficiency and cruelty in this. What better way to be sure of Sherlock’s consent than to have him fetch the implement of his punishment himself? Sherlock pouts/grimaces at John but gets only a mild smile in return. He feels John’s eyes on his ass as he walks to the chest. He opens the drawer and he understands the qualifier. There’s more than one. He freezes up and John says, “It’s the beginner’s model. Don’t dawdle.” Sherlock has a moment of déjà vu as he watches his hand pick up the wicked-looking black-handled thing. My own hand. When he turns around, John is standing and Sherlock is a little puzzled.

Conversationally, John says, “For a paddling, you’ll bend over the back of the chair and place your hands on the seat. That will present your arse properly for me and I’ll have room to swing.” Sherlock is feeling a little dizzy and John reminds him, “Breathe. You can do this. Promise.” John turns the chair and waits patiently while Sherlock coordinates his limbs and walks back. John takes the paddle and places it on the seat and helps bend Sherlock over. Sure enough, his ass is tipped up, but John isn’t satisfied and nudges his feet and hands until the angle is sharper. The skin tightens over Sherlock’s curves and he clenches his muscles, unsure if it’s out of anxiety or the awareness that he is completely exposed.

“I know it’s difficult, but you’ll want to relax as much as you can. I’m going to give you a warm-up with my hand, so you won’t have to worry about bruising as much, and relaxing will help.” He places a hand on the small of Sherlock’s back and it eases his anxiety a bit. He feels more grounded and secure. “Deep breaths. What’s your color?”

Sherlock breathes and, at light-speed, he reviews the events that have brought him to this time and place, and with a calm, confident voice, he says, “Green.”

John is sincere in his admiration. Sherlock’s steadiness is surprising for a beginner. “That’s my good boy. Here we go.”

Despite himself, Sherlock tenses up waiting for the first blow. The noise registers before the sting. He has no time to recover, because, unlike the last time, John’s hand falls like a metronome,
quickly and with a rhythm that leaves Sherlock breathless and struggling to process the impact. The heat spreads uniformly across his skin, but it’s not registering as pain yet. Though he knows it’s impossible, he’d swear he can feel the texture of John’s palm and fingers. That touch is worth whatever after effects he’ll face later. He wonders if that will change when he’s confronted with the paddle and in a flash of insight understands the necessity of a punishment implement. It will put distance between the two of them and the loss of intimate contact will be part of the punishment itself.

After about five minutes, just as Sherlock can no longer deny that it hurts, John slows down and lightens the weight of his hand until he is rubbing the skin. Sherlock isn’t sure if this increases or lessens the sting, but he is soothed regardless. He is on the verge of tears, but his breathing slows down as John speaks to him.

“You did so well, Sherlock. You took that so well. It’s time for the paddle now and I want to be sure you’re ready, so I need you to ask me for your punishment. Can you do that?”

Sherlock nods, to himself, but responds to John out loud. “Please,” deep breath, “please punish me, Sir.”

“Well done, Sherlock. Yes. I’ll punish you. Please count and thank me for each stroke.” Sherlock watches as John reaches around and takes the paddle from the seat underneath him. He slides it in a circle, startling Sherlock with its cool, smooth surface, and covering the area that has turned a rosy pink.

He thinks he’s ready for it, but the first blow still takes Sherlock’s breath away. He is so preoccupied, trying to process the impact, he doesn’t realize how much time has gone by until John says, in a low, chill-inducing voice, “What did you forget?”

Sherlock is panting and gets his thoughts back together enough to say, “One, thank you, Sir.”

“This is your first formal punishment, so I’ll let it pass this time, but if you forget to count or thank me again, we’ll have to start over. Do you understand, Sherlock?” The affection and reassurance is gone and Sherlock responds quickly this time, feeling its loss as sharply as the bite of the paddle.

“Yes, yes, Sir.”

“Alright, here we go.”

This blow falls lower and lights up an entirely new part of his ass, and he rises up on his toes, but he doesn’t forget this time. “Ah! Ah! Two, thank you, Sir.”

Three, four, and five come with very little time in between, moving lower and lower, overlapping each other and intensifying the heat. Sherlock feels his eyes fill and then overflow with tears and his responses are swift but almost breathless. John has to remind him, “Breathe, Sherlock. Deep breaths. Almost finished now.”

Sherlock whimpers. His foot is sliding back and forth on the carpet and he has to grit his teeth to resist reaching back to rub out the intensity of the bite. “Ow, ow, ow.” His voice is far squeakier than he would like. John waits until Sherlock composes himself and stands still again. John puts his shoulder into number six and he can hear the sob in Sherlock’s voice as he counts.

“Six, ah, six, thank you, Sir.” Sherlock tries to stay quiet, but John knows he’s crying steadily now from the way his shoulders are moving up and down. He doesn’t delay the last stroke. Sherlock moans, but the stiffness in his posture eases and John begins to rub his hand over the bright red
“It’s all over now. All done, and you were so good, Sherlock. Punishment is done and you’re all forgiven now. We start over. The board is clean.” He helps Sherlock stand up and pulls him in close. He holds him, one hand on the back of his head and the other rubbing his back. He keeps up the comforting words, hugging and gentling him, until the crying fades away. He pulls away and wipes his tears with the bandana that Sherlock had given him, it seemed like weeks ago. “You alright?”

Sherlock sniffs and nods. He takes the bandana and blows his nose. John takes it back and wipes his face one more time for good measure, then tosses it onto the night table. He pulls Sherlock in for a gentle kiss, but Sherlock has ratcheted up a week’s worth of desire and the encounter in the dressing room has only intensified it. The fire in his ass has done nothing to diminish the fire of his desire for the man in front of him. He crushes John to his chest, hungry for him, his mouth, his touch.

John wants to coddle him, but Sherlock isn’t interested in that kind of comfort right now and John abandons his plan. He pulls him backwards so that he can sit on the edge of the bed and Sherlock kneels in front of him, for the second time of the evening. He hisses when his heels touch his burning skin but he straightens up and starts to unbutton John’s shirt. John slides his fingers into Sherlock’s curls and grips tightly, pulling his face closer so his tongue can lick at those perfect lips. Sherlock’s fingers falter at the buttons. It’s all he can do to hold on to the shirt itself while he focuses on the sensations of warm and wet and soft. When their tongues meet, the shock of it travels straight down his spinal cord and floods his cock. He pulls back to look at John, who finishes undoing his own buttons, then bends over to take hold of Sherlock’s lower lip between his teeth, unwilling to let him get away again. Sherlock works on John’s belt and zipper.

John reluctantly releases his hold so he can slip off his jeans and underwear, then lies back on the bed, tumbling Sherlock over on top of him. He scrabbles backwards tugging Sherlock with him until he has his head on the pillow. Sherlock covers him. The skin of his body against the skin of John’s body feels like sliding into a warm bath and Sherlock wants to soak it up, roll in it like a dog in fresh cut grass. He hasn’t been touched, so completely touched, in so long. He breathes it in through every pore.

The pain seems distant as he focuses on the sensation of John’s skin against his, from his lips all the way down to his knees. It is everything, and at the same time not nearly enough. He is straddling one of John’s legs and begins to rub himself against his hip, moaning into John’s mouth. John’s hand is tracing his spine, while the other is buried in his hair, holding him in the kiss. When John’s hand roams lower and skims over his ass, Sherlock squirms, trying to escape the friction that reheats the tender skin and increasing the pressure on his swollen cock. Every part of him feels electric, and alive and he is so lost in his own want that he is almost surprised when he feels John’s erection against his hip.

He pulls away and looks into John’s eyes, questioning silently. John gives the slightest nod and Sherlock starts sliding down John’s body, his hands and lips exploring John’s muscled chest, biceps and shoulders. On his left shoulder Sherlock’s fingers encounter a knot of twisted flesh, and they stop there momentarily.

“Does this hurt?”

“No, it’s an old scar, I’ll tell you about it sometime.”

Without knowing why, Sherlock kisses the scar and runs the tip of his tongue over it, learning its contours before moving back down John’s body. When he reaches John’s cock he fights the urge to
devour it immediately but instead takes a moment to just look. It is much thicker than his own, uncircumcised, and he thinks it is just about the most beautiful thing he has ever seen.

He wraps his fingers around it and pulls back the foreskin before enveloping the head with his mouth.

John looks down and can scarcely believe that he has managed to get this singular boy in his bed. He feels Sherlock’s hot mouth around him. He moans, “God, Sherlock, yes, your mouth. That’s it, make it just like you imagined.” Sherlock does, hollowing his cheeks and running his tongue around the glans again and again, his own cock sliding against the sheets.

“Don’t come,” demands John gruffly. Sherlock stops rubbing and concentrates on the dick in his mouth.

John is overcome by the feel of the boy’s silky smooth mouth working his cock. He knows what he’s doing. This is not news to John; he’s had his suspicions. He buries his fingers in Sherlock’s curls, and can’t keep from thrusting into him.

A minute or two more of the wet heat and John comes deep in his throat. Sherlock swallows every drop expertly.

Panting, John tells him, again, “Good boy.”

Sherlock kisses his way back up John’s body.

“You,” breathes John, as if he can think of no other words.

Sherlock soaks in the unspoken praise and covers his mouth with hungry kisses until John turns his face away and asks, “Do you think you could lie on your back?”

Sherlock thinks, I’d jump off a bridge if you asked me, but he answers “I’ll try, Sir,” He rolls off of John, wincing as his ass touches the sheets. He maneuvers himself a bit, then decides, “It’s OK.”

John hovers over him now, examining him for signs of stress. He grabs a bottle of water from the bedside table and holds it so that Sherlock can drink, making sure he swallows at least half of it. Satisfied with what he sees, he says, “I want to make you feel good now, Sherlock and I’d like to tie your hands. What’s your color?”

Sherlock’s breathing speeds up a little, but he huffs, “Green. Green.”

“So brave for me.” John brushes his fingers through the curls on Sherlock’s forehead, then reaches into the drawer and retrieves a bottle of lube and a bundle of soft silk scarves. He takes Sherlock’s left hand and brings it to his mouth, kissing each fingertip before looping the cloth around his wrist and tying it. He pulls his arm up over his head and secures it to the metal rails of the headboard. He repeats this with Sherlock’s right arm.

This feeling is new. He trusts John, but now that one of his defenses, his hands, is taken away, he feels vulnerable, and a little frightened. “Easy,” murmurs John, stroking his cheek tenderly. “Color?”

Sherlock is silent for a moment as he wills himself to calm down and breathe before whispering, “Green.”

“Good. I’m not going to hurt you. Opposite in fact. I’m going to make you feel so good. I’m going to take such good care of you.” And then he pushes to see how Sherlock reacts. He lowers his
voice to an almost-growl. “You’re mine now, you belong to me. Say it Sherlock, tell me who you belong to.” John is sitting on the edge of the bed and as he speaks he reaches and lazily circles a nipple with his finger.

“I belong to you...Sir.”

“Good boy, now just let me look at you.”

John licks his lips as his gaze drags over Sherlock from curls to toes. Stretched out and tied, his pale body illuminated by the moonlight streaming in through the wall of windows, he looks ethereal and utterly delicious. Even though he’s just come in that pretty mouth, John feels his cock twitch.

Sherlock’s hesitancy has disappeared. “Please, Sir.” He is so hard and there’s a little puddle of pre-come on his stomach. He squirms and pulls at the scarves that bind his wrists.

John chuckles and leans over him, hands on the bed on either side of his raised arms. “I will. There’s no hurry. I intend to take my time, sweet boy.”

Sherlock whimpers, but stops pulling.

John kisses his eyebrow, the tip of his nose, brushes across his lips and runs his tongue over Sherlock’s chin. Sherlock tilts his head and feels the tongue continue down his neck, licking and biting. His hips thrust upward against nothing. It is exquisite torture. He can’t decide if this is worse than the paddling.

John kisses the hollow above his collarbone, his hand moving up his triceps and forearm over the fading track marks, to interlace his fingers with Sherlock’s for a moment before sliding back down to his chest. There is no contact other than John’s lips and fingertips against his skin. Sherlock is panting now. “Please,” he says again. He’s afraid he might scream it soon.

John tweaks a nipple and Sherlock moans. He pulls the right nipple into his mouth and sucks hard while pinching the left between his fingers. Sherlock writhes. “Fuck!”

He moves down Sherlock’s concave stomach and lingers at his navel, pushing his tongue into it and licking up the pre-come that has pooled there without touching his penis.

“John!” Sherlock groans in frustration, pulling at his bindings and twisting his hips.

“Tsk, tsk, that’s two strokes for next time,” John says, straddling Sherlock’s thighs and pinning him. Sherlock has abandoned any attempts at self-control. He’s squirming. “I don’t fucking care,” he gasps. “Jo -- Sir, touch me. God, touch me!”

John smiles. “Manners, Sherlock.” He reaches for the bottle of lube. He squirts some onto his hand and lets it warm for before grasping Sherlock’s cock. Sherlock’s mouth opens and his eyes close.

“Uh-uh, eyes on me, remember?”

Sherlock struggles to open his eyes but finally looks at John as he strokes and twists with agonizing slowness. Sherlock has never, ever, been this turned on. With his arms and legs immobilized he is at John’s mercy and it feels...extraordinary.

John suddenly moves and Sherlock gasps. John has let go of him and is nudging his legs apart. Settling between his spread thighs, John mouth closes over the head of his penis while his hand cradles his balls. He sucks and laps as Sherlock moans.
“You taste so good.”

Sherlock hears the lube bottle open again and the hand that had been caressing his balls a moment before is now sliding behind them. When he feels the pad of John’s finger gently circling his hole, Sherlock tenses.

“Relax,” whispers John against his dick, and he tries to obey.

*Gay. Fag. He freezes. Not ready.* Sherlock struggles within himself. Will John be angry if he can’t? Will he really stop? He wants it. He thought he wanted it, but suddenly it carries too much weight. He hears his father’s voice and he tries to silence it. “A son of mine taking it up the ass.” Shut up! He blurs out, louder than he meant to, “Yellow!”

John removes his finger immediately and places the hand on Sherlock’s stomach. “Sweet boy. That’s good, it’s perfect. I’m so proud of you for using your colors.” He rubs in a small circle until he feels Sherlock relax. His cock hasn’t softened a bit, so John, continues. “Can I…?” He returns to licking Sherlock’s cock delicately, and feels more of the tension leave his body. Sherlock arches up and moans, “Yes…” Reassured, John licks up over the head and opens his mouth to cover it. He suckles gently for a minute or two, then swallows Sherlock as deep as he can. The sensation is overwhelming. Sherlock cries out as he thrusts hard into John’s mouth and comes. And comes. Wave after wave. He hears a keening sound and then realizes it is coming from his own throat.

Sherlock isn’t sure how John manages it, but his hands are free and his shoulders and wrists are being rubbed. John is squeezing his hands and fingers. “Wiggle your fingers for me, Sherlock, come on.” It takes a few seconds for Sherlock to remember where his fingers are, but he manages to squeeze John’s hands and is rewarded with kisses all over his face and hair and neck. He rolls over onto his side and curls his arm around John’s middle.

“I’m sorry.”

John pokes up Sherlock’s chin with one finger so he can make eye contact. “For what? For following the rules? What’s Rule number three?”

“Use my safewords?”

“Don’t ever be sorry. Rule number four: Be honest. I can’t take care of you if I don’t know where you’re at. Rule Number five: Take care of yourself. If I can’t trust you to take care of yourself, we can’t play. That’s what the rules are for. To keep you feeling safe.” John says as he traces his fingers lightly up and down Sherlock’s biceps.

*Play?* John keeps using that word. This doesn’t feel like playing to Sherlock. It feels more important than that. Is this just a game to John? He wants to ask, but is afraid of the answer. He snuggles closer to John’s warm body. Right now, in this moment, he feels safe and cherished and he wants to hold onto the feeling as long as possible. So instead he says, “How did you know?”

“What do you mean?”

“How did you know that I’d say yes to all of this? That I’d respond to you the way I have?”

“I saw myself in you. I didn’t know for sure. I took a chance, of course, but here you are.”

Chapter End Notes
Martin Greenfield is a real tailor (although in NY, not Ohio). He is a Holocaust survivor and you can watch him tell his story in a video here: https://www.greenfieldclothiers.com
Molly's Party

Chapter Summary

It's the night before graduation and John makes Sherlock attend Molly's party although he doesn't want to. Events turn nasty when Sebastian and his friends show up and Sherlock proves to be a good friend.

“Are you ok? Stupid question, are you hurt, do you need an ambulance?” Silence.
“Sherlock? Talk to me, Sherlock. Now. What’s happened?”
“You’re coming? I’ll be alright. I’m not hurt, I’m just, I’ve got to get out of here.”
‘I’m on my way. Ten minutes. Will you be alright till I get there? Ten minutes.”
“Ten minutes? I’m ok, I’ll be ok.
“What happened? You’re not hurt?”
“No, no, I’m ok. She’s ok. I just need to get out of here. Please, can you come get me?”
“I’m coming, of course I’m coming, just keep talking to me. She who? Who’s ok? Molly?

Sherlock’s alarm goes off Wednesday morning. Ughhh. He squints at it. Eight o’clock. He remembers that he’s promised to meet John at Greenfield’s Clothiers at nine thirty to pick up his suit. Stretching and yawning, he doesn’t even begin to reach for his erection. Obey. Keeping his hands off himself is getting a little easier. Maybe not easier exactly, but he feels like he might be getting stronger.

He takes a minute to think about the past Saturday, watching the sunset, being curled up next to John in bed, ass still hot and burning from the paddling, and warmth spreads through him, not helping the wood between his legs. He’d wanted to spend the night but John had driven him home. He’d been feeling a little fuzzy and was glad that John had done it himself instead of sending him off with the nameless driver.

John has texted or called him every day, hello, how are you, this happened today, but Sherlock is tingling with excitement about being able to see him this morning. He’s looking forward to seeing Mr. Greenfield too. As he thinks about this, he remembers that he hasn’t called Myc. The tailor had asked about Myc on Monday, reminded Sherlock that he had promised to talk to him. Shit.

Still lying in bed, Sherlock reaches for his phone, brings up his contacts and stabs hard at the picture of a vulture, his icon for Myc. It rings several times and Sherlock is hoping it will go to voicemail, but then hears Myc’s voice.

“Little brother! So glad you’ve called. I’ve been meaning to call you and see how things are going but I’ve been...busy...that Russia situation. So how are you? And how’s dear old Dad?”

“I’m fine, and he’s a lousy drunk. You still coming Saturday?”

“Hmm, well I’m still hoping to-- if I can get away. Someone should be there to see it. It’s rather a miracle after all.”

Sherlock grits his teeth and wills himself not to make a nasty retort. His erection is gone now. Note
to self: Call Myc every morning to get rid of boner.

“Dad says he’s going and I have a friend who’s gonna come.” Sherlock immediately regrets mentioning John. If Sherlock is observant, Myc is perceptive in the extreme.

“A friend?” Myc says, surprised. “Your dealer?” he adds with sarcasm.

“Fuck you Myc.”

“Something you want to talk about?”

“Oh, I see. Male or female?”

“Not discussing it.”

“Male then. Well, this gives me extra incentive to come. Can’t wait to meet your --’friend’."

“Bye Myc.” Sherlock hangs up on him.

Well that went well. At least he can say he tried.

*******

Sherlock arrives at Greenfield’s at nine twenty carrying one of the white shirts. He’s pretty sure that lateness would earn him a stroke under Rule one and isn’t taking any chances. John’s car isn’t there. He enters the shop and Martin greets him warmly.

“Young man, good to see you! The tailor puts his arm around Sherlock’s shoulders and squeezes.

Sherlock smiles, “Good to see you too.”

“Come. Come. The suit. I think it’s finished! It’s waiting for you.” Mr. Greenfield walks him toward the back.

When he comes out a few minutes later wearing the suit, John is there, dressed for work in tan slacks. There’s a matching blazer hung over the back of a chair. He’s wearing a maroon button-down that fits him perfectly *custom made*? emphasizing the physique that Sherlock now knows lies underneath. His short hair is mussed in an intentional way and his face is covered with an attractive stubble that Sherlock finds incredibly hot. He feels his stomach flip.

They stare at each other silently in mutual admiration while Martin watches, barely suppressing a chuckle.

“You like, John?”

“Like? You’ve outdone yourself Martin,” John says, not taking his eyes from Sherlock as he walks around him, drinking him in with his gaze. The blue sharkskin suit skims the long lines of Sherlock’s body like a second skin, the rich fabric shimmering and changing colors just like the boy’s pale eyes. John is facing Sherlock now and fixes his own ocean colored eyes on Sherlock’s, causing Sherlock to let out the breath he didn’t even know he’d been holding.

“Give us a minute, please,” John says.

The tailor smiles knowingly and nods as he heads to the front room of the shop.
John is on Sherlock in a split-second, pushing him against the wall, pinning his upper arms and kissing him hard. Sherlock opens his mouth and meets John’s tongue with his own. “You look so fucking gorgeous,” John says gruffly, into his mouth. “Tell me. Tell me who you belong to.”

Sherlock is panting already. “I belong to you, Sir.”

“Yessss, good boy. I want you so much. I’m going to wait until you’re ready, but god, I so fucking want you.” John grinds his hips into Sherlock.

Sherlock finds he can’t say anything at all.

John steps back and runs his hand over his face and through his hair. “I’m sorry, Sherlock.”

Sherlock is still against the wall, gasping. “I’m sorry I’m not allowed to touch.” He looks down at his obscenely tented trousers. “He may have to let them out some.”

John huffs out a chuckle. “Not a quarter inch. They’re perfect. Or maybe it’s just you. You might be perfect. But it’s no excuse for losing control like that. Or like this.” He adjusts his own pants where the outline of his swollen cock makes Sherlock’s mouth water.

“Can we…?”

With a tragic expression, John says, “I can’t. I really can’t. Mr. Hatherley is being flown in from Houston for an emergency bypass. I should be scrubbing up now, but I had to see you in that suit. You’re going to let Martin finish fitting you and I’m going back to the hospital. I, uh, was going to hold off on giving you this, but, I decided I’d like you to be able to wear it on Saturday.” He walks over to his jacket and pulls a long flat rectangular box out of the inside pocket. “For graduation.”

Sherlock takes it, staring at the black box with the words Jaeger-LeCoultre written on it in gold lettering.

“Open it.”

Sherlock slowly lifts the lid and his mouth drops open as he sees a beautiful silver watch nestled in the box. It has a round face, black with lots of details and dials. It looks expensive. His eyes lift to meet John’s and he shakes his head. “I can’t. Not after all the clothes…”

“Nonsense, it’s yours.”

He’s a bit stunned. His dad’s truck probably isn’t worth as much as this watch. John takes Sherlock’s hand and turns it over. He unbuttons the cuff of his shirt and brings Sherlock’s wrist to his lips and places a gentle kiss on his pulse point. John holds his hand out to take the watch back, then clasps it around Sherlock’s wrist. “It’s waterproof. I’d like you to wear it all the time. Think of it as my hold on you when we’re apart. The alarm is set for noon. Every time it goes off I want you to think of me touching you. Sherlock turns his hand over and stares. Good thing he’s a heart surgeon. Mine might stop. He looks at John then lunges for his mouth. John wraps his arms around him and squeezes so hard it might qualify as a chest compression. Then he grips Sherlock’s curls and pulls back, exposing miles of long neck before placing an open-mouthed kiss on the soft flesh under his jaw. “I’ve got to, got to go now. I’ll be there for you Saturday. He releases Sherlock, turns and walks out.

Sherlock sighs as he watches him go. He might be seeing him on Saturday, but not under the circumstances he’d like. He’s not even sure what the circumstances will be: who else is going to be there, how he’s going to manage whoever does show up, and the fact that he’s afraid he’s going to turn into a babbling idiot if he tries to introduce any of them to John. But maybe John doesn’t want
to be introduced. Sherlock wants him there desperately, but has no idea how to explain his presence. His thoughts are interrupted as Martin returns with an armful of suits and asks, “And how is your brother?”

Two hours later Sherlock leaves carrying two suits and the shirt, but with no better idea about how things will turn out.

*******

Sherlock is sitting on a bench outside of Rod’s on Thursday eating his lunch of an apple and pb & j and really missing the satisfaction of smoking, when a yellow Volkswagen Beetle pulls to the curb and a slender hand waves from the window. Molly. He waves in return.

She opens the door and practically bounds over to him, all smiles and swishing hair, carrying a Steak ‘N Shake bag. “Hi Sherlock! I was hoping I’d catch you working today. I brought you dessert,” she says, sitting beside him before pulling two milkshakes from the bag and handing him one. I hope you like chocolate.”

“Who doesn’t? Wow, thanks Molly,” he says, looking at her quizzically.

“I just thought I’d check up on you. You know, make sure you’re coming this weekend. To graduation. And, also to invite you to my party tomorrow – there’s gonna be a bonfire.”

“I’m not really the party type, but I’m definitely coming to graduation. I promised Hudders.”

“Oh, come on, it will be fun,” Molly says squeezing his arm, “I’ll text you my address.”

“Molly. Really. Thank you, but I don’t get along with any of those people… maybe you’ve noticed. I’m not – likable.”

“Pffft! Stop it. They just don’t know you like I do. Promise you’ll think about it…. Geez,, that’s a fancy watch, Sherlock,” she says, taking his wrist.

“It’s a graduation gift.”

“Wow. From whom?”

Sherlock shifts uneasily. “A friend.”

Molly cocks her head and narrows her eyes. “Spill!” she demands.

Sherlock considers how much he should tell her. He’s torn between wanting to keep it private and the desire to share with this girl who has been as close to a friend as he’s had since Vic died. It’s the best thing that’s happened to him since, well, since Victor, and there’s not anybody else he can tell, or who might be happy for him.

“I’ve met someone.”

“And he bought you this?” She taps the watch incredulously.

“Yeah.”
“Sherlock… is he a…are you …?”

He knows what she’s thinking. “No, no, no it’s not like that. He’s older. Just--ok, he’s a doctor.”

Her eyes widen. “Oh, that’s--” she hesitates. “Great. Awesome--Okay, I gotta ask, how old?”

He stares at his milkshake. “I dunno, over thirty I suppose.”

Molly bites her lip, wondering if she should press him. “Are you okay Sherlock? I mean, like, are you safe?”

He thinks. Carefully. About how he feels when he’s with John. When he’s not with him. When he’s about to be with him. No one has ever made him feel safer. Not Victor, not even his mother. He’s more careful about Sherlock’s safety than Sherlock’s been for his own. Then he thinks about Mike. And Martin. Then he looks at Molly.

“Completely.”

He tells her about a lot of it, about the clinic visit and the tailor, just enough about the sex that she knows they’re having it, and doesn’t go anywhere near the Other Stuff. The watch begins beeping. Noon. “Um, Molly, I have something I need to take care of.”

“Sure, I’ve gotta go help my Mom shop for the party. That you are coming to,” Molly adds, punctuating each word with a poke to his arm before getting up and walking to her car.

“I’ll text you,” she calls out as she drives away.

He has no intention of going. He calls John and is rewarded with a warm greeting. “Sherlock!”

“Were you thinking about me?”

“You’re all I think about these days. It’s very distracting. But let me ask you, what are you supposed to think about when you hear the alarm?”

Sherlock closes his eyes. “You touching me, Sir.”

“Good boy. And are you?”

Sherlock remembers John’s fingertips and lips on his skin, the feeling of John’s mouth around his cock. “Yes, Sir.” He feels it stir in his jeans.

“Good. I don’t want you to forget who you belong to. Now, do you have anything planned for tomorrow?”

“Nothing, if you’re free. Molly’s having this party tomorrow night, but there’s no way--”

“No, you should go to the party.” John is adamant. “You’ll regret it if you don’t. This may be the last time you ever see some of these people.”

“Are you kidding? I can’t wait to get away from them!”

“But you told me you like Molly! Why wouldn’t you want to go?”

Sherlock scrubs his face in frustration. “Ok, not Molly. But it’s just not something I do! Parties are… torture! I have nothing to talk to anybody about, they’re gonna get high, they all think I’m weird--I just don’t wanna go!” He thinks he’s whining and he hates it.
“You’ve been doing a lot of things you don’t do, lately.” Sherlock can hear the smirk. “I think this is important, Sherlock.” He pauses. Significantly. “It would please me to have you go. You don’t have to stay long. She’s been a friend to you and she wants you there.”

“You think this is important.” He doesn’t have to say anything else.

“Yeah, I guess so, but--” Then, what he dreads happens. The voice.

“Sherlock.”

Shit.

“What?”

“That’s one. That’s your tally now, three? I want you to go to the party.”

He’s totally whining. “Why? It’s really not that important--”

“That’s another two.”

“That’s not fair! I already told Molly I’m not coming!”

“That’s another three. You’re up to eight. Anything else you want to say, before I continue?”

Sherlock bites his lip and feels his cock twitch. *Obey. Obey.* “Nope. No, Sir.”

“There we are. Now, let me rephrase. You’re going to the party.”

Through gritted teeth, he says “Yes.” Inhale. “Sir.”

“Careful. Tone.”

Deep breaths. “Sorry, Sir.”

“You’re still learning, so I’ll let it pass. Next time, I’ll consider it disrespect. What time does it start?”

“Eight.”

“Wear the light blue shirt and those tight black jeans. Greg will pick you up at eight and take you there. You’ll spend one hour and talk to Molly and one other person. You’ll say you can’t stay long, a friend is in town for graduation. You can have one beer. I will pick you up at nine fifteen and we’ll have a late dinner. Clear?”

Sherlock swallows. “Yes, Sir.” *So the previously nameless driver has a name.* “Greg”.

“Good boy.”

Rule number six is particularly difficult to follow that evening.

********

Friday, Sherlock’s mood swings between sulky and elated. He doesn’t want to go to Molly’s party but he’s also excited about seeing John. He’ll make it through his punishment *I’m not going to cry this time* John will make love to him and maybe let him spend the night. For some reason this has become important to him; a sign of John’s commitment.
After work he comes home and sees the blue pickup in the drive. It’s just as well, they need to work out the details for tomorrow. He finds his dad sitting at the kitchen table, smoking and reading a magazine. No beer. *Good.*

They greet each other and Sherlock joins him, making sure to keep the watch under the table and out of sight. George offers him a cigarette and he shakes his head. “I’m quitting.” His dad looks at him suspiciously. “Really?”

Ignoring the question and the look, Sherlock says, “Dad, you’re still going to graduation tomorrow right?”

“Yeah, I said I would. What time do we need to be there?”

“Two thirty.”

“Got it, I’ll drive you, we’ll leave at two. You know I’m really looking forward to it. I know we don’t always get along but you are my son…” His voice trails off as if there is something else he wants to say.

Sherlock says nothing and keeps staring at the table, lips pressed together tightly.

“Your mom… would…” He hesitates again, “understand you. I just don’t, but I know she would have. I fucking miss her Sherlock.”

Sherlock looks up and sees that his father’s eyes are welling with tears.

“I know, Dad.”

They are both silent. Years of regret, sadness and shame have built a wall between them that neither has the tools to dismantle.

Finally, George pushes away from the table and goes to the refrigerator for a beer.

********

He knows he should start getting ready but he stalls, not sure if he’s really nervous about the party, or if he’s acting out because he’s pissed he has to go at all. He plays his guitar awhile and resolutely avoids lying down on his bed to avoid the temptation to jerk off to relieve his anxiety. Before he knows it, it’s seven thirty, and he jumps up and runs for the shower. He had asked John to have Greg wait for him around the corner so there aren’t any issues with his father, and by the time he makes it to the door of the car, breathless, curls still dripping, it’s ten after eight.

He’s already apologizing as he slides into the back seat. “Sorry I’m late, I, um…” Greg raises his eyebrows at him in the rearview mirror and pointedly raises his watch.

“I have eight ten. You?”

*Shit.*

“Um…eight after?”

Greg stares.

*Fuck.*
“Right. Eight ten.”

By the time they arrive, there’s barely enough room to turn on to the block. Molly may be a geek, but she’s a well-liked geek and nobody wants to miss what John correctly identified as the last chance many of them will have to be together.

Sherlock says goodbye and starts to get out of the car, when Greg says, “You might want to text the doc. He’ll want to know if he should come get you ten or fifteen minutes later.”

Sherlock hears the suggestion for the veiled threat that it is and his glare is met with a sympathetic smile. “Sorry, kid. Man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do.”

Sherlock’s stomach drops just a little bit more as he makes his way to the brightly lit house. Way too many people, way too loud. Maybe he can ask somebody where Molly is, say hi to Molly and then hide in the bathroom. He could honestly say he’d spoken to two people. Just his luck, Molly, wearing a pink sundress and more makeup than usual, intercepts him immediately, hooks elbows with him, and refuses to let him loose.

“Yay! I’m so glad you came,” she says in his ear, trying to talk above the music. There’s food here in the kitchen and more out back where the fire is,” she says, pulling him through the crowd, out of the back door and into a large backyard that ends in woods. In the middle of the yard is a huge pile of wood which is already blazing and around which groups of teenagers are standing, most holding red plastic cups or soda cans.

“There’s beer and whiskey in the woods. C’mon, that’s where I was going.” Still holding onto his arm, she leads him to the back of the property.

“I can’t stay that long. John’s going to pick me up in an hour.”

“Oooh, a hot date with the big-shot doctor.” She giggles and stumbles against him and Sherlock realizes she’s tipsy already. About fifty feet into the woods are some coolers and bottles. She takes a beer from a cooler and pours half of it into a cup before handing it to him. One, I can have one. She pours the other half for herself and crashes it into his, laughing like it’s the most hilarious thing she’s ever seen. He envies her lightheartedness and is very tempted to chug it. Then he remembers Greg’s advice and pulls out his phone.

SH: One bottle or one cup?

JW: How anxious are you?

SH: Six pack

JW: Bottle

SH: BTW, don’t know if Greg mentioned it...

JW: You’re lucky he likes you. Add 1 to the tally. I’ll text you when I want you to meet me.

SH: Yes, Sir.

As much as he’s dreading the paddling, he’s comforted to know that John will be waiting for him.
at the end of this. And since he’d rather be sober when he’s with him, he does, in fact down it immediately and Molly refills his cup. On an empty stomach, he’s hoping he’ll get at least a bit of a buzz, but be sober by the time he’s with John. His father has put him off alcohol, so he’s pretty much a lightweight. Heroin, on the other hand… And as much as he’d really like to track down the source of that pot smell, he has promises to keep and punishments to avoid. He chugs again and crumples his cup. Molly pouts at him. “That’s it?”

He just smiles. As they are walking back to the fire, someone he vaguely recognizes from study hall tears Molly away, the two of them shrieking, and he’s left by himself. He watches the sparks and smoke rising from the bonfire. He idly considers the destructive capability of the nitrogen dioxide being released by the combustion, relative to the CO2. Everyone talks about the carbon dioxide, but 200g CO2 equivalent per kg of wood burnt, 300 times the potency, 120 years in the atmosphere, NO2 is far more...

He checks his watch, taking comfort from the links as he runs his fingers over them. Eight forty-five. He’s sure John will let him stew till nine thirty at least. Great.

He sees that there are still cars pulling up and dropping kids off and he really hopes he’s wrong, but he thinks he sees a silver Mustang parked at the curb. She wouldn’t have invited them. No way. He walks into the crowd gathered on the patio and grabs a handful of potato chips. He still needs to talk to one more person. He looks around, sees faces that are familiar but despite the beer, his pulse rate picks up.

“I can’t do this.”

“Sherlock Holmes?” he turns to find a pretty brunette standing behind him. He looks at her uncomprehendingly.

“Janine, from history class,” she prompts.

“Oh, hi.” He has no idea who she is.

“Never thought I’d see you at a party,” she says, flinging her hair and giving him a flirty smile. “So quiet and mysterious and cute. Wanna get a drink, or smoke some weed?” She taps her purse.

“Um, no, I can’t, I need to find Molly, have you seen her?”

“I think she went back into the woods” says Janine frowning. Sherlock bolts toward the back of the yard without saying goodbye. That counts as talking to someone!

In the woods, at the coolers, he looks around but doesn’t see Molly. He’s about to leave when he hears sounds deeper into the trees. Rustling and a barely audible female voice.

He starts walking toward the sounds. It’s almost dark now and he can barely see. As he gets closer, he sees Sally coming towards him, looking over her shoulder. When she turns around and sees Sherlock, she takes off running.

He almost walks right into Sebastian who is standing in his path. Sherlock freezes, then takes a step backwards.

“Mind your business, faggot.”

Sherlock is thinking this very thing. This is none of my business… He is about to turn around when he hears a girl’s voice again. It’s muffled but it sounds like Molly. Stepping to the side, he looks past Sebastian and sees another boy and… Pink. Molly’s pink dress. The boy has Molly pressed against a tree, one hand over her mouth and the other under her sundress which is pushed up to her
hips. She’s got her hands on his shoulders and she’s clearly trying to push him away. Sherlock takes all of this in in a split-second.

“Are you deaf? Get the fuck out of here.” Sebastian closes the distance between them.

Sherlock’s mind is racing. Sebastian isn’t as tall as Sherlock but is heavier. There are two of them. He should turn and run back to the house, get her parents. *I’m not leaving her!*

“Let her go,” he says as loudly as he can. If there are any kids back by the coolers, he hopes they will hear.

Sebastian laughs contemptuously. “You gonna make us, fairy?” He takes another step forward and gives Sherlock a hard push.

Sherlock feels a cold rage overtake him. All of their taunts and bullying and just their shitty meanness directed at him are bad enough *But now they’re hurting Molly! These stupid redneck motherfucking idiots.* He assesses the surroundings in an instant. Bending down, he picks up a thick dead branch and without hesitation slams it against the side of Sebastian’s head. It makes a satisfying “thwack” and Sebastian drops to his knees. Sherlock is tempted to hit him again but just as he pulls the branch back, Sebastian sways and falls forward onto his face, groaning. Branch over his shoulder, he takes off for Molly, shouting, “Hey, leave her alone, asshole! Molly! Somebody help!” It’s one of the kids that were in the car that day and when he turns to see who’s shouting, Molly knees him in the groin and he drops like a stone. She kicks him in the ribs twice, screaming, “You son of a bitch!” They hear voices approaching now and Sherlock is shaking. Molly looks up and catches his eye for a second before she kicks the downed kid again. He drops the branch, raises his hand toward her and bolts toward the street, pushing through the now steady stream of kids heading in the opposite direction, toward the woods.

When he makes it to the front of the house, he’s a wreck. His stomach turns over and the beer and chips come right up as he pukes into the bushes. He collapses onto the curb, sweaty and chilled, and with trembling fingers, he punches John’s number. He picks up immediately.

“Still a little early, Sherlock.”

Voice trembling, he says, “I know, but could you come pick me up anyway? I, I really need…” He chokes back a sob.

“Are you ok? Stupid question, are you hurt, do you need an ambulance?” Silence. “Sherlock? Talk to me, Sherlock. Now. What’s happened?”

“You’re coming? I’ll be alright. I’m not hurt, I’m just, I’ve got to get out of here.”

“I’m on my way. Ten minutes. Will you be alright till I get there? Ten minutes.”

“Ten minutes? I’m ok, I’ll be ok.

“What happened? You’re not hurt?”

“No, no, I’m ok. She’s ok. I just need to get out of here. Please, can you come get me?”

“I’m coming, of course I’m coming, just keep talking to me. She who? Who’s ok? Molly?” He keeps Sherlock talking.

Sherlock stutters and stumbles his way through an explanation of sorts and John pulls up just before two police cars and an ambulance turn onto the block. Sherlock scrambles up and into the
Porsche and John makes a U-turn as the cops are getting out of their cars. He’s still shivering and John pulls a blanket and a small bottle of apple juice from behind his seat. “Put this over your shoulders and drink all the juice. You’re in shock.” Sherlock puts up no resistance.

Sherlock texts Molly as soon as they are out of the neighborhood.

SH: Are you OK? Hurt? I had to get out of there.

MH: Yes, fine, not hurt. I’m with my parents now. The police are here. Where are you?

SH: With John.

MH: Good. Thank you so much!!!!!! <3 <3

SH: Is Seb OK? How bad?

MH: He’ll have a headache. I think I broke Joe’s ribs tho.

SH: Good. You are a badass BTW.

MH: :

SH: What about the police?


John takes Sherlock straight back to the condo. They don’t talk much until they are sitting on the sofa, Sherlock leaning his head against John’s shoulder.

“Hey, it’s going to be alright, Sherlock,” John says soothingly into his hair.

“I hate them so much.”

“You have every right to be angry. You did a good thing. I’m proud of you for protecting your friend.”

“Am I going to get in trouble?”

“I don’t know, we’ll deal with that when we need to. Right now you just need to calm down. Do you think you could eat something?”

Sherlock shakes his head, the very thought making his stomach clench.

“Okay then, let’s just sit here.” He pulls Sherlock onto his lap and gently pushes his head down to rest on his shoulder.

Sherlock lets his breathing slow down, then says, “It doesn’t bother me as much when it’s just me.”

“What do you mean, just you?”

“Kids always hassle me, especially them. Because I’m different.”
“You are different, Sherlock. You are unique. It’s your gift.”

“I mean because I don’t like girls… that way.”

“Because you’re gay?”

“Yes. Do people hassle you? Because you’re gay. You are gay, right? Sir?

“I’ve been with men and women, so, no, technically, I’m bisexual.”

Sherlock slides down and stretches out, resting his head in John’s lap and looking up at him. “Do people hassle you about it?”

“Not really. People who would aren’t worth my attention and, where I live, attitudes are different.”

“London?”

John nods.

Sherlock lets out a sigh and closes his eyes. When they open again he sees John staring at him. John’s left hand cradles the top of his head and the other rests on his stomach, his thumb rubbing circles there. Thirteen strokes. He swallows hard as he remembers.

“Are you going to punish me, Sir?”

John’s face is serious. “Yes. I am, but not tonight. You aren’t in the right frame of mind.”

“What if I want it?”

“Careful. I said no punishment tonight and the rule is that you accept my decisions without argument. Remember who’s in charge. There’s still time to add to the tally.”

Sherlock swallows again. “Sorry, Sir.”

“But if you’re feeling alright otherwise...”

“We could, I mean, could we do something else?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact. I was hoping we would. I’ve been wanting you all week.” He stares down at him like a cat who’s cornered a mouse. “And you deserve a reward.”

John unbuttons Sherlock’s shirt and runs his hand over the smooth skin, circling a nipple and feeling it harden under his touch. Victor never touched him there and Sherlock had no idea that nipples could be so erotic. He doesn’t touch him anywhere else, but John has him hard and writhing as he licks his thumb and rubs it over the sensitive buds. When Sherlock starts lifting his hips and whimpering, John chuckles and moves his hands to Sherlock’s shoulders, sliding his shirt off.

“You smell like smoke and you’ll probably want to brush your teeth, so go clean yourself up. You’ll find everything you need in the guest bathroom. Dressing gown too.” Sherlock blushes a little. “I’ll be waiting for you.” He kisses Sherlock’s forehead, slides his thumb over his plush bottom lip, and pushes him back up to sitting.

Sherlock takes what is, no doubt, the most luxurious shower he’s ever had with the rain shower head and body jets and finds the chair waiting for him outside John’s room. He’s much less concerned about who’s watching him this time and drops the robe without a second thought. John
is rummaging in the chest of drawers but he turns and smiles when Sherlock enters. He walks to
the side of the bed and says, “Come. Take off my clothes.” He watches Sherlock walk towards
him, regaining the erection he’d been working on in the living room. When he is close, John tilts
his head and Sherlock bends to meet him. They share a deep kiss and then John licks his bottom lip
and grips it with his teeth. He remains passive as Sherlock begins with the buttons of John’s white
cotton shirt. When he finishes with the buttons, he tugs the shirt out from John’s pants and begins
to slide his hands up John’s back in order to slip the shirt off his shoulders but John’s hands shoot
out and grab his wrists. “No skin. Just my clothes.”

Sherlock aches to touch him, but says, “Yes, Sir,” and starts to breathe a little more shallowly. He
continues with the shirt, careful not to touch. He hangs it on the back of the chair he was paddled
on last week. He unbucks the belt and pulls it through the loops and drapes it over the shirt. As
he works on the button and zipper of his pants, he sees that John’s cock has started to fill out and
Sherlock has to manipulate the pants to get them off without touching him. He wants to bury his
face in John’s chest, see if his nipples are as sensitive as his own. *Obey.* He resists the temptation.

He hooks his thumbs in the waistband of the boxers and slides them down John’s hips to the floor
and John kicks them aside. They are standing naked, just inches apart. Sherlock can hear their
breathing, synchronized and unnaturally loud in the otherwise silent room as he waits for
instruction. The temptation to lean in and kiss him is almost too much to resist.

John breaks the moment by taking his hand. “Lie down on your stomach.” He tugs Sherlock
towards the bed. Sherlock obeys, resting his cheek on his crossed arms.

“How much you ever had a massage?”

“No.”

“Mmm, you’ll like it. You deserve it. You were the hero tonight, Sherlock, and I’m proud of you.”

John straddles Sherlock’s thighs, and there is a moment of stillness. He skims his fingers over his
smooth white back and round buttocks. “So gorgeous.” He picks up the bottle of oil that he had
taken from the chest of drawers and drizzles it on Sherlock’s back. John slides his palms from
Sherlock’s lower back up to his shoulder blades, leaning in to apply pressure. He does this several
times. Next, he massages the back of Sherlock’s neck by rubbing his thumbs in circles on either
side of his spine.

Sherlock lifts his head to catch the scent of almonds and melts under John’s touch. All of the
tension from the events of the evening drains away and he concentrates on the feel of John’s strong
hands. Rubbing. Soothing. They slide over his biceps again and again, then back down over his
lower back to his buttocks.

John pauses and picks up the bottle of oil, this time dripping it over Sherlock’s ass cheeks and
between them. Scooting back, John begins running his hands over the flesh, gripping and
separating, moving in gentle circles.

Sherlock hums in appreciation. He feels his cock harden against his belly as John continues to
massage him. Then John shifts and covers Sherlock with his body, his mouth at Sherlock’s ear.

“Sweet, sweet boy. My beautiful boy, I want you so much.” Sherlock feels John hard against his
ass, sliding against his oil slicked skin. Alarm bells start to go off in his head, but before he can say
anything John is moving down his body, planting kisses as he goes. On his shoulder blades, along
his spine. He kisses each ass cheek and then flicks his tongue between them.
Sherlock moans and twists his hips, driving his leaking cock into the mattress. John doesn’t stop. He pulls the cheeks apart with his hands and bites one of them. Sherlock cries out, more in surprise than pain.

“Color?” John asks breathlessly.

Sherlock can’t answer, he’s overwhelmed by the idea of what he is sure is about to happen and that he wants it. He doesn’t hear the voice of his father or Sebastian and his inner voice is quiet. He is conscious only of John’s hands and mouth on his body.

“Color?” John demands, louder.

“Green,” Sherlock breathes.

John flicks his tongue across Sherlock’s hole and he gasps, gripping the sheets with both hands. He tenses, but John flicks again and then flattens his tongue, stroking again and again, and Sherlock moans loudly.

“Does that feel good?”

He wants to say no, he shouldn’t like this, it’s filthy. But it’s so filthy and that makes it so hot and so good, he’s lost. “Oh, Sir, yes, fuck, yes.”

“Relax.”

Sherlock obeys and feels John’s tongue circle around the muscle until it loosens, and then John pushes into him. This new sensation coupled with the friction of his cock against the sheets is overwhelming and he buries his face in the pillow to muffle the sounds that he cannot control as John penetrates him again and again.

Just when he thinks he can’t take any more, John stops and flips Sherlock to his back. “Don’t do that again,” he orders. Sherlock looks at him, bewildered. “I want to hear what I do to you. I want to hear the noises you make, do you understand?” John says.

“Yes, Sir.” He’s transfixed by the intensity of John’s eyes, only a sliver of indigo shining around his huge pupils. John lowers himself onto Sherlock, and he can feel John’s cock slide against his own. John adds some of the oil to his hand before reaching down to try to grasp both of them. Sherlock groans and rolls his hips, thrusting into John’s hand and against his cock. “Yes, yes, yes…”

John begins stroking faster and Sherlock adds his hand so that every throbbing inch of them is covered with a slick fist. The bed is creaking as they rock together and sweat is dripping from John’s forehead. A drop lands on Sherlock’s lip and he licks it off, savoring its saltiness.

“Oh, god, Sherlock, you perfect thing, I can’t--” John lowers his head and licks into his mouth, chasing after his tongue. They deepen the kiss and Sherlock moans into John’s mouth. Free finally to touch him, he uses his free hand to stroke John everywhere he can reach, trying to make up for lost opportunities: the back of his head, his shoulder, neck, cheekbones.

Sherlock feels his climax building, his muscles tensing and he bucks under John. “I…” He is torn between chasing his climax and never wanting the exquisite friction to end. John decides for him.

“Yes, come for me baby,” whispers John. Relieved of making a decision, Sherlock comes, head thrown back and mouth open, emitting a loud wail. “Yes, that’s it, good boy.” John says as he continues to stroke. When Sherlock is spent, John rises to his knees. “Watch me, Sherlock, watch
what you do to me.” He brings himself to orgasm, decorating Sherlock’s chest with ribbons of semen. Sherlock watches— he can’t take his eyes off him, this man who could have anyone he wants, gorgeous, brilliant, sexy, *He wants me.*

John sits back, panting, and Sherlock swirls his fingers through the come on his chest, then delicately licks the tip of each one. John groans, “Oh, god,” again and drops down to kiss him and nibble along his jaw. He whispers in his ear, “You’ll be the death of me.”

Sherlock holds him tight, despite the stickiness on their chests and the sensitivity of his still twitching cock and hums, “Mmm, not yet.”

John laughs and rolls over pulling Sherlock with him. Sherlock snuggles a little closer. He broaches the delicate topic. “Why do I have to go home tonight? It’s not like anybody’s going to miss me.”

John kisses the top of his head. “We don’t have to rush things. There’s time.”

“But you’re leaving soon!” Sherlock wiggles around so he can look up at him.

John combs his fingers through his tangled curls and kisses his forehead. He whispers, “Sweet boy,” but doesn’t answer the question and Sherlock pouts. “Soon. I promise.” John keeps petting and murmuring to him and it feels so good, Sherlock decides to let it go. He realizes he must have dozed off because the next thing he knows, there’s a wet cloth rubbing the drying come off his chest.

“Ugh.”

“Worth it though, yeah?” John chuckles.

“Yeah.”

“Big day tomorrow, I need to get you home. You going to be alright?”

“I guess so. Molly seems OK and that’s what counts.”

John looks thoughtful for a moment. “Sherlock, you see the difference between what they did to Molly tonight and what we’re doing, don’t you?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“What happened to her was wrong and you knew that, that’s why you did what you did. She didn’t consent and that’s always wrong. Actually, it’s criminal. What we do is only what you’ve agreed to and I will always stop if you change your mind. I want to make very sure that you know that.”

“I do.”

“Good. Now, let’s get you dressed and Greg will take you home.”

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Sherlock rides home in silence: overwhelmed by thoughts of the party, mad at Greg for adding five strokes to his tally, disappointed that John wouldn’t let him spend the night, and worried about how tomorrow will turn out.
Ruined

Chapter Summary

It's graduation day and it will be memorable for all the wrong reasons.

As usual, Greg drops Sherlock off around the corner, but it isn’t necessary. No truck, no dad. He isn’t sure what to think. Did he stay somewhere to sleep off a bender? Finally wreck the truck? Probably at his girlfriend’s again. He promised he’d be there tomorrow. It’s too soon to be worried yet but a nagging doubt starts to grow and it settles like spoiled food in his stomach. He tries to ignore it. He promised.

He wakes up Saturday to a quiet house and looks out of the living room window. The driveway is empty as he was afraid it would be. Sherlock shuts his mind down against any more speculating and concentrates on the feel of John’s watch against his skin. He opens the door of his closet and lifts the plastic that’s draping his suit, to run his fingers over the shimmering fabric. He takes a deep breath and, out loud, says to himself, “It’s going to be a good day.”

He showers. After the luxury of John’s guest bath, the tiny bathroom he shares with his dad seems grungy and cramped. The small shower head is encrusted with lime and the grout between the wall tiles is stained, with black mold spotting the corners where the wall meets the tub. I’ve gotta take care of that. Closing his eyes, he imagines himself back there now as the hot water runs over his shoulders.

Opening them again he looks down at himself. He sees his smooth, nearly hairless chest, flat belly and penis nestled in dark pubic hair. Before meeting John, he’s never thought of himself as sexy. Compared to the boys at school whom he considers hot, mostly athletes with muscles, he just doesn’t stack up. But John likes his body, calls him beautiful. Could it be true? The thought is thrilling and he smiles as he runs his hands over himself, touching his lips and neck before running his fingertips down his chest. He wonders if nipples are off-limits, and deciding, after yesterday’s revelation, that they are, by-passes them and continues down his stomach and then, avoiding his definitely off-limits dick, around to his buttocks, caressing himself the way John did. He pulls his cheeks apart as he remembers how John’s tongue felt, fucking him. It had been so good. Better than he expected and he wonders how it would feel to have more than a tongue in his ass, to feel John’s perfect cock there. Really fucking him.

Shit. His dick is half hard now. He didn’t mean for that to happen. Flesh stays no further reason, But rising at thy name. Fucking Shakespeare making sense--what the hell has happened to me? I hated Shakespeare, and how do I even remember this stuff? He clenches his fists and waits for the water to run cold. That and thoughts of Myc are the only things that work.

He gives his body a final once-over in his bedroom mirror and wonders again what John sees, but he’s as ready as he’ll ever be. He debates which shirt to put on, but decides on the purple, of course, and then ties the narrow black tie he wore to his mom’s funeral. Myc taught him how to tie it that morning and he’s surprised he still remembers. It was too long for him then. A fleeting thought is all he allows himself. I wish you were here. I think you’d like him. She would have known how to handle dad.

The suit feels as luxurious as he remembers. When he turns around to view the final effect, he has
to admit: he looks good. He takes a selfie and sends it to John who sends back a flame emoji and Sherlock smiles.

He stays perfectly still trying to kill time without messing up his suit. He waits, half anxious, half hopeful, for his father to show up. Myc hasn’t made contact either, not that he was expecting him to. His alarm rings at noon, and he calls John.

“Hi.”

“Hey! You look amazing! Excited?” *He always sounds so happy.*

“Glad I get to see you at least.”

“What’s the matter? You don’t sound right.”

“It’s dumb. I don’t know why I haven’t learned yet.”

“What is it? What’s wrong? Sherlock, talk to me.”

“It’s just that nobody’s here. My dad never came home last night. Myc didn’t text me or anything. I guess he’s not coming either.”

“Oh, god, Sherlock, I’m sorry. I’m not sure what to say. You must be really disappointed.”

Angry now, Sherlock bites out, “That’s what I mean. I’m so stupid, expecting anything to be different. Like they would really show up, I’m such an idiot.”

Just as angry, John snaps at him. “Stop it. I’ll not have it, Sherlock. First, there is nothing, nothing stupid about you and there’s a rule about being kind to yourself, and I won’t allow you to break it. Add one to the tally. Second, you have a right to expect the people in your life to treat you well. Your father and brother of all people have a responsibility to be there for you and if they fail, it’s on them, NOT you. Do you hear me?”

“Yes, Sir.” As much as he grimaces at the thought of another paddle stroke, he feels a weird comfort in the thought that somebody cares enough to think about his self-esteem. ...*care for and protect...his well-being...*

“Right then, we’ll talk about this later, but I want you to concentrate on why this is still a great day for you. You tell me, go on.”

Sherlock takes a few deep breaths and starts haltingly. “Well. I made it. It was touch and go for a little while, but I whipped Ponyboy’s ass, thanks to you and I’m actually gonna graduate.”

“There you go, that’s right. Keep on.”

Stronger now, Sherlock continues. “Hudd...Ms. Hudson is going to hand me my diploma and a scholarship check, and I’m going to get to see you.”

“Anything else?”

“Yeah, it’s the last time I have to see any of those assholes again!”

“Fair enough,” John laughs. “By the way, how are you getting there?”

“Dad was going to drive, he’s still got two hours. If he doesn’t show up... Maybe I’ll call Molly.”
MH: Rejoice little brother! I will be present for your moment of triumph. Perhaps a little late.

SH: I think I might actually be glad. I don’t think Dad will.

MH: Is he there? Truck?

SH: Neither.

MH: I can’t promise I’ll be there in time to get you, but I can call you a cab.

SH: I might need it. I don’t wanna bike and get sweaty. I’ll let you know if I do.

CUL.

Sherlock’s phone suddenly plays his “Sympathy for the Devil” tone. “Hold on a sec, it’s Myc.”

MH: Rejoice little brother! I will be present for your moment of triumph. Perhaps a little late.

SH: I think I might actually be glad. I don’t think Dad will.

MH: Is he there? Truck?

SH: Neither.

MH: I can’t promise I’ll be there in time to get you, but I can call you a cab.

SH: I might need it. I don’t wanna bike and get sweaty. I’ll let you know if I do.

CUL.

Sherlock would rather walk than take a chance on ruining his suit. He returns to the call. “Well, looks like somebody’s gonna show up anyway.”

John sounds happy again. “Fantastic! You see? It’s not as bad as all that. And there’s still time for your dad to make it. Will Myc be able to bring you?”

“Probably not, but he said he’d call me a cab.”

“I could send Greg if that would work.”

“I think a cab would be safer.”

“We haven’t talked about it, Sherlock, but there’s no reason I have to meet them, your father or brother, today. Or ever. I don’t want you to worry about it. I’d be happy, proud for you to introduce me, but it’s all fine, whether you do or you don’t, you know best. I don’t want you to feel any pressure. Obviously, it’s your decision and I’ll stay in the background. I will be there, whatever you decide.”

“I want you there! I want to introduce you to Molly and Hudders, definitely. I just have to...work it out with...somehow.”

“No worries. We’ll play it by ear. Just be sure you stay in touch.”

Sherlock smiles. “Rule number seven.”

“That’s my good boy.”

Sherlock calculates how long he can wait till it’s the last possible second and he finally gives up on his father. He texts Myc and the car shows up in fifteen minutes. He asks the driver to drop him off a block away and he finds his way to his place in the processional line, grateful there’s not too much time to have to stand by himself pretending he doesn’t care that he has no one to talk to.

As he’s trying to put that ridiculous cap on, Molly sneaks up on him. She pulls his gown open and whistles. “John?” He’s ridiculously happy to see her and nods. “You clean up nice! Too bad you have to cover it up.” She takes the cap from his hands and says, “Let me do that.” She fiddles with it, tilting it back and forth, trying to get it to sit right on his curls, and then just laughs. “Hopeless. By the way, none of them are here. There’s a restraining order. Thank you.” She kisses him on the cheek and again, she’s snatched away by a screeching girl he’s sure he should know. Molly waves
and calls out, “Don’t leave after! I wanna meet him!”

He scans the crowd, pretending not to, and can’t hide his grin when he spots John, looking hot as hell standing in the aisle close to the stage. If it weren’t for the three-thousand dollar suit, he could be somebody’s uncle. He winks at him and Sherlock feels the flush turning him bright red as he looks down, hoping no one notices. Nobody’s ever winked at him before. By the time he looks up, the senior band has started tuning up and he sees Myc taking a seat in the back row. He catches Sherlock’s eye and gives him a slight nod. Sherlock feels himself stand up straighter, and nods back, thinking, He came. He really came.

Mr. Anderson, in charge of the processional, whistles above the band and directs the students to fall in to their assigned seating order. Holmes comes right before Hooper in the alphabet and she takes her place in front of him.

“Are you really alright Molly, I mean after last night?”

“Mad as hell at those asshole Neanderthals, but I’ll be fine. It was really scary though. My dad wants me to take a self-defense class. I hate to think what would have happened if you hadn’t shown up.”

“I’m glad John made me come, I wasn’t going to.”

“So where is he anyway? I’m dying to see what he looks like.”

Sherlock looks over his shoulder and points out John, who raises a hand in greeting.

“Damn, Sherlock! I see why you like him, he’s gorgeous. I’m almost jealous.”

He grins down at her. “You’re not his type.” She punches him in the arm.

Before they can continue the conversation, Pomp and Circumstance starts and they’re in their seats listening to the various too-long speeches about how high school is such a memorable experience…How they should go forth into the world and make a difference. Etc. Etc. Sherlock vaguely remembers watching Myc make such a speech as valedictorian years ago and being equally bored.

Finally, it is time to receive diplomas. They stand and walk one by one to the auditorium stage.

His name is announced, something, something, chemistry scholarship, and he takes a deep breath and starts up to the stage. He sees Ms. Hudson standing there smiling and he walks toward her. This feels momentous. It’s only high school but it seems like a turning point. He’s made it. He’s free.

Free to do what, he’s not sure. He’s certain it does not involve staying in this town, with these people. But he has no plan. Yet. He doesn’t want to make a plan that doesn’t include John somehow.

He reaches Ms. Hudson and she hands him his diploma and an envelope and shakes his hand before giving him a big hug and kissing his cheek. “Congratulations, Sherlock, you should be proud of yourself.”

“I am. Thanks for everything.”

They pose for the picture and Sherlock walks off the stage. After what feels like days, the ceremony is over. The moment that the flying caps have settled once again to earth, Sherlock slips
off his gown and looks for John. *To hell with everybody. He’s the only one I care about.* He walks right over to him and throws his arms around him for a proper hug. John pulls back and smiles at him like he’s won the Nobel Prize. Then he looks over Sherlock’s shoulder and points. Sherlock turns to see Ms. Hudson making a beeline straight for them with that look on her face, and he briefly wonders if he forgot to turn in an assignment.

He wants to run and hide before she gets there, but John saves him. He sticks out his hand to her. Out of the side of his mouth, he growls, “Introduce me Sherlock.”

“Yes, Sir.” He looks down with a flush rising up his cheeks and by the time he looks back up, he sees only the tail end of Hudder’s look, the one that sizes up Dr. Watson in a flat second. He’s standing proudly looking directly at her.

“This is my … friend, John, I mean Dr. Watson. Dr. John Watson.”

“Hello Dr. Watson, Martha Hudson, I am, or I was, Sherlock’s chemistry teacher.”

“I’ve heard a lot about you, Ms. Hudson, all good. Sherlock clearly enjoyed your class, might’ve been the only one he actually did.”

“He’s a natural. A prodigy. I’m going to miss him. So. Excuse me for being direct, but how do you know Sherlock?”

Sherlock panics a bit as they see their eyes lock.

“I met him just a few weeks ago. An accident, as a matter of fact.”

“And you’re coming to his high school graduation?”

Sherlock feels excluded from whatever is going on between them and stands there helplessly.

“He invited me.” There is a challenge in his voice.

She doesn’t waver. “He’s a boy.”

“No, he’s a man. And it seems like he’s been taking care of himself for quite a long time already. The age of consent is sixteen in Ohio, same as the UK, I checked. He’s eighteen. And more mature than most. Old enough to choose.”

“Choose what exactly? And tell me. When are you returning to London?” Her voice is icy.

*Molly! Has Molly been talking to Hudders?*

“Hey, I’m standing right here,” he reminds them.

John’s face softens, and they both turn their heads in Sherlock’s direction.

“Right. Sorry,” John says, placing a hand on Sherlock’s shoulder. “Ms. Hudson, it’s clear that you want what’s best for Sherlock. I want you to know that I do as well. I hope we can be friends. For his sake.”

Her lips press together in a thin line for a moment and then she takes a breath. “Yes, you’re right, perhaps the three of us can get coffee and talk about his future. Among other things, the scholarship, and applying for college. I’ve been trying to get him to apply somewhere.”

“You haven’t applied?” John’s hand drops from Sherlock’s shoulder and he turns to face him, his
expression dark.

Somehow, in all their conversations, Sherlock has avoided telling John that he’s never applied to college. Hasn’t lied exactly, just told him he hadn’t been accepted. He’s regretting this now as he sees the disappointment and the touch of anger in John’s face and feels his stomach churn. Sherlock’s eyes drop and he shrinks a little under John’s disapproval. Ms. Hudson’s eyebrows flick upwards at the exchange and she gives John another searching look.

And naturally, Myc chooses this second to appear. “Ms. Hudson, so good to see you again, it’s been an age. Little brother, congratulations. Goodness, what are you wearing?” He brushes his fingers over the lapels of the sharkskin suit and gives Sherlock a knowing look. Without waiting for an answer, he turns to John and flashes a smile that doesn’t reach his eyes. “Sherlock, introduce me to your friend.”

Sherlock is speechless for a moment and then stammers. “Uh, Myc, this is my friend, John Watson. Dr. John Watson. John, this is my brother, Myc.”

The two men shake hands and Sherlock is wondering what his brother is going to say to John that will ruin everything, when there is a scuffle at the rear of the auditorium, noticeable even above the celebratory noise of 200 liberated teenagers. Grateful for the interruption, Sherlock turns and feels his stomach sink even further. It’s his father, still in his filthy work coveralls and trying to stand up from where he’s tripped over a bag left in the aisle. Someone gives him a hand up and he makes his way down the auditorium ramp, calling out, “There they are! The Holmes boys! Let’s get this party started!” Sherlock flushes to the roots of his hair and Myc clenches his teeth tight enough to crack them. Sherlock’s instinct is to flee, but he’s surrounded and there’s no escape.

The crowd falls back from the unsteady and obviously drunk man, looking away in embarrassment. When he reaches them, Myc tries to take control of the situation. “Dad, let me make the introductions. This is Ms. Hudson,” but that is as far as he gets.

George Holmes says, loudly, “Sherlock? What is that? What the hell are you wearing?” There’s a loud gasp from Ms. Hudson and a murmur from the crowd that hasn’t yet left the hall. In the sudden quiet, George continues, “A purple shirt, for Chrissakes. Everybody knows you’re queer Sherlock, you don’t have to advertise it.” The disgust in his voice is as vicious as his words. “And where in the fuck did you get that suit?”

Myc’s mouth drops open and Sherlock closes his eyes. He is frozen, praying that he’s in a nightmare, that he’ll wake up, that he’ll disappear, please god, anything, not this...

“Mr. Holmes, that’s enough,” John says, very quietly, taking a step forward to place himself between Sherlock and his father.

“What the fuck are you?” slurs George.

“I’m Sherlock’s friend, John, and you are going to shut the hell up.” John’s tone is threatening.

“Oooh, I remember. John, the one he’s always talking to. So, you’re the one who’s fucking my son.”

“Dad, please.” Myc puts his hand on George’s arm but he brushes it away.

“Faggot!” George Holmes spits and a glob of saliva hits John on the cheek. George clenches his fist. He shifts his stance and his shoulders tilt. He winds up his arm and everyone sees the punch coming.
Sherlock’s paralysis is broken and he screams, “Stop it!” as he steps around John and places a hand in the center of his father’s chest. Before he can process the fact that he’s laid a hand on his father, his head is snapped sideways and pain blooms on the side of his face.

As he reels backwards, hand on his cheek, he is aware of a flurry of motion and sound. Of Ms. Hudson, running up the aisle, of blue coveralls, lunging, Myc moving. John’s face… Oh god, John’s face. John’s fist. Blood. Someone on the ground. Shouting. Footsteps running toward them.

Sherlock continues to step backwards, away from the train wreck in front of him as people rush down the aisles, flocking to see the melee.

Ruined, ruined, everything is...

Sherlock backs away towards the door at the side of the stage. He steps through, pauses for a moment in the muffled quiet of backstage Exeunt. Shakespeare for the win before pushing the fire safety door open and sprinting into the afternoon sunshine. He’s panting, not knowing exactly what he is doing except that he needs to get away. Far away. Dad’s truck. He scans the parking lot and sees it at the back, parked crookedly, with only two wheels on the pavement. He runs toward it.

_Unlocked!_ He slides onto the seat and is relieved to see that the keys are in the ignition. He starts the truck and, instead of backing up and driving through the parking lot, guns the engine and drives through the grass toward the main road, tires screeching and leaving a cloud of dust as he turns onto it and speeds away. He is out of sight when Myc and John run out of the building.

*******

By the time the sheriff has taken statements and put George in the back of the car, Myc is making calls and Ms. Hudson has spoken to Molly. Molly heads for Sherlock’s house and her parents offer to drive by some places that Molly’s heard about. John knows the notorious spots on campus and there are a couple of former students Ms. Hudson can pressure for information. She’s helped quite a few of them over the years and they’d be happy to return the favor.

Nothing pans out. Sherlock isn’t answering his phone, and, after a few hours, the adults insist Molly go meet her parents and try to celebrate as much as she can. Eventually Myc asks John to come home with him to wait, worry, and talk. He picks up takeout on his way and when he arrives he is taken aback by the condition of the house. It is clean but dilapidated and has clearly seen better days. Myc, seeing his expression, says apologetically, “I didn’t know it had gotten so bad. He never said…”

Trying to keep his voice even, John says, “He’s like that, isn’t he?”

“You have no idea. He was stubborn even before our mother died. You understand, I couldn’t give him money.”

A little louder now, “You couldn’t take him with you?”

Matching him, Myc raises his voice, “I did! Twice! He wouldn’t stay. I try not to think about how he made his way home. Once he was old enough to start working he even refused to take advantage of the accounts I opened at the stores in town. Do you have any idea how frustrating it is to feel so powerless in the one area of your life that matters most? And after Victor, all I could do was worry about how he’d manage to kill himself.”

John sits on one of the kitchen chairs and suddenly slams his already sore fist down on the table. “I
am NOT going to let that happen.” He tries Sherlock’s number again and someone picks up. “Sherlock! Where are you?”

********

Sherlock pulls into the parking lot of The Thirsty Scholar and parks the truck as far back in the lot as he can. His chest is heaving and hot tears sting his eyes. He’s driven the outer belt that circles Columbus twice, knowing eventually he’d end up here. He leans his forehead against the steering wheel and tries to collect himself. Everything has just gone to shit. Today was supposed to have been a good day and his father had spoiled it. He’d spat on John. Called him a faggot. He has no idea what happened after he left the auditorium and he doesn’t want to know. But he’s quite certain he’s just lost the best thing that’s ever happened to him. John can have anybody, why would he want to be with the kid with the crazy dad?

Why does it matter so much? It’s just sex, right? Only it feels like… what? Falling… no, stop it! It doesn’t matter anyway because it’s all been “playing” to John.

“Fuck fuck fuck!” He pounding the dash with his fists. He feels unhinged.

He’s driven to this bar for a reason, to get high, but he can’t get out of the truck. _Obey. Rule number five._ He sits up and digs the heels of his hands into eyes while rocking back and forth in the seat. _John. Oh, John._ John is gone, probably back at his condo right now, ripping up the contract and regretting ever wasting his money and time on Sherlock.

John’s gone so Rule five doesn’t matter. There are no rules anymore. Sherlock takes off his jacket and tie and gets out of the truck.

********

“Dude! Sherlock! Thought you’d died. Haven’t seen you for a while,” says the thirty-something bearded man behind the bar when Sherlock walks in. “Shit, man, what happened to you?

Sherlock reaches up to touch his face and winces. “Hey, Pete, long story. I’m still alive but I need some.”

It’s summer break so the bar is almost empty, and Pete motions Sherlock to a table in the corner.

“How much?”

“How about a bundle? And I need everything, the rig, all of it.”

"OK, I’ve just got some new stuff. It’s really good, pure. You won’t need to cook it. I can set you up for say… $120.”

Sherlock bites his lip and reaches into his pocket for his wallet.

“I’ve got thirty bucks; can you spot me the rest?”

Pete shakes his head. “No can do bro. You know it doesn’t work that way.”

“How much for three bags?”
“With the works, fifty bucks.”

Sherlock puts his elbows on the table and rubs his temples. *Think!*

“Bro, that’s a sweet watch.”

He runs his fingers over the band. *The watch. John’s gift. No, I can’t, won’t.*

He really, really wants the heroin. He can practically hear it calling to him. He wants to float, and drift, and forget everything. It makes him think of that clown in the Stephen King movie, looking out from the storm drain. “*Come on, Sherlock. Down here we all float.*” He feels himself getting hysterical again. He shakes his head to put that bizarre vision out of his mind. He tries to think of something else he can offer. His guitar? Not worth enough. Truck? Too complicated. The suit? *The watch. Not the watch.* Pete has his eyes on it.

*Think of me touching you.* Sherlock chokes out a sound halfway between a laugh and a sob. *He’ll never touch me again. It’s over. It’s a hunk of metal.* He strokes the links one last time. “You want the watch? It’s worth a lot. I want the bundle, OK?” Sherlock unclasps the watch and hands it to Pete, who looks at it appreciatively.

“Yeah, OK but the thirty bucks too,” Pete says.

“Can I use the back room?”

“No fucking way, Sherlock. And stay out of the bathroom. Too risky for me. I’ve got a business to run,” Pete says, as he pockets the watch and cash. “I’ll be right back with your shit. Hey Tina, watch the bar for a minute,” he calls to the blonde waitress wiping down tables near the back of the room.

*******

Sherlock is sitting in the truck outside The Thirsty Scholar and dumps the bag that Pete gave him out onto the seat. Ten bags, a syringe, a metal cup, a stir stick, cotton, a bottle of water and three condoms.

Two bags should do it. He hasn’t used for almost a month and doesn’t want to push it. He draws 30 ccs of water into the syringe then puts the cotton in the cup and empties two bags into it, adds the water and stirs it until it’s completely dissolved. Feeling a thrill of anticipation, he empties a third bag into the cup. *I deserve it. It’s my graduation day.* He giggles.

He rolls up his left sleeve and unwraps the condoms. He ties them together and wraps them around his biceps, tying off and slapping his arm to bring up the vein. He’s breathing heavily now but working methodically. *Soon.* Everything must be done just right for the payoff. And the ritual is soothing. He should have asked Pete for a cigarette.

Placing the needle in the cotton, he pulls back the plunger, drawing the liquid into the barrel. After removing the air, he carefully inserts the needle into his arm at the elbow. *Pull back the plunger a bit, dark red blood. Hit the vein. Perfect.* Taking a deep breath, he pushes the plunger slowly, emptying the contents into his body.

*Count to seven. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven.* Yessss. The euphoria spreads through him
and his head drops back against the seat. It feels like a thousand orgasms over every part of his body. It feels like love, like floating. There is no more pain. Not in his bruised face and, even better, not in his heart, which just five minutes ago, felt crushed by the enormity of everything he’d lost today. Only bliss.

The euphoria gives way to an overwhelming heaviness. He can’t open his eyes. He can’t move, can’t breathe. He drifts into velvety darkness. He smiles at the irony: his last thought is Romeo’s: Under love’s heavy burden do I sink.

******

It’s not Sherlock’s voice, that’s all John can say for sure. It sounds like...thirsty something, and there’s music in the background, but the call cuts off and there’s nothing.

He looks at Myc, frantic and confused. “It wasn’t him. Whoever it was, said thirty? Thirsty? Thursday’s collar?”

Myc jumps up and runs for the door. “Come on! It’s The Thirsty Scholar, dive bar, near campus.”

John is close behind. “Should I follow in my car?”

“No, just come with me.” Myc makes another call. “Anthea, check footage from the intersections along Lane Avenue, between High and Tuttle Park. Yes, a pickup. No, I’ll wait.”

Once they are in Myc’s rental car, speeding toward the university, John tries phoning the bar, but no one answers. He tries again and again, out of pure helplessness, until someone, finally, picks up. “Thirsty Scholar.”

John switches to speaker. “Yes, yes, hello, I’m looking for Sherlock Holmes, tall, skinny, curly hair, blue pickup truck--”

Tina says, “Yeah, sure, Sherlock was here a little while ago but he left, oh but, wait, I see a blue truck in the parking lot.”

“Tina, is that you, this is Myc. Do me a favor, will you sweetheart, go out and check it for me?”

“Mykie! Long time no see, man! Lost track of the little guy, did you? Let me go see. Call me back in five.”

“Tina, wait!” She’s already gone. Myc starts blowing past red lights and John grips the grab bar above his head. John has the door open as Myc is skidding on the parking lot gravel and is out of the car before he comes to a stop. He sprints to the truck and rips open the door. He sees the condoms still strapped around Sherlock’s arm and starts slapping his cheeks and talking to him. “Sherlock, Sherlock, talk to me. Wake up. Wake up for me now. Now. You wake up, dammit. Don’t you dare die on me, you little prick, come on beautiful boy.”

He’s reaching up along his neck searching desperately for a pulse. He yells at Tina who’s just now coming out of the bar, “Call 911! Tell them we need Narcan!” He feels nothing under his fingertips and drags Sherlock out of the truck and lays him flat on the ground. “Come on, breathe, come on, that’s my good boy, don’t let go, I need you here.” He starts chest compressions, counting off, and then breathes for the still, white body below him. He looks like a little kid. Endless minutes go by, pumping his heart, breathing for him. He yells at Myc, “Where is the fucking ambulance, goddammit? Call again! Tell them he’s not breathing.”
After making the call, Myc stands by helplessly, almost as pale as Sherlock. John feels for a pulse again. Nothing. In the distance, sirens are coming. Chest compressions while he mutters under his breath, “You come back to me, Sherlock, come back, sweet boy. Dammit, you hold on, I, fuck, I love…fuck, you are not leaving me here.”

Breaths and the EMT’s are rushing, bringing a stretcher and equipment over from the ambulance. John continues the compressions and yells, “I’m Doctor John Watson, patient needs Narcan now, no pulse, no respiration. Unclear how long he’s been down, chest compressions for maybe five minutes now. Do you have it?” He finishes the round of compressions.

“Got it doc, got the oxygen.” They gather around Sherlock and one administers the nasal spray, and then slips a mask over his face. The other extends Sherlock’s left arm and sees the new puncture wound. He starts an IV line. Once the mask is over his face, the first tech pulls open Sherlock’s collar and places electrodes on his chest. He begins to prepare a breathing tube but John says, “Wait, I think I saw…” Everyone freezes. And suddenly, Sherlock’s breathing. Breathing.

John feels like he’s taking his first breath along with him.

The EMT’s lift Sherlock onto the stretcher, and one of them says, “OK, doc, I think he’s back. You coming with?”

“Hell, yeah. Myc?”

“I’ll be right behind you.”

The door to the ambulance closes and the sirens start up again.

Myc walks over to the still-open door of the truck and uses a handkerchief to sweep everything left on the front seat onto the floor mat which he rolls up and carries to his own car. As the police pull in to the lot, he is placing a call. “Anthea…”
The bliss is gone. It’s not dark anymore. But it’s awful and empty and he hurts all over. It’s like being born. Like leaving the warm soft comfort of a mother’s body and being thrust against his will into a harsh, cold, bright world. The way back is covered with glass, sharp needles of glass, the light crackling off them, shrieking as it scrapes against itself, driving shards and spikes into his skull.

His eyes are open but he doesn’t really see. Just bright lights and flashes of color. Distant voices, bits of conversation. Are they talking to him? A siren… more voices. He closes his eyes again, wanting to return to the beautiful place where he was. But it’s gone. Fuck, he wants it back. It’s bad here. “Sherlock?” “Sherlock, can you hear me?” He opens his eyes and tries to focus. It’s blurry and there is something on his face. He closes his eyes tight and opens them again, trying to concentrate on who is talking to him. God it hurts, and he thinks he’s going to vomit.

A hand brushes his forehead. “Sherlock, it’s John.”

“I’m here. You’re going to be OK.” His eyes finally focus and he sees the face above his. It’s John’s face. He can scarcely believe it. Am I dreaming? Hallucinating? Dead?

“John…” he tries to speak through the mask covering his nose and mouth.

“Don’t. We’re almost to the hospital. We can talk later.” John takes Sherlock’s hand in both of his and presses it to his lips. Sherlock can see that there are tears in his eyes.

“You’re going to be OK.”

**********

John and Myc are waiting in the hallway outside of the curtained room in the ER where Sherlock has been taken, speaking in hushed tones.

“What is your interest in my brother?”

“We are… involved.”

“I gathered as much.”

“He needs guidance. I’m providing it.”

“In exchange for what?”

“We have a consensual relationship Myc. That’s all you need to know.”

“I have ways of knowing a great deal,” Myc says with an unpleasant smile.

“Then you know I care about him. I’ve not known him long, but I assure you that I want what’s best for him. It’s in your best interest, as well as his, that we try to work together on this.”

The two men are staring at each other when the curtain opens.
A dark haired man in green short sleeved scrubs, revealing heavily tattooed arms, emerges. He has a stethoscope around his neck and his name tag reads “Ryan”.

“He’s awake, out of danger,” he says as he ushers them in. “The doc will probably want to keep him overnight but usually OD’s check themselves out AMA. Gotta tell you, I’m so sick of these, we get six or seven a day. What a waste.” The nurse shakes his head in disgust. “It’s the fentanyl. It is scary stuff, can take down an elephant, and we’re seeing it show up in heroin more and more. Get him some help before you lose him. He was lucky this time.”

John asks the nurse, “Have the police spoken to you? I haven’t seen them anywhere.” Ryan slides his eyes over towards Myc and says, “Yeah, Doc, weirdest thing. They were here for about two minutes and talked to the elder Mr. Holmes over there, and went looking for the eldest Mr. Holmes -- George. Haven’t seen them since. Usually for an OD…”

Sherlock flushes while John tries to interpret the subtle signals flying every which way. He gives up and goes directly to Sherlock’s side but Myc speaks first. “Sherlock, I’m not going to be able to clean up your messes forever.”

John shoots him a withering look, then turns to Sherlock. “Your brother’s upset. You scared him, you scared me. How are you feeling?” he says as he pulls up a chair and sits by the bed.

Sherlock has not taken his eyes from John since he entered the room. He ignores Myc’s remark and asks John, “Why are you here?”

“Where else would I be?” John says, picking up Sherlock’s hand. His eyebrows are creased in puzzlement.

Myc clears his throat, “Sherlock, you may not believe it, but you scared me to death. I’m so grateful you’re OK, really I am, but we need to get some things straightened out.”

Sherlock rolls his eyes.

John looks at one and then the other and says, “Give us a minute first, please.” He looks at Myc and jerks his head toward the curtain.

Myc inhales sharply and looks like he’s about to say something, then, thinking the better of it, turns and steps outside.

“But… My dad…”

“Is an arse, but that doesn’t matter. Why would you think it would?”

“Because I’m just temporary. It’s a game to you, and I’m not worth the trouble. You won’t even let me stay the night--”

“Stop it. Right now.” Sherlock is startled by the change in his voice. “Don’t you ever think that I’m not 100% serious about you. About what we’re doing. About how I feel about you. We’ve moved quickly because I’m greedy for you, but no matter how old you are inside, you’re young. And inexperienced. And you need time to process what’s happening and be sure about what you’re doing.”

A little angry, Sherlock says, “You’ve said it yourself, more than once, we’re just playing!”

John softens immediately. “Oh, god, Sherlock, I’m so sorry, I wasn’t saying…I should have explained. You couldn’t have known what that means. I’m not playing about how I feel about you,
I’m not toying with you. You’ve been so brave and given me so much in such a short time. I would never be casual with that gift. When I say playing, I mean playing with the power dynamics between us. Experimenting to see what you enjoy, what brings us pleasure, makes both of us happy. That part should be fun. But you can’t ever think that I’m not serious about you.” He takes Sherlock’s face between his hands. “Look at me. You believe me, don’t you? Fuck, please believe me.”

Sherlock looks back with hurt eyes and tries to figure out if he does. He thinks of Angelo. He remembers Mr. Greenfield’s words: Dr. Watson is a good man and you can trust him. He doesn’t have to think. He feels it. He felt it when he signed the contract, put himself in the man’s hands, over his lap. And he repeats the words he spoke to Mr. Greenfield with an easier heart: “I do.”

Still holding his face between his hands, John kisses him tenderly and Sherlock feels relief wash over him. He still wants me. He wants to laugh. To shout. Instead he kisses John harder and tries to hug him with arms that are tangled up in tubes and wires. He laughs through the kiss, but his joy turns to dismay when he remembers the watch. Oh god, what have I done? He breaks the kiss and a sob escapes his throat.

“What’s wrong?”

Sherlock looks down at his wrist and opens and closes his mouth, before he’s able to get the words out. “I’m sorry, I... The watch…” Sherlock stutters miserably. “I sold it to buy the dope.”

John leans his forehead against Sherlock’s and whispers into his hair, “It’s just a watch, don’t worry about it. It isn’t important.”

“It was important to me. But when I thought you were gone, I was desperate and I didn’t have anything else to—” John hugs him as carefully as he can and tries to soothe him. “Shhhh, shhhh, maybe we can get it back.”

As Sherlock tells John about Pete, Mycroft pokes his head around the curtain. He has a sour look on his face but when he sees John holding Sherlock, his expression eases, and he watches them for several seconds before saying quietly, “Sorry to interrupt, but we need to make a decision about what happens next.”

John lets go of Sherlock and sits back in the chair, rubbing the stubble on his chin. “Your—father—is going to be here overnight at least, then jail until he sees a judge. Myc, you’re not planning on bailing him out?”

“Wait, Dad’s here?” Sherlock says.

“He got hurt, and so yes, he’s here,” John says, flexing his hand to show Sherlock the swollen knuckles. Sherlock looks puzzled, then startled. The scene at school was so surreal, he hadn’t had time to process the sight of John punching his father powerfully enough to put him in the hospital.

Myc snorts. “If I have anything to do with it, he’ll never go home. But I don’t want Sherlock in that house tonight, or possibly ever. We’ll get a restraining order, but it’s no guarantee of his safety. Dad’s crossed a line now. They want to keep you overnight anyway, and at least we know you’ll be safe here,” he says, looking pointedly at Sherlock.

“I don’t wanna stay here.” Sherlock looks at Mycroft, eyes wide, then John, imploringly.

“He’ll stay with me,” John says.

“Is that really a good idea?”
John ticks off the options on his fingers. “He doesn’t need to be here medically, he’s not going home, he can’t be alone, and if I’m not mistaken, he won’t go with you.”

Sherlock shakes his head frantically. “You can’t make me, Myc, I’m eighteen.”

Myc grits his teeth and looks between them. “You’re right, I can’t.” He looks directly at John. “But I respectfully request to accompany my brother.”

The two older men stare each other down for a few tense seconds until John nods tightly.

Sherlock sputters in outrage, “What? He is not--” but John hushes him immediately. “Quiet. This is not your decision to make.” John gives him a look and Sherlock immediately lowers his eyes and answers “Yes, Sir.” Then, realizing what he’s done, shoots a look at Myc, and then immediately back down again.

Myc looks at Sherlock with a tilted head and raises an eyebrow, then shifts his gaze to John who meets his eye and gives him an ever-so-slight smile, as if to say, yes, and there is nothing you can do about it.

They stop by the house to pick up Sherlock’s clothes and it’s almost three in the morning by the time they arrive at the condo.

Myc looks around appreciatively at the expensively appointed space and doesn’t visibly react when he spots the riding crop still on the mantelpiece. “You must be a very good surgeon.”

“I am,” laughs John, then says to Sherlock, “Are you hungry, did you eat today?”

“Only lunch, and yes, I’m starving.”

“Cold pizza OK?”

“That sounds awesome.” He remembers not to say “Yes, Sir.”

John pours glasses of bourbon and the two men watch Sherlock devour the pizza like he hasn’t eaten in days. After a few moments, he realizes they haven’t said a word and he looks up and asks, “Do I have pizza on my face or something?”

John starts to speak, but Myc holds up his hand to ask for permission.

“I know you’re eighteen, Sherlock, and I can’t make you do anything. But I’m family and I do have an interest in what happens to you. I’m not going to just watch you throw your life away. You could have died today, and regardless of what you think, that would devastate me. I know that you know that, no matter how hard you try to convince yourself otherwise. I’m reserving judgment about your… arrangement with the good doctor for now but, I assure you I’m looking into it.”

“Sherlock, it’s been a long day for you,” John says. “Why don’t you go take a shower while I talk to Myc.”
“But...”

John frowns.

“OK,” Sherlock says quickly, but thinks, *Yes, Sir.*

When Sherlock is out of earshot, Myc drains his glass and sets it down a bit harder than necessary. “I can tell that my brother has feelings for you. I’m just not satisfied yet that you aren’t a danger to him. Physically or mentally. ‘Out of the frying pan, into the fire’ so to speak.”

“I’m not going to discuss our relationship except to tell you that he’s in no danger and that I also care about him. More than I intended to actually.”

“He enjoys being your pet? Your... sex slave?”

“Surely, you, more than anyone else, know he would only be here of his own free will,” John says, and Myc concedes the point. “And the word is ‘submissive’ as I’m sure you also know. Your research will turn up an excellent reputation for discretion and positive references from almost every club in London. I can print you out a list if you’d like. Save you some time?”

Myc looks at his watch and says, “Unnecessary by now. The inquiries have been made.”

The posturing over for the moment, John says, “In that case, we are done with this conversation. Shall we move on to how we are going get him on track so that he has a future?”

********

Sherlock walks into the living room in a robe, drying his hair with a towel and sees John and Myc deep in conversation. When they see him they stand.

“I’m leaving Sherlock,” Myc says. “I’m available 24/7 if you need me. I’m going to fly back to D.C., but I’ll be back in a few days. We still have much to discuss.” He holds out his hand and Sherlock reaches for it but Myc unexpectedly hugs him instead “Don’t you ever do that again little brother. Please,” he whispers.

“Um, thanks Myc, for everything,” Sherlock says, extricating himself.

John walks Myc to the door and Sherlock wonders what they talked about. Him undoubtedly. He decides to ask John about it tomorrow. After Myc leaves, John says, “Let’s get some sleep. It’s been a very long day. Rules still apply though, leave your dressing gown on the chair.” He takes Sherlock’s hand and pulls him toward the bedroom. They pause outside the door as Sherlock removes his robe and drapes it over the chair.

John leads him to the bed and pulls back the covers. Sherlock gets in and John kisses the damp curls on his forehead. “Sleep, sweet boy.” Soon Sherlock hears the shower in the master bath. He snuggles into the soft sheets and sighs. He is so tired. He aches all over and so much has happened. He dozes off, but wakes when he feels John slip into bed. He’s lying on his side and John scoots up behind him and slides his arm around his waist. Sherlock can feel the soft cotton of his T-shirt and his breath, warm against his shoulder. “Do you want...” Sherlock begins.

“No,” whispers John. I just want to hold you. Feel you breathe. Go to sleep.”
The guilt is crushing. “I’m really sorry, John.”

“Go to sleep.”

“This isn’t how I wanted to spend our first night together.”

John huffs out a sad, little laugh. “Me neither.”

“Are you going to punish me for it?”

“Yes. We’ll talk tomorrow. Now go to sleep.” John presses a kiss to the back of Sherlock’s neck and hugs him a little tighter.

Feeling safe and a bit lighter, Sherlock is happy to obey.
He wakes with a tickling feeling on his face and when he moves to brush it away, John catches his wrist and holds it. “It’s aloe. It helps with the swelling.” John is sitting on the side of the bed, dabbing at his cheek. Sherlock thought he ached the night before, but this morning it hurts to even breathe.

“That’s from the chest compressions. You’re lucky I didn’t break your ribs. It happens sometimes.”

“You did it? I thought it was the EMTs.”

“No, Sherlock. I found you. You weren’t breathing. You had no pulse. You were dead.”

For the first time, the full weight of it crashes down on him and Sherlock turns his face away and tries to hold back the tears that want to come. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry I did that to you. I didn’t mean for it to happen. I wish I could take it back.”

John gently turns his face back towards him, and in a severe tone, says, “You’re old enough to know there are things you can’t undo.”

Sherlock sits up. “I want you to punish me now.”

“I will be punishing you, but there will be no paddle until you’re healed.” John continues rubbing in the aloe.

“But, I want you to.”

“I heard you, Sherlock. But I’m the one who makes those decisions, remember? You’re going to have to live with the guilt until I decide you’re ready.” He raises his eyebrows slightly and Sherlock responds.

“Yes, Sir.”

John continues ominously, “I promise you when the time comes, I will make sure that the slate has been cleared.”

Sherlock’s eyes widen and he is suddenly grateful for the delay.

“Is that true, that you didn’t mean for it to happen?” John says.

“I didn’t want to die, if that’s what you mean. I just… I don’t know. You don’t understand how good it feels. It makes me forget what shit my life is and the stupid things I’ve done. I thought you were going to leave me and you’re the best thing…” he checks himself. “I didn’t want to die, Sir. I want to live. I feel like I’m supposed to be more, do something important, but I don’t know what. My mom always told me that I was special and I believed her. I fucking believed her. The dope makes me feel…” He almost says “loved”, but instead says “better.”

“I’m a doctor Sherlock, I know what drugs do. That’s why there’s a rule against using. So you’re telling me it was an accident?”

“Yes, Sir, I swear. I bought ten bags, but I only used three. I thought I would be able to handle it, but I guess it’s been so long, or maybe the stuff was as pure as Pete said. It was an accident. And I’m so, so sorry. I’m just, I can’t believe you’d have me back.”
“I agree with your mother, by the way, you are special Sherlock. I’ve only known you for a few weeks but I see it.” John begins to spread the aloe on Sherlock’s chest, hoping to speed the healing of his ribs. “Myc and I have agreed that you’ll be staying here for now.”

Sherlock grabs John’s hand and kisses his knuckles. “Oh, god, thank you, thank you so much, I promise--”

“Don’t be so quick to thank me. If you thought you had rules before, welcome to Boot Camp. While you’re here, you’ll have obligations.”

John watches Sherlock resist the urge to scowl, then leans down and kisses him on the forehead. “First things first. Before the end of the day, you’re going to enroll yourself in a summer class. I’ve printed a list that you can choose from. We’ll look at it over breakfast. You’ll be writing letters of apology to Myc, Ms. Hudson, and Molly and her parents, for worrying them all to death. I will be making up a list of your daily responsibilities and we’ll go on from there. Come, breakfast.”

“I’m not--” Sherlock reconsiders immediately. “Sorry, I meant, yes, Sir.”

Sherlock looks for a robe but doesn’t see one. “Is there something I can put on?”

“No, actually, I want you naked. You’ll earn your clothes back.”

Sherlock stares, having some trouble processing what he’s heard. “You mean...I can’t wear any clothes?”

“Yes. That’s what I mean. Paddling isn’t the only way for me to punish you. You broke the rules and disregarded your commitment to my authority. There will be consequences. Your brother and I agree that you need more structure and being in a dom/sub relationship means we would be increasing that intensity as well. Given what’s happened, we’re going to be moving more quickly than I would have preferred, but there’s nothing for it. Having you naked should remind you of your place in the agreement.”

Sherlock is still trying to grasp the implications. “So no clothes.”

“Being naked around me will make you very self-conscious. And that’s what I want you to be at the moment--conscious of your real self: your feelings, desires, acceptance or rejection of what I’m asking of you. I want you remember that you can terminate the contract whenever you wish. I’m not going to withdraw my support from you. You’re welcome to stay as long as you need to--as long as I’m here, but if you are going to be submissive to me, then this is what I’m asking from you right now.”

John goes to the closet and pulls out a robe. “I’m going to leave this here. Take your time.” He leaves the room and closes the door behind him. Sherlock sits on the bed for a few minutes deciding what to do. This isn’t just about sex. He remembers the sentence he was unwilling to finish earlier. John is the best thing to happen to him since Victor and he’s not going to lose him over a damn robe.

I can terminate the contract whenever I want. It doesn’t have to be now. He hangs the robe back up and follows John to the kitchen. When John sees him, naked, he smiles and walks to meet him with his hand held out. For a moment that’s all that Sherlock can see: that smile directed at him. And then he is excruciatingly aware that he is naked. And John is right. He can think of nothing else. And then he makes his way around to a different thought; he’s naked because John wants him to be. And that’s good enough.
There is a cushion on the floor next to John’s seat and he leads Sherlock to it. “This isn’t a punishment. I’d like to feed you. I want you to understand that I have as much responsibility to you as you do to me. This is one way for me to show you. So please kneel for me.” Sherlock kneels as John sits. “Are you comfortable?”

Sherlock shifts and settles. “Yes, Sir.” And it’s not just physically comfortable. He is calm; safe. I don’t have to worry. John will take care of it. All I have to do is obey.

John strokes his hair and he leans in to the touch. “Open.” John holds out a strawberry and Sherlock opens his mouth and bites into the sweet, succulent flesh. It’s delicious. Have they always tasted this good? Or was I not paying attention?

“That’s my good boy.” The meal continues with bits of whole wheat bread smeared with peanut butter and jam, and other morsels of fruit. When the juice from a piece of watermelon drips down onto Sherlock’s chin and John catches it with his finger and holds it out to him, Sherlock licks the juice off. John scoops the jam from a piece of bread and this time Sherlock takes his finger into his mouth and sucks and sucks on it, until he moans with the pleasure of it, feeling his cock rising with nothing in its way. When John is satisfied with how much he’s eaten, he dabs carefully at Sherlock’s sticky mouth. Sherlock finishes the meal with his erection demanding attention, but he doesn’t expect release any time soon. John leans down and kisses him, then pulls him onto his feet, ignoring his arousal.

He settles him onto a chair, and Shit, it’s bizarre how much more naked he feels with his bare ass on the cold, smooth surface, his hard dick not helping at all. He shifts and makes a complaining noise and John looks at him with a smirk and a raised eyebrow. “Uncomfortable?”

He blushes, surprisingly embarrassed, considering what’s gone on between them up till now, and Sherlock feels the weight of the lesson sinking into his bones. He looks away. “I asked you a question, Sherlock, and I expect an answer. Add one to the tally. What are you up to now, ten? I expect you to remember what rules you’ve broken. You may need to start writing them down. Now, are you feeling uncomfortable?”

Deep breath. “Yes, Sir.”

“Good.” John reaches across the table for a folder and takes out a sheet from the collection of papers. “Take a look here. These are the classes you can choose from. Once you’ve picked, you can start on the paperwork. You’ll need Myc’s help for some of it.” He hands Sherlock the folder with the list on top. “Tomorrow I’ll drop you off at the registrar so you can enroll. Then you’ll come meet me at my office.”

Scanning the sheet, Sherlock carelessly says, “Yes, Sir... This list only has English classes on it.”

“Excellent observation. And you said English wasn’t your strength.” John gives him a half-grin.

Sherlock looks up at him with hurt eyes. “But I don’t want to take any more English. I thought I was finally through with that shit. I want to take chemistry or at least some other kind of science.” His erection is all but gone.

John answers drily, “Yes I’m sure you would. But that’s not what you need. With the English grades you have now, you’re going to have to take remedial classes and that’s going to set you behind before you even get started. If you take one of these now and another in--”

“Another?” Sherlock blurts out, disbelieving what he’s heard.
John pauses, pursing his lips. “You interrupted me. I wasn’t thinking we’d need it so quickly, but I was wrong, apparently.” John walks to the hallway closet and brings out a magnetic whiteboard with a marker and eraser attached to it. He sticks it to the refrigerator and writes the number “10” at the top. “I’ll do it this time but it will be your job from now on.” He makes a tally mark and next to it ‘interrupting, #2’. “That’s number of strokes, the behavior, and the rule you broke.” He caps the marker and returns to the table.

“Now, where was I? One in June, and one in July. I’d recommend writing courses. If you can avoid what they call Freshman Composition here in the American Universities, you’ll be very lucky. But it’s your choice.”

Sherlock repeats, “My choice.” He desperately wants to argue the point and John watches him patiently, waiting to see if he can get a hold of himself before he makes another mistake.

Sherlock shifts again, his bony ass finding no comfort on the unforgiving surface, then grits his teeth and says, “Yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir.”

John smiles and kisses the top of his head. “Good boy.”

Sherlock mutters under his breath and John says, “I heard that. Consider yourself warned.”

“Sorry, Sir.” He looks at the list and grimaces, then picks up a pen and starts slashing.

ENGLISH 1110.01 First-Year English Composition Boring
ENGLISH2220 Introduction to Shakespeare Never again
ENGLISH2260H Introduction to Poetry God, no
ENGLISH2265 Writing of Fiction I The art of lying
ENGLISH2268 Writing of Creative Nonfiction What does that even mean?! Nonfiction isn’t creative!
ENGLISH2276 Arts of Persuasion Might help with John
ENGLISH2280 The English Bible Oh, god, no
ENGLISH2281 Introduction to African-American Literature Maybe
ENGLISH2282 Introduction to Queer Studies I can study that in College? He circles that one.

He starts shuffling through the application paperwork, hyper-aware of the unyielding chair under his bottom, and wondering if it’s worth asking for a cushion. He stretches his arms up over his head. His ribs are still sore when he takes a deep breath. He leans over a little to see if he can see what John is up to on the sofa.

“Do you need something, Sherlock? I know you can’t be finished already.”

Caught out, he figures he might as well ask, “Um, no, Sir, not finished, but could I have a cushion to sit on please? This chair is kind of hard.”
John smiles, “Either that, or your arse is too skinny. I can’t wait to fatten it up a bit. Come and get one, sweetheart.”

Sherlock pops up, grinning himself, and meets John halfway. John grabs a handful of his ass and squeezes before he starts back to the table. Sherlock shoots a disapproving glare over his shoulder and John smirks at him.

It takes Sherlock two hours to finish what he can of the paperwork. John looks it over and tells Sherlock he can take a break.

“Bring the cushion and come kneel by me.”

The awkwardness Sherlock feels about being on the floor, naked, disappears when John starts to run his fingers through his hair. He leans his head against John’s thigh and sighs. John strokes his cheekbone with his thumb as Sherlock hums with contentment. Paperwork, nakedness and whatever else John has planned for him seems a small price to pay for how he feels right now, on his knees, being petted and stroked. He feels like he’s put down a heavy weight, like he’s floating in warm water, like he’s walked in out of the cold. John feels like home.

After a few minutes, John says, “I’m going to go out for a while. I want you to finish earning your clothes back by writing those apology notes. You’ll find paper on my desk. There is plenty to eat if you’re hungry and you should try to get as much rest as you can. Do some deep breathing and stretching, arms up and out to the side. It will help with the healing. I’ll be back by dinner time.” He lifts Sherlock’s chin with his finger. “Can I trust you to stay here alone?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Stay out of my things, understand? I expect you to respect my privacy.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Good boy.” He pulls Sherlock to his feet and gives him a slow, deep kiss, while cupping his ass with both hands. Being naked while John is clothed and holding him is unexpectedly arousing and Sherlock’s feels his bare penis harden against John’s stomach. John feels it too and whispers into Sherlock’s mouth, “Oh, you’re ready aren’t you? You want to come? You’d like me to suck you off, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes, Sir,” Sherlock whispers back.

“Sorry sweetheart, not today.” John steps back and looks down at Sherlock’s growing erection with a grin. “Remember Rule 6 while I’m gone,” he says as he walks toward the door.

Sherlock writes the apology notes with some reluctance. Paper, seriously? Who even uses paper anymore? Nevertheless, the notes to Molly and her parents and to Ms. Hudson are fairly easy. Sincere, even. He re-reads hers before he puts it in the envelope.

Dear Ms. Hudson,

I’m very sorry that I worried you yesterday. You have done so much for me and I appreciate it. I
just lost it. I wasn’t thinking about anybody else or what it would do to them. Please forgive me.

You were a great teacher and I really enjoyed your classes. Chemistry is so beautiful. Weird, I know, but that is how you made me feel about it. Are we (and Molly!) the only ones who see it this way?

You gave me your number and I probably should have called you. If the offer is still open I would like to talk. Again, I am so sorry to have worried you. No need to worry now though, I am fine. I’m staying with John.

Sincerely,

SH

The note to Myc is harder. He stares at the blank paper and starts the letter several times, crumpling each attempt and tossing it in the trash. Finally, he’s satisfied that he has the proper balance of insult and apology.

Myc,

I’m sorry for shooting up yesterday and causing so much trouble. I didn’t mean for that to happen. I wanted to forget all of it, not kill myself.

Thank you for coming to my graduation. I’m glad you came. I wasn’t sure you were going to. You’ve always been such an asshole (you know I’m right), but having you there meant something.

I don’t know what to think about Dad. I feel sorry for him sometimes, and other times I hate him. Right now I hate him, I can’t help it. I don’t care so much that he hit me, but he spit on John!

I can tell you don’t like John much but please don’t screw this up for me. I like him a lot and he makes me feel good. I think he’s good for me. I think he makes me better. I know you guessed the truth about me a long time ago. (You are too fucking smart, Myc!) Did you know before I did?

Again, I’m sorry for the trouble I caused. Please forgive me. And thanks.

Sincerely,

SH

He folds the note and places it in the envelope. He wonders if he can get dressed yet and decides against it. His chest aches and the lack of sleep together will all the writing and forms has made his head fuzzy. He stretches a few times and breathes deeply, then lies down on the sofa, pulls a blanket over himself, and is fast asleep within seconds.

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He is still sleeping when something pleasant nudges him toward wakefulness. A smell. Eyes still closed, he slowly becomes aware of a delicious aroma that might be a dream but keeps getting stronger. He hears a sound that seems very close, and realizes it’s his own stomach growling. *Not a dream.* He opens his eyes, gradually remembering where he is and notices that the sun is low in the sky outside the wall of windows. Without thinking, he stretches his arms above his head and arches his back. “Ow!”

“You up then? Still hurts?” John says from the kitchen, which is separated from the living room only by the breakfast bar.

Sherlock sits up, rubbing his chest. “Yeah, what smells so good?”

“Lobster risotto.”

Sherlock gets up and walks to the kitchen holding the blanket around his hips like a skirt. John has an apron over his T-shirt and jeans and is stirring something in a pan on the stove, clearly the source of the wonderful smell. He looks at the blanket and raises an eyebrow.

“I finished the letters.”

“I saw.”

“Did you read them?” Sherlock asks in alarm, not sure how John would like him calling Myc an asshole.

“No, I’m going to trust you. You’ve earned your clothes. Good thing too. It’s a lovely night and we can eat on the balcony. Go get dressed. Dinner will be ready in ten.”

The lobster risotto is delicious. Another first for Sherlock. *So many firsts.* They talk about the classes that Sherlock will take, John describes London, and conversation is light. He seems to purposely avoid the unpleasant events of the weekend and Sherlock is grateful. For dessert, John brings out bowls of peach ice cream.

Kneeling beside John on the balcony, with the last rays of the setting sun making John’s hair look like spun gold, and the warm June breeze ruffling his own, Sherlock lets John feed him the ice cream. Knowing that he could be seen, by the neighbors or maybe even from the ground, makes the act more meaningful. He is proud to belong to John.

John kisses him and their lips are cold and sweet from the ice cream. Holding Sherlock’s face in his hands, John uses his tongue to lick the stickiness from the skin around his lips and from his chin. “My beautiful boy, I’d like to coat you in ice cream and lick you all over.” Sherlock shivers at the thought.

“Another time,” John chuckles as he stands and pulls Sherlock with him.

John has him clean the kitchen after dinner and they write up a schedule for the week, including the chores he’s responsible for each day. Sherlock reminds him that he’s scheduled to work this week.

“As much as I’m sentimental about the tack shop, a job at the hospital will be much better for your applications to school. And you’ll have more supervision. I can take you back and forth, have lunch when our schedules coincide. I’ve already started the ball rolling and I’ll follow up tomorrow.” Sherlock is equal parts embarrassed that John thinks he can’t be trusted on his own and thrilled that they’ll be able to spend more time together.
“Before we go to sleep, there’s the last part of today’s punishment.”

“But I thought...”

“We’re not quite done. Do you think writing notes and spending time naked is sufficient punishment for what you did?”

Sherlock looks at the floor. “No, Sir.”

“Good, neither do I. Take off your shirt.”

Sherlock obeys.

“Come lie on the sofa for a moment and lift your arms over your head. You did your stretches?” Sherlock nods and winces a bit as John runs his fingers over his ribs. “Which ones are the most tender?” Sherlock points and John nods. He rubs on more aloe. “Another two days, I expect. Sit up. You’re definitely not ready for the paddle yet but I have something else in mind for tonight. I want you to use the toilet and take a shower. Be thorough. I’ll meet you in my bedroom.”

Sherlock does what he’s told. He wonders what kind of punishment John might give him that doesn’t involve the paddle. Perhaps John will just spank him again. He hopes so. He tingles a little at the thought of lying over John’s lap. No, it would probably hurt his chest. John wouldn’t risk it.

With a towel slung around his hips, he goes to the bedroom door and drops it on the chair. He walks in, gnawing on his lip, to see John, in a black silk robe, sitting on the side of the bed, unsmiling.

“Kneel, hands behind your back,” orders John, pointing at the floor in front of him.

Sherlock obeys, dropping to his knees on the rug, remembering this time to keep his eyes on John.

John gazes at him without speaking, eyes roaming all over his body. He feels so exposed, kneeling there silently, waiting for whatever it is that is coming. The silence continues and Sherlock is starting to feel awkward. The rug is irritating under his bare knees. He wants to squirm, to ask John to just do whatever it is he’s going to do, but he doesn’t dare.

After what seems like an hour, John gives a small smile and says “Good boy,” and Sherlock feels a little rush of pleasure.

“Do you like me looking at you?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“I like looking at you, Sherlock, you are amazingly beautiful.”

Sherlock feel his cheeks flame with a blush.

John stands and when Sherlock sees that he has the crop in his hand, he inhales sharply.

“Don’t worry, not tonight,” John says, but he rests the tip of the crop under Sherlock’s chin. “Remember the day we met? What I said to you? Tell me.”

“You said you were going to use the riding crop on me and... fuck me, Sir.”

“I did. And that must have sounded good to you because you called me the very next day.” As John speaks, he traces the crop down Sherlock’s chest, down his stomach to his cock, which is rapidly
swelling, dragging it over the length of it before dropping it lower and stroking it over Sherlock’s balls.

“I want to do both of those things Sherlock, eventually. Tonight, we’ll continue to clean the slate for yesterday and at the same time I’m going to help you begin to accept yourself. You need to come to terms with who you are and what gives you pleasure. There is no reason to be ashamed. You’ve lived in a toxic environment. The world is different. The world is so much bigger than what you know. Your punishment is that I’m not going to let you come. You will watch me and I’m going to touch you, in ways you’ve not been touched before, but you will have no release. I’m going to push you to the edge and leave you there.” John is behind Sherlock now and he feels the riding crop pass over his buttocks as John whispers this in his ear.

John comes back to face Sherlock and tosses the crop to the bed, before dropping his robe to the floor. He’s naked and his thick cock is hard and standing straight out from his tanned muscular body, less than a foot from Sherlock’s face. John takes it in his hand and begins stroking himself.

“Open your mouth.”

This doesn’t feel like a punishment. Sherlock opens up eagerly and John steps forward and guides his cock in. Sherlock takes it into his throat but suddenly John retreats, pulling it out again. John resumes using his hand, his erection now lubricated by Sherlock’s saliva. His other hand goes to Sherlock’s head, winding his fingers through the curls.

Sherlock is transfixed as he watches John masturbate, just inches from his face. His mouth waters as the head of Johns’ penis slips in and out of the foreskin as he continues to pull and twist, pull and twist, thrusting his hips forward in a lazy rhythm. He wants to touch himself, wants to touch John, to take him back into his mouth, but all he can do is kneel and watch with his neglected dick throbbing.

“Do you see what you do to me Sherlock, do you see how hard I am for you? How much I want you?” John’s voice is low and breathy.

“Yes, Sir.”

John is close enough that when a drop of pre-come drips from the tip of his erection, Sherlock leans forward slightly and tries to catch it with the tip of his tongue. John pulls away and Sherlock has to lean back to keep from overbalancing.

Finally, John stops and orders Sherlock to stand, then guides him down onto the bed before climbing on top of him on hands and knees, avoiding his chest. Oblivious to the pain, Sherlock pulls John close, hungry for contact, thrusting his hips upward, and seeking John’s tongue in an almost frantic kiss. John yields to Sherlock’s passion and Sherlock lets his hands roam over the doctor’s body, feeling his strong shoulders, running them along his back and down to his ass, pulling John’s hips tighter against him, reveling in the exquisite friction of their bodies.

When Sherlock’s breathing becomes ragged, John pulls away, “That’s enough, sweetheart.”

“John... Sir, please.”

“Oh, uh”

“But...”

“Add one to your tally and open your mouth.”
Sherlock obeys and John picks up the crop and puts it between Sherlock’s open lips.

“Bite down and stop talking, except for your colors.” John takes Sherlock’s wrists and pulls them above his head. “Hold onto the rails until I tell you to stop. Nod if you understand.”

Sherlock nods and grasps the metal rails of the headboard.

John scoots to the side of the bed and picks up lube from the bedside table, then gets back on all fours over Sherlock. He can feel John’s penis just brushing against his own and he moans around the crop. John kisses the tip of Sherlock’s nose and then nibbles his bottom lip as he murmurs, “Sweet, beautiful boy.” He places open-mouthed kisses down Sherlock’s long neck and pauses at his collarbone to suck a bruise there. Sherlock grips the rails hard and closes his eyes as he concentrates on John’s lips, tongue, and hot breath as they travel slowly over his skin. When he feels his nipple sucked into John’s mouth he moans again.

“Oh, you like that don’t you? You’re sensitive. That’s lovely,” John says, and he continues to suck and nibble, one nipple, then the other. Sherlock’s breathing is rapid and his body wiggles in frustration. He feels his cock, hardening against his belly, and each wave of pleasure firing from his nipples seems to travel straight to it.

John moves further down, using his mouth all over Sherlock’s heated skin. He nudges his penis aside with his cheek and licks up the pre-come that has dripped onto his belly. He kisses the tip of Sherlock’s cock and then every inch of it, and licks the crease between his leg and belly.

Sherlock feels John settle between his legs. “Lift your hips.” Sherlock does, and John slips a pillow beneath him, then pushes on the backs of his thighs so that his feet are suspended in the air. Once positioned, John laps at his balls and kisses his perineum.

Sherlock is drowning in the sensations, and he’s making noises he doesn’t recognize. More, more, more…

When John uses his thumbs to gently separate the cheeks of his ass, he pauses and asks, “Color?”

Sherlock feels that anxiety rising up from within. He almost hears his father’s voice. He takes a deep breath and focuses on the mesmerizing feel of John’s breath between his cheeks. John pulls his head away and more sternly says, “Color, Sherlock, now.” Then Sherlock remembers. Shut up you bastard. I hate you. Strongly, and as clearly as he can through his clenched teeth, Sherlock says, “Green.” And then John’s hot wet tongue is sliding over the most secret part of his body. The physical pleasure gives him chills everywhere and when he thinks It’s John, doing this for me, he whimpers at the intimacy of it.

“That’s it, it feels good, doesn’t it?” John starts speaking softly to him in between the strokes of his tongue. “The sounds you’re making, Sherlock, do you hear them? I want you to feel good, I can make you feel so good. Let yourself feel it. Relax and let me in.” Sherlock’s knees fall open, giving John more room and he presses his tongue over the clenching muscle gently, soft but firm, poking inside as the entrance relaxes more and more. Sherlock starts moaning around the crop in his mouth, and John starts up a rhythm until he’s fucking Sherlock with his tongue. John slides his finger in alongside his tongue and Sherlock raises his hips to try and draw John in deeper. John pushes in and pulls out until he is in up to the knuckle.

When John feels Sherlock begins to tense up, he pulls out and sits up. “I wish you could see yourself, how beautiful you are right now. I’ve never seen anything as gorgeous as you are, as hot and sexy as you are.” Sherlock is gasping at the loss of stimulation, and lifts his head trying to see John.
John removes the crop. “What I’m doing feels good, right?”

Like velvet. Like melted chocolate. Like… “Oh yes, Sir.”

“You deserve it, Sherlock, it doesn’t make you less of a man. My tongue is in your arse, does it make me less of a man?”

Sherlock moans, “No, no, Sir.”

“Your pleasure, your desires – own them. Be confident about who you are. Fuck masculine anyway, be human. And to hell with anyone who gives you shit about it, because they are unworthy of you. Now, tell me your color.”

A kind of calm settles over Sherlock at these words and he says, “Green.”

John smiles and says, “Eyes on me and relax. Let it all go.”

Still kneeling, he squirts lube onto his fingers and puts his other hand behind one of Sherlock’s knees, pushing it toward his chest. He slowly circles the pucker and then slides one slick finger in. Sherlock concentrates on relaxing.

As John slides his finger in and out, Sherlock’s head falls back against the pillow, still looking into John’s eyes. A second finger enters him and he can’t believe how amazing this feels until a completely new sensation arrives. Something inside him is radiating a pleasure that feels like an orgasm building up in slow motion. It’s new, a new kind of touch, Is it...

“Your prostate,” John whispers.

Sherlock is panting now and his forehead is damp with sweat. He wants to touch himself. Wants to come. He’s so hard that he’s sure he will explode, if he could just...

“Ahhhh please, Sir.”

John bends and kisses Sherlock’s erection.

“Is this what you want? You’re begging for it now, aren’t you?” John says as he continue to stroke Sherlock’s prostate while flicking his tongue over his cock.

“Fuck!” Sherlock practically shouts.

“Mmmm, I’d like to, believe me.”

Sherlock whimpers and begins to writhe.

John slides his fingers out and says, “Let go and turn over. Don’t you dare rub against that pillow. You are not permitted to come. Think of Myc if you need to.”

Sherlock turns over and feels John’s hardness against his ass and kisses on his back.

“Don’t worry, trust me. Just stay still,” John says in a low hoarse voice.

As John begins to move, Sherlock feels the thickness of his cock sliding between the cheeks of his ass, feels teeth biting his shoulder blades. He tries to keep still, not to rub, but John’s movement is rocking him gently. “Oh good boy. Sherlock, my beautiful boy, yes, god, I want you,” John pants.
Sherlock feels the tip of John’s cock catch against his hole briefly before sliding up between his buttocks again and again. Suddenly he feels deprived. He wants John inside him desperately, wants to take all of him in deep and it’s OK. It’s a tease now, that he knows he can’t have him, that John won’t join them to each other this way. Yet.

He’s so hard and so close, but the friction on his cock against the soaked linen underneath him isn’t quite enough and he fights the need to rut wildly. He clutches the sheets in both fists and groans with frustration. “Please,” he gasps, already knowing the answer.

He hears a moan against his shoulder as John comes and a warm wetness spreads across his back. He tries to catch his breath as John recovers and slips off of him. Sherlock rolls onto his side to relieve the pressure on his throbbing cock. They are face to face and Sherlock concentrates on John, trying to take his mind off his intense need to come. He looks so handsome, his hair mussed, damp with perspiration, and is giving him a smile that makes Sherlock’s heart flutter. He breathes in, as deeply as his ribs will allow, trying to memorize the scent of sweat and musk and come.

“You OK?” John asks, brushing the wet curls from Sherlock’s forehead and tracing his fingers across the bruised cheek.

“Yes, Sir, except for…” Sherlock glances sadly down at his neglected, weeping cock.

“Can’t be helped. You earned it.”

“I know. Sorry, Sir.” Sherlock wants to say more but can’t quite find the words to express what he’s feeling and he thinks that even if he could, he’d be afraid to say them, and so instead he just says, “Kiss me?”

“Always.” John gives him a tender kiss and rolls to his back, pulling Sherlock against him.

“The slate is almost cleared for yesterday Sherlock. When your ribs are ready we’ll finish it once and for all... And you’ve got a backlog we’re going to need to take care of too.”

“Yes, Sir,” Sherlock says, snuggled up against John’s shoulder. He feels weary and frustrated but so lucky. He’s with John. Dad and Mycroft might as well be on a different planet. Soon he’ll be able to clear his slate and he can almost feel his ass burn at the thought. It makes him smile and he snuggles closer.
Amends

Sherlock’s phone rings, rousing him from a deep sleep. He sits up groggily, and, squinting against the sunshine streaming in the windows, finds it on the bedside table. He looks around and sees only a pillow and rumpled sheets. John must have left the phone there for him before leaving for work. He stares at the display. Dad. He presses the “decline” icon and flops back down onto the pillow. *Fuck Dad.* He’s not going to talk to his father. Maybe not ever. Does this mean he’s out of jail? *I. Don’t. Care.* After this past weekend, he’s done with him. He’s out of school, is with John, at least for now, and he just wants to forget what happened on Saturday. Doesn’t want his motherfucking sorry excuse of a father to ruin this. Whatever *this* is.

He remembers last night, his second night here with John. Feeling safe, cared for, and protected. He’d woken several times during the night and lain there just watching John sleeping next to him, concentrating on the places where their bodies touched: A foot, a forearm, a fingertip. Feeling the warmth of John’s skin and watching the rise and fall of his chest. Satisfied that it wasn’t a dream, he had drifted back into dreamless sleep each time. He has a vague recollection of lips brushing his, and a murmured, “Goodbye till later, sweet boy.”

He stretches experimentally, testing his tender ribs. Still a little tender, but much better.

His phone rings again. He picks it up angrily, intending to decline it once more but sees it’s from John and accepts the call. *I really need to give him his own ringtone.*

“Hello, Sir.”

“Good morning, sexy.”

Sherlock smiles and hums.

“So how are you feeling?” John asks.

“Only a little sore.”

“Good, you’ll be ready soon, maybe tomorrow.”

Sherlock doesn’t need to ask what John means. *Punishment.*

“But today you have a full agenda,” John continues. “There’s a notebook on the bar. Your schedule will be there every day. You have chores, and you’re going to deliver those apology notes.”

“But how --”

“Greg will take you where you need to go. His number is on the fridge.”

*Wow, my own private driver!*

“I have to get back to work now. I’ll see you later if I can. I’m teaching this afternoon and, I’ll be covering for the on-call surgeon tonight.”

“You mean I may not see you?”

“I can’t leave the hospital.”

Sherlock can’t help the sigh of frustration that escapes. After last night he was hoping he’d get to
be intimate with John this evening, to finally get some relief.

“I’m disappointed too, sweet boy. But being on call usually means lots of waiting around, so we could have dinner.”

Sherlock cheers up a bit. “Yes, Sir.”

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After showering and dressing in cargo shorts and a T-shirt, Sherlock goes to the kitchen to make coffee. He’s never used a Keurig before, but it takes him just seconds to figure it out. As he takes a sip, he feels a nagging craving for a cigarette. He’s wearing a patch, but coffee triggers the desire. Pushing it aside, he picks up a banana, then sits at the bar to read the instructions John has left him.

MONDAY

1. Update your tally!
2. Water the plants on the balcony.
3. Do my laundry.
4. Exercise if you can--gently. I picked up your bike and guitar yesterday. The bike is in my storage unit in the parking garage (code 1-8-9-5). If it hurts, just take a walk and stretch out your ribs. The guitar is in your bedroom.
5. Weigh yourself and write down everything you eat.
6. Turn in your notice at Rod’s. Offer to work two more weeks - it’s the right thing to do. Never burn bridges. Greg’s number is on the fridge.
7. Hand deliver notes to the Hoopers and Mrs. Hudson.
8. Stop by Greenfield’s and try on a tux. You will need one this weekend (I have a surprise). Martin is expecting you.
9. Call me when you finish all the errands.

When he finishes reading the list, his head is spinning a bit. He’s not sure how he’s going to fit everything in, but he remembers, that’s the plan. John wants to keep him busy. He rummages in the fridge and finds a cup of yogurt, then the cabinets, for a granola bar. Then another one. Maybe he can add a few ounces before he gets on the scale.

After eating, he weighs himself and writes 152 in the notebook. He makes another mark on the whiteboard, I, disrespect, #2. That’s a total of twelve, plus whatever he’s earned for the heroin. He bites his lip. That’s a lot; it’s going to hurt.

He wants to get the apologies out of the way ASAP. John has obviously figured out how to make him miserable when he deserves it. I’ll have to talk to them. He shudders. He texts Molly to see when she and her parents will be home. He wants to text Hudders in the hope of avoiding a conversation, but he knows John will expect him to call her, so he does. She doesn’t pick up Thank god and he leaves a message. Next, he texts Greg, and they work out an itinerary. Laundry, plants. He gets on his bike and actually enjoys a half hour spin along the river. He’s never biked there before. No pain at all. Tomorrow. When he gets back, he puts the laundry in the dryer but, before
he gets in the shower again, Ms. Hudson calls him back.

“Sherlock, I’m so glad you called! How are you feeling?”

“I’m good, Ms. H. I didn’t mean to overdose, please believe me. I’m just lucky that John found me.”

“You are ‘well’; grammar is important, even for a scientist. And you scared us terribly, young man.” He winces.

“I know. And I’m really, really sorry. Um, that was the reason I was calling actually. I, uh, wanted to know if I could, uh, drop off a letter I wrote? Today if possible, but you’re probably busy--”

“Never too busy for you, Sherlock. I’m home all day, taking it easy. Summer vacation, you know, one of the perks of being a teacher. What time works for you?”

Great. He works up the schedule again and hops in the shower. He’s left himself a little extra time to enjoy those side jets. They feel fantastic, and he does his stretches as the hot water massages his practically healed ribs.

*********

An hour later Sherlock is in the back of the sedan on the way to Ms. Hudson’s house. He hasn’t spoken to Greg yet. He’s still a bit annoyed about Friday night.

“Oh, come on, kid, I was just doing my job,” Greg says finally. “And he’s picky about being on time.”

Sherlock folds his arms and looks out of the window, scowling.

“He pays me; you don’t. It’s going to be a long summer if we’re not going to talk to one another.”

“I don’t need a babysitter.”

Greg looks at him skeptically, and Sherlock wonders if he knows what happened. “Maybe you do, maybe you don’t, but in any case, it’ll be more pleasant if we’re friends.”

Sherlock huffs. “I suppose.”

He looks over Greg’s shoulder at the picture clipped to the sun visor. In the photo are an attractive woman and a girl of about eight wearing red white and blue and holding mini American flags.

“Is that your family?” Sherlock asks, knowing full well that it is, but trying to make an effort at conversation.

“Yeah.”

“How long have you been divorced?”

“How did you know I’m divorced?”

“That’s an old picture, your daughter’s shirt says ‘Red, White, and Boom 2012’. If you were still married, you’d have a more recent one.”
“But I’m wearing a ring.” Greg holds up his left hand.

“Maybe you don’t want to be divorced.”

“I’ll be damned,” mutters Greg under his breath.

They pull up to a small brick house just outside of downtown. It’s in a fashionable neighborhood, with brick streets lined with restored 19th-century homes and quaint shops. Sherlock rings the doorbell, and Ms. Hudson opens the door almost immediately.

“Sherlock!!” She throws her arms around him and gives him a big hug and stands on tiptoe to kiss his cheek.

“Hi, Ms. H.”

“Do come in! I want you to meet Marie.” She takes his hand and pulls him inside.

“Marie! We have a visitor.”

A slight woman with short gray hair comes out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on a dishtowel.

“Marie, this is Sherlock, my best chem student this year. Maybe ever. Sherlock, this is my wife, Marie.”

Wife. Sherlock knew that same-sex marriage is now legal. His dad had made a huge deal of it, complained about it when the Supreme Court case was decided a couple of years ago. He’s known for some time that Ms. Hudson is a lesbian and that she wears a wedding ring. Still, meeting Marie makes it real, and he feels uplifted. Until now he’d felt disconnected and excluded from an aspect of life that other “normal” kids were experiencing, and the constant disapproval and ridicule from his father made him feel ashamed. But since meeting John, that burden is gradually falling away. Seeing Mrs. H and her wife makes it a bit lighter still. This is a life that happy “normal” people live. And don’t try to hide. Maybe he can be one of them someday.

They shake hands and exchange pleasantries, and then Marie excuses herself to finish the pie she is making and Ms. Hudson ushers Sherlock to the sitting room.

He hands her the note. “I’m sorry I worried you,” he begins, lamely.

“Oh, Sherlock, I had no idea it was so bad for you. I’m sorry that you’ve had to live that way. I wish you had spoken to me. But it doesn’t excuse the drugs, young man. That was extraordinarily stupid. You know that already, don’t you?”

“Yes, Ms. Hudson.” He looks at his shoes, fidgeting, as she opens the note and reads it.

“Apology accepted. So you’re staying with John?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I have my reservations about him too, but after watching him defend you on Saturday... Just be careful, Sherlock.”

As if in explanation, he says, “He’s making me take summer classes.”

“Good.” She sounds slightly surprised. “And what about applying to college? It’s too late for Fall semester, but you should get cracking if you want to start in Spring.”
He bites his lip and doesn’t know why it’s so hard, but it is. Asking for help has never been easy for him. Accepting help has never been easy either, except from John. “Do you think you could, you know, help me, Ms. Hudson?”

She gives him a warm smile. “Of course I will. I’ll email you the website for the Common Application – most schools use that, and you can call me with questions. We should talk about what schools to apply to-- Oh, and I’ll look at your essay.”

*Essay! Shit.*

“OK, sure. I really need to go now. I have to visit the Hoopers too.”

“Sherlock, remember, you cannot take chances like that ever again. Your life is not your own and when it’s over it’s not you who will miss it, but those who care about you. Death is a curse on the living. Poor Molly was terrified; we all were.”

“I know. I want to apologize to her too.”

They walk to the front door, and she hugs him again. “You and John should come next weekend for Pride,” she says. “The parade goes right past our house. We have a big party.”

“Pride?”

“Yes dear, the Pride parade. *Gay Pride.*”

“Oh.” He’s heard of this but never imagined going himself.

“It’s wonderful, Sherlock, you should come.”

“I’ll think about it,” he says as he waves goodbye. Who knows? He might even enjoy it.

*******

The next stop is Molly’s house, and she is on the front steps waiting for him as they pull into the driveway. She runs to the car and throws her arms around him when he steps out.

“Oh Sherlock!” she sighs into his chest. He hugs her back awkwardly.

“I was so scared for you,” she says, not letting go.

“I know. I’m sorry. But I’m OK.”

She pulls away. “Well, you almost weren’t OK.” Her voice is angry now. “How dare you! How dare you poison that beautiful mind, and how dare you do that to the people who care about you!” Her eyes are flashing, and he’s almost afraid she’s going to slap him.

“Molly, I --”

She throws her arms around him again and squeezes hard enough to hurt his ribs.

“I know. I know, Sherlock. It’s just that I thought you were going to die.” She hugs him for a few more seconds then steps away, wiping at her eyes.
Sherlock stands there miserably, not knowing what to do, then remembers the note and pulls it from the pocket of his shorts.

“This is for you and your parents. It’s an apology note. And I am sorry, Molly. I don’t have friends. I only have one. You know that don’t you? I’ve always been alone, and and it’s protected me…But I’m glad that I have you.”

“Alone doesn’t protect you. Friends protect you. Like you protected me. Idiot. And you had Vic.”

“Yeah well, not anymore.” He looks away and shoves his hands into his pockets. “I don’t want to talk about him.”

“OK then, what about John?”

“I don’t know Molly. He’s great. I… I… Molly, I don’t know what the hell is happening between us but I really like him, and I’m afraid.” He can’t believe he’s telling her this.

She puts her hand on his arm. “Afraid? Why?” she asks, alarm in her voice.

“No, not afraid that way. He makes me feel safe. And good. So good. I mean like, even a good person.” He feels a bit of heat on his cheeks. “But he’s only here for the summer.” The people I care about most leave me.

“Oh Sherlock, I’m sorry.”

He shrugs, ‘I’ll be fine. Hey, I’ll still have you right?’ He laughs, trying to lighten the mood.

“Of course. Always,” she smiles.

“So, you seriously have a driver?” She makes a face and hooks her thumb over her shoulder at Greg.

“Pretty cool, huh?” he says.

“Like, yeah!”

“I’ve got a few more stops to make, d’you want to come?”

“Are you kidding? I might never get another chance!”

They climb into the back seat. Greg raises his eyebrows in the rearview mirror.

“Oh come on, I’m sure John won’t mind,” Sherlock says. “He likes Molly.”

“If you say so,” Greg says, and then turns to look at Molly.

“Hello, Miss. You must be a special young lady to put up with Mr. Personality here.”

Sherlock rolls his eyes but doesn’t respond. Molly giggles.

They head for Rod’s. He’s always in on Tuesday to order inventory and John’s right again. Rod’s quite friendly about it. “I always expect kids to leave after graduation, so don’t worry about it. If you wouldn’t mind staying on till I get somebody; it won’t take long. And you’re always welcome back.”

Then on to Martin’s.
Molly is seriously impressed. “A tux?! Is he taking you to meet the queen?”

“No, I have to get a top coat for that. Next week.” She punches him in the shoulder.

“Ow! I don’t know. He says it’s a surprise.” He tries to play it cool, but a little boy smile sneaks out.

Molly pretend-pouts and says, “Why can’t I find a boyfriend like that?”

Seriously, he says, “You will, Molly. You really deserve it. I just got lucky.”

“Bullshit, Sherlock. You deserve it as much as anybody. Just don’t screw it up.”

He shakes his head. “Seriously. I almost did.” They’re both quiet for a moment. Then Sherlock tells her about Ms. Hudson, her wife, their little brick house. He mentions the parade and is surprised when she expresses interest in going.

“It’s supposed to be a real blast. Of course I want to go.” She slides over on the seat and links elbows with him.

They don’t notice Greg smiling at them in the rearview mirror.

********

Martin is thrilled to see him and to meet Molly. “Sherlock is lucky to have you for a friend, young lady. He is lucky in general.” He looks sadly at Sherlock. “It’s a gift, Sherlock, not to be taken lightly.”

Sherlock is embarrassed, realizing that John has told Martin what happened, and he doesn’t know what to do. Molly saves him by saying, “I already told him how he scared us.”

There is a quiet, heavy moment and Martin claps his hands twice. “Enough! The past is for remembering and the present is for the living. Let’s get you fitted, young man. You are going to look spectacular in this tuxedo. But I’m not allowed to tell what it’s for.” He grins, enjoying being in on the secret. And he’s right. Sherlock does look spectacular. The satin lapels set off his pale skin and the stripes running up his legs make them look endless. When Martin finishes tying his bowtie, he and Molly stand silently and look.

“What? What’s wrong?” He looks down at himself nervously and Martin says, “No, no, chin up. Now turn around.”

Sherlock turns around, and for a moment he can’t find himself. It isn’t until he catches sight of his face in the mirror that he realizes it isn’t a mannequin or a life-size cutout, it’s him. He is...handsome. Elegant, even. He turns his head to look over his shoulder and Molly and Martin nod.

“Wow,” he says.

“Yeah, wow,” Molly echoes.

Martin picks up his pincushion and heads towards him. “I agree. Now let’s make it perfect.” He fusses over him for half an hour or so. “You’ll have to come one more time for the final fitting, but
do not bring the doctor.” He shakes his finger at him. “He’s not to see you before the event. It will be an unveiling.”

*********

They drop Molly off at her house and drive toward the hospital. Sherlock thinks about how Greg and Martin both seem to know about John and Sherlock and whatever they are. He felt embarrassed at first. Now he has a different thought. John is not ashamed of them. Greg and Martin are good people. Molly and Ms. Hudson duh. Mycroft, votes aren’t in yet. They all know. And it makes him feel safe. It confirms his initial instincts about John, that he can trust him and surrender to him without fear. Except for the fear of it ending.

Sherlock picks up his phone and brings up his favorites. There are only three: John, Molly and Rod’s. He can’t bring himself to make Mycroft a “favorite.” He decides to text to keep the conversation private. Greg doesn’t need to know everything, although Sherlock suspects he knows quite a lot.

**SH:** On our way – is it still OK to come for dinner?

**JW:** Yes, looking forward to it. Did you get everything done?

**SH:** Yes, Sir.

**JW:** Good boy

**SH:** :)

**JW:** Can’t wait to see you. I’ve been thinking about you.

He leans his head back against the seat and closes his eyes, but his fingers tap restlessly on his thighs. He feels a little flutter of anticipation in his chest, followed by a warmth that seems to radiate through his bones and he smiles. John’s been thinking about me.

*********

Dinner in the hospital cafeteria is hardly romantic, or anything like what Sherlock had hoped would happen tonight, but just being with John is good. He’s wearing a lab coat over his scrubs and looks tired, with the beginnings of bags under his eyes, but he seems genuinely happy to be with him.

“I delivered the notes to the Hoopers and Ms. Hudson. I met Ms. Hudson’s wife.”

“Oh?”
“Yes, that was… strange, but cool,” says Sherlock, chewing on a french fry.

“Sherlock, you know it’s not unusual, right? Gay marriage is legal here. You could be married someday.”

Sherlock blinks.

John laughs. “Someday, Sherlock. You’re only eighteen. I’m just saying it’s something you can look forward to.”

“Have you ever been married?” Sherlock asks.

“Yes.”

The fries stick in Sherlock’s throat, and he has to take a drink to keep from choking.

“Um. OK. Are you married now?”

“No. That’s not something I would keep from you, Sherlock. Trust, remember?” Sherlock looks away for a moment and John takes his hand. Sherlock doesn’t even care that someone might see them. “And since I know you’re wondering, I was married to a woman. It didn’t work out. And that’s a story for another time.”

John finishes his burger and wipes his mouth with the paper napkin.

“I’m going to have to get back soon. Don’t forget to write that down.” He gestures towards Sherlock’s empty tray.

Sherlock has a moment of panic when he realizes he forgot to eat lunch. He rationalizes that John didn’t tell him he had to eat, only that he should write everything down. Technically. He changes the subject.

“Can we watch the parade?”

“What, Pride?”

“Yes, Ms. Hudson invited us.”

“Of course! I think that’s a wonderful idea. With all that’s happened, I’d forgotten about it.”

“I’ve never been.”

“Then you are in for a treat. Finish up there, and I’ll show you where I work.”

*******

After a short tour of the cardiac wing, John takes him up in the elevator to the third floor. Another doctor gets on and stands in front of them. John takes the opportunity to pinch Sherlock’s ass. He gasps, and the other doctor looks over his shoulder at him. When he turns back around, Sherlock glares at John, who grins cockily. They exit and head down a quiet corridor. John stops in front of a closed door and raps on it twice. When no one answers, he opens the door and pulls Sherlock inside, closing it behind them.
The light is off but there’s a window with drawn shades, letting in sunlight around the edges, and Sherlock can see that it’s a small room with a cabinet, a sink and two single beds that look like they’ve been slept in.

“I don’t have much time, but you deserve a reward for following all of my instructions today, don’t you think?”

“Yes, Sir.” Sherlock breathes faster and tingles of anticipation dance in his groin as John pulls him close and kisses him. He slides his arms around John’s shoulders and lets him explore his mouth and nibble along his neck. Then John’s hand is on the front of his shorts. After last night, after having John all over him, being so turned on and not being allowed to come, his dick stirs immediately, and he pushes his hips forward. A low moan escapes his throat.

John chuckles. “Yes sweetheart, I know. I know you need it. You’ve been such a good boy today. My good boy. Tell me what you want.”

“I want you.”

“I’m right here, be more specific,” John says, as his hand massages Sherlock’s cock through the fabric of his shorts.

“I want your mouth,” Sherlock says in a whisper, his mind focused on the growing urgency between his legs.

“Better. But not good enough. Try again. And mind the rules this time.”

“I...I want you to suck my dick, Sir.”

"Right. Good. Always ask for what you want Sherlock.”

“Yes, Sir.” Please, please, hurry John.

John sits on the edge of one of the beds, pulls Sherlock to stand between his thighs and begins to unbutton and unzip his shorts. They fall to the floor around his ankles. He’s wearing snug boxer briefs, and his hard cock is outlined under the thin material.

“Oh, sweetheart, look at you,” John says. He slides his hands up the back of Sherlock’s thighs and to his ass. Sherlock feels the softness of John’s hair between his fingers as John places a kiss on his cock through the cotton, then mouths it from the bottom up to the tip.

Sherlock groans and rolls his hips forward, fingers closing on fistfuls of short hair. Heat and tension gather low in his belly and when John flattens his tongue and presses it against him in just the right spot, Oh, yes, right there he can’t stop it, and like a freight train it overtakes him, I’m coming.

“I’m coming,” he gasps, and the waves crash over him, buttocks clenching, lungs drawing in great gulps of air.

Warm wetness spreads across his groin where John’s mouth is still pressed against him.

“Oh shit.” Sherlock steps away and looks down in dismay at his wet underwear, then up at John. “I’m so sorry.” His cheeks burn with embarrassment.

John laughs and stands to take Sherlock’s face in his hands. “Nothing to be sorry about, love. You’re eighteen, it’s expected. And besides, I like to think it’s because I’m so sexy. Knowing I can
bring you off that quickly turns me on just as much. He kisses Sherlock lightly. “Love.” John’s used this expression before. Maybe it’s a British thing? Meaningless.

There’s a rap a the door and Sherlock jumps, and with his shorts pooled around his ankles, almost falls over before John steadies him. He looks at the door with horror.

“Occupied,” says John loudly, then more quietly to Sherlock, “No one comes in here without knocking first, it’s an unwritten rule. He grins. “I’m not the only one with a gorgeous boyfriend. Let’s get you cleaned up and on your way home, I’ve got work to do.”

Off come the shoes and shorts, then the soaked and sticky briefs. “I think I’ll just throw these away and go home commando,” Sherlock says and drops them into the trash can as John hands him paper towels from the dispenser over the sink.

As he’s wiping himself off, John asks, “So how does your chest feel?”

“Hardly hurts now.”

“Good, tomorrow then. We’ll get Saturday’s disaster behind us, I think, and save the rest for the weekend.”

“OK. Yes, Sir.”

Sherlock swallows hard and takes a breath.

“What’s gonna happen, exactly? You haven’t told me, Sir.”

“The crop. You sold it to me just over three weeks ago, and I believe it’s time that we tried it out. What you did was almost unforgivable, Sherlock. You belong to me, and I nearly lost you. That warrants a harsh punishment. Eighteen strokes. One for each year of the life you almost threw away. Tomorrow.”

Sherlock’s eyes widen, and a shiver runs down his spine. He’s been wanting and dreading the crop since the day John walked into the shop and turned his world upside down. And now that he’s staring it in the face, he wishes his introduction to it would have been under different circumstances, but the way John has described it seems fitting. He says, “Yes, Sir,” and John draws him in close for a more meaningful kiss, turns him around and gives him a swat on the ass. Sherlock yelps out of surprise and rubs, pouting at John over his shoulder, just to get a smile out of him.

“Go on, sweet boy. You’re too tempting.”

“Do you know when you’ll be home?”

“No telling. Now go!”

“Yes, Sir!”
The crop finally gets some use, and our lovely boy loses his virginity.

The doors to the fourteenth floor open with a “ding” and Sherlock walks toward #1410. Home. For now anyway. John has given him a key, and this makes him feel like he belongs here. The woman at the front desk, Lana, had waved at him as he crossed the lobby without asking him to sign in. His status had apparently been upgraded from visitor to resident.

He’d worked his usual Wednesday shift at Rod’s today. Rod was in and let him know that he’d only need him through the end of the week. He isn’t sure yet what John has planned for him. Classes certainly, but there had been the talk of a job at the hospital. He keeps meaning to bring it up but things have been happening so quickly, he hasn’t had the chance yet.

He waves the key card across the reader and when the light turns green, enters the condo.

His eyes immediately find John, seated on the sofa with a drink in his hand. He’s wearing khakis with a navy polo shirt and his feet are bare, as usual. His face splits in a broad smile when he sees Sherlock.

“Sherlock!”

“Hello, Sir!” Sherlock can’t hide the happiness in his voice. John hadn’t been able to come home last night, and Sherlock had slept alone in John’s bedroom, dutifully leaving his clothes on the chair outside the door and sliding naked between the sheets, his head buried in John’s pillow. He’d stayed awake as long as he could, waiting, but in the end, succumbed to sleep. John hadn’t been there when he left for work this morning.

Sherlock practically bounds across the living room to the sofa and slides to his knees in front of John.

“Ahem.”

Sherlock freezes then turns his head slowly toward the kitchen. Myc.

Myc is standing behind the breakfast bar, pouring bourbon over ice. He looks quite at home. He picks up the glass and takes a drink before speaking.

“Hello, Sherlock.”

Sherlock’s muscles tense involuntarily at the sight of Myc and then feels heat in his cheeks when he realizes what his brother just witnessed, that he’s on his knees. The condescension had practically dripped from Myc’s words. He looks back at John, who gives him a reassuring smile, and the anxiety melts away.

Sherlock slides down and shifts, sitting on his heels with his back against the sofa and leans against John’s leg. He looks directly at Mycroft with his best “…and the horse you rode in on” look. John rests a hand on his shoulder.
“Hello, Myc,” Sherlock says.

“Myc came back today to tie up loose ends with your father and to check up on you, to make sure I’m treating you well.” John’s hand wanders up from Sherlock’s shoulder to finger a lock of hair at the nape of his neck.

Even though John and Myc are cordial, and might even be plotting behind his back about god knows what, there is a tension between them, a rivalry even. John seems to be flaunting his closeness and influence over Sherlock, something Myc has never been able to achieve, and this thought makes Sherlock’s lip quirk up in a lopsided grin.

“I went by the house today and talked to Dad. He said he tried to call you yesterday.”

“I don’t want to talk to him. I blocked his number.”

“Well, he wanted to tell you that he’s in rehab, court ordered, as a condition of his release. And he wanted to say he’s sorry.”

Sherlock shrugs. “I’m tired of hearing that. I’m tired of him. I hope he gets sober, but I’m so done with feeling...the way he makes me feel. I’m not talking to him.” He remembers the scene in the auditorium, being humiliated in front of all those people, and he just can’t forgive it. Maybe not ever...

“I understand Sherlock, and it’s probably for the best at the moment. I brought some of your things; I put them in your bedroom here.”

“Did you bring the picture of Mom?”

“Yes, of course I did. I knew you’d want it,” Myc says, and Sherlock hears something close to tenderness in his voice.

“Thanks, Myc.”

“And, with all that’s happened, I completely forgot to give you your graduation gift!” Myc says. He crosses the room and pauses to pick up a gift-wrapped box that had been hidden behind a chair. He hands the box to Sherlock, who stares at it.

“Aren’t you going to try to guess?” Myc says.

“You should have seen us at Christmas,” he tells John. No matter how well our poor mother wrapped the gifts, we always guessed most of them. It was a kind of competition, wasn’t it Sherlock? Oh, and forget Santa Claus. Sherlock, how old were you when you figured that out?”

“Five, I think.”

“Yes, well you were a bit slow. I was three.”

“You are such an asshole Myc.” There’s almost no bitterness in his voice, and Mycroft notices. His lip twitches and he says, “I’m an asshole who bought you an expensive gift. Please open it. I know you already know what it is.”

Sherlock slides off the wrapping paper to reveal an Apple MacBook Air.

“I thought that would come in handy for college,” Myc says.

Sherlock is staring down at the box, temporarily at a loss for words.
“Myc...I...Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Just make sure you put it to good use. Don’t sell it to buy drugs.”

Sherlock shoots him a wounded look, and John says “Myc--”

“Sorry! Sorry!” Myc says, holding up his hands. But really. Don’t.”

“I’ll make sure he doesn’t,” John says. “He’s going to be so busy there will be no danger of that.”

“Good. Then I’ll leave you two to do...whatever it is you do. And judging by the whiteboard on the fridge it’s going to be painful. I’m catching a plane back to D.C. tonight and I’ll be out of the country for the next few weeks, but I’ll keep in touch.”

Sherlock flushes bright red, and his mouth drops open.

John stands, and the two men shake hands.

“I’ll let myself out. Goodbye, Sherlock.”

Sherlock closes his mouth but remains speechless.

John nudges him with his foot. “Manners, Sherlock.”

Sherlock looks up at him and gives his head a little shake to snap himself out of the shock--Myc knows what they’re doing.

“Bye, Myc, and, um, thanks again for the computer.”

After the door closes behind Myc, Sherlock says, “Oh, god that was humiliating.” He gives John a glare. “Did you tell him?”

“Trust, Sherlock, remember? Our relationship is our business. Besides, do you really think your brother needs me to tell him what’s going on? Open your gift.” John sits back down on the sofa and watches as Sherlock opens the box and runs his hands over the computer. Its silver surface is sleek and smooth. It’s beautiful, and he can scarcely believe it’s his. He traces the Apple logo with his fingertip.

“He cares about you; you know that, right?”

“I know. He’s just... I don’t know; he’s just so damn... sanctimonious!”

“Sanctimonious,” John laughs. "Now that’s a big word. I’m sure your English teachers would be proud.”

Sherlock feels a little chuckle escape his throat. He leans his head back onto the sofa and looks up at John, smiling.

John combs his fingers through Sherlock’s hair, and he closes his eyes and sighs as John begins to massage his scalp.

“Feel good?”

Sherlock nods slightly and says “Yes, Sir,” his eyes still closed. John’s fingers alternate between gently tugging at his curls and rubbing circles at his temples and behind his ears.
“I like to make you feel good,” John murmurs and Sherlock feels lips pressed lightly against his forehead. He opens his eyes and looks into John’s deep blue ones, upside down, above him.

John slides one hand under Sherlock’s T-shirt, and brushes it across his chest, making his nipples harden. Sherlock hums.

“I’m going to take you apart tonight Sherlock, after we clear the slate. You’ll feel lighter when it’s over, I promise.” John kisses the tip of his nose, his hand still stroking his chest.

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They have dinner on the balcony again, exchanging stories about their day and Sherlock is struck again at how easy it is to talk to him. He feels none of the awkwardness and fear he usually does, even with Molly or Ms. H. It just feels right; comfortable. Until John looks at his watch and raises his eyebrows at the time. “We have a lot to get to tonight, Sherlock. I’ll tidy up here; you go take a shower and be--”

He gets up and begins to make his way through the living room. “I know. Thorough.”

John gives him a half smile. “Clever boy. Take the crop off the mantel and leave it on the chair. Outside the bedroom.”

Sherlock freezes then turns to look at John over his shoulder. The smile is gone.

“Go on then.”

Sherlock approaches the mantel like he’s walking through a minefield to reach a rattlesnake. He knows the crop won’t bite him, but he is still reluctant to touch it. “Don’t keep me waiting please. Hurry.”

Sherlock says, “Yes, Sir,” and picks it up gingerly. When he reaches the chair, he pauses and, runs his fingers up and down the black leather shaft. It’s one of the longer crops that Rod carries, to suit the mostly little girls taking lessons. It’s all black from the wrapped handle to the braided rod and the flat tip. It’s a beautiful object, and the smell of leather is intoxicating. He sighs as a mental image of John holding it comes to him. Intimidating and erotic in equal measure.

He places the crop delicately on the seat, then goes to shower. He doesn’t enjoy it. He is on that edge, the one that John keeps him on, where fear meets excitement, dread slides into anticipation. First, he’ll get through the punishment and John said they will be able to leave that horrible day behind them, forever, he hopes. And then...he is ready; eager even. But that little shiver runs up his spine again as he cleans himself as thoroughly as he dares.

He brushes his teeth and then appraises himself in the mirror. The love mark that John left on his collarbone is fading, and he touches it, then turns and looks over his shoulder at his smooth white buttocks, imagining what they might look like later, or even tomorrow. Will there be welts? Bruises? A part of him hopes so. He wants to get the guilt behind him, but somehow the thought of carrying marks on his body from John is thrilling. Facing the mirror again, he squares his shoulders and takes a deep breath. You can do this. He wraps a towel around his waist and makes his way to the chair, where he drops the towel and picks up the crop. He knocks, and John tells him to come in.
He stands there, holding the crop, unsure what to do. John holds out his hand, and Sherlock walks to him gratefully. “The first time I saw you, I told you I would whip you and fuck you, but I didn’t see it happening this way. And I never thought it would be because I’d almost lost you. And that I’d want to fuck you to prove to myself that you’re still here. But it is what it is. Kneel for me.”

Sherlock drops to his knees in front of him and John starts the litany that he’s used before. “Why are you being punished, Sherlock?”

“Because I broke the rules, Sir.”

“Which rules?”

“Um, number five, to take care of my health. No drugs.”

“That’s right. And what else?”

Sherlock looks confused. “I thought we were only going to take care of Saturday today, Sir.”

“That’s still true. You broke two other rules on Saturday. If you had followed those, I wouldn’t have let you break the other one.” He pauses. “You don’t know.”

Sherlock shakes his head and then remembers. “No, Sir.”

“Well, that’s my fault then, for not making the rules clear enough. We’ll work on that. Tell me Rule number four.”

Sherlock recites, “I am to give myself freely to Sir. I am to be open and honest, trusting the ability of Sir to help me feel safe in expressing myself.”

“Do you see now?”

Sherlock repeats, “No, Sir. How did I break that one? By running away?”

John looks at him sadly and reaches out to touch his cheek. “No, sweet boy. In your place, I would have run away myself. What did you tell me about why you needed that heroin? What were you afraid of?”

“I was afraid,” Sherlock clears his throat, “that you would leave me.”

“And Rule number seven?”

Sherlock drops his eyes and recites again. “I will be available by phone at all times. If I am unable to answer, I must call as soon as possible.”

“So. If you had trusted me enough to be able to help you feel safe, to be able to talk to me, you would have known that I would never have left you because of your father. We could have talked. But we couldn’t talk, could we? Why’s that?” John uses the crop to lift Sherlock’s chin. “Hmm?”

Sherlock can’t meet his eyes. “Because I didn’t answer my phone.”

“If you had answered your phone, I would have reminded you of my responsibility to you. What’s my first rule?”

Sherlock whispers this time. “I promise to care for and protect SH. I will help, teach, guide and discipline him. All decisions I make will be with his well-being in mind.”
“So you didn’t believe that I would take care of you, protect you just when you needed me the most. We’ll have to work on that too, then.”

The weight of his guilt returns and Sherlock stretches forward, hugging John’s legs. “No, no, it was my fault. I was afraid and I’m so, so sorry. Please punish me now. Please, Sir!”

John reaches down and strokes his hair.

“I will. You’re ready now.” He pulls Sherlock to his feet and brings him to the wall. “Bend over and put your hands on the wall. I expect you to hold your position, but I’m not asking you to count or thank me. What’s the punishment going to be?”

“Eighteen with the crop, Sir. One for each year of my life.”

“Right. And when it’s over, it’s over, Sherlock. We start fresh. Get ready.”

John slides the shaft across the cheeks of Sherlock’s ass and takes the measure of his stance. When he is satisfied, he sets his feet and draws his arm back. Sherlock hears the whistle of the crop through the air and thinks he understands the force behind it, but when it lands, it takes his breath away. It is completely different from the paddle, which was a flat, thudding, deep pain. This is a line of fire across his skin. And John doesn’t hold back. He’s barely caught his breath before the next stroke falls. He gasps out loud and hears John say, “Two. Breathe Sherlock.”

He tries, but numbers three and four have him panting. John puts his hand on Sherlock’s back momentarily and speaks again. “Deep breaths.” John is laying the strokes carefully so that none overlap so far, but as the count climbs, he runs out of room on Sherlock’s ass and moves lower. “Try to relax as much as you can.” Sherlock sees the wisdom of the advice, but he can’t help but tighten up in anticipation. When John strikes the back of his thighs for the first time, Sherlock sees the first tear spill over his eyelid and fall to the floor. At the halfway point the blows begin to double over each other, and he has trouble holding still. John puts a steadying hand on his back again but he can’t keep his feet still. His head jerks up and his shoulders heave as the tears turn into sobs. He has completely lost track of the numbers and is vaguely aware of being grateful that John hadn’t made him count. He hears himself cry out three times and suddenly he is in John’s arms.

“All finished, sweet boy. I forgive you.” It is a relief to hear the words and for a few seconds he forgets the burning pain covering his ass and legs. He lays his head on John’s shoulder and between gulps of air and crying, he chokes out, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry...”

John hushes him, “I know, I know you are, but it’s all over now. No more apologies. You’re forgiven. You don’t have to worry about it anymore. The punishment is done. We start fresh now. It’s all in the past.” He strokes the back of Sherlock’s head and allows him to cry as long as he needs to. He takes him by the hand and leads him to the bed where he helps him to lie down on his side and holds him until the shuddering breaths slow and then even out. “Feel better now?”

Sherlock nods into John’s chest. “Yes, Sir. You were right. I do feel lighter.”

“Unfortunately for you, Sherlock, you have a conscience, and it’s quite painful sometimes. Punishment helps you feel better. You have me. You don’t need to punish yourself. I’m going to get a flannel to soothe you now. I’ll be right back.” Sherlock flips over onto his belly and winces when he felt the welts with his fingertips and heat radiating off his backside. He tries to look over his shoulder but can’t see much. John comes back with a cool, wet washcloth and kneels beside Sherlock. He lays it carefully on the bright red skin and purpling stripes and Sherlock inhales sharply. John leaves it for a few moments as he blows gently on the welts on his legs, and it cools the burning flesh. He moves the cloth to Sherlock’s thighs and alternates the cooling breaths with
feather-light kisses. Sherlock closes his eyes and concentrates on the warring sensations, the burn and the brush of lips, the burn and the soothing current of air. Then he feels a finger gliding gently over his buttocks again and again. John must be tracing each mark.

“Lovely,” John says softly. “Lift up, sweet boy.”

Sherlock rises to his knees and places his hands on the mattress. His dick is half hard and he wants to touch it or wants John to. Instead, John nudges his legs apart then uses his thumbs very gently on Sherlock's ass cheeks to spread them. He feels John blow air across his burning skin and on the unmarked but sensitive area now exposed. The anticipation is excruciating.

“Color?”

“Green,” says Sherlock without hesitation. He is suddenly filled with an overwhelming desire. To be touched, to be filled, to be John’s. At this moment he doesn't think there is anything he’s not willing to do for this man. He feels John’s tongue lap against his perineum, then travels upward to his hole, licking over and over. It feels exquisite, and he begins to moan. John’s tongue swirls for a moment, then pushes inside him. Sherlock’s head is reeling from the overload of sensation. The pain on the skin of his legs and ass, his throbbing dick and oh sweet Jesus, the feeling of being fucked by John’s hot tongue. His head hangs down between his shoulders, and he watches the pre-come drip from his body.

“Please, Sir. I want to touch myself.”

John pulls away. “Not yet, but soon,” he says, getting to his feet and pulling Sherlock to his so that they are standing beside the bed. When John draws Sherlock in for a kiss, he can taste himself in John’s mouth, and it’s so erotically filthy. Sherlock runs his fingers through John’s hair, and he is so desperately hungry for him, that he’s almost panting. He presses his erection against John’s stomach and can feel John’s against his hip, and he suddenly wants it in his mouth, must have it in his mouth, and he slides slowly to his knees, trailing his hands down John’s body.

He looks at John’s penis, hard and glistening, for just a moment, then up at John through his lashes. Then, while still looking into John’s eyes, slides the foreskin back with his hand and covers the head with his mouth. John’s eyes flutter and close, and his hands go to Sherlock’s head where they rest lightly. Sherlock begins to stroke with his hand and mouth as John rolls his hips into him.

“Oh, Sherlock, Oh yes. God. Your mouth. Your mouth,” John breathes, as Sherlock continues to suck and stroke. Finally, he rests his hands on John’s hips and relaxes his throat, a skill he learned in back rooms and dark alleys, and lets John fuck his mouth as deeply as he can.

After a few minutes, John pulls away and stands there, looking down at him, chest heaving. “Oh, you amazing, beautiful thing,” he says, “I want you so much, come here.” John sinks down on the mattress and pulls Sherlock with him. Sherlock scrambles up on to the bed and crawls to lie on top of John, searching for his mouth. John’s arms wrap around him, holding him tightly. Their lips meet, and they kiss and bite and lick, and Sherlock does not want to stop. Wants to kiss John forever. He grinds his hips and feels John’s cock slide against his own.

John begins nibbling his neck and jawline, then flicks his tongue over Sherlock’s earlobe.

“Remember how I told you to tell me what you want? You know what I want, don’t you?”

“Yes, Sir,” Sherlock whispers.

“I’m going to tell you anyway, my gorgeous boy, I want to put my cock inside you, I want to fuck
you until you pass out. I want to possess you completely. This is what I’ve wanted from the first
day I met you. I’ve waited Sherlock. I’ve waited for you to be ready. Tell me, are you ready?”

Sherlock doesn’t have to think about the answer. He wants John more than anything he can
remember wanting before. He pulls away to look at him. “Yes, Sir.”

“If you could, I’d love you. This is what I’ve wanted from the first
day I met you. I’ve waited Sherlock. I’ve waited for you to be ready. Tell me, are you ready?”

Sherlock doesn’t have to think about the answer. He wants John more than anything he can
remember wanting before. He pulls away to look at him. “Yes, Sir.”

“Use your colors.”

“Green, Sir.”

“Oh, Sherlock.” John brushes his fingers through Sherlock’s bangs and looks at him with such
tenderness that Sherlock’s heart seems to stop for an instant and he feels dangerously close to
saying... I love you. Instead, he pushes this ridiculous thought away and says instead: “Tell me
what to do.”

John smiles at him. “You should be on top, that way you have total control. You’ll be able
to protect your sore arse. And I can see you; I want to look at you, watch your face when you come.”

“If it hurts?” Sherlock looks apprehensively at John’s thick cock.

“It might. I’m not small. It’s important to relax and go slow. You can stop anytime, Sherlock. Do
you understand?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Move off for a minute.”

Sherlock obeys, and John reaches to the nightstand for lube and then scoots back to a semi-sitting
position against the pillows and headboard. He motions for Sherlock to straddle him. John squirts
lube onto his hand and passes it over Sherlock’s cock in a long smooth tug, base to tip and Sherlock
gasps with pleasure. Then he passes it over his own cock, lying hard against his belly. Adding
more lube to his fingers, he slides them under Sherlock’s balls and slowly presses a finger in.

Sherlock grabs the top rail of the headboard with both hands as John’s finger slides in and out of
him. It feels good, easy so far. After a minute or so, John slides in a second finger and leaves it
there.

“Are you OK?”

“Yes, Sir.”

Sherlock feels John’s fingers move inside of him and a subtle pleasure begins radiating through his
groin as his prostate is stroked.

“Oooh,” he moans.

“OK now, let’s give it a try,” John says, removing his fingers. “Take my hand.”

When John holds up his hand, Sherlock takes it and their fingers interlock. It feels grounding and
intimate. Sherlock looks at their joined hands then into John’s eyes and is overcome by a calm
certainty. There is no turning back, and he doesn’t want to.

John takes hold of his own cock and Sherlock raises his hips above it. Still looking into John’s
eyes, he lowers himself slowly until he feels the head against him.

“Breathe,” John says.
He hadn’t realized he was holding his breath and he exhales.

“Now push.”

He does as John says and lowers himself a bit more and feels pressure, then a bit lower still and John slides into him, just a few inches.

Sherlock let out an exclamation, “Oh!” and pops off. It did hurt.

“Relax, sweetheart. Take your time,” John says. There are beads of sweat on his forehead and he is obviously trying to be patient.

Sherlock tries to relax and lowers himself onto John’s cock again. This time, when it slides in he stays still and concentrates on breathing.

It hurts, but after a few seconds, the pain fades away as his body adjusts. He lowers himself further and further, inch by inch until John is completely buried inside him. _John is inside me._ He hasn’t moved yet, is just soaking in the sensation when John’s hand goes to his hip.

“Oh, god Sherlock, you feel so good, so tight.”

Sherlock raises himself until John is almost out then lowers himself again. John moans underneath him and tightens his grip. There is no pain at all now, and Sherlock moves a little faster. As he tilts his pelvis to explore how he can avoid the sting of the welts on his skin, he suddenly feels the head of John’s cock brush against his prostate. He moans and starts to grind down, but hisses against the pain and lifts himself up again. He lets go of John’s hand and places both hands on his chest and starts moving back and forth, feeling the friction of John’s cock deep inside of him and his own against John’s tight stomach. He’s so keyed up from the sensations he begins to lose his rhythm, and John uses his hands to gently guide him back into smooth motion. They groan together and John asks him breathlessly, “Are you alright?”

“Fuck, yes.”

“Oh, then, beautiful, I’m going to move a little bit, just because you feel amazing, and you’re doing such a good job, I’m gonna help, so tell me if it’s too much. Ready?”

“Yes, yes, god, yes.”

John huffs out a laugh and pushes his hips up gently and Sherlock pushes back, choosing the pleasure of being full over the pain left by the crop.

John speeds up the pace of his thrusts, and tells Sherlock, “I’m close, Sherlock, but I want you to come first, so touch yourself, I wanna watch you come on my cock.”

Sherlock whimpers and takes himself with his right hand and begins stroking as John drives into him. _Oh god, oh god yes, fuck me, John. I’m going to come, yes I’m going to come with you inside me. Oh shit, yes. So good. So good. John. John. Oh, John._

“Look at me, you gorgeous thing, look at me, I wanna come in your arse, but you first, now, I wanna watch you.”

Sherlock is panting and his fist is flying over his cock, and he opens his eyes to do as John says and the adoration he sees on his face triggers a climax that has him shooting thick come all over John’s belly and chest.
“That’s it, there you are, my sweet boy, ah, ah, ah.” John arches his back as Sherlock’s orgasm tightens the muscles surrounding him and he fills Sherlock’s ass with his own release.

Sherlock collapses as John pulls him to his chest and they lie, pressed together, trying to catch their breath. John holds Sherlock’s face between his hands, kissing him, his mouth, his face, and whispering to him, “Are you alright, how do you feel? You’re ok, right? Tell me. You were perfect, Sherlock, tell me you’re alright.”

Sherlock feels boneless, draped over John, and tries to answer, but is only able to giggle soundlessly as John continues to cover his face with kisses. John skitters his fingers up and over Sherlock’s ribs and he wriggles and feels John’s cock slip out of him.

“Don’t tell me you’re ticklish too?”

Sherlock is breathless. “No, no, I’m not, I swear,” but he can’t keep from laughing.

John rolls Sherlock over onto his side and tickles his belly. Sherlock squirms and tightens his lips to keep more giggles from giving him away. Then John pulls him close. “I see. Not at all. Now, one more time, tell me how you feel.”

Sherlock snuggles himself into John’s neck and says, “I feel fantastic. Except for my flaming ass.” He stops giggling and is quiet for a moment before continuing. “It was...good, more than good. I don’t know what I was so afraid of. It was incredible to have you inside me that way, except I think I’m going to be sore. And it’s weird to feel your come leaking out of me.”

John smiles. “Ah, yes. The one downside of going bareback.” John pulls away and looks at him sternly. “Which you never do without test results in your hand.” Sherlock almost rolls his eyes but John’s fingers skim lightly over his backside.

“Yes, Sir.”

“You probably will be sore, but luckily you’ll have welts to distract you. I’ll clean you up, sweet boy.” He kisses his forehead and rolls out of bed. Sherlock watches his ass as he walks away and can’t believe how lucky he is.
Prelude

Chapter Summary

pre·lude: /ˈprel(y)oʊd,ˈprā(l)y)oʊd/ an introductory piece of music

Sherlock plays his guitar for John and finds out why he needs a tuxedo this weekend. He also gets introduced to one of the items from "The List".

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sherlock sits on the balcony, his new favorite place besides John’s bed. The people below, walking and running along the river look like ants. They are far away, just as he likes them. It rained earlier and the smell of the petrichor, radiating from the hot pavement, drifts up and mixes with the scent of a charcoal grill from one of the nearby units. Summer smells. The sun is low in the sky as he waits for John to get home from the hospital. Sherlock drums his fingers against the guitar on his lap. Since John is working late, he’s had some extra time to play. He’s sitting cross-legged on a cushion on one of the reclining deck chairs. He hasn’t played since he’s been here and it feels good to have his guitar under his arm again.

Music has had such a lasting influence in his life: a connection to his mother, a creative outlet, a refuge. He looks out over the river, watching some kayakers, and picks out a tune, nothing in particular, just improvising. Letting his fingers lead the way. Thinking. Playing and thinking. Playing always focuses his mind. Tonight, it is taking his mind off the lingering soreness.

This morning when he’d looked at himself in the mirror, he was both horrified and fascinated by the parallel purple stripes lining his ass and thighs. They would no doubt change color over the next few days to yellow and gray before fading away. John had checked them to make sure no skin was broken. Had kissed each one tenderly before rubbing in a salve to relieve the pain.

Sherlock wore his loosest jeans to work but still had an awkward gait that he was sure everyone noticed. The pain on his skin was only part of it. There was also the soreness left by John’s cock, not all that unpleasant reminder of what happened last night, of how it felt to ride him.

He smiles as his fingers move lazily over the strings of his guitar, remembering, and he’s so lost in thought that he almost doesn’t hear the sliding glass door as John steps out onto the balcony. He’s holding two glasses of red wine.

John smiles and places one glass on the small table next to Sherlock and then leans down to kiss him.

“Don’t stop. I was enjoying it.”

“It’s nothing, just messing around.”

John takes a seat on the other chair. “Rule number five, Sherlock, no self-criticism. If I tell you I’m enjoying your playing, the appropriate response is?”

Sherlock looks down shyly. “Thank you, Sir.”
John salutes him with his glass and smiles at him. “How are you feeling?”

“Fine, Sir. Sore just about everywhere though.”

John chuckles and sips his wine. “So what kind of music do you like?”

“All kinds, I guess. My parents liked country, so I know a lot of that. I like rock and blues mostly. Old stuff...Stevie Ray Vaughan, Buddy Guy, Jimi Hendrix.

“Anything from my side of the pond?”

“Sure, Pink Floyd, the Beatles. My mom loved the Beatles.”

“Play me something. I’d love to hear you play. Do you sing? I’ll bet you have a beautiful singing voice.”

“Yeah, it’s OK I guess. Vic always liked it.” He hadn’t meant to say that. Didn’t really want to talk to John about him. Not just yet anyway. He looks down and fiddles with the leather bracelet on his right wrist. Vic’s bracelet.

John doesn’t ask about him but says, “I’m sure I will too.”

Sherlock picks up his guitar, thinks for a moment, and begins to play and sing *Blackbird*, one of his mother’s favorites, and one of the first he’d tried to learn, from the Beatles’ White Album.

Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take your broken wings and learn to fly...
All your life...

Playing this song brings back happy memories. His mom always teased him that the blackbird was his “spirit animal” and that the blackbird totem represented knowledge, intelligence and quick wit. He didn’t believe in such nonsense as spirit animals, and she knew it. It was their little joke. He closes his eyes and pictures her smile as he sings.

You were only waiting for this moment to arise
You were only waiting for this moment to arise
You were only waiting for this moment to arise

He plays the final note and looks to John. *Did he like it?* John is sitting back, the fingers of his right hand stroking his lips, and his eyes are soft. Sherlock bites his lip and waits for the verdict.


Sherlock relaxes and grins with relief.

“Thank you, Sir.”
“Your playing is wonderful Sherlock, but your voice...your voice. It’s delicious.

“So what kind of music do you like, Sir?”

“Acid jazz is probably my favorite. It’s a mixture of soul, funk, and jazz. But I enjoy listening to almost everything. Motown, rock, blues, classical. And anything live. Have you heard any live music, Sherlock? In a hall or theater?”

“I’ve been to some concerts. Mom would take me to anything free. We could never afford to buy tickets to see any of the big famous acts, but we went to all the concerts at the park, no matter who was playing. It was good in a way. I heard a lot of things I never would have listened to on my own. She said it made you a better musician, to know lots of different genres. I’ll pretty much listen to anything at least once.”

“I’m really happy to hear you say that because I want to take you to the opera on Saturday. It’s a fundraiser for a Harvey Milk High School right here in Columbus, black tie. That’s why you need a tuxedo. And I can’t wait to see you in it. And to see you watch your first opera.”

At first, Sherlock feels only anxiety. He has no idea how to behave at an opera. What if he--

He’s interrupted by John’s laughter, and he scowls.

“What’s so funny?”

“Your face! You look more nervous than my bypass patients! It’s an opera, not surgery. You might even enjoy it. At least I hope you will. I wouldn’t recommend opera to the average eighteen-year-old, but you’re hardly average, and you’re a musician. There are no secret codes you have to learn or exams you have to pass. You do have to be quiet. Opera-goers are very serious about noise during the performance. No rustling candy wrappers or clearing your throat. But besides that, it’s an experience you should have just for itself. Broaden your horizons a bit.”

Sherlock relaxes some and feels quite pleased that John considers him sophisticated enough to take to the opera. And now his curiosity has been triggered. “Who’s Harvey Milk? What’s the opera like? Will it be in English? Which opera is it? What’s it about?”

“Slow down. One at a time. Harvey Milk was the first openly gay elected official in California and he was assassinated in 1978. The high school is for LGBTQ students who can’t go to regular high school because of harassment or persecution. It’s Giacomo Puccini’s opera, Turandot. My personal opinion, the Italian operas are the most beautiful, the best for a new listener, and Turandot has what is considered the most beautiful aria, solo really, Nessun Dorma. It will be in Italian. I learned Italian so I could understand opera, but nowadays, there are English translations projected around the stage, but you could also read the libretto, the script, beforehand so you have a general idea of what’s going to happen.” John sounds more eager as he continues.

Sherlock soaks up the information with complete attention, and stores away the stunning Harvey Milk data for later. John smiles at his bright eyes and intent gaze.

“We could find a version on YouTube with captions if you like. On your new computer?”

“Awesome.”

They finish watching the sunset and have some leftovers for dinner, Sherlock dutifully recording his intake. John prepares notes for his upcoming classes while Sherlock watches the opera video with his headphones on. John interrupts him to ask for his notebook. “I want to enter your schedule and check on your meals so far.”
Sherlock hands it over as casually as he can and quickly puts his headphones back in. Sure enough, he sees John frowning as he flips through the pages. But then he picks up his pen and begins to write and Sherlock relaxes and goes back to the video. The story is pretty weird, and the sopranos are annoying sometimes, but it holds his attention, partly because he knows that John loves it, partly because he knows his mom would be proud of how he’s stretching himself, partly because the music is complex and new and challenging. He’s lost in it when John comes up behind him and puts a hand on his shoulder. When he turns around it’s not to the smile he was hoping for. John taps the headphones and Sherlock takes them off and turns around.

“I have a concern, Sherlock. Do you have any idea what it might be?”

“Um, maybe? I might. I…” deep breath, “I forgot to eat lunch?”

He glances up at a raised eyebrow.

“Twice.”

“You didn’t exactly say I had to eat.”

“No, I didn’t. But you knew what I wanted. For you.”

Sherlock nods and looks down, but John’s finger pushes up his chin. Two raised eyebrows this time.

Shit. More on the tally?

“Yes, Sir.”

“I’ll need to think about this.”

This time it’s Sherlock’s eyebrows that go up, and it makes John laugh. “Is it that much of a shock? Doms don’t always know what to do right away. In the meantime, you are expected to eat at least three times a day. I would like you to have a couple of snacks also, but the minimum is three meals. Do I need to put it in the contract or are we clear that it’s included under Rule number five?”

“Clear, Sir.”

“Good. Time for bed. Busy day tomorrow.”

Thursday is almost a repeat: household chores, his shift at Rod’s, exercise. John adds in a minimum guitar practice which he loves and SAT Reading and Writing practice which he hates. He’s meticulous about eating and makes a quick grocery trip to look for snacks that might actually tempt him. He leaves them on the bar so John will notice.

John does notice and smiles as he looks through the notebook that evening after dinner. He’s on the sofa with Sherlock sitting on the floor at his feet. “One hundred fifty-three pounds. Moving in the right direction.” He puts the notebook down and motions for Sherlock to come to him.
Sherlock climbs up onto John’s lap, straddling him.

“You’ve been a good boy today. Completed all your chores and gained a pound. That makes me happy.” John takes Sherlock’s face in his hands and kisses him. “It’s a beautiful night, let’s take a walk. You might be thin as a rail, but I need to work off that lasagne.” John stands up with Sherlock still wrapped around him. “If you get much heavier I’m not going to be able to do this,” he says into Sherlock’s mouth and they both laugh.

They walk on the moonlit path along the river, holding hands. This is the first time they’ve held hands in public. It feels magical. They pass other people out enjoying the summer evening: couples, people walking dogs, joggers. They all smile and nod in greeting. No one has given them a dirty look or a rude word. Sherlock can hardly believe it. I think I like city living. They walk for several miles before returning to the condo.

It’s late when they get back. John is tired and has an early class in the morning, so they climb into bed to watch some television. This turns into cuddling, which turns into kissing, which turns into groping and mutual hand jobs.

They fall asleep with Sherlock playing the little spoon. John is pressed against his back with one arm around him. He feels John’s now soft penis nestled against his buttocks. As John’s warm breath tickles his neck, he tries to stay awake as long as possible to soak in the closeness and the feel of skin against skin. His thoughts drift, and an image of Victor comes. Smiling and handsome. They had lain together this way: close, laughing and kissing. I never cried for him. I’ve cried more in the past month than I have in five years but I never cried for him. A lump forms in his throat, and he bites his lip. He tries to push away these unwelcome thoughts. I’m not ready. He pulls John’s arm a little tighter around him. Finally, his eyes close and darkness glides over his consciousness, taking him under.

Friday is Sherlock’s last day at Rod’s. It’s bittersweet. He’s worked there for just over a year, and the money had given him the means to indulge his bad habits, but also to buy food when things were bad at home. And it’s where he met John. As he’s leaving for the last time, Rod shakes his hand.

“Sherlock, thank you for everything. If you need references, let me know. You have been a dream employee. No drama. Dependable. Whip-smart. I expect big things from you. Remember us when you’re famous.”

Sherlock blushes a bit at this praise. “Thanks, Rod, I’m not sure I’m going to be famous, but I’ll remember you, I promise.” As he walks out the door, it feels like turning a page. The last vestiges of his old life, like his father, behind him. In front of him are possibilities that he has never really imagined could be his. College, and being with John. Whatever that means. He decides that for at least this summer it means being happy again. It’s enough for now.

He takes the bus downtown to Greenfield’s to pick up the tux.

Martin greets him warmly when he walks through the door.

“Sherlock! It is good to see you, young man.”
The tuxedo fits perfectly, and Martin teaches Sherlock how to tie the bowtie. It doesn’t take long before Sherlock can tie it flawlessly.

“John told me about the opera, I’m not sure what to expect.”

“You are in for a treat! Opera is like champagne: it makes life sparkle and turns everything around you glorious. But it’s sometimes almost too much. To me, it feels like looking down from a mountain and feeling the fear of falling. So much beauty! You will come back and tell me how you liked it, yes?”

“Sure. But I’m a little nervous, honestly.”

“Just be quiet during the performance. Stand tall. In this, you will look like you were born for La Scala. Milan! Rome! You will make us both proud.” Martin tugs at the lapels of the tuxedo and looks at Sherlock with satisfaction. “Never doubt the doctor’s judgment. You are magnificent!”

Sherlock grins shyly, looking at himself in the mirror. He looks elegant and sophisticated.

“So how is your brother?” Martin says.

Sherlock frowns, his good mood broken by the mention of Mycroft. “He’s OK, he was here a few days ago. He gave me a computer for graduation.”

“He sounds like a good brother. You are lucky.”

“I suppose,” says Sherlock skeptically.

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Sherlock stashes the tux in the closet in his bedroom and tapes a “Do not disturb” sign on the door. When John texts him that he’ll be home in half an hour, he starts a salad and fires up the gas grill on the balcony. While working in the kitchen, he glances at the whiteboard and is reminded of the paddle strokes he’s earned. Twelve. John still hasn’t added any for the missed lunches. Maybe he’s forgotten?

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Saturday morning Sherlock is woken by the sound of thunder, and he opens one eye. Rain is beating against the windows, and the sky outside is dark and ominous. He closes his eye and burrows down into the covers, awake, but listening to the storm. Enjoying the fact that it’s Saturday and he doesn’t have to get up. He senses that John isn’t in bed with him and this fact is confirmed when he smells coffee. Mmm, coffee.

Then the mattress shifts and lips brush his forehead.

“Good morning, sleepy head.”

Sherlock finally opens his eyes and rolls to his back. “Good morning, Sir.”
“I’ve made you breakfast in bed. Today’s a special day. Do you know why?”

“We’re going the opera.”

“Yes, but also, it was four weeks ago today that we met.”

“So it’s our…anniversary?”

“Of sorts. At least it’s an excuse for me to feed you in bed, and give you a gift.”

Sherlock starts to protest, but John gives him a warning look as he holds up a small gift bag.

Sherlock sits up, takes it and gives it a gentle shake.

“No guessing, just open it!”

Sherlock removes the tissue paper, reaches inside, and takes out a watch. His watch. He stares at it, dumbfounded, then looks at John questioningly.

“But...how?”

“I paid a visit to Pete last Sunday. He was most accommodating,” John says with a smirk.

“Did you...hurt him?”

“No, I didn’t hurt him, Sherlock, although I wanted to. Wanted to wring his neck for selling you that poison. And for endangering who knows how many others. But I think his selling days are over. I was very convincing.”

Sherlock is running his fingers over the watch, and when he turns it over, he sees that it’s been engraved.

To SH,

From JW,

A reminder of my touch

“Thank you, Sir.” Sherlock throws his arms around John and buries his face in his neck. “Thank you. I’m sorry.”

“Hush, that debt’s been paid Sherlock,” John says into his hair, hugging him back.

Sherlock pulls away and holds out his hand and John clasps the watch around his wrist.

“I won’t take it off, ever again.”

John’s eyes flit to his for a split second. Ever. That word had just slipped out. The implications of it hang between them. Then John says, “Right then. Breakfast,” and kisses Sherlock lightly before getting up.

“Go pee. I’ll be right back.”
When John comes back, he’s carrying a tray covered with a cloth, which he sets on the bedside table. He gives Sherlock a mischievous grin.

“I’d like to blindfold you, Sherlock. Is that alright?”

Breathing a little more quickly, he says, “OK. Yes, Sir. I mean, green, Sir.”

John takes a strip of black cloth and ties it loosely over Sherlock’s eyes. He can’t see anything, and he waits patiently, wondering what’s going to happen.

“Open your mouth.”

Sherlock obeys and feels something placed on his tongue. He rolls it in his mouth and crushes it. Sweet, tart, a blackberry. He swallows it and opens his mouth again. Salty this time, a bit of ham. Next comes a piece of waffle with maple syrup, a grape, buttered toast. When he finds a marshmallow on his tongue, he giggles as he chews it. Marshmallows for breakfast? When he opens his mouth for the next treat, an unfamiliar smell assaults his nose. Fishy and something, it’s salty and has a strange texture. He doesn’t like it and spits it into his hand.

“Sherlock, you just spit out fifty dollars worth of caviar!” says John and Sherlock can hear the laughter in his voice.

He’s a little shocked, but he can’t help the shudder that runs through him. “Sorry, but it’s disgusting!”

John is still laughing. “Don’t worry, it won’t go to waste. He licks it up from Sherlock’s hand. He makes sure to get every last bit of salt with his tongue, swiping Sherlock’s palm a little longer than absolutely necessary. Sherlock shifts, his morning erection not entirely gone.

“Here, you’ll like this better, I promise. Stick out your tongue.”

Sherlock obeys and feels something dribble onto his tongue. Honey. He tips his head back as the sweet substance drips into his mouth. Suddenly, John’s mouth is on his, and he’s kissing him, licking the honey from his tongue. He pulls away and Sherlock tries to chase him, but John grips his chin and tilts his head back to let more honey drizzle onto his lips and into his mouth. John follows it with his own tongue and every bit of honey is consumed. Without sight, Sherlock’s other senses are heightened, and the feel of John’s lips, the sweetness of the honey, and the steady beat of rain against the windows are almost overwhelming, and he’s gasping when John finally removes the blindfold and climbs into bed beside him.

As they’re snuggled together, Sherlock in his arms, John says, “Greg will be picking us up at seven tonight. We’ll have to do a little mingling beforehand, and I’ll get to show you off a bit.”

Sherlock looks at him with wide eyes and opens his mouth to protest, but John stops him with a finger on his lips. “Not a word. Rule number five. You’re brilliant, you’re gorgeous, and you have nothing to worry about. If I didn’t believe you could handle it, I wouldn’t bring you. Do you think I’d be seen with you if I weren’t proud of you?” He gives him a brutal kiss that leaves his lips puffy. “I can’t wait to see you in that tux. Martin said you’re stunning. In the meantime, I thought about clearing your tally today, but I don’t want a sore arse to distract you from the opera, so we’ll take care of that another time. But, I have decided what to do about the missing meals.”

Sherlock stiffens despite himself.

John continues. “It’s not a punishment exactly. I think you’ve been on your own for so long that you’ve forgotten what it feels like to have someone worry about you. You’re on my mind all the
time and, I want you to remember that. It’s part of the reason I asked you to wear my watch. As a reminder. Today, I’ve got another reminder for you.” John reaches down to the floor and grabs a box that has already been opened. He brings out a small black object that Sherlock can’t identify immediately. It’s about four inches long. One end is elongated and tapered, and the other end is flared. Suddenly, he recognizes what it is. He remembers it from the Google search he did a few weeks ago when studying John’s List. An anal plug. *Jeez, and I said yes to that.*

“You know what this is?” John says.

Sherlock nods, his eyes still glued to the plug held between John’s fingers. It’s not that big, certainly nowhere near a large as John. *But still.*

“Good. You are going to wear this today until we leave for the theater. For two reasons. Number one, as another reminder that you belong to me and that I care about you, and number two, to help with soreness. It’s a training plug. This one is a “small”. When you’re used to this one, there are larger sizes. Now. You did agree to this, but let me ask again. What is your color?”

Sherlock tears his eyes from the plug and looks at John. “Green, Sir.”

John gets out of bed and bends to kiss Sherlock on the forehead. “Get yourself cleaned up and I’ll meet you in your room.”

After showering and shaving, Sherlock walks into his bedroom, although he’s not yet slept in the bed there, and John is waiting for him. He’s sitting on the bed and pats the space next to him, inviting Sherlock to sit. The plug, the aloe, and a bottle of lube are on the bedside table.

Sherlock sits, and John takes his hand and kisses him tenderly.

“Lie down on your stomach sweet boy, and spread your legs.”

Sherlock obeys and feels the towel around his waist being tugged off and watches as John rakes his eyes over his long white body. The crop marks have faded to purple stripes. John gazes at him for another moment then spreads aloe gel along each one. Sherlock hums in appreciation, and his cock stirs just a little. When he’s finished, John gets up to put the gel away and wipe his fingers. He retrieves the plug and lube before climbing onto the bed and kneeling behind him.

Sherlock hears the *snick* of the bottle and feels a hand on his ass-cheek and then a little tap.

“Up on your hands and knees.” Sherlock feels so much more exposed now. His head drops down, and he starts to breathe through his mouth. Then John’s slicked finger is massaging his hole. He closes his eyes and wills his body to relax as John’s finger pushes inside. He remembers riding John and his cock plumps up a little more. He takes a deep breath and sighs it out. *Easy peasy as Molly would say.* John strokes in and out and inserts another finger. *John inside me. Again.* The thought helps him release some of the tension and John stretches and twists with a second finger now.

“Good boy,” John says after a short time. “Now I’m going to put the plug in you.” The fingers withdraw and are replaced with the tip of the plug. “Relax,” John says as he presses it in slowly. Sherlock takes in a deep breath as the widest part enters him and lets it out as it slips into place. An
“oh” escapes his lips when John grasps the base and wiggles it. He can feel his dick getting seriously hard now.

John rubs his left cheek gently and says, “All finished. You can get up now. It’s going to feel strange and uncomfortable for a while. You’ll be very aware of it, but it shouldn’t hurt. Let me know right away if it does, right?”

Sherlock is a little afraid to move, but answers, “Yes, Sir.”

John gives him a light slap and, as he involuntarily clenches, Sherlock gasps at the way the plug shifts inside of him.

John laughs. “You can’t stay frozen on the bed all day, Sherlock. Come on.” He grabs Sherlock’s ankle and tugs a little. With a whine of protest, he gingerly crawls to the side of the bed and eases, backwards, off the mattress.

As his foot touches the ground, he groans and says, “I’m supposed to walk around with this all day?”

“Afraid so, sweet boy. You know, some people actually enjoy wearing plugs. They wouldn’t consider it a punishment at all.”

Under his breath, Sherlock said, “They’re welcome to it.”

“Careful, Sherlock. Rule number one: ‘Subject to the agreed terms’...?”

Sherlock answers grudgingly, “I will accept without argument, his guidance and punishment. It doesn’t say anything about complaining.”

John takes a menacing step towards him with an evil grin on his face and Sherlock falls back trying not to laugh, “No, no, I’m sorry, Sir! I didn’t mean it! Really!” The plug shifts within him as he falls to the mattress, His muscles clench around the intruding object, and it’s simultaneously uncomfortable and arousing. He grimaces, then with an innocent look, he says, “How about whining? Is whining okay?”

John lunges for him this time and grips him around the middle, tickling him up and down his ribs and under his arms, until Sherlock is alternately thrashing and trying to hold still, laughing and moaning. He has no hope of escaping John’s solid frame and firm muscles, and in seconds, he’s pinned underneath him flat on his back. John rubs it in. “You’re going to have to bulk up if you’re ever going to have a chance of getting away from me.”

Sherlock reaches up and gives John an open-mouthed kiss. “Who says I want to?”

Chapter End Notes

It's a shame that we still need them, but The Harvey Milk High School in NYC was the nation's first public school for gay and lesbian youth.
Nessun Dorma

Chapter Summary

A night at the opera

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

One benefit of the wrestling match that morning is that Sherlock feels a lot less tense about moving with the plug lodged firmly in his ass for the rest of the day, not that he isn’t hyper-conscious of it at every moment. He moves awkwardly around the apartment to do his chores, scowling every time he catches John smirking at him. He tries to get away with standing at the bar to do his studying, but John motions him to the table alongside him and he spends the time trying not to squirm on the chair. He asks if he can skip guitar practice to finish the opera video. John agrees, and they watch it together. It takes Sherlock about two minutes to configure his computer to play through the TV, and they sit side-by-side on the sofa. John does some work on his own laptop when he can tear his eyes off Sherlock’s expressive face. He is watching intently, responding to subtle changes in the music and referring to the libretto he’s printed out. Suddenly he hits pause and turns excitedly to John.

“I know that music! I’ve heard it before!”

John smiles and nods. “That’s the aria I told you about, Nessun Dorma.”

Sherlock’s fingers are flying over his keyboard. “My mom made me watch it. It was Aretha Franklin, her favorite singer, she was on the Grammys, and my mom said this opera guy, a really big important one was supposed to sing it, but he got sick or something, and she stepped in as a replacement at the last--here it is!”

He’s so animated and John smiles to see him so excited. Sherlock switches to another screen and there she is, Aretha in her burgundy outfit, fur at her collar and cuffs, owning the stage. “My mom got all teary-eyed watching it, and I teased her about it.” He looks at John with a soft smile and John takes his hand, kisses it, and says, “Show me.”

John’s sound system is state of the art and as Aretha’s voice fills the room, Sherlock is lost in the flood of feelings that rises: the beauty of the music, the memories of experiencing it with his mother, wonder at the idea of she and John loving the same things and wanting to share them with him, how she will always be a part of him, what she taught him...that beauty transcends time and race and language, and so many other huge ideas, that he’s afraid he’s going to explode. And then John squeezes his hand and Sherlock settles his spinning head onto his sturdy shoulder, grounded once again.

“I’ve listened to this opera at least a dozen times in opera houses all over the world and that aria even more, and her version ranks right up there. Thank you for sharing it with me.”

They have a light dinner because, John says, “There will be hors-d'œuvres, and I expect you to try a few things you’ve never had before.”
Sherlock tightens his lips. “But what if I don’t like it and I have to spit it out again? What if I mess up? I don’t think I can do this.”

Sherlock sees the tiny clenching and relaxing of John’s jaw. “First of all, hors d’oeuvres are always served with napkins. If you don’t like something, you spit it into the napkin. Second of all, you’re not going to mess up. Third of all, so what if you mess up? Everyone messes up. It’s the nature of the human condition. It’s OK to be a little nervous when you’re doing something for the first time, but you know, you could also think of it as being excited rather than anxious.” He checks his watch and says, “We should probably start getting ready. I’ll take the plug out after you shower. Before you get dressed.”

Sherlock gives him puppy dog eyes. “Not before the shower?”

John raises an eyebrow at him, and Sherlock is chagrined. “Sorry, Sir. After the shower.”

John nods. “Is it still uncomfortable?”

Sherlock stands up gingerly and shifts his weight from foot to foot. “Not...exactly? It’s like you said, I can’t forget about it. It’s always...there. Moving. Reminding me.”

“Good. And what are you supposed to be remembering?”

Sherlock sighs. “Three meals and snacks.”

“Good boy.” John kisses his forehead, turns him around, and gives him a smack right over the plug.

“Hey!”

“Shower.”

Wanting to get the plug removed as quickly as possible, he hurries through the shower and finds John waiting for him at the side of the bed. He points at the sign on the door of the closet.

“Cheeky.”

Sherlock smiles slyly and shrugs. “Martin made me promise.”

“The two of you colluding against me, I don’t stand a chance.”

Sherlock laughs, then stops suddenly, the plug making itself known once again. “Pleeeeeease take it out now.”

It’s John’s turn to laugh. “Come on up here, gorgeous.”

Sherlock drops the towel and crawls up on the bed with none of his usual speed or grace. He playfully wiggles his ass in John’s direction, looking coyly at him over his shoulder. John hums and approaches the bed. He smooths his hand over Sherlock’s flank but, suddenly, jerks Sherlock towards him by the hips. Sherlock gasps and arches his back. John bites him on his right ass cheek. He runs his lips over it and says, “I like it when you tease, sweet boy. It means you know how much I want you.” He runs his hands up Sherlock’s sides and tweaks his nipples. Sherlock squeaks and John huffs out a laugh. John’s hands slide over his stomach, through the sparse hair trailing down from his belly button. Carefully, the backs of his fingers avoid his rapidly filling cock despite Sherlock’s rocking back and forth on his hands and knees. John is kissing and licking whatever he can reach.
Sherlock whispers, “Please, touch me, please.”

John hums again and, using one hand to keep stroking Sherlock’s skin, uses the other to put the tip of his finger on the base of the plug and gives it a tiny push. Sherlock jerks forward slightly, then back against the pressure. John grips it and pulls it gently, just enough to see it bulge against Sherlock’s entrance. He sets up a rhythm, pushing and pulling, twisting gently. When John rubs his fingers along the silky soft skin on Sherlock’s inner thigh, the back of his hand brushes against his balls and Sherlock moans, “Please, please…” again.

John sucks a bruise next to the bite marks he left and then moves up to growl in Sherlock’s ear, “Still want me to take it out?” He increases the pressure as he continues to play with it.

“No--yes--I don’t know!” Sherlock’s voice is ragged, and John laughs.

John pulls back and strokes him soothingly now. “If we didn’t have somewhere to be, I’d help you make up your mind. And there’s not enough time for another shower, so, deep breaths, and relax.”

Sherlock mutters, “A little late for that, don’t you think?” and drops his head to the mattress just as John gives him a swat. Without much energy, he says, “Ow.”

“Bear down now.” Sherlock gives a little grunt, and John slips the plug out. He wraps it in a cloth and sets it aside. Sherlock rolls over onto his back with his arm over his eyes. It still feels strange, but in a different way. He’s open and his muscles are gripping on empty space. John crawls up over him and kisses him. Sherlock puts his arms around John’s neck and kisses back. A few more kisses on his eyes, cheeks, chin and he’s feeling somewhat back to normal. John tells him, “Come on, time to get dressed.” He pulls him to his feet. “Call me if you need help.”

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Sherlock ties the bowtie the way Martin showed him while standing before the full-length mirror in his room. He’s locked the door so that John won’t see him before he’s ready. The fabric of the tuxedo feels rich and smooth as he runs his fingers up and down one of the sleeves. He buttons and unbuttons the jacket, can’t decide what looks better and ends up leaving just the top button done. The suit fits his slim body like a glove.

He appraises himself in the mirror and thinks he looks pretty good. Even his hair, normally an unruly mop, looks stylish thanks to a large quantity of product. He makes a pretend gun with his fingers and pulls a serious face. “Bond. James Bond,” he says to his reflection in a terrible British accent. He’ll have to work on that. Luckily, I have an excellent role model. He grins at himself.

As he’s changing poses, his phone buzzes. It’s a text from Molly.

MH: Hi handsome! So? What’s the surprise IF you can tell me :)?

SH: J is taking me to the opera.

MH: Oh cool! That sounds fun!

Several seconds go by.

MH: BTW, it would be polite to ask what I’m doing or say SOMETHING. Really,
Sherlock, if you're going to be a socialite you need to learn how to hold up your end of a conversation. LOL.

SH: What are you doing? (Eye-roll emoji)

MH: I'm at Janine's. We're gonna binge Grey's Anatomy.

SH: ????


Sherlock snaps a selfie and sends it to Molly.

MH: (flame emoji) OMG you look so f'ing hot. Janine just fainted.

SH: Thx. I'm a little nervous. There will be lots of people. I don't do people.

MH: You'll be fine. Just remember to send the ball back when someone talks to you. Call me tomorrow and tell me all about it.

John raps on the door. “It's time to go Sherlock.”

SH: OK, I will. ttyl

MH: Bye <3

Sherlock takes a final look at himself in the mirror and straightens his bowtie before unlocking the door and walking down the hallway to the living room.

John is standing in the middle of the room in his tux, one hand on his hip and the other holding his phone to his ear.

“...could start Monday. Sure, the girl too...” He stops abruptly as his head turns in Sherlock’s direction. “Never mind, I’ll call you tomorrow,” he says, ending the call without taking his eyes off of Sherlock and dropping the phone into his pocket.

“Bloody hell.”

“Is that good?”

“Oh god, yes. It’s good. Really fuckin’ good,” John says, still staring.

Sherlock takes a few steps toward John, then stops and rotates slowly, arms extended from his sides in his best impression of a runway model. Warmth blooms on his chest and creeps up his neck as John’s eyes devour him.

“Sherlock, you...fuck. I need to send Martin a bottle of wine.”

Sherlock feels his blush extend further. He looks at John who is wearing a black tux with velvet lapels that shift green at certain angles. It fits his compact, trim frame every bit as well as
Sherlock’s does. He looks so handsome and sexy, and Sherlock’s whole body seems to vibrate with the anticipation of going on an actual date, in public, with this man. This amazing man who wants him, and who thinks he’s worthwhile.

“Not too bad yourself, Sir.”

John closes the distance between them and kisses him fiercely. Sherlock melts against him and lets John’s tongue explore his mouth. He feels a hand on his crotch, squeezing.

Then John pulls away and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. “I can’t wait to get you out of this tuxedo, but first you have an opera to experience. We’ve got to go. Greg’s waiting for us.”

*******

As they turn onto State Street, Sherlock can see limousines lined up in front of the opera house. There are couples dressed to the nines, photographers, and TV satellite trucks, and Greg pulls over. “What do you think, boss?”

John hums. “Wasn’t this bad last year was it?”

Greg shakes his head and says, “Not nearly.”

John settles back against the seat and taps his fingers on his thighs. “I didn’t think there would be such a fuss.” He turns to Sherlock. “Would you rather avoid the limelight? I have a feeling that we’ll be photographed if we go in the front door right now. Probably nothing will come from it, but it’s possible the pictures might show up in a local paper or the opera bulletin.”

Sherlock’s eyes go a little wide and he just shrugs. “If you’re OK with having your picture taken with me…”

John tightens his jaw a bit. “I’d be honored to have my picture taken with you. Queue us up, Greg.”

After ten minutes or so of crawling forward in the line, John says, “Let’s just walk from here, alright with you?”

“Sure.”

John looks at Greg and says, “Sometime between eleven and eleven-thirty, I think.”

Greg nods and they exit the car. When Sherlock steps onto the sidewalk, John takes his hand. He feels a little thrill, but also apprehension. So many people will see.

John, sensing his feelings, says “Does this make you uncomfortable?”

“A little, but...it’s...good.” He forces a small smile despite his nerves and doesn't let go of John’s hand.

John smiles gently at him. “No worries. We’re among friends here.” They walk along the sidewalk until they reach the crowd of people waiting to enter the theater. Sherlock looks around at the people dressed in gowns and tuxedos and sees a lot of same sex couples. John waves at a short man with dark hair, who nudges his partner, a broad-shouldered giant of a man who points at John with two hands and is clearly thrilled to see him. John’s face breaks into a gleaming smile and points
into the lobby, receiving an enthusiastic nod in return. John leans towards Sherlock and says, “That huge bear with curly gray hair is Gary. He’s a guest lecturer in hematology and his partner, Billy, owns a bed and breakfast. They’re from New Hampshire. I can’t wait to introduce you.”

They make their way inside and John snags two flutes of champagne from a tray and a cracker with salmon and caviar on it. He holds it up to Sherlock’s mouth jokingly. They hear the shutter clicking of a nearby camera and John laughs. He pops the whole thing into his mouth while Sherlock shakes his head. John points out a tray loaded with crostini and bruschetta. “You’ll like that. And over there is some prosciutto and melon. Try that too.” Sherlock takes a bite out of the bruschetta, tilts his head and nods. The melon and prosciutto is not as successful.

“I like the meat, but not together with the melon.”

John says, “I can fix that.” He takes another off the tray and peels the prosciutto off and holds it out for Sherlock who blushes, but leans forward with his mouth open so that John can put it gently inside. John looks smugly at him over the top of his champagne glass, then drains it. His playful teasing and flirting works to put Sherlock at ease and he begins to notice the beauty of the theater, with its huge chandelier and red and gold carpet. John whispers filthy gossip to him about people, and he tries not to laugh as John introduces them. He’s pretty sure he’s not embarrassing himself though, and John seems to be enjoying himself immensely. John stays close to him, putting his hand on the small of his back or taking his hand, seeming to know when his nerves are creeping up on him. He points out hors d’oeuvres he might like and encourages him to finish his champagne. They keep an eye out for Gary, but it’s too crowded to move much and soon, they’re climbing the stairs up to their private box.

They enter the door of the box closest to the stage on the left side. It has four chairs and two tables and is fairly deep. Sherlock walks to the front of the box to look down at the filling seats below, and when he turns around, he notices the curtains on the sides of the box. He gives them an experimental tug, and sure enough, they slide quietly on their cloth tabs. John catches his eye and flicks his eyebrows up and down. Sherlock feels his cheeks heat up a little and he turns back around to watch as the musicians begin to fill in the orchestra pit. John comes and stands close to him and takes his hand again. John waves to a few people in various places around the theater, one couple in the box directly across from them.

“There’s a group of us that try to stay in touch via Pride week and then the opera benefit and as sponsors, we have first choice at our favorite seats. Those are my friends Irene and Kate opposite us.”

Sherlock returns to watching the musicians. He feels a thrill as they begin to tune up and he turns to grin at John, who gives him a quick kiss. He arranges the curtains so that they’re enclosed, almost in their own bubble, and pulls Sherlock back so they can settle themselves in their seats before the house lights go down. When the curtain goes up, Sherlock has a moment of realization. Those are real people down there. The performers are close enough that Sherlock can see their makeup and he’s amazed enough again to grin at John. He mouths Thank you at him and John squeezes his fingers.

Sherlock is so fully engaged he’s surprised at the end of Act I when the lights come up again and John brings him down to the lobby where they buy some water and there are more introductions.

“What do you think?” John asks.

“I’m glad I watched it beforehand, so I know what’s going on. Otherwise I’d have no clue. But the live music and singers—it’s just amazing to think about how hard it must be to perform live like that. I can’t wait to hear Nessun Dorma.”
“You’re not the only one.”

At the second intermission, John says, “Come with me. There are some interesting photographs downstairs that you might like.” The pictures range from historical photos of Columbus to famous artists who’ve performed there. They use the restroom and return to the box where Sherlock once again peers down into the orchestra pit. When he turns around, he sees that John has rearranged the chairs and table, back a bit, away from the railing. Sherlock is a little confused and when the house lights go down, heads for his seat, but he’s grabbed around the waist and pulled onto John’s lap.

As the musicians enter, the audience applauds and John asks, “Trust me?”

Sherlock’s heart starts to race, but he swallows and nods.

Another round of applause for the conductor and John whispers in his ear. “Remember, quiet.”

John runs his hands up and down the tops of Sherlock’s thighs, then along the sides and then the insides. Sherlock begins to breathe a little more heavily and John gently places his index finger over his mouth. “Shh.” He strokes Sherlock’s cheekbones with the finger, then along his jaw and over his Adam’s apple. Unbuttoning one button of his shirt, he slips a hand inside and then dips into the notch between his collarbones. He flattens his hand to rub over his chest skimming his fingertips over his nipple making Sherlock gasp. John huffs and rushes to put his other hand gently over Sherlock’s mouth. When the orchestra begins to play, and in a ghost of a voice, he repeats, “Quiet.”

He returns to teasing Sherlock’s nipple with the gentlest of strokes, and Sherlock’s head drops back onto John’s shoulder, rolling back and forth in time to the rising and falling swells of the music. John lets his hands drop down to Sherlock’s belt. Chills run along his spine when he feels John’s breath in his ear. “Color?”

Turning his head, Sherlock exhales, “Green.”

John waits for a crescendo and undoes the buckle of Sherlock’s belt. Delicately, silently, he draws it from the loops and times the dropping of it to the floor with a crash of the cymbal. He presses the palm of his hand down on the growing bulge in Sherlock’s pants as he unfastens the button with the other. Tooth by tooth, John lowers the zipper of Sherlock’s trousers. He slips his hands inside the waistband then around to Sherlock’s hips, and slowly around to the cheeks of his ass. He gives them a squeeze and Sherlock jumps a little. John takes the opportunity to lift him just enough to slide his pants and boxers down to his knees. When Sherlock settles down he feels John’s stiff cock against his back. And when John’s fingers close around him, he’s almost as hard. Between his own arousal and his fear that somehow, they’ll be caught, he begins breathing shallowly, repeating in his head, Quiet, quiet, quiet...

John lets his fingers play up and down and around Sherlock’s erection, which is twitching and swelling. He Sneaks his hand between them and from nowhere John produces a palmful of lube that Sherlock can feel sliding against his back as John slicks himself. Oh, god, is he really going to... Sure enough, John releases him and uses his free hand to cup Sherlock’s ass and lift. Sherlock complies and puts his forearms on the table and leans forward as John’s fingers slide inside of him and he feels only exquisite friction; he is loose and still slick from the plug that John pulled from him a few hours ago. The head of John’s cock rubs against his hole and then stills. Sherlock answers the unspoken question by pushing backwards slowly and allowing John to guide himself into Sherlock’s willing, eager body.

It’s easier than last time and only hurts a little. He makes small movements at first as John’s hands caress his hips. Then suddenly, he wants all of John inside him for the aria, to be as close to him as
possible. He pushes back slowly until he’s resting against John’s body, and they both sigh when
the opening strains of Nessun Dorma begin. Sherlock shudders and begins to rock back and forth
as the music washes over him and the joy of it fills his mind as John fills his body and the sound
and the sensations combine to produce an exquisite intimacy of shared experience.

Sherlock sits back on John’s lap and shifts, clenches. He feels John’s warm, moist breath on the
back of his neck and his hand, as it closes around his cock, stroking him in time with the music.
Sherlock leans forward again. He clutches the sides of the table and begins to move back and forth
between John’s cock and fist. He does his best to stay silent, but the dual sensations are so
overwhelming that he can’t be sure he’s being successful. He wants to cry out and whine and he
sucks his lips inside his mouth and bites down, afraid that the air rushing in and out of his nose
sounds like a hurricane. He tries to focus on the music, remembering the words of the aria:

Watch the stars,

That tremble with love

And with hope.

All he can do is listen while the coiling tension collects in the pit of his stomach. He makes the
mistake of opening his eyes and looking out into the theater. He sucks in a mouthful of air and
freezes, realizing he can see directly into the box across from them and all it would take is the turn
of someone’s head and they would be caught. John pauses, waiting for Sherlock’s consent to
continue.

But my secret is hidden within me,

My name no one shall know,

No... no...

On your mouth, I will tell it,

When the light shines.

And my kiss will dissolve the silence that makes you mine!

He feels John begin to pull out, thinking it’s too much and that Sherlock has changed his mind, but
he moves back against John’s hips and resumes their rhythm.

Sherlock thinks of the secrets he’s felt compelled keep, how he’s had to hide in the dark for so long
and how John has helped him step into the light and he comes, open-mouthed and silent, surprising
himself with the speed and intensity of his climax. He’s in a whorl of pleasure and his senses are
spiralling so, that all he knows is he doesn’t want it to end. John is grinding against him, his fingers
clutching his hip tightly enough that Sherlock knows he’ll be wearing bruises tomorrow. When
he’s wrung every drop out of Sherlock, John grabs his other hip and starts to drive deep and hard
into him until he collapses back into the chair, pulling Sherlock back to lean against his chest.
Sherlock doesn’t feel the wet heat he felt the last time and he realizes that John has used a condom.

The music ends, and the audience rises to honor the tenor with a standing ovation. Sherlock turns,
seeking John’s mouth and a deep passionate kiss.

“Thank you,” he whispers.

His heart is full and his thoughts are bouncing around in his head like kernels in a popcorn
machine. It’s like Martin said—*So much beauty*. It’s too much to put into words, so he just leans back against John, still joined in the most intimate way, and lets him kiss his neck and nibble at his earlobe.

John presses his lips against Sherlock’s ear. “My sweet boy. There is so much I want to show you, so much for you to learn. The world is so much bigger than you know and you deserve to see it all. You are special, Sherlock and I’m going to help you believe it. Once you do, nothing will be able to stop you.” He wraps his arms around Sherlock and holds him tight as the applause fades.

Chapter End Notes

Kameo here. If you’ve never seen Aretha sing *Nessun Dorma*, go here now:

https://vimeo.com/285410731

John’s line about it is a direct quote from my father (may he RIP and not notice what his daughter is writing) who was Italian and knew many operas by heart.

Sherlock’s thought about real people on stage was me at my first Broadway show, *Grease*.

Harvey Milk High School:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvey_Milk_High_School
John introduces Sherlock as his boyfriend after the opera. The following day John gets a pleasant morning surprise and Sherlock gets his long overdue punishment.

The opera concludes with Sherlock sitting on John’s lap, his arms around his neck as John wipes up the last traces of their adventure with his handkerchief. John nudges him and they rise for the standing ovation offered to the lead tenor and soprano. They check one another for the state of their clothing. The front of Sherlock’s shirt is cold and wet with semen and he shivers as he tucks it into his pants and buttons the jacket to hide it. John sends a couple of texts so that they can meet up with Gary and Billy and Irene and Kate. The audience is cheerful and noisy as they exit. Again, they see Gary over the rest of the crowd as they make their way through the lobby.

Once outside, the six of them, Gary, Billy, Kate, Irene, John and Sherlock gather in a circle. Everyone is looking expectantly at Sherlock and he unconsciously takes a step closer to John for reinforcement. John slips his arm around his back and says, “Hey, everyone listen up. I want to introduce you to this brilliant young man, my boyfriend, Sherlock Holmes.”

Sherlock feels the blood drain from his head and feels a little unsteady on his feet. John feels him drift a bit and keeps talking. “Introduce yourselves and be gentle with him, will you?”

The beautiful dark-haired woman that John had pointed out in the box opposite them grabs the auburn-haired woman next to her and says, “No promises, John. I’m Irene and this is my partner, Kate.” She reaches across to shake his hand and says to John, “Oh, look at those cheekbones. Brilliant and gorgeous. Well done, Doctor Watson.”

Sherlock feels the blood rush right back up to his cheeks and John wipes his hand over his forehead and down over his eyes. “Kate—”

Kate elbows Irene and reaches to shake Sherlock’s hand herself. “Pay no attention to the woman, Sherlock. Welcome to our little group.”

Irene shrugs. “What? I misbehave. Were you expecting something different?”

Gary shakes his head and puts his arm around Billy. “Pleased to meet you, Sherlock. We’ve heard a lot about you.”

Sherlock glances at John with surprise and receives a warm smile in return. Billy, who looks much younger than Gary, identifies himself and the six of them break into smaller groups to catch up with one another. John and Irene start to discuss their plans for the Pride parade. John explains that they may have to catch up with all of them later because they’ve been invited by Sherlock’s chemistry teacher to watch the parade from her house.

Irene says, “Chemistry teacher? Not Martha Hudson?”

John looks at Sherlock who nods.

Kate takes her cell phone out of her black velvet clutch and punches in a number. She turns away
with her finger in her ear and after a few more minutes of everyone catching up with one another, Martha Hudson and Marie Turner join the group. The four women hug and chat and more introductions are made.

Ms. Hudson’s mouth opens wide at the sight of Sherlock in his tuxedo and she gives him a big hug. She shakes John’s hand with a more open expression this time.

“I didn’t realize you were a sponsor, Dr. Watson. This is a cause very close to my heart as you can imagine.” She takes Sherlock’s hand and says, “I’m only sorry we weren’t able to get the school started sooner.” John tilts his head and looks at Sherlock curiously. “I hope Sherlock passed on my invitation to you. We would be very pleased to have you and your friends come to our party.” She looks at Sherlock and says, “And you asked Molly as well?” Sherlock nods. Cheerfully, she calls out in her classroom voice, “That’s settled then. Everyone at our house before the parade, eleven o’clock. Good night.” She and Marie take off.

John asks Irene to take a picture of him and Sherlock together and it sets off a round of picture taking in every possible configuration. John is flipping through them as Sherlock looks and says, “We’ll have to send these to Martin. And Myc.”

Sherlock still can’t believe it’s him in the picture standing next to this jaw-droppingly handsome man. He can’t wait for Mycroft to see him in the tux. Possibly even his dad. Maybe they’ll see I’m a man. “To Molly too,” he adds. It’s getting on towards eleven-thirty now and everyone says goodnight.

*******

When they arrive at the condo, Sherlock is still buzzing with excitement. The music was beautiful, having sex in public was thrilling, and John had introduced him as his boyfriend to his sophisticated friends. Once again, he is disoriented by how much his life has changed in such a short time.

He doesn’t think he messed up. He had answered politely when Kate and Gary spoke to him, remembered to “send the ball back” and ask Gary about the bed and breakfast. He makes a mental note to tell Molly about his conversational success.

John pulls him close for a kiss and they kick off their shoes and tumble onto the sofa laughing. Sherlock lies on top of John, talking a mile-a-minute about the music and the theater and asking about John’s friends.

“I wonder if I can get Nessun Dorma sheet music for guitar. Will there be other operas this summer? How old are Gary and Billy? I can’t believe there were so many gay couples just...being gay. Can we go to New Hampshire? I’ve never been outside of Ohio and —”

“Whoa! Slow down, sweetheart! First, I want to tell you how proud I was to be with you tonight. Did you mind me introducing you as my boyfriend?”

“No.”

“Excuse me?”

“I’m sorry. No, Sir.”
“Better.” He kisses the tip of Sherlock’s nose. “And did you like being fucked in public?”

“Yes, Sir, it was scary but exciting. Someone could have seen us!”

“That’s what makes it exciting. Do you know why I did it?”

“Because you were horny, Sir?”

John laughs. “Yes, there was that. But I did it to show you that no matter where we are, you belong to me. I can have you wherever and however I please.”

A little shudder passes through Sherlock at these words. He wonders how the pleasure he feels in submitting to John can co-exist so seamlessly with the increase in self-confidence he’s experienced in the last month. It doesn’t make sense. He’ll have to think about this, but not tonight. He lays his head on John’s chest and hums.

“Up now, time for bed,” John says, pushing him off.

Sherlock heads for the bedroom as John turns off the lights. He’s three steps through the door when he hears John clear his throat. He turns, and John is standing in the hall wearing a dark expression.

“Sherlock.” John’s voice is ominous, and Sherlock draws in a deep breath. He’s entered the bedroom clothed without thinking.

“Come here,” John says quietly, and Sherlock obeys, walking meekly to stand beside John in the hall.

“I’m sorry, Sir. I was distracted, just thinking, about so many things.”

“No excuses. Rules are rules and I expect complete obedience. We’ll make this the start of next week’s tally. Two strokes.”

Sherlock reaches up and begins pulling at his bowtie.

“Wait. Earlier I said I couldn’t wait to get you out of this tuxedo, allow me,” John says, taking Sherlock’s wrists and easing them down to his sides. John finishes untying the bowtie and pulling it from the collar, then he pushes the jacket from his shoulders and places it over the back of the chair. Taking each hand in turn, he kisses the palm, then unbuttons the cuffs. Next, he begins with the buttons at Sherlock’s neck, slowly exposing the creamy flesh underneath with each one and pausing to pull the still-damp shirt from his trousers. He runs his fingers lightly over each pink nipple before moving on. Sherlock stays motionless, allowing himself to be undressed.

For the second time this evening, John unbuckles the belt and pulls it from the loops. He holds it near Sherlock’s face. “Maybe with your belt, yeah?” John whispers and Sherlock’s stomach flips. John unfastens his trousers and they drop to the floor. He feels hands on his hips, and the boxers slide slowly down to join the trousers. He steps out of them and stands naked before John. He can feel John’s eyes travel over his body.

“As handsome as you looked in that tux, you are exquisite without it,” John says taking his hand and leading him into the bedroom.

“I’ve got dried come all over me,” Sherlock observes, looking down at his matted pubic hair.

“Can you guess why I didn’t have you wear a condom?” John asks.
“So I’d be reminded all night what we did and that I belong to you, Sir?”

“Exactly right, Sherlock,” John chuckles, “you’re a quick learner. Come, let’s get in the shower, and I’ll clean you up.”

Sherlock wakes up with every limb wrapped around John who is starfished under the covers. He’s warm and feels so cozy he almost wants to go back to sleep, but his knee brushes against John’s morning erection and he grins mischievously to himself. He slides down under the sheets. The smell is intoxicating: their mingled nighttime sweat, John’s musky maleness, a new combination of the two of them. Boyfriends.

He drags his nose along the crook of John’s neck, inhaling deeply as he goes. He wants to lick his nipples, but not enough to wake John up and ruin the surprise, so he just gently rubs his cheek on his chest, minding his stubble. John lets out a sleepy grumble and Sherlock freezes until he’s sure he’s back asleep. He lays his face against the tight muscles and makes a mental note to find out if John is as ticklish as he is. He traces his hipbone and follows the deep scent to John’s groin and breathes in, filling his lungs, his mouth watering. John rolls over with another sleepy noise and Sherlock follows him onto his side. He slides down a bit further until his face is aligned with John’s cock. It’s dark but just enough morning sunlight filters through the sheet to see it lying hard against his stomach. It takes all of his self-control not to grasp John’s hips and swallow down the length of him. But he’s having too much fun to end things quickly.

He focuses on the head and places a tiny, delicate kiss to the very tip. Even with as much time as he’s spent on his knees in dark alleys, he hasn’t had too much experience with foreskins. His “clients” had mostly been cut. He fiddles with it for a moment, sliding it back and forth. John is so much thicker than he is and he wonders how he fit that much girth inside him. He pushes the loose skin back with his mouth. He lets his top lip settle on the slit and his lower lip on the silky-smooth skin of the glans, and just rests there for a few moments. He sticks out his tongue and slicks up his bottom lip with enough saliva to mix with the moisture seeping out and let him slide around the crown. He gives the underside a soft little lick. It jumps, but John doesn’t wake so he does it again, relishing a longer stroke, and then another until his tongue travels the whole underside of John’s cock.

The skin feels smooth and velvety and its taste is the scent intensified: deep, rich, salty, slightly bitter. He traces the bumps and ridges, tracks the vein that curves up underneath. John’s hips push forward slightly, and Sherlock looks up from under his lashes and sees the muscles of his stomach twitch. He suspects he’s running out of time and wants to cover as much territory as he can, so he slides down a little farther, having to curl up his long legs to fit on the bed.

He nudges his nose up against John’s balls. Other men’s testicles are still mysterious. Guys paying for blowjobs aren’t looking for technique and, as far as Sherlock was concerned, the deeper he could go and faster he could get the sleazebag off, the better. Fuck finesse. John has been very attentive to Sherlock’s balls and he’s hoping to return the favor as a mind-blowing wake-up call.

He wishes there was a little more light. He’s never seen them this close before. Hopefully, there will be time for a closer visual examination at some point. In the meantime, he gets busy with his fingers, lips, and tongue. He presses his lips to John’s skin for the lightest kiss, more of a touch, really. The skin there is wrinkled, and he knows how soft it is from his own explorations, but
against his lips, it’s impossibly delicate. He wants to rub his cheek against it, but he’s afraid his stubble might be too rough. He pulls the loose skin, holding it between his fingers as gently as he can, and it feels even more velvety. He continues exploring with tiny little licks and gets the whole of it as wet as he can, then opens his mouth slowly and draws it inside, cradling it carefully and rolling it with his tongue. He hollows his cheeks and applies gentle suction.

John makes a grumbling sound and Sherlock guesses he better proceed to the main event. He drags his tongue up along the underside of his cock and takes the whole thing into his throat at once. That was my moneymaker. If for nothing else, even if things never go further, at least I’ll love him for that forever. He took me away from that and I’ll never go back.

“Oh, god, Sherlock, what--” John lets out a noise that’s something between a groan and a shout. Sherlock smiles to himself and starts sliding up and down with energy now, swallowing on the downstroke and moaning himself. He feels John reaching for him under the covers, but when he can’t find him, throws the sheet back.

“Fuck, Sherlock, you’re killing me. Let me sit up. I want to touch you.” They rearrange themselves and John buries his fingers in Sherlock’s tangled curls, while he buries his face in John’s lap again, with determination. He can feel John tensing up more and more and increases his speed. John throws his head back, his balls pull up under Sherlock’s chin and empty into his throat. He swallows hungrily, taking John into himself, absorbing him, enveloping him. It is nothing like the blowjobs he’s given to strangers. Those were mechanical, this is...intimate. Almost spiritual.

When Sherlock releases his softened cock, John is panting but pulls him up to lick at his lips and taste himself. Sherlock kisses him back, exhaling the scent of sex into his mouth, then curls against his chest to let him catch his breath.

“What did I do to deserve that, sweet boy?”

Sherlock looks at him, thoroughly pleased with himself. “Nothing in particular. I just woke up happy to be here. Happy you took me to the opera. Happy you introduced me to your friends.” Happy to be your boyfriend. “Just happy.”

John kisses his forehead and says, “Let’s see if I can make you even happier. Kneel up.” John spreads his legs and Sherlock settles between them. “Perfect. Now, it looks like you could use some attention yourself.”

Sherlock had been trying to ignore the increasing tension between his legs, and focusing on bringing John off had been a perfect distraction, but now he can think of nothing else. He gulps and clasps his hands behind his back not trusting himself to keep them off his cock. And the way John is staring at him isn’t helping at all, like he’s some kind of tall, cool drink in the desert. John strokes his fingers down from the sides of his nose like he has an invisible mustache and his tongue peeks out just enough for Sherlock to see the pink tip of it.

“Perfect. Absolutely perfect.”

Sherlock’s stomach flips over and he closes his eyes, letting his head drop back. John chastises him immediately. “None of that now. I want your eyes open and on me.”

Sherlock picks his head back up and opens his eyes wide.

“Is that clear?”

Sherlock feels the heat coloring his cheeks. “Yes, Sir.” How can it be harder to look at him than it
“Good boy.” And that sends the heat searing across Sherlock’s chest. His eyelids flutter closed despite his effort and John says, “That’s one for the tally.”

Sherlock opens his eyes and frowns when he sees the ravenous grin on John’s face.

“Let’s try again. Your eyes are…”

“Open and on you, Sir.”

“That’s right. Next--” John reaches over into the nightstand and gently tosses the bottle of lube to Sherlock. “You’re going to wank yourself off, but you’re to follow my directions and finally, you’re NOT to come until I tell you. All your orgasms are mine. Do you understand?”

Sherlock’s face is blazing now. “Yes, Sir.”

John sits forward and swipes his tongue across his lower lip. “Now, let’s get started. Slick up your hands.”

The cap opening and the squirt of the lube sound unnaturally loud to Sherlock and he tries to focus on John and following his instructions.

“Rub your hands together to warm them up. Then scoop up your bollocks with your left hand and just roll them around a little in your palm. Give them a little tug, just a gentle one. That’s right, now just hold them and take your other hand and get yourself all wet--keep those eyes on me—”

Those words--roll, tug, wet-- in John’s voice, are impossibly arousing and Sherlock worries that he is going to shoot off before he even starts stroking himself. He shudders to think what the punishment for that would be.

John keeps on with his scorching narration. “Spread the lube around, but keep your hand open, don’t grab. Make sure you get every spot on the shaft covered. Is it all covered?”

Sherlock’s head is lolling around but he nods. He’s managing to keep his eyes locked on John’s eyes, the brilliant blue only a ring around his dilated pupils.

“Words, Sherlock, is your cock slick now?”

“Yes, yes, Sir. Slick.”

“Good boy. Now, squeeze a little more into your hand and get the head greased up-softly, just circle around some, then run your finger under the ridge. Go ‘round it again and then you can grip it and give a twist underneath, that’s it, and now you can start pumping, go ahead, up and down now, you can go a little faster, faster—”

Sherlock is breathing heavier now and struggling not to close his eyes and give himself over to the sensations and then he hears:

“Stop.”

“Wha—”

“Freeze! Take your hand off, now!”

Sherlock releases his grip and stares at John in open-mouthed shock.
“Deep breaths, in and out, that’s it.”

Sherlock tries to slow down the rise and fall of his chest while the throbbing of his dick short-circuits his brain. He’s whimpering, but he holds on, keeping his eyes fixed on John, who’s locked on him like a laser.

“Good boy! You did it, you held on for me, I’m so proud of you! Now, we’re going to do it one more time. You’re going to bring yourself right up to the edge again.”

Sherlock groans and swears to himself that if John kills him, at least he’ll die happy.

“You tell me when you’ve got a hold of yourself, when you think you’re ready to start again. Do you know how beautiful you are like this? Your red cheeks and chest, your nipples standing out…”

Sherlock reaches for them and they are, erect and firm under his fingertips. The sensation jumps straight to his cock, and lets go of them quickly, not needing any more stimulation. A few more deep breaths and he says, “Ready, Sir.”

“Go on and rub them a little more, softly, around them, across the tops, that it. It feels good doesn’t it, yeah?” Sherlock gulps in a rush of oxygen and John nods knowingly. “We’re going to be paying those a little more attention in the future, sweet boy. Now, give your cock a squeeze at the bottom and start sliding your hand up and down again. Do you need more slick? Ok, then, speed up a little, squeeze a little more, and give a twist up at the top, right under the head…”

This time around the pressure builds so fast that Sherlock can’t wait for John’s instruction and he rips his hand away before John even realizes that his orgasm is cresting.

John gets to his knees so that they are only inches apart, and the tip of Sherlock’s erection is brushing John’s stomach, making him want to push his hips forward, sandwich it between them and come. Every nerve ending is tingling, every muscle tensed, waiting for permission to let go and come. Please John.

John touches Sherlock’s forehead with four fingers. “Look at you now, your skin is glowing, sweat’s broken out all over you.” He licks the tips of his fingers while Sherlock watches, shaking and clenching his fists. John lifts the curls from the back of his neck. “You’ve done so well, you were so good for me, such a good boy, you deserve a reward, don’t you think?”

Breathless, Sherlock huffs, “Please, please, Sir.” John leans in, grabs his shoulders and gives him a kiss, a mashing together of lips and teeth, but Sherlock stays frozen, afraid that any movement will set him off like nitroglycerine. John picks up the lube, squirts a healthy dollop into his own palm, and takes possession of Sherlock’s flushed cock. He pumps, fast and firm.

“You have my permission, now, sweet boy, whenever you’re ready, you come for me. You keep watching me, but let it take you, let me see you let go.”

Sherlock had tried to pry a plug out of a socket with the blade of a knife when he was little but the shock of it was nothing compared to the pulse of electricity that rips through him when he comes under John’s hand as they are staring into each other’s eyes. He falls forward and John catches him and lays him gently down on the come-smeared sheets. He strokes his face and combs through his hair, praising him and showering him in affectionate nonsense. Sherlock smiles blearily and buries his face into John’s chest, still trembling with the aftershocks of his orgasm.

They lay together silently for several minutes, the morning sun painting golden stripes on their damp skin. It’s Sunday morning and the city is quiet. The only sounds other than their own
breathing are the tweets and whistles of the birds at the feeder on the balcony and the distant clang of bells from one of the several old churches in the heart of downtown. It’s peaceful, and Sherlock is thinking he’d like nothing better to stay here all day in John’s arms when his stomach growls loudly.

“Worked up an appetite, did you?” John says, giving him a squeeze.

“Yes, Sir. I wanted to surprise you. Was it good?”

John’s chest heaves with laughter under Sherlock’s head. “Was it good? Bloody hell, Sherlock, waking up with my cock in your mouth? It was amazing. You are amazing. Thank you.”

Sherlock grins, pleased with himself, and John continues, “I’ll get up and make us some breakfast.”

“Nooo, not yet,” Sherlock says, rising up on an elbow to look pleadingly at John.

“Alright, five more minutes, but then we are going to get you fed.”

When Sherlock is once again nestled against him, John says, “I got a call from Mike Stamford last night. You remember him?” Sherlock nods. “He was able to get you that part-time job in the lab. I know it’s late notice, but they want you to start tomorrow and work Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Your class is Tuesdays and Thursdays, so it works out perfectly.”

“How—”

“I have some pull there and they don’t know about the drug issues. You passed the background check, so you must not have had any arrests.”

“No, Sir.”

“And somehow the records of your overdose have ‘disappeared’. Myc is quite impressive. I’m beginning to like that brother of yours.”

John holds Sherlock’s chin and looks at him severely.

“I’m placing my trust in you, Sherlock. In that environment, you may have access to opiates. I recommended you. If you cock this up, it reflects on me, understand? Do you think you can handle it?”

“I’m going to stay clean, Sir. I promise.”

“As an insurance policy, I was able to get Molly in too. She’s a good influence. They’ve probably already contacted her. It’s nothing too exciting: data entry, delivering paperwork, cleaning equipment, but it will look good on your applications, which, by the way, you need to get started on. I’m putting it on your list for this week.”

“Yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir. Thank you so much!” Sherlock hugs John enthusiastically before pulling away and falling back onto the pillow.

Sherlock clears his throat and asks the question that has been percolating in his brain since he moved in. “I’ve been thinking. About where I’m going to go when the summer ends. I can’t get in anywhere for fall semester and I don’t want to go back to my Dad’s. I could start looking, maybe try to get my own place, but I don’t have any money.”
“While you’re here you’re my guest and you will be saving every penny you make for college. That is non-negotiable. We’ve got some time to work out what will happen in the fall.”

“But you’ll be leaving?” The thought of this makes Sherlock’s insides churn.

“Yes, I’ll be going back to London, I have to, but I’ll be back to visit. I’m not going to walk out of your life, if that’s what you’re worried about. I wouldn’t do that to you, Sherlock.” He takes Sherlock’s hand and gives it a squeeze. “When I met you, I admit it, you might have been just a conquest, but now...now, I’ve come to recognize how amazing you are and I’m not going to hurt you. We’ll figure it out. I promise.” John pulls Sherlock to his chest and kisses his forehead. “I will not disappear.”

Sherlock tries not to think about his mom. Or Myc. Or Victor.

******

After breakfast, Sherlock makes a dividing line on the whiteboard and beneath it, makes three tally marks and writes “#1 disobeying”. Above the dividing line, the twelve-stroke tally for this week remains. It’s on his mind all day, but John doesn’t say a word. Sherlock plays his guitar, and it doesn’t help. He studies, but the thought of the impending punishment is so distracting that he doesn’t accomplish much. He rides his bike along the river and can think of nothing else. Will it be a paddling again? Why hasn’t John said anything? He’s not dreading it exactly; it’s more like a nervous excitement.

As he pedals, he feels a vibration in his back pocket and stops to check his phone. Rule #7 - I will be available by phone at all times.

He pulls off the path and looks at the screen. Molly. He lays his bike on its side and sits beside it in the grass while opening the text.

MH: Hi! How was the opera?
SH: Awesome! U would love it
MH: And Dr. Hottie...?
SH: I’ll tell U L8R
MH: afkuguigb!!!!
MH: I got the call about the job! Give J a big kiss for me
SH: I will :)
MH: So I’ll CU tomorrow!
SH: Yes
MH: And you’ll tell me everything?
After dinner, Sherlock is clearing the table and tidying the kitchen while John works in his study. The whiteboard is still there with its tally, reminding him, as if he needed a reminder, of his debt. He’s loading the final plate into the dishwasher when he sees John leaning against the door to the study, watching him with arms folded across his chest.

“It’s time,” John says.

Sherlock closes the dishwasher and stands still, waiting for instruction.

“Get yourself cleaned up and I’ll meet you in my room.”

Sherlock enters John’s bedroom naked and John is standing by the low backed chair, wearing only his jeans. He points wordlessly to the floor in front of him and Sherlock kneels obediently, grasping his elbows behind his back.

“You have a debt to pay. You’ve broken the rules.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Before we begin, I have something I want to try out with you.” John holds up a thin, black strip of leather. “You told me you were happy to be called my boyfriend. I’d like you to wear a symbol of my ownership of you and your submission. It’s not a formal collar, but it is a symbol of our relationship deepening. I’d like you to wear it when we are here together. Perhaps at some point, you will wear it in public, but let’s take it one step at a time. I’m going to ask you for your color, but from here on out, it is your responsibility to tell me. I won’t always ask. You have agreed to use your colors and I expect you to do it. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“So, what is your color, Sherlock?”

Sherlock looks at the black leather collar dangling from John’s fingers. It has a small ring embedded in the front. Sherlock can only imagine what that is for. A leash maybe? He answers without hesitation. “Green, Sir.”

John smiles. “Good boy.”

He holds it out so that it is just inches from Sherlock’s face. “Kiss it.”
Sherlock leans forward and presses his lips to the smooth leather, inhaling the smell of it. It reminds him of the crop.

John places the collar around Sherlock’s neck and fastens it, snug but not tight. He moves his head from side to side, getting used to the feel of it. Some of his nervousness about the punishment leaves him as he concentrates on this new sensation and he lets out the breath he’d been holding. He feels almost calm.

“Do you remember which rules you broke?”

“Yes, Sir. One, two and five.”

“And how many strokes?”

“Twelve, Sir.”

“Good. Go to the drawer and bring me the paddle with the cut-out.”

Sherlock rises and goes to the chest of drawers. The requested paddle is lying next to the one that John used last time. It is black and rectangular, but the middle of it is open. Sherlock knows his physics and immediately understands the reason. It will travel faster through the air. He picks it up and it’s heavier than the other paddle. Stiffer too. He suspects that these twelve will be harder to take than the previous seven, and, the nervousness back in full measure, hands it to John who places it in his back pocket.

Sherlock is hoping for some affection, but John is all business. “Bend over the chair please.”

Sherlock bends over the low chair back and his knuckles are white as he grips the edges of the seat. *Breathe, breathe.*

John’s hand runs up his back to his neck, and he gives the collar a little tug. “I’m going to warm you up with my hand first.” The hand trails back the way it came and comes to rest on Sherlock’s buttock, where it lingers, caressing his skin. He closes his eyes and waits. The anticipation is maddening. *Shit, I actually want it.* This thought takes him by surprise and before he can think about it further, John smacks his ass with an open hand.

Compared to the paddle and the crop, the feel of John’s hand is almost soothing. The sound of it: *smack, smack, smack,* echoes in his ears as his body registers the sting. It’s more personal, the skin against skin contact, and Sherlock finds himself yearning to be over John’s lap, to feel his body pressed against John’s thighs as he accepts the spanking. But he realizes that wouldn’t be a punishment anymore.

When his backside is thoroughly suffused with warmth, John stops and repeats the formal words that Sherlock remembers from his last paddling.

“It’s time for the paddle and I need you to ask me for your punishment.”

A shiver runs up Sherlock’s back and he says, “Yes, Sir. Please punish me, Sir.”

“Please count and thank me for each stroke.”

Sherlock hears the sound of the paddle slide out of John’s pocket and shivers again when he feels the slick leather surface against his warm skin.

He can hear the difference before he feels it. It whistles, and the smack of it is sharper against his
already pink skin. John is not holding back either. He has begun at a much more intense level, apparently believing Sherlock no longer needs coddling. A yelp escapes him and he wills himself to hold still. His optimism about making it through without crying vanishes.

“One, thank you, Sir.”

The second stroke comes quick and harsh and he has no confusion about the fact that he’s being punished.

“Two, thank you, Sir.”

His ass is on fire with the third and fourth blows and John touches him, the contrast between his cool hand and Sherlock’s hot skin isn’t comforting at all. Five, six, he’s halfway through and breathing heavily.

John lets loose with a barrage of four and Sherlock cheats a little. “Seven eight nine ten, thank you, Sir.” He feels tears pricking at the sides of his eyes, but he can’t remember why he should be concerned about it. The reason seems such a long way away. He’s drifting on a wave that subsumes the pain into heat and pressure—a pressure on his flesh that lifts the pressure on his mind. Two more strokes and the tally and his conscience will be clear. He’s eager for them now and they come.

“Eleven, thank you, Sir. Twelve, thank you, Sir.” Sherlock’s elbows unlock and it’s only John’s quick grab around his waist that keeps him from collapsing to his knees.

“Heart, there, sweet boy, what’s going on there? Are you alright?” He drops the paddle onto the floor and swings Sherlock’s arm around his shoulder. He half-walks, half-draggs him over to the bed and lays him down gently on his belly. “Talk to me, Sherlock, are you ok?”

Sherlock gives him a bleary-eyed smile. “All forgiven?”

John rubs small circles into his back. “Yes, all forgiven, once the punishment is over. Now, tell me how you feel.”

“Feel good, Sir. All, like, floaty.”

John gives a quiet laugh. “Welcome to subspace, love. We may have to find new ways to punish you if you start enjoying it this much.”

Sherlock’s eyes are closed, and his cheek pressed into the pillow. It’s the endorphins released into his bloodstream that are making him feel this way, it’s all chemistry. This makes him think of Mrs. Hudson and he almost laughs.

He feels a softness against his skin, velvety but still slightly irritating to his raw flesh. John has covered him with a blanket. The mattress shifts and John is beside him under the covers, rubbing his back again, lips pressed to his forehead, gentle and undemanding.

“Sweet boy, my beautiful boy, let me hold you.” John rolls to his back and pulls Sherlock to him.

“Mmm,” Sherlock murmurs as he allows his boneless body to be cradled under John’s arm, eyes still closed, trying to hold on to the euphoria.

John continues whispering endearments and praise while stroking Sherlock’s hair. The words are just a low rumble, comforting, like background music, as his mind drifts and his usually racing thoughts seem to move in slow-motion.
Eventually, he opens his eyes. His face is still pressed against John’s chest and he sees the golden hairs there, moving in time with his own breath, and he watches them with fascination. There is wetness against his chin. *Shit, I fell asleep and drooled on him!*

“You awake, Sherlock?”

He nods and adds “Yes, Sir. Sorry, Sir.”

“For what?”

“For falling asleep and…drooling,” Sherlock says, wiping his chin and John’s chest with his hand.

“You were snoring too,” John laughs. “But don’t be sorry sweetheart, I was enjoying just holding you against me. Come up here.” John guides Sherlock to lie on top of him so that they’re face to face, and runs his hands over his ass which is still hot, tracing the welts with his fingertips, and Sherlock feels the first stirrings of arousal between his legs.

“How do you feel; would you like me to get a cold cloth?”

Sherlock shakes his head. “It hurts, but I’d rather just stay like this, Sir.”

“Later then, but you should drink something. I’ve got water and juice for you here by the bed.” Sherlock nods, “water” and John hands him a bottle. He tilts his head back and drains it as John watches. “God, you look so fucking sexy in that collar,” John says as he takes the empty bottle and tosses it to the floor. He brings his hands up to Sherlock’s face and traces the cheekbones with his thumbs before pulling him down for a kiss.
Fire and Ice

Chapter Summary

Week five starts off with a new job and the start of Sherlock's summer class. Sherlock and Molly meet their co-worker, Jim Moriarty, and John tests Sherlock's limits with an intense sensory experience.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When the alarm rings on Monday morning, Sherlock rolls over and pulls the covers over his head. John gives him another five minutes before nudging him gently.

“Come on, Sherlock. Let me take off your collar so you can shower and get ready.”

It works to wake him up. He sits up, and his fingers play around the edge of the leather. He’s forgotten all about it. He turns, and John unbucksles it, hands it to Sherlock, and says, “You’ll keep it in the drawer of the table by the front door. If I’m not home, you can put it on if you like. Otherwise, you’ll bring it to me when I get home and I’ll do it. It’s mine to take off of you. The only time you should take it off is to use it as a safeword. If you take it off, I’ll recognize it as a time-out from the contract, that there’s something we need to discuss or fix. How does that sound? Any questions or worries?”

“I don’t think so right now. If I think of something...”

“Always. Our arrangement is always open to negotiation Sherlock. I expect you to bring up questions or concerns whenever you have them and right away. The only reason I’m in charge is that we both want it that way. If there’s something you want to change, you have to let me know. I need to be able to trust you to be honest with me. Ok?” He tilts Sherlock’s chin up with his finger.

Sherlock still hasn’t figured out how a man who paddles his ass can make him feel so safe. I’m gonna be sore all day! But he tucks it next to the other mysteries that are John Watson and gives him a hug.

“Yes, Sir.”

*******

Sherlock is both anxious and excited about his first day of work. Retail work was tedious at best, and he wonders what work in a real lab is going to be like. John has classes today and they climb into the Porsche together for the drive to campus.

“Can I drive it sometime?” Sherlock asks, shifting in the seat to find the least painful position.

“Do you know how to drive a stick?”
“No, but I’m sure I could learn.”

“Oh, I know you could. It’d probably take you a whole five minutes. I’ll teach you.”

They pull out of the parking garage into the bright June sunshine. John puts on his sunglasses and zooms into the street and then onto the highway. Sherlock fiddles with the radio and lands on 102.7 Jack FM: “Playing what we want”. The words “the fuck” after “what” are implied in the station’s slogan.

He can’t believe he’s riding in this fancy car to his new job with his hot boyfriend. I have a boyfriend, and I don’t care who knows it. This concept is still exhilarating, and the wind whips through his hair as he sings “Natural” with Imagine Dragons, drumming his fingers on the door while his other hand rests over John’s hand on his thigh.

They arrive at the hospital and John gives him a warm kiss before they get out of the car.

“You ready?”

“I think so.”

“You’ll be fine,” John says squeezing Sherlock’s hand reassuringly. “Dr. Sawyer’s in charge of the lab. You’ll like her; she’s a friend of mine. Lots of paperwork today, I expect.”

I hope there’s no sitting involved.

John is right. When he arrives at Human Resources, he finds Molly already there, wearing slim beige pants and a yellow blouse, filling out forms. They agree to text each other when they’re given a window for lunch, but they cross paths in the line for having their picture taken and head towards the cafeteria.

“You OK Sherlock? You’re walking funny.”

“Oh, I um…pulled a muscle,” Sherlock mumbles as he texts John.

She furrows her brow slightly, then her eyes widen, and she looks like she’s trying to suppress a giggle.

Sherlock groans. “Please, just don’t…”

Thankfully, their conversation is interrupted when they arrive at the entrance to the cafeteria which is full of noisy staff and visitors heading for lunch.

John manages to meet up with them and they all spend a cheerful half-hour together, chattering and stuffing their faces as quickly as they can. John smirks every time he sees Sherlock fidget on the hard seat. He rushes away to a class and Molly and Sherlock head back to security to pick up their I.D. badges. Most of the rest of the afternoon is taken up with more paperwork, orientations, online presentations, and other bureaucratic minutiae.

Finally, near the end of the day, they are taken to the lab to meet Dr. Sawyer. She’s a pretty woman with light brown hair pulled back in a ponytail. Beside her is a slight, dark-haired boy in a lab coat who looks to be in his twenties, and has his eyes locked on Molly. A student probably, Sherlock thinks.

Dr. Sawyer looks down at the clipboard she’s carrying.
“Alright then, it’s great to have you on board, Molly and Sherlock. So, Molly, you’re starting in the fall—pre-med it says here.”

Molly smiles and says “Yes ma’am, I’m so excited to be here!”

“And Sherlock, you are…”

“Just taking a summer prep course right now. I’m mostly interested in Chemistry,” says Sherlock, slightly embarrassed.

“I understand you’re a friend of Dr. Watson’s.”

“Yeah.” Sherlock notices the other boy’s dark eyes shift from Molly to him and narrow a bit when he hears this.

Dr. Sawyer smiles kindly. “Welcome both of you.” She gestures to the boy in the lab coat. “This is Jim Moriarty, a graduate student in Forensics, and one of our lab techs here. You’ll mostly be working with him during your time this summer.”

Jim raises his hand and nods in greeting.

Dr. Sawyer continues, “He’ll show you around and get you a locker. I’ll see you again on Wednesday.” She shakes their hands and exits the lab, leaving them with Jim.

“You’ll be working for me while you’re here,” Jim says with an air of superiority. Usually, these jobs are reserved for University students, you two must be ‘special’,“ he makes air quotes with his fingers.

“We do a variety of testing here, mostly blood and urine tests for pathogens or drugs. You won’t be doing any of that of course. You’ll basically be my gophers. If you’re lucky, I may let you assist me in some testing.” As he says this, he’s looking at Molly again, and Sherlock sees her blush slightly under his gaze.

“You two probably think you’re the bee’s knees,” Jim says, “hot shots in your little high school. But this is the big leagues. Everyone here is smart, and you are starting at the bottom, so you’d better get used to it.”

“Sherlock’s a genius,” Molly says.

“Is he now?” Jim takes a step closer to Sherlock, invading his personal space and giving him a look that is half challenge and half amusement, but that Molly can’t see.

“Is he your boyfriend?” Jim asks, addressing Molly but still looking directly at Sherlock.

“No,” Sherlock says, meeting his gaze. He has taken an instant dislike to Jim but is determined to keep his cool.

“I didn’t think so,” Jim says with a sly wink, then turns and walks toward the back of the room. “Come on, I’ll show you your locker and give you your lab coats.”

“We get our own lab coats!” Molly whispers excitedly, grabbing Sherlock’s arm as they follow Jim.

*******
Despite his intention to work on his college application, Sherlock dozes off in the lobby while waiting for John to finish up his day, and is jolted awake by a hand on his knee.

“Don’t tell me they wore you out on your first day!” John says, leaning down, and for a moment Sherlock is afraid that John might kiss him. Holding hands at an opera, with lots of other same-sex couples is one thing, but kissing in a hospital lobby is something else. John doesn’t kiss him though, he just smiles.

“It was all boring shit, just like you said it would be,” Sherlock says, getting to his feet.

On the ride home, Sherlock fills John in on the details of his afternoon.

“What did you think of Dr. Sawyer?” John asks.

“She was nice. I didn’t really like that Moriarty guy though.”

“Moriarty?”

“Yeah, the lab tech, Jim Moriarty.”

The hand that John is resting on Sherlock’s thigh tightens almost imperceptibly.

“Do you know him?”

“Yes, we’ve crossed paths. He’s a real knob.”

“Knob, Sir?”

“Sorry, ‘dick’. He’s a real dick. Just be careful, OK, Sherlock?”

“I’ll try my best, Sir.”

********

When they enter the condo, they pause inside the door, and John traps Sherlock against it, caging him with his arms. Sherlock slides down a bit and John presses against him and finds his mouth. The kiss is long and deep and the rough feel of the scruff against Sherlock’s face contrasts deliciously with the softness of John’s lips and tongue.

“I’ve wanted to do that all day,” John says breathlessly, his forehead pressed against Sherlock’s. “Now be a good boy and get your collar.”

“Yes, Sir.” He’d thought about the collar on and off since this morning, wondered what Molly would think if she knew about it, wondered what Myc would think. And oh Jesus, what about his dad. But they would never know, would they? It’s just between us. Taking it from the drawer, he hands it to John.

“That will be your responsibility to remember from now on. Kneel, please.”

Obediently, Sherlock drops to his knees.
Walking behind him, John places the collar around Sherlock’s neck and fastens it.

“How does it feel?”

“It feels good, Sir.” And it does. It’s just a strip of leather, but it feels comforting, like an embrace. It means that John cares for him and that he doesn’t have to worry about anything while he’s wearing it. It doesn’t diminish him, submitting to John, and this is the paradox. It gives him confidence because John has chosen him. Submission has become a respite from his fucked-up life. A haven. He closes his eyes as John’s hands caress his neck and shoulders, hands that are tender now but that wielded the paddle last night with no mercy. Kneeling on the floor with the collar around his neck, Sherlock understands that he needs and desires both: the yin and the yang, the duality of pleasure and pain.

“I thought it would,” John says, pressing his lips to the top of Sherlock’s head.

The lesson of being on time, having been reinforced thoroughly via a sore ass, Sherlock arrives a few minutes early for his first college class, *Introduction to Queer Studies*, on Tuesday. He wishes there were aisles so he could sit in the back, but the chairs are arranged in a circle, so he takes the seat closest to the door. He’s nervous, sure he’s going to stick out like a sore thumb, but as the other young people drift in, he feels positively boring. A couple of kids have dyed hair, one in stripes the color of the rainbow. He’s the only person without a visible piercing and figures trying to work out the gender of a person with facial hair, who’s wearing a skirt, may not be the best use of his time. He opens his laptop and tries not to stare.

The professor is a thin man, in his sixties, Sherlock guesses, with a severe look that belies his cheerful attitude and sense of humor. He hands out a syllabus, a reading selection, and an assignment to write two pages about themselves, what made them decide to take the class and what they hope to get out of it. Sherlock wonders if “My boyfriend made me take it,” or “I don’t want a spanking,” are valid answers. He makes them go around the circle and introduce themselves and give their preferred pronoun, acknowledging that he himself might make mistakes and that they will all just have to be gentle with one another as they learn new ways to treat each other with respect for who they are.

The concept of preferred pronouns is new to Sherlock. “They” is hard to accept. “They” is plural. Even he, with his less than stellar English grades, knows this, yet they’re using it to refer to one person, according to the Professor. It makes no sense, and he frowns to himself, his logical mind thrown for a loop, and he wonders if he is going to be able to cut it in this class.

Sitting by the door works, because Sherlock gets to hear other people’s responses before he has to answer and when his turn comes, he says, “I’m Sherlock Holmes, um, I’m a him, and I’m more of a science person than humanities, but I need a humanities course and this seemed to be the most useful one to me.” There are a few chuckles and nodding heads at that. It gives him enough courage to go out on a limb. “And I guess I’m looking for all the advice I can get about what it means to be gay.” More nods and murmurs of agreement and he feels like he’s left high school behind for real.

His first assignment is a reading from *The Beautiful Room is Empty* by Edmund White and though it’s a fictionalized autobiography, he is drawn in immediately. A gay teenager from the Midwest--
what’s not to like? By the time John gets home, he is halfway through the book, even though he only had to read the first three chapters. He answers his greeting with a grunt and John has to take the computer out of his hands to get his full attention. Sherlock apologizes, brings John his collar and makes up for it with a wet and dirty kiss that has John gripping his hair with one hand and grabbing his ass with the other.

“Mmm, much better. That’s the kind of hello that brings a man home on time. Go add two to your tally. What’s got you so interested there? Couldn’t possibly be for your English class.”

Sherlock pouts a little at the teasing. “Yes, I admit, it’s interesting. And we’re going to be reading non-fiction too, so that’s a good thing. And the other kids were so open about who they were…” He takes off on an excited retelling of his day and John starts dinner, smiling fondly at his enthusiasm.

Later that evening they are enjoying the warm night air on the balcony. Sherlock is reclining on a lounge chair with his hands behind his head, looking at the stars, while John works on his laptop. An almost empty bottle of wine and two glasses sit on the table.

“I’d really like a cigarette right now.” Sherlock sighs.

John stops what he’s doing and turns to look at him. “You’re wearing the patch, right?”

“Yes, Sir.” Sherlock sits up and pulls up the sleeve of his T-shirt to show John the patch on his arm. “It helps, but sometimes it’s really hard not to think about it.”

“It takes time to break habits and make new ones, but I’m really proud of you Sherlock.” John gets up and sits next to Sherlock, taking his hand, and bringing it to his lips. “You’re strong to come as far as you have. I have faith in you. Thank you for telling me how you feel so I can help. Let’s get your mind off of it, talk a bit, I can finish up my notes later.”

Settling into the other lounge chair, John motions for Sherlock to join him. John spreads his legs, and Sherlock sits between them, leaning back against John’s chest. Together, they look at the night sky. Sherlock’s head is buzzing pleasantly from the wine, and his limbs feel heavy.

“Pretty, isn’t it?” John remarks.

“I guess so, Sir.”

“There’s the Big Dipper John says,” pointing. “When I was a kid I was fascinated by the stars. I could identify most of the major constellations. I wanted a telescope, but we were too poor to buy one.”

“Seems pointless,” Sherlock says.

What does?

“Stars, constellations, planets. What do they matter?”

“Aren’t you curious?”

“They just don’t seem relevant. There are so many interesting things to learn about here on Earth.”

John laughs. “Oh, Sherlock,” and he runs his fingers down Sherlock’s arms, from his shoulders down to the watch on his left wrist and the leather bracelet on the right. He pauses and fingers the bracelet.
“Can I ask you about this, Sherlock? Do you want to talk about it? You don’t have to. But if you wanted to…”

Sherlock is silent for a while, unsure of what to say. He doesn’t want to talk about Victor but there is a part of him that longs to bring it all out into the open. He’s never talked about what happened with anyone, not about what really happened, not Molly, not Myc, not Vic’s parents, and certainly not his father. The pain and guilt he’s carried with him for the last year rise in his throat, and he pushes it back down, glad that John can’t see his face. It’s too hard, I’ll lose it. I can’t.

“It was my best friend Victor’s,” he says finally.

“The one that died?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“He was more than your friend, wasn’t he?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“I’m so sorry, Sherlock,” John says, and thankfully doesn’t ask more questions, just wraps his arms around him and hugs tightly. They stay that way, silent, for several minutes. John’s arms feel strong and comforting, and Sherlock closes his eyes, just concentrating on the warmth of John’s body and the rise and fall of his chest against his back. It makes him feel better.

“You OK, sweetheart?” John whispers, kissing his temple.

Sherlock rolls his head against John’s shoulder and snuggles a little closer against him. “Yes, Sir. But I think I could fall asleep right here.”

“I was thinking I’d like to try something tonight, Sherlock, play a little bit, but if you’re too tired…”

Sherlock perks up immediately, and twists to look at John. “No, Sir, not tired at all.”

John lowers his chin and raises his eyebrows. “Really. Would you like to try again, keeping in mind Rule number four?”

Sherlock sighs deeply. “I’m sorry, Sir. I wasn’t thinking. I am a little tired, but I really want to play. Please?”

“Hmm. I don’t know. It’s been a long week for you already. You might need to sleep more than you need to play.”

“Um, maybe, Sir, but it’s been three days, since…”

“Since the opera?”

“Yeeeeees, but the opera was the last time…”

John waits with eyebrows raised. Sherlock’s eyes dart back and forth, looking at the floor and the sky and his hands, anywhere but John.

Finally, with a barely concealed smirk, John says, “You have five seconds to spit it out, or you’ll be adding five to your tally for Rule number four, because you aren’t being open OR honest and I’m losing patience.”

Sherlock swallows and John counts. “Five, four—”
“I’m horny!”

“That’s it! And Rule number…?”

Sherlock is screwing his eyes shut in excruciating embarrassment, but squeezes out, “Six. I will not engage in any sexual behavior without permission. This includes masturbation.”

John smiles broadly and takes Sherlock’s cheeks in his hands and kisses him sweetly. “And you’ve been a very good boy, haven’t you?”

Flaming red, Sherlock whispers, “Yes, Sir.”

“Well, then I suppose you deserve a reward, eh?”

“Please, Sir?”

John kisses him again and says, “I think that can be arranged. All right then, up you go. Let me finish my notes,” John says as they get to their feet. “Shower and—”

“I know, be thorough.” Sherlock softens his eye-roll with a mischievous grin, but John still gives him a swat on the ass.

“I’ll be waiting for you.”

********

When Sherlock enters the bedroom, naked but for the collar, John is already there, wearing only black silk boxers. The bed has been stripped of its covers, and John takes Sherlock’s hand and leads him to it.

“Turn around and let me have a look.”

Sherlock turns, and John runs his hands over Sherlock’s skin. The welts have faded a little, but the pattern that the cut-out paddle made is still visible. The feel of John’s hands on him sets off a flood of warmth in his groin, and he feels his dick jump.

John hums, then says, “Still sore?”

“Yes, Sir.”

John smiles, “I’ll be careful. I’m going to tie you up and give you some sensory stimulation, I think you’ll like it.”

*Sensory stimulation?* “Is it going to hurt, Sir?”

“Yes and no. This isn’t punishment Sherlock, it’s pleasure. You’ll have your safewords of course, but I don’t think you’ll need them. Lie down.”

John guides Sherlock down onto the bed.

“Do you trust me?”
“Yes, Sir. I do.”

John reaches to the bedside table and retrieves several strips of cloth. He pulls Sherlock’s hands together in front of him and binds his wrists before pulling them above his head and securing them to the headboard. Then he does the same to each of his feet separately so that Sherlock is stretched out naked on the bed with his legs spread. The last time John restrained him, it had only been his hands, so he still felt some measure of control. He could have kicked if necessary. Now he is completely immobilized and vulnerable. Instead of scary, it feels thrilling. John is standing by the bed just looking at him like he’s a piece of art...or a juicy steak, Sherlock can’t decide which.

“You’re so beautiful, Sherlock, tied up this way for me.” John’s hand has strayed to the front of his boxers, and he’s stroking himself through the silk as he continues to rake his gaze over Sherlock’s supine body. “I know you haven’t fully accepted it yet, no matter how many times I’ve told you, but you are so incredibly sexy.” John gets onto the bed and straddles him as he says these words. He kisses Sherlock and traces his jawline with his lips and Sherlock squirms against the restraints.

“Oh, my sweet boy, I’m going to have you tonight. I’m going to have you while you are helpless to stop me except with your words. Promise me you’ll use them if you need to.”

“I promise, Sir,” Sherlock says breathlessly.

“I’m going to blindfold you now. I’m going to give you pleasure and pain and, by the end, you won’t be able to tell the difference. Just concentrate on the sensations. Your body is an instrument and I’m going to play it. Are you ready?”

Sherlock’s mind is racing. “Yes, Sir.”

John takes another strip of cloth from the bedside table and ties it over Sherlock’s eyes so that there is only blackness. “I’ll be right back,” John says, kissing him before rising from the bed. Sherlock listens to John’s footsteps as he leaves the room and returns a few minutes later. He waits, his body tense, unsure of what’s about to happen.

\textit{Tssht}, the sound of a match being struck, followed by the smell of smoke. The clink of ice in a glass. A drawer being opened and shut. Every fiber of his being is on heightened alert, waiting.

He becomes aware of the smell of almonds and he identifies it immediately as the oil that John massaged him with a few weeks ago. The massage is a pleasant memory and his taut muscles relax somewhat. He expects to feel John’s hands on him and he isn’t disappointed. John is sitting next to him and then his hands are on the exposed undersides of Sherlock’s arms, sliding down to his shoulders and chest, rubbing the fragrant oil into his skin, circling his nipples briefly before moving down to his stomach in short, firm strokes.

“That feels good, Sir,” he murmurs.

“You’ll appreciate it even more a bit later,” John says without elaboration, pausing, presumably, to pour out more oil.

The hands are on his hips, on either side of his now-aching dick and they glide down the tops of his long thighs and come back up on the insides, fingers just brushing against his balls. With his legs tied open, he feels exposed and vulnerable and he tugs at the ankle restraints. He’s clenching his fists, eyes moving under the blindfold, trying to piece together all the sounds he’s heard and to remember what items were on the bedside table. \textit{Why didn’t I pay attention?}

“Calm down, sweet boy,” John says in a soothing voice. “Give that brilliant brain of yours a rest
and just enjoy what you’re feeling. Let go. Give me control. Trust me.” John has moved down to Sherlock’s lower legs and is massaging his left foot, sliding oily fingers between his toes causing him to jerk and giggle.

“You are a ticklish one,” John observes and then drags his short nails over the top of Sherlock’s foot from his ankle to the tips of his toes and it feels unexpectedly wonderful.

“Do that again please, Sir, harder.”

“Look at you, asking for what you want. Good boy,” John chuckles as he drags his nails with more force over Sherlock’s skin, then repeats it on the right foot. The praise adds an extra thrill to the sensation.

The touch is removed and doesn’t come back. Sherlock hears nothing for several seconds and then without warning, his dick is grasped and stroked firmly twice.

“Aaaggghhh. Fuck, Joh--Sir!” Sherlock exclaims.

“Soon, sweet boy. Soon,” John whispers as his thumb rubs the sensitive spot just under the head.

“Please don’t stop, Sir.”

“We’ve got lots of playing left to do, I don’t want you coming just yet.” John’s hand is gone and Sherlock is thrusting up into air. The feeling is maddening. Like having an itch and not being able to scratch it. A scene from his past suddenly comes to him.

When he was fourteen, Victor had somehow gotten Sherlock invited to a sleepover at another boy’s house and even more impressively, had convinced Sherlock to go. It had been as painful as he expected it to be.

There had been a shirts-and-skins touch-football game in the backyard. “Come on Sherlock, I’ll help you,” begged Vic, pulling at his hand and trying to get him to participate.

Sherlock drew away and crossed his arms over his chest, shaking his head furiously.

“I don’t know how. Just let me watch.”

And he sat in the grass and watched the other boys running and laughing. Sometimes he wished he could fit in and be like them, but they were mostly interested in dull and unimportant things: sports, Pokémon, girls.

As the game went on, he found himself watching the boys’ bodies, their strong legs and bare chests. Puberty was transforming these previously skinny, hairless kids into young men, and Sherlock inexplicably found himself wondering what their sweaty skin would taste like. He quickly pushed that thought away. What the fuck?

Later that night as they sat in the basement, Pokémon cards strewn on the floor after some serious battling and trading (pointless and stupid), the conversation turned to girls, and who had done what with whom. Each boy bragged about girls they’d kissed or felt up and who had the best tits. Even Victor had a story about French-kissing Suzie Ferguson under the bleachers in the gym. Sherlock felt that most of them were probably lying as he tried to stay as quiet and unobtrusive as possible.

“What about you, Sherlock?” asked one of the boys.

Horrified, Sherlock looked down at his hands, his brain racing to come up with an acceptable
reply. He’d never kissed a girl. Never even wanted to. He glanced desperately at Victor, who gave him a small reassuring smile and announced loudly, “I’ve got weed! Who wants to smoke?” This caught everyone’s attention and Sherlock mouthed, “Thank you” to Victor as soon as no one was looking.

When everyone was high, things got strange. A few of the boys were wrestling on the floor and others were playing a video game. Sherlock was in his sleeping bag, feeling mellow and watching the other boys with fascination as if they were some sort of alien life form.

Someone yelled, “Circle jerk! Who’s in?” There were some whoops and claps and three of the boys made their way to the center of the room. The boy who had suggested the game acted as emcee. “OK, guys, you know the rules, first one to shoot wins. Get ready, I’ll count to three.”

The three boys knelt in a triangle formation, pulled down their shorts and spit into their hands.

“One. Two. Three. Go!”

Each boy grabbed his own penis and began to pull and stroke.

Sherlock’s breath left him, and his mouth dropped open. He had never seen anything like this before, hadn’t known there was such a thing. One of the boys was facing away from him and Sherlock could see his buttocks clench and unclench as he thrust into his fist. Sherlock couldn’t tear his eyes from the boy’s ass.

The other boys began cheering and clapping, “Shoot, shoot, shoot!” and it broke his trance. He watched the other boys’ hands slide over their dicks again and again.

Breathing shallowly, he felt an erection growing between his legs. This was wrong, so wrong, but he couldn’t help it. His arousal grew as the boys continued to masturbate. Finally, one of the boys shouted and thick ribbons of semen pulsed from his penis and landed on the carpet.

“And we have a winner!”

Sherlock was grateful that all of the attention was focused on the competitors and that no one would see his flushed face or dilated pupils.

When the lights were out and they were all on the floor in their sleeping bags, Sherlock remained awake with a raging hard-on. Playing back the mental video of the circle jerk over and over, but unable to touch himself, terrified that someone would notice. He’d lain there in the dark desperate for stimulation.

Now he’s immobilized by physical bindings and not by fear, but the result is the same, an all-consuming, erotic frustration. He’s brought back to the present by a tinkling sound.

The next thing he feels is cold against his lips. Ice. John is rubbing a piece of ice over his mouth then taking it away even as he’s reaching for it with his tongue.

Then a wet coldness on his nipple. John is circling his left nipple with an ice cube while pulling the right into his warm mouth. Sherlock arches his back off the bed and a cry escapes his lips.

John ignores the exclamation and continues his assault on the sensitive buds. After a moment he stops, leaving Sherlock with his chest heaving. The coldness picks up again on his stomach as John traces the melting ice cube over his heated skin. His muscles contract as water drips into his navel, only to be sucked out by soft lips, and John takes a moment to rub his rough cheek over the skin of Sherlock’s belly and to lick lightly at the tip of his erection. Sherlock pushes his hips forward to
find more contact, but John has already begun kissing his way up Sherlock’s torso, pausing to rub his stubbled chin over his nipples, causing him to gasp with the almost-pain that seems to send electric pulses straight to his dick.

John kisses his lips and says, “I’m going to take things up a notch now, gorgeous. You’ve felt cold and soft and rough and I’m going to try heat next, melted wax. It will be hot, but not enough to burn. It’s supposed to hurt a bit, to push your limits. Just enjoy the sensations and the contrasts and remember that you have the power to stop it. What are your safewords?”

Sherlock lets out a breath. _Hot wax?_ He hadn’t been expecting that. He’d put his finger in the well of a burning candle before and it had hurt, the melted wax clinging to his skin and turning it red. His mom had scolded him and run his finger under cold water after kissing it.

“Safewords, Sherlock.”

He takes a moment to think, then remembers. _John_. “Yellow to slow down, red to stop.”

“Good boy.”

He feels John get off of the bed.

“OK Sherlock, I’m going to say where the first drop will fall, but after that, I won’t tell you, the surprise is part of the charm of this experience. Your right triceps. Are you ready?”

Sherlock nods.

“Words, please. Add one to your tally.”

“Yes, Sir.” Sherlock bites his lip and tenses. When several seconds have gone by and nothing has happened, he begins to have second thoughts. He’s helpless, tied and he’s only known John for what, a month? His breathing quickens, and he suddenly feels cold all over

“Red!”

John is beside him in an instant, one hand on his cheek, and the other pulling the blindfold from his eyes. “Talk to me, Sherlock.”

“I...I...just got scared.”

“Oh, my sweet boy, my good boy. I’m so proud of you for using your colors.” John is stroking his cheek. “What are you scared of? Are you scared of me?”

“I’m sorry, Sir...yes, I mean no...I...it was just for a second,” Sherlock says miserably.

“Don’t ever be sorry for using a safeword, Sherlock. I will always, always respect it. Rule five of my portion of the contract, remember? This relationship is supposed to bring pleasure to both of us, and we have to trust each other for it to work. Do you want me to untie you?”

Sherlock looks into John’s blue eyes. There is concern and kindness in them. The only reason he wants to be untied is so that he can wrap his arms around John, hold him tight and never let go. John had stopped when Sherlock said “red” and didn’t seem disappointed in him. “No, Sir, I’m better now. I trust you. Green.”

John shakes his head. “I don’t know, Sherlock.”

“Please, Sir. Green, I mean it.”
John leans down and kisses him gently on the lips. “All right sweet boy, but let’s start slow.” He stands and does not replace the blindfold. Taking the lit candle from the bedside table he holds out his arm and tips the candle over, letting the wax drip onto his own wrist. “It’s hot but I can control the heat by the distance. It won’t injure you and I won’t go near your most sensitive areas. Now, let’s try it on your arm.” He holds the candle about a foot over Sherlock’s triceps and looks at Sherlock questioningly.

“Yes, Sir.”

The candle tips and Sherlock watches the drops fall through the air and land on his skin. It burns and he draws in a sharp breath. It hurts, but not nearly as much as the paddle or the crop. He lets the breath out. The initial sharp burn is fading and, as the cooling wax travels across his skin, it feels soothingly warm. He gives John a smile.

“Shall we try again then?”

“Yes, Sir.”

John replaces the blindfold and slowly decorates Sherlock’s body with stripes and dribbles of wax, on his shoulders, down the middle of his chest, across his stomach and thighs. Sherlock is surprised at how good it feels, and he finds himself anticipating the next drop. Occasionally John surprises him by running something soft over his skin. A feather? Or dripping cold water on him which makes him jump. His mind is completely empty of anything but what his nerve endings are sending it and the more and more urgent throbbing between his legs.

He’s moaning by the time John finally removes the blindfold. “You’ve done so well, Sherlock, are you ready for your reward?”

Sherlock is practically writhing with arousal now. “Yes. Yes, Sir,” he gasps out.

“I’m going to let your feet loose and then help you over onto your belly. But you’re not to come until I tell you. That goes from now on. You don’t come without permission. Understood?”

“Yes, Sir.”

John unties the bindings at Sherlock’s ankles and slides his hands up his legs to his hips. He helps him turn over and grabs a couple of pillows to slip underneath him. Sherlock feels so exposed and it doesn’t help when John says, “Spread your legs open wider. I want to see that cute little hole of yours.”

Sherlock groans with embarrassment and lust. He does as he’s told. And then he waits. After a few moments, he feels John’s hands cupping his ass and massaging the cheeks gently. He pushes back against them, but as he settles back down he realizes that he’s so on edge, it’s possible that he could come any second from the friction between his cock and the pillowcase. He resolves to hold still, but he feels John’s thumbs separating the cheeks of his ass and a breath of cool air passes over his rim and he jerks forward. John chuckles and licks an ice-cold swath from the base of his balls to his tailbone and Sherlock yelps, thrusting three or four times into the pillow despite his intentions.

John’s tongue goes to work, circling Sherlock’s rim, nipping around the edges, and then dipping inside. Somewhere in the middle of the overwhelming sensations, Sherlock remembers that he had objections to this and scoffs at his own ignorance. The only thing that could be better is—

“I’m going to fuck you now Sherlock. I’m going to fill you up with my come. And then I’m going to put a plug in you. Keep it in you all night. You like that idea?”
Sherlock groans an answer, “Yes, Sir, please, god, please can I come?”

“After me, not before. You’ll feel me come, and then it will be your turn, understand?”

Sherlock feels John’s finger sliding where his tongue had been, and he pushes back again, wanting that finger inside of him.

“Greedy now, are you? Hold on, I’ll give you what you need.” Sherlock lets out a sound somewhere between a moan and a whisper when he feels John’s finger poke through the resistance of his muscle, and the slight burn only adds to his excitement.

“That’s it, sweet boy, let me hear you.” John pumps his finger in and out and Sherlock continues to sigh with pleasure. “Only for me, I’m the only one who gets to hear you. Nobody else gets to see you spread out like this. You take it only from me. Say it.”

Sherlock whimpers, “Yes, Sir, you, only you, please.”

John takes his time stretching the furl of muscle and adding a finger as Sherlock tries to still his squirming. It doesn’t help. “Please, Sir, please, I wanna come.”

John removes his hand gives him a slap on his ass, still tender from the paddle. “What did I say?”

Sherlock cries out, “Not until you, Sir. First you!”

“That’s right, you’ll wait for me. I get to take my pleasure from you, you gorgeous thing, then I’ll make you feel so good, right?”

“Oh, god, yes, please, please.”

John leans over and growls in Sherlock’s ear, “Ask for it.”

Sherlock tries to muffle his groan, but John rubs his now naked cock up against the cleft of his ass and his head comes up off the pillow and the sound makes John growl again, “Say it.”

“Please…please…”

John slips his fingers back inside and gives them a gentle twist. “Ask me for it.”

Sherlock bucks back, up against John’s hand. “Please, please, fuck me, Sir, please.”

“That’s it.” John replaces his fingers with his dripping cock and pushes slowly against his slippery opening. “And who—” they both gasp as John breaches him. “Who gets to fuck you? Who gets to come in that perfect arse?” John eases in until he’s sitting fully inside him, then draws out slowly while Sherlock grinds back, not wanting to lose the contact. John slaps him again. “Hold still, you take what I give you. Now answer me, who gets to fuck you?”

Sherlock jerks into the pillow again. “Ah! You! You, Sir, you’re the only one.”

“That’s right.” John starts speeding up his movements until Sherlock is grunting out a huff of air with every smack of John’s hips against his ass.

Sherlock cannot keep the pressure off his cock now and he cries out to John, “I can’t, I can’t stop it…”

“Don’t. Don’t you dare.” John shuffles forward and jerks Sherlock up by the hips to eliminate the friction, but keeps pounding away at him. It doesn’t help.
Sherlock cries out as John strikes his prostate over and over and he comes untouched. “Ah, ah, ah...I couldn’t...I couldn’t help it.”

John chokes out, “I didn’t even touch you, Sherlock, how...” He cuts off as, with a final thrust, he comes himself. He collapses on top of Sherlock and rests there long enough for his deflated cock to slip out. He reaches up and unties Sherlock’s wrists, checking his fingertips to make sure they’re warm and pink. “How do you feel, how are your hands, your wrists?”

Sherlock turns and hides his face in John’s chest. John wraps his arms around him, pulling him closer. He kisses his forehead and says, “First things first. Your hands.”

“They’re fine.” He clenches them against John’s chest so he can feel for himself. “I’m sorry. I tried not to.”

“I know you did. It’s alright. You know how sexy you are? How sexy you make me feel? I’ve never seen somebody come like that.”

Sherlock looks up at him shyly. “Really?”

John smiles and spreads a few more kisses around. “Yeah, really. We’ll work on your stamina. Or maybe use a cockring next time.”

“A what?”

John chuckles breathlessly and says, “Never mind. Roll over again. I don’t want that come leaking out of you before I get the plug in.”

Sherlock whines, “Do we have to?” and gets yet another smack for it.

“Not a good idea, adding to your tally at the moment. You’re in enough trouble as it is.” John rustles around before settling between Sherlock’s legs again. “Let’s see.”

Sherlock covers his face with his hands as John spreads him open. “Ah,” he hums in satisfaction, “plenty left. You’re slick with it.”

Sherlock feels his face flaming as the tip of a plug nudges up against him. “This one is the next size up, but it shouldn’t cause any pain. You might not even feel any stretch after me.” He can hear the smugness in John’s voice, but is distracted by the slow drag of the plug past his rim. He squirms until John taps his ass and says, “Hold still.” The bulge slips through and he takes a deep breath and he lets it settle in place. He’s still reeling from his orgasm and so exhausted, he barely minds.

John bustles around, wiping Sherlock down and removing the dried wax, which hurts a little where he has body hair. “Now you know why I oiled you up; wax is a bitch to get off without it.” He changes the pillows, then covers Sherlock with a sheet and blanket before slipping into bed. Sherlock turns away from him, but John doesn’t allow it, tugging him back over and cupping his face between his hands. “It’s OK, love, really. I’m not angry. Not at all. And you’ll get better at it, I promise.” He tilts Sherlock’s head up and kisses him gently on the mouth. “Ok?” He kisses him again. “Hmm?” Another kiss. “Huh?” Sherlock laughs finally and kisses him back. John ruffles his hair and they fall asleep snuggled close together.

Chapter End Notes
The book Sherlock is reading for his Queer Studies class, The Beautiful Room is Empty, by Edmund White, was the inspiration for Sherlock's line about tuxedos in the restaurant scene of The Empty Hearse. The line in the book is: "But for me the tuxedo (which depersonalizes waiters and lends distinction to friends)..."
Chapter Summary

John and Sherlock attend the Columbus Pride parade and festival. It is an eye-opening experience that takes Sherlock further along the path of self-acceptance. And there's John in a kilt. :)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sherlock is so excited the morning of the Pride parade, he doesn’t even remember his nicotine patch. From his stool at the breakfast bar, John reminds him to put it on. “Add one to your tally. Rule number?”

Grinning devilishly, Sherlock says, “I can’t remember.”

John grins back and grabs him, pulling him in tight between his legs for a kiss. “Brat. Make it two.”

Sherlock puts his hands on John’s shoulders and tries to pull away. He whines, “No fair! I was kidding! It’s number five! I will take care of my mental and physical health.”

John reaches inside Sherlock’s robe, clutches two handfuls of his ass and pulls him in even tighter. “Mm-hmm. Two anyway. Maybe a third for whinging. Just because I can. And because I like your arse pink.” He squeezes and Sherlock relaxes into John’s grip and grinds up against him.

The adrenaline is mostly excitement, but there is a flicker of anxiety running underneath it. He is looking forward to the parade, no question. That in itself is a kind of surprise—he can’t remember the last time he looked forward to being with other people, let alone in a crowd. But he wants to see Molly. He wants to spend time in Hudder’s house, to see what it’s like to live with a partner. He wants to know John’s friends, to be with him with other people. When he gets to the bathroom for his nicotine patch, he looks at himself in the mirror. He looks the same. But I’m different. He likes who he’s becoming.

He has an idea and opens the medicine cabinet and takes out a bottle of hair gel. He slicks his hair back with a comb and tilts his head from side-to-side, thinking he looks decent, then doubting himself. He reaches for a towel and starts to try to remove the gel, but as he’s looking at himself, John sticks his head inside the door. “Hey, gorgeous—bloody hell, your hair!”

Sherlock reddens and scrubs harder. “I know, hideous, I’m taking it out.”

“Bollocks—you look absolutely amazing! Don’t you dare touch it. As a matter of fact—” He grabs the comb and the gel and fusses over the curls that Sherlock missed. “I love your curls, but this is perfect for the parade. I’m gonna have to beat off the blokes who are going to want to get their hands on you.” He growls and grabs Sherlock by the hips and jerks him back against himself. “Who gets to touch you?” He reaches around and palms Sherlock’s cock. He’s breathless and doesn’t answer. John takes hold of him and bites his earlobe and whispers, “Who? Who do you belong to?”

John hums and licks a stripe up behind his ear. “Don’t you forget it.” He thrusts against him one more time and pulls away. Sherlock swallows and says, “Yes, Sir.”

“It’s a half-hour’s walk to your teacher’s house, so we need to leave soon. I’m going to get ready. Leave that hair alone.” He points at Sherlock menacingly.

“Yes, Sir. What should I wear?”

“Well, many people really go all out. It’s a chance to express themselves without judgment...be free. You’ll see all sorts of different clothes. Some of it’s pretty extreme, but it’s a special day, I think it warrants special clothing. What were you thinking of wearing?”

“I dunno, just shorts and a T-shirt.”

“I’ve got a rainbow T-shirt you could try. Would you be comfortable wearing that?”

Sherlock takes in a breath and considers it. In the past five weeks he’s undergone such a metamorphosis. Not so long ago he’d stood on the sidewalk outside his school being taunted by Seb and his friends and feeling humiliated. Now he’s considering wearing a rainbow T-shirt and going to a Gay Pride parade with his boyfriend. The prospect is both frightening and exhilarating. There would be no hiding it or denying it now. Not that he wants to. He’s not ashamed anymore. Now that those people, including his dad, are out of his life, the negative feelings have gone with them. He certainly isn’t willing to share the details of his relationship with John with anyone yet, maybe never will, but the weight he has carried for years feels so much lighter now.

“Yeah, OK.”

“You could wear your collar.”

Sherlock’s eyes widen. *Ms. Hudson and Molly!*

John reads his expression. “No, not now. I’m sorry. Forget I said that.” John looks thoughtful for a moment, then says, “I have another idea; something I’d love to see you in.” John’s eyes are twinkling and the tip of his tongue darts out over his lower lip. “I’ll be right back.” He goes to the bedroom and comes back a few minutes later holding what appears to be a bundle of black straps in his hand.

“It’s a harness. You’ll wear it under your clothes. No one will know but you and me. It’ll make you feel sexy, I’ll wager.”

“A harness, Sir?” Sherlock is incredulous but curious, unsure of what, exactly, it entails. He’s worked in a tack shop—is this some kind of pet play or something?

“Yeah, it doesn’t hurt. It just reminds you of what you are. Mine. It’s a sexy little secret. This one might even feel good. It’ll lay across your nipples, rub them when you move.”

Sherlock eyes the bundle of straps apprehensively then meets John’s eyes, which are calm and reassuring, but also a little hungry. If this will make John happy, he wants to do it. *How bad can it be?*

“Try it on, see how it feels.”

“Alright.”
John smiles, “It wasn’t a question, Sherlock. Now take off your clothes.”

“Yes, Sir.”

Without hesitation, Sherlock shrugs off his robe and drops his boxers to the floor. Obedience to John’s commands is becoming more and more automatic.

“Hold out your arms.”

John slips the harness over his arms and shoulders. Turning Sherlock around he pulls it into place and fastens it behind Sherlock’s back. It’s elasticized and fits snugly. Two straps about two inches wide, stretch across his chest, one just below his collarbone, and the other, precisely as John had described, over his nipples. They are connected to straps that circle his shoulders. Two straps that are joined in a Y shape in front of him, come from somewhere in the back, under his arms, and the tail of the Y hangs down his front, almost to his knees.

John takes the dangling strap and reaching down, lifts his testicles and slips the strap underneath so that the crotch of the Y is just behind them, then pulls the strap between his buttocks and attaches it somewhere behind his back. He takes a moment to fondle Sherlock’s ass and give his shoulder a gentle bite before turning him around.

John steps back and looks appraisingly at him. “You look bloody fantastic, Sherlock. It fits you perfectly.”

Sherlock stands there feeling awkward and a little strange with the strap running between his legs, and suddenly an unwelcome thought comes to his mind.

“Has someone else worn this for you, Sir?” The thought of John putting this on some other man before him makes him feel a bit jealous. He knows that John has had other partners, other relationships, he’d even been married before, but the thought of it makes him feel unsettled and defensive.

“No, Sherlock, not this particular one. I had it made just for you.”

“But, how...Not Mr. Greenfield!”

“No, god, no, calm down. Martin didn’t make it, sweet boy,” John says, taking Sherlock’s face in his hands. “He did give me your measurements, but I didn’t tell him why. Don’t worry. Come, look at yourself.”

John leads him to the full-length mirror and stands behind him looking over his shoulder, as they both gaze at the reflection.

“See how sexy you are,” John whispers, running his fingers lightly up and down Sherlock’s torso. “If we didn’t have to leave soon, who knows what I’d do to you.”

The image in the mirror looking back at him is a tall and slender figure that he can scarcely believe is him. His slicked back hair makes him look older. The black of the harness and collar contrast with his pale skin and the straps running down his body and disappearing beneath his balls make his body appear even longer than it is. It’s exotic, and he has to agree that it looks hot. He likes the way it feels too, the elastic shifting slightly over his nipples when he moves his arms and shoulders. Like the collar, it is comforting, a reminder of John’s ownership and protection, but the strap between his legs will definitely take some getting used to. Not in high school anymore. He smiles at himself and then at John.
“I thought you might enjoy it,” John says, turning Sherlock toward him again and kissing his lips lightly. Now just put your clothes on over it. I’ll bring you the T-Shirt. I’ll take off your collar before we leave and no one will be the wiser, yeah? Someday, I hope you’ll feel comfortable enough to wear something like this or your collar more openly, but for now it’s just for us.”

Someday.

“Someday” implies a future for them doesn’t it? Beyond the month or so they have left before John will go back to London and Sherlock will...do what? And what if he doesn’t get into school? He’d finished the online Common Application this week, no doubt saving himself several strokes of the paddle, and had emailed Ms. Hudson the first draft of his essay. Still, John promised he would stay in his life and what he’d just said implied that they would be physically together. Sherlock puts the questions of where and how and when aside and tries to concentrate on the present moment. He buries his face in John’s hair and hugs him tightly. “Just for us, Sir.”

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Sherlock is dressed and on the sofa reading *The Beautiful Room is Empty*, when John walks out of his bedroom. Sherlock, engrossed in the book, catches the movement out of the corner of his eye and then does a double-take. John is wearing a tight black tank top, short black lace-up boots with socks peeking over the tops and a *kilt!* The kilt is blue and green plaid with yellow and red stripes running through it. He’s wearing a thick black belt and some sort of pouch hangs from a chain around his waist.

“What the fuck?” Sherlock blurts out before he can stop himself. “I’m sorry, but what the actual fuck, Sir?”

John grins and crosses the room to stand before Sherlock with his arms crossed. “It’s a kilt. I told you people go all out today.”

“But why a kilt? I mean you look...um, pretty amazing, Sir, but—” Sherlock shakes his head. How can he look so masculine, so goddamn hot in a skirt?

“My father’s family comes from Scotland, and this plaid is the Clan Watson tartan. It goes back centuries. Kilts were forbidden for thirty-five years by an act of suppression by Parliament and were worn by the Highlanders as a protest. Then as a matter of cultural pride. Appropriate for today, no?”

Sherlock nods thoughtfully. “I guess so.”

“The pouch is a called a sporran. The rest of the outfit is, well, not so traditional, but it is over eighty degrees outside. And I’m not going to be the only one in a kilt, I assure you. And when you’re ready, I’ll take you to a BDSM club. Plenty of kilts there as well.”

“I didn’t know you were Scottish, Sir.”

“Yes, a ‘true Scotsman’ under my kilt, actually. Google it.”

Sherlock types a search into his computer and then looks up laughing.

“You’re not wearing underwear, Sir?”
“Nope,” John says, wagging his eyebrows suggestively.

“Prove it,” Sherlock challenges with a wicked grin. He’s surprised how much he’s turned on by seeing John this way. He’s normally so professionally dressed and conservative and the unexpected change is thrilling,

“Be my guest,” John counters, gesturing toward his groin.

Sherlock slides from the sofa to his knees and lifts the hem of the kilt. John hadn’t been joking, he is completely naked underneath, his soft penis nestled in golden pubic hair between muscular thighs. Sherlock bites his lip at the sight. He’s seen John naked many times before, but somehow this is different, sexier. Just like he feels daring with the secret harness beneath his clothes, knowing John is exposed beneath the kilt is making his dick hard.

He looks up at John, who is smiling down at him.

“You like what you see?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Close your eyes.”

“Sir?”

“Don’t question. Do as I say. Close your eyes.”

Sherlock closes his eyes.

“Now think about us going to dinner tonight. Think about yourself on your knees under the table, your head underneath the kilt sucking me off while I sip my drink.”

Sherlock’s breaths come a little quicker.

“Or slipping into the restroom, me bending you over the sink with your shorts around your ankles, and fucking that sweet arse of yours. It would be so simple.” John’s hand is now caressing Sherlock’s cheek.

“Yes, Sir. Yes, please.” His dick is fully hard now and needs attention, but he knows better than to reach for it.

“Just food for thought,” John says, pulling the hem of the kilt from Sherlock’s fingers. “Now open your eyes and let’s get moving.”

“But, I’m—”

“Sherlock. Who’s in charge here?”

“You are, Sir.”

“Yes, I am, and I said let’s get moving. Add a stroke to the tally and turn around so I can take off your collar.”
As they walk towards Ms. Hudson’s house, the crowd grows thicker and thicker. Downtown Columbus is usually sleepy on the weekends when all the businesses are closed, but this Saturday the sidewalks and streets are brimming with parade goers. Sherlock is utterly amazed by the variety of people and colors and music all around. There are families with strollers, men wearing impossibly high heels, glitter, rainbow flags, rainbow shirts, butch lesbians on motorcycles, topless women Is that even legal? and many people who look like they could have come right from his own neighborhood. Music adds to the air of joy and celebration. It’s contagious, with echoes of “Happy Pride” coming from every direction.

“So, what do you think?” John asks.

“It’s bigger than I expected. Where did all these people come from?”

“I’m sure that some people travel to watch the parade but most of them probably live right here.”

“I didn’t know.”

“Sherlock, most gay people don’t walk around in some sort of costume, or with an ID badge. They are just people. We are just people. People with jobs, families, bills to pay, with hopes and dreams that aren’t so different from anyone else’s. This is a day to celebrate what makes us unique, but at the core we’re all just human. All of us want and need love and intimacy.”

“And sex?”

“Yes, and sex, of course,” John laughs. “Enough seriousness! We are going to have a good time today. I want you to enjoy yourself, be yourself. Let down your hair, so to speak.” A curl has fallen down onto Sherlock’s forehead and John carefully replaces it. “I bet by the end of the day I might even get you to dance.”

Sherlock snorts, “Dance?”

“Sure, why not?”

“I don’t dance.”

“Yeah, you do.”

“No—”

“Sherlock, I’ve seen you in your room when you didn’t know I was watching. You dance, and you know what? You’re not half bad. You’ve got some moves, kid.”

Sherlock feels the familiar flush on his cheeks. “But not with...people.” He gestures vaguely at the throng around them.

John squeezes his hand. “Maybe with me then.”

At that moment, Sympathy for the Devil emanates from Sherlock’s back pocket. “It’s Myc,” Sherlock says without moving to retrieve his phone.

“Answer it, Sherlock.”

Breathing out a huff of protest, he obeys.
“Hi Myc.”

“Hello, Sherlock. I’m still out of the country, In London, actually, but I’m checking in on you as promised.”

“I’m fine.”

“How’s the good doctor treating you?”

“Great, really great.”

“And you’re clean?”

“I haven’t sold the computer for drugs if that’s what you’re worried about,” Sherlock says, bristling at his brother’s interrogation.

“I worry about you, Sherlock. Constantly.”

“I’m clean, OK?”

“Good to hear. Have you talked to Dad?”

“Hell no, have you?”

“Yes, I keep tabs on him. He’s still in rehab, but he seems to be serious about getting better. He talks about you, you know.”

“Yeah, I’m sure he does, calls me a faggot, I’ll bet.”

“Not to me, but he did tell me he saw your picture in a local magazine.”

“What?” Sherlock stops on the sidewalk abruptly and almost causes a pile-up. John gives him a quizzical look and he shrugs in reply and resumes walking, putting his finger in his other ear to keep out the noise of the crowd.

“City Scene, it’s a free arts and entertainment magazine. Apparently, they covered the Opera you attended last week, and you and Dr. Watson were photographed.”

“Shit, how bad was it Myc?” For an instant, he recalls bending over the table in the private box, with John’s dick in his ass. No. Impossible. No one saw that, it must’ve been in the lobby.

“I haven’t seen it, but from what he told me, it leaves no doubt that you two are a couple. You are, aren’t you? So I don’t see why it would be bad. Did something happen?”

“No, nothing happened. It’s just…I’m not sure how I feel about everyone seeing that.” He glances over at John who is listening with interest to his side of the conversation.

“The genie’s out of the bottle, brother mine. Anyway, I don’t recall you ever caring much about what people think of you, or was I wrong about that? If it’s any consolation, Dad said that you looked very sophisticated—Where are you, Sherlock? It’s quite noisy.”

“I’m at the Pride parade with John. We’re going to watch it from Ms. Hudson’s house.”

There are several seconds of silence. Was Myc thinking up some sarcastic comment? He is usually so much quicker than this with his retorts.
Finally, he answers and his voice is kind. “I’m glad Sherlock. I’m really glad that things are changing for you. That you’re happy. You deserve it, and whether you want it or not, you have my support. I’ll be back in the States soon and we’ll talk more. Say hello to John and give my love to Ms. Hudson.”

Sherlock realizes as he hangs up that that may have been the easiest conversation he’s ever had with his brother and wonders if it’s just because he’s growing up, or if John really has made everything in his life better.

“Anything new?”

“Yeah,” Sherlock says as he puts the phone back in his pocket, “Our picture was in some magazine, and here’s the really big news, he was nice to me.”

John gives him a lopsided smile and pulls Sherlock’s harness so the elastic snaps against his back.

“Ow! What was that for?”

“Oh, general brattiness.” John pulls him aside and against the wall of the building they are passing, and slides his hands inside his T-shirt and then under the harness. “How are those nipples feeling?”

Sherlock looks around, embarrassed to hear the spoken word and then realizes, absolutely no one is paying any attention to them since there are so many more interesting couples to be seen.

“They’re just more...there than usual.”

John gives each of them a little pinch and lets the harness slip back into place. He takes Sherlock’s hand and they continue along the route, occasionally waving or responding to the friendly cheers of the crowd. Ms. Hudson’s house is on a tree-lined street about three-quarters of the way down the route of the parade and, when they arrive, they are both hot and sweating and happy to get out of the sun. Gary and Billy have already arrived, dressed in matching short shorts and Pride march T-shirts from Concord, New Hampshire. Gary is also wearing a strap-on pair of glittery wings.

He puts his arm around Sherlock’s shoulder. “I used to get called fairy a lot when I was younger. Until I grew eight inches taller and put on forty-five pounds in senior year. I decided to own my fairness after that.”

Billy reaches up and gives him a peck on the cheek. “You are the most adorable fairy I’ve ever seen.”

After saying hello and shaking hands, Sherlock stands mutely beside John, trying not to stare. He remembers them from last weekend looking distinguished in their tuxedos. The change is shocking, but not in an unpleasant way; it makes him feel like smiling. He wonders at how brave they are and is a little ashamed of feeling courageous for wearing John’s rainbow T-shirt.

“Sherlock! Dr. Watson! So happy you could make it!” They hear Ms. Hudson’s voice behind them, and for a moment Sherlock hesitates as an image flits across his mind of her in a mini-skirt and pasties. Thankfully, when he turns, he sees her standing on the porch wearing modest white shorts with a T-shirt emblazoned with “Love is Love,” and waving at them.

She comes down the stairs flanked by wrought iron railings festooned with rainbow-colored streamers and joins them on the wide brick sidewalk. Her outstretched arms invite a hug and he embraces her awkwardly before pulling away as soon as he can. *What if she feels the harness?*

“Oh, your hair!” she exclaims. “You look so handsome.” Then, turning to John, she shakes his
hand. “Dr. Watson, I barely recognized you’” she laughs, looking at his kilt and tank top.

“Please, call me John.”

“Only if you call me Martha.”

“Agreed.”

“Excellent! I’m sure you must be thirsty. We have lemonade, iced tea, and some ginger ale punch. Which would you like?”

John hooks elbows with Sherlock and they follow behind her to a table spread with a rainbow tablecloth, covered with pitchers and platters of finger-foods, bowls of potato and macaroni salad, and other things.

“Sherlock?”

“Um, lemonade for me.”

“Same here.”

As she’s pouring the lemonade, Ms. Hudson continues to play hostess. “Plates are at the far end. John, please load Sherlock’s plate up. He has got to put on some weight.”

John scowls at him and turns back to Ms. Hudson. “I’ve been saying that for weeks now. Do you know how hard it is…”

They wander off complaining conspiratorially, leaving Sherlock to sip his drink and marvel at where he is and who he’s with. He wonders if Molly is here and texts her.

SH: Where are you? Rescue me!

MH: Stuck behind a bunch of drag queen baton twirlers. They’re a riot. There already?

SH: Yes. They’re plotting on how to make me fat.

MH: UR 2 skinny.


MH: Hang on. B there soon.

John comes back with of deviled eggs, pasta salad and stacks of tiny sandwiches. They eat, chattering about the different signs they’d seen along the parade route. John pushes Sherlock to clear his plate. “What was your last weight, by the way?”

Sherlock smiles proudly and says, “one fifty-seven.”

John leans towards him and whispers in his ear. “That’s my good boy.” He kisses him full on the lips and Sherlock forgets to be self-conscious until he looks up and sees Molly, trying not to stare at them.

“Hello, Doctor Watson. It’s good to see you again. I wanted to say thank you for the job recommendation again.”

“Call me John. And you deserve it, Molly. You wouldn’t have gotten it unless you met the
requirements.”

“Well, thank you anyway. It’s such a great opportunity. I hope I don’t mess up or anything.”

John had risen from his seat to give her a hug and a kiss on the cheek. “I wouldn’t worry about that too much, from what I’ve seen. Just do me a favor and keep an eye on our boy, will you?”

“Oh, I’d do that anyway.” She blushes when she realizes what she’s said. “I mean, I’m always looking out for him.”

John squeezes her hand and smiles. He says, “I know.”

Sherlock cuts in, in an annoyed voice. “Um. Standing right here.”

Molly takes that as an opportunity to wiggle away from the conversation with John. “Oh my god, Sherlock, you look amazing! Why did you never wear your hair like this before?” She gives him a hug. He shrugs helplessly and looks at John, who, grinning, offers no assistance.

Molly pulls him in for another hug and stops for a minute, rubbing her hands over his back with a curious look. “What is that? What are you wearing?”

Sherlock’s mouth drops open slightly and he looks frantically at John, who looks back at him with curiosity and widened eyes. He makes a fist and rubs it over his mouth to hide what Sherlock knows is a smirk.

He takes a step back, but she follows him, concern on her face and in her voice. “Is it a back brace? Did you hurt your back?” She looks at John, then back at Sherlock, who closes his mouth and opens it again. He is saved by the dramatic entrance of Irene and Kate in full leather gear.

Kate is wearing a collar with a dangling leash. She has cuffs with rings attached and a laced bustier exposing skin down to her navel. Her mini-skirt barely covers her ass. But it is Irene who stuns everyone into silence. Her black leather pants appear painted on, with slits running up the sides and Sherlock does not believe that she walked the length of the parade in five-inch stilettos. Her corset shrinks her waist impossibly and is held together in the back with fine silver chain. Her breasts are barely contained, defying gravity to rise above the edge of the corset. She is carrying a short braided whip over her shoulder and wearing gloves that extend past her elbows. The entire room is staring, but the two women waltz in with a regal disdain for the stunned crowd. Sherlock, not knowing where to look, catches Ms. Hudson’s rolling eyes. She sings out a merry greeting and announces that there are three kinds of pie and fruit salad waiting on a dessert table in the garden. The moment shatters, and the hum of conversation starts up again.

But Molly isn’t deterred. Announcing “I want some pie!” she grabs Sherlock’s hand and pulls him toward the garden. He allows himself to be led away, looking back over his shoulder to see John, his back turned, in conversation with the leather-clad women.

Instead of heading towards the dessert table, Molly takes him to an unoccupied corner of the small garden, ducking under the boughs of an ornamental tree.

“I feel underdressed,” she says, laughing.

“Me too.”

“Nice try, but I’m not buying it. What’s under your shirt?” She grabs the hem and tries to lift it.

“Stop it Molly!” he hisses, taking her small hands in his.
“Sherlock, what’s wrong? You can tell me,” she says, serious now.

“Nothing’s wrong, it’s just...private.”

“You can trust me. I want to know that you’re OK and I’m really, really curious. About...about everything. You and all of this.” She gestures toward the people mingling in the garden.

“Well, it’s not like I’m some kind of expert!”

“Compared to me you are! And if you don’t tell me what you’re wearing, I’m going to go ask John, and—”

“No!”

“C’mon, Sherlock, I’m your friend. I’m probably your best friend.”

He grits his teeth. It’s true. Besides John and Ms. Hudson, she’s his only friend. He doesn’t understand why she’s stuck with him all this time. She’s smart and outgoing and popular, and he never seems to know what to say to people, or if he does, it’s the wrong thing. Yet she has been a good friend and he’s tempted to share just a tiny bit of his strange new life with her, despite the exact opposite opinion he held this morning. It makes his head spin, but it also makes him feel sophisticated in a way he never has before, advanced beyond the worries of teenage crushes and acne. He is in a real relationship. It’s serious. Adult.

“Molly, you wouldn’t understand.”

“Try me.” Her face is determined.

Oh, what the hell. If there’s anyone in the Universe besides John who will really listen to him, it’s Molly. He lets go of her hands which are still grasping his shirt. She pulls it up slowly, peeks underneath, and her eyes grow wide. She stares for a moment then looks up at his blushing face.

“What the heck is that?”

“It’s a harness.”

“But why?”

Sherlock takes a deep breath and drops down, pulling her onto the grass with him. “Sit.” They sit cross-legged beside each other. Sitting tightens the strap running between his legs and he shifts, trying to get comfortable, while Molly watches intently.

“It’s kind of hard to explain,” he begins. “I…um…do you remember that movie that came out a couple of years ago? “Something, something…Grey”? He had never watched the movie but had seen it advertised and heard kids talk about it in the hallways.

“Fifty Shades of Grey?”

“Yeah, that one. Well, it’s kind of like that. Not really, but...” He avoids her eyes and examines his cuticles as if they have suddenly become the most interesting thing in the world.

She grabs his arm. “Sherlock, are you trying to tell me that he hits you? That he ties you up and hurts you?” Her voice is full of alarm and too loud.

“Shhhhh!” He instantly regrets having gone down this path and rests his elbows on his knees with his head in his hands, fingers rubbing his forehead.
“It’s not like that. Well, it is like that but it’s OK.”

“Sherlock, talk to me. You told me you were safe.” She pulls his hand away from his face and he turns his head to meet her eyes.

“I am safe, Molly. I feel safer than I’ve ever felt. John would never hurt me if I didn’t let him.”

“And you let him?”

“Yeah.” Sherlock bites his lip but maintains eye contact.

Now it’s Molly’s turn to put her head in her hands. “Oh my god. Oh my god,” she whispers.

“Moll, it’s OK. Really. It’s not like you think. You don’t have to worry about me. Has anybody ever made me do anything I don’t want to do?”

“I just need a minute to wrap my head around it. You’re really alright?” He nods.

“You…like it?”

He squirms uncomfortably and struggles to put his feelings into words that she will understand.

“I like the way I feel when I’m with him. I like me when I’m with him. And he listens to me, Molly. Sometimes we just talk for hours, about music or science or whatever. And I’m not such a screw up with him around.” He pulls up his sleeve and shows her the nicotine patch. “I haven’t had a cigarette in a month. He keeps me right. I don’t want to disappoint him.” He looks at her for a reaction, then keeps talking.

“The pain part...It’s counter-intuitive, I guess, but being a sub to John — Oh. A sub is a — ”

“I know what it means Sherlock, I saw the movie.”

“Right. Being a sub to John makes me feel stronger, even when we aren’t...you know, actually doing ‘stuff’, and when we are...doing stuff, he makes me feel sexy and…and...”

“Loved?”

He looks at her in surprise.

“That’s what you were thinking wasn’t it?” she says.

“Oh, Molly...how did you...” He grimaces.

“Come here you.” She throws her arms around him and hugs him tightly. Sherlock. I’m sorry I freaked out. I was just a little shocked. I’m happy for you, really, I am. I’m sorry for being such a mom.”

He hugs her back. “Thank you, and don’t be sorry, moms are great, I wish mine were here.” She feels small and thin in his arms and he is surprised that he enjoys the embrace. It’s a relief to have shared his secret, a secret he thought he wanted to keep just between him and John. And it hadn’t scared her away. She is still his friend. She pulls away and they look at one another, calm and affectionate. The moment is broken when Ms. Hudson ducks under the branches.

“There you are! You’re missing the parade, John’s been looking for you.”
They get to their feet and follow her to the street where most of the guests are gathered, watching the parade go by. They join John who is on the sidewalk with Marie, Irene and Kate. They all have drinks in their hands. John offers his to Sherlock and he tastes it. Whiskey. He wonders why people like the burn. He takes a drink anyway.

John slips a flask into the sporran, winks, and whispers, “Don’t tell Martha,” before taking the cup back and putting his arm around Sherlock’s waist as they watch the parade go by. Sherlock is again impressed by the sheer size of it — it’s been going on for over an hour, but there is no end in sight. A large group from a local business walks by, each person festooned with dozens of long balloons so that they look like a mass of colorful sea-urchins. Next is a group of men whose ages appear to vary from twenty to seventy, all wearing leather and chains. They walk next to a convertible carrying a man wearing a sash that reads, “Mr. Leather 2018.” He is smiling and waving to the crowd from his perch. There is a black, white, and blue striped flag with a red heart on it, flying from the car.

John whisper-shouts in his ear. “That’s the Leather Pride flag. Sort of a BDSM emblem.”

As Sherlock tries to process this information, an older man passes right by him, holding a chain attached to the handcuffs of a younger man walking a few steps behind. The new realizations just keep coming — regular people are gay. People are proud of being into BDSM. Molly doesn’t care that he’s a sub.

The parade continues and the party-goers drift in and out, refilling their plates, refreshing their drinks, but Sherlock and John remain, Sherlock analyzing the ordinary people, not afraid, proud of who they are. He deduces occupations, entertaining John with his split-second evaluations based on minutiae.

“That guy with the cap pulled low on his head? Cop. He keeps reaching for a holster that isn’t there and he can’t help looking at everyone in the crowd. And those shoes? Only cops. The skinny guy behind him is staying behind him because he knows he’s a cop and the way he keeps wiping his nose, with his sleeve? He’s amped up too high to realize he should drop back to get away from the cop, but he doesn’t want to lose sight of him, so paranoia means it’s either coke or poppers. Poppers don’t last that long, so probably coke.”

“Are you sure you want to be a chemist? Maybe you should be, I don’t know, a detective or something.”

John sneaks food into him and continues to share his drink and Sherlock realizes he’s having a good time. At a party. In a crowd. He feels at ease and it is just as new and exciting as all the other changes that John has brought to his life. So when John grabs his hand and pulls him out into the street behind a float carrying a dozen or so scantily clad men dancing to the music blaring from speakers, he lets go of his inhibitions and follows him laughing. The whiskey helps a bit.

They walk hand in hand and are soon joined by Irene and Kate. The onlookers lining the street wave, cheer, and sing along with the music as they walk by. Sherlock is still awe-struck by the sheer number of people that have come out to watch. They line the sidewalks and spill into the street, a dozen deep in places, waving rainbow flags, and handmade signs. There are a man and a woman holding hands and wearing matching shirts printed with “I LOVE MY GAY SON,” and it makes something in Sherlock’s chest hitch.

“Nice kilt,” somebody yells.

“Thanks! John yells back.
“What’s underneath?” responds the onlooker.

“That’s only for him to know.” John counters with a laugh, tipping his head toward Sherlock.

Just then, Lady Gaga begins singing *Born this Way*. Irene and Kate give a whoop and begin to dance, waving their arms in the air and shaking their hips as they walk, then pausing to grind against one another as they sing along.

*Don’t hide yourself in regret*

*Just love yourself and you’re set*

*I’m on the right track, baby*

*I was born this way*

Irene catches Sherlock’s eye and motions them to join in. John looks at him questioningly.

“C’mon, let’s dance, show the crowd how sexy you are.” As he speaks, he turns and grasps Sherlock’s waist. The parade had slowed to a halt as it tended to do every now and then and then they were no longer walking forward. Everyone around them is dancing as they stand there together. The crowd seems to fade into the background and there are only the music and his boyfriend. *His boyfriend*. He forgets to be self-conscious. He forgets everything but the pure joy of the moment, of being free, of being himself and being with John.

His shoulders and hips begin to move and he sways in time with the music. John’s face breaks into a wide grin as he begins to match Sherlock’s movements, still resting his hands on his waist. They dance, sometimes breaking apart and sometimes pressed together. The harness slides over his nipples as his body gyrates, teasing them to attention. The strap lengthens and tightens behind his balls and slides up and down between the cheeks of his ass and it lends a dirty grind to his moves. Dancing in the crowd with John feels like being high, better than being high because, when it’s over, he’ll carry the remnants of euphoria with him, not descend into dark despair. He spins, shaking his hips seductively and earning a hard pinch for his effort. Completing the turn, he crashes his body against John whose hands slip down to give his ass a squeeze as the song ends.

“You are something else, Sherlock Holmes” he whispers into his mouth as they kiss. This praise sends tingles down his spine and he feels light, happy, and completely relaxed. He can’t remember when he’s had this much fun.

The parade starts moving again and they continue on, partly dancing, partly walking. Irene struts over to them, takes John’s hand, and they dance together for a moment. Laughing, he twirls her and dips her low.

After John lets her go and she is returning to Kate’s side, she touches the tip of Sherlock’s nose with a forefinger. “Hold on to him, you lucky thing. You’re good for each other.” She winks and gives him a peck on the cheek before saying, “Why don’t you take off that shirt, gorgeous? You aren’t fooling anyone.”

Sherlock looks sideways at John, who shrugs. “It’s up to you, of course, but I’d love to show you off.” He feels immediate gratitude for the choice. Had they been in the condo, John might have ordered him to comply, and even if he had given him the order here, in the middle of the street, Sherlock would likely have obeyed, no matter the discomfort.
He takes a deep breath and looks around. There are only the friendly faces of strangers. Ms. Hudson hadn’t joined the parade. Having her see him in the harness would have been just too weird. The adrenaline from dancing and the effects of the alcohol combine to overcome his natural shyness. I can’t believe it, but I’m gonna do it.

Grasping the hem of his shirt, he pulls it over his head. The move elicits some cheering and cat-calls from the parade watchers and he feels heat rise up his neck to his cheeks.

“Whoo hoo!”

“Damn!”

“Hey Scotsman, I want summa that, you sharing?”

John turns and pushes Sherlock behind him, possessively. He crosses his arms again, his sturdy legs spread, gives the onlooker a menacing smile and challenges back in his best Scottish accent, “This one’s mine, chief. Get your ain.”

Sherlock looks straight ahead, embarrassed, and John takes his hand. “Told you I’d have to fight them off.”

By the time they near the end of the route, he’s begun to feel comfortable. He and John are almost conservative compared to most of the other paraders, and aside from some whistles and hoots, no one is paying them much attention. As they turn onto the last street, the happy sounds that have been all around them since the beginning are interrupted by a man’s voice booming through a bullhorn.

“Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment is come!”

About two dozen men, women, and a few children line the left side of the street holding signs: “Homosexuality is a Sin. Christ can set you free,” “You’re going to HELL,” “Repent or Perish,” “God Hates Fags.”

“Some things never change,” John mutters with disgust. “I was wondering where they were.”

Sherlock says nothing but looks at them darkly. A little of the joy slips away, the cocoon of positive energy that had enveloped him today breached by these unwelcome intruders. It reminds him of high school, of his dad’s hurtful words at graduation and suddenly he is furious that these morons are ruining his day. He clenches his fist as the tightness builds in his chest.

Sensing Sherlock’s distress, John squeezes his hand. “Sherlock, ignore them. They don’t matter, they’re idiots, not worth your anger.” As he’s saying this a large group of men in lavender shirts with “CGMC” on the front converge on the protesters and circle them. They begin to sing loudly, drowning out the man with the bullhorn. Their voices are rich and beautiful.

“Columbus Gay Men’s Chorus to the rescue,” John says as they pass by the spectacle.
The crowd thins out at the official end of the march, and the four of them retrace their path to Ms. Hudson’s house. As Sherlock is putting his shirt on, John touches his chest and remarks, “You’ve had a bit too much sun, you’re going to be pink tomorrow.” Then leaning a bit closer he says in a low voice, “I’ll see to it that you have an arse to match.” Sherlock shivers a little, whether from the words or his sensitive skin, he’s not sure.

When they get back, they have a few more drinks and begin to say their goodbyes, thanking Ms. Hudson and Marie, collecting their things, giving hugs all around. Gary and Billy ask about his upcoming birthday, and John tells them that they should be expecting invitations. Sherlock looks at him curiously, but before he can ask a question, he feels a tap on his shoulder and turns with a smile to see Molly. The smile fades at the sight of Jim next to her. He tugs on John’s sleeve and the man mimics Sherlock’s reaction precisely. Molly senses something’s not quite right as she looks between them, but speaks in her usual cheerful voice. “I forgot to mention that Jim and I were meeting up. We’re going to rent kayaks and then get something to eat.”

Jim looks irritatingly smug and it rubs Sherlock the wrong way. He gives John a sideways look and sees his jaws clenched. He recognizes that face and would be feeling a little squirmy if it were directed towards him. His voice is even more worrisome. Low and flat, John says, “Jim.”

Jim’s grin widens and, a little more loudly than necessary, says, “Dr. Watson! Isn’t it weird to see people out their usual environment? And with your boyfriend too? It’s so cool that you’re comfortable with your relationship like that.”

John says, “Is there a reason we shouldn’t be?”

Jim tries for a placating tone. “Oh no! Of course not. Especially with this crowd. I mean, who’s going to notice the age difference with everything that’s going on, right?”

Sherlock’s anxiety spikes and he remembers the magazine that Myc told him about. Is he endangering John’s career? Technically, it’s just like John told Ms. Hudson. He’s an adult, and a fourteen year age difference isn’t that much, is it? He turns to look at John, who takes his hand and gives it a squeeze.

“Only you, apparently, Jim.” He looks at Molly with a genuine smile and says, “Do us a favor and give me a ring when you get home, alright?” He leans over and kisses her cheek, giving Jim one more steely glare, before turning, pulling Sherlock away as he calls out, “Bye, Molly,” over his shoulder.

Sherlock says, “I really don’t like that guy. There’s something off about him.”

“Doesn’t take a genius to make that deduction. Keep an eye out for Molly, Sherlock.”

“Is he dangerous?”

“I don’t know about dangerous, but he’s arrogant and ambitious, and I don’t trust him. And he has reason to dislike me. He and I have had…issues. I wouldn’t put it past him to try to get back at me through you or Molly. But let’s not ruin our day talking about Jim. Let’s go to the festival and see what’s going on over there,” He points across the Scioto where the Pride festival is underway on the opposite bank. “Then we can sit by the river and watch the sun set. I could use some quiet.”
Several hours later they leave the festival, having stuffed themselves with gloriously unhealthy but delicious street fare: greasy french fries served in a cup, barbeque ribs, “Moe’s Award Winning Ribs - Best in the Midwest!” according to the sign, and funnel cakes. They had perused the booths selling all manner of Pride merchandise and John had purchased a light blanket with a rainbow design that he now carries under his arm. Molly texted that she was safely home from her date with Jim, which was a relief to both of them.

After crossing the bridge back to the east side of the river, they walk south away from the crowds and toward the condo. Sherlock can see its lights in the distance against the darkening sky.

“Let’s stop here,” John says, pulling Sherlock from the path and under a shelter with tables and chairs arranged around the columns and planters. He elegantly spreads the newly purchased blanket over the square metal table and pulls the slatted chair back, playfully gesturing for Sherlock to sit. “Monsieur?”

Sherlock grins at him and replies, “Merci, garcon.”

John says, “Can I ’elp you with anything, sir?” He pretends to show him a menu.

Sherlock replies, “Hi, yeah. I’m looking for a bottle of champagne – a good one.”

John leans closer. “Mmm! Well, these are all excellent vintages.”

“Er, it’s not really my area. What do you suggest?”

“Well, you cannot possibly go wrong, but, erm, if you’d like my personal recommendation …”

“Mm-hm.”

“…this last one on the list is a favourite of mine.” John presents Sherlock with a bottle of water.

“Great. I’ll have that one, please.”

John unscrews the top and holds the bottle over Sherlock’s head. He tips his head back, and John slowly lets the water pour into Sherlock’s mouth. He swallows until John can no longer keep up the charade and bursts out laughing, which sets Sherlock laughing too, then choking. John pounds on his back and gasps out, “You’re lucky I’m a doctor and up on the latest life-saving techniques.”

Sherlock sputters, “Your life-saving techniques are going to break my ribs!”

“Luckily I know how to fix them too. Don’t you know kisses make everything better?”

John bends and places a kiss on Sherlock’s wet lips and licks up a few stray drops before saying, “I should really check your sunburn. What kind of a doctor lets his boyfriend go without sunscreen? I don’t know what I was thinking.” There is no one in sight, and Sherlock doesn’t protest as John pulls the T-shirt over his head. There is just enough light from the setting sun and the lights along the nearby path for John to inspect the skin on his shoulders and back.

“Hmm…it won’t blister but we’d better put something on it when we get home. Is the harness rubbing it?”

“A little.”
“Let’s take it off then. Stand up.”

John unbuckles the straps and pulls it over Sherlock’s shoulders so that it hangs down over his shorts. As leery as he was of the harness this morning, he misses it a little now. That’s been happening a lot lately.

John grins. “The bad news is that you have a sunburn pattern from the harness. The good news is that you may get some new freckles; they are quite adorable.” John touches Sherlock’s back with his fingertips. “You have whole freckle constellations back here! I see a set that forms Cygnus, the Swan, here, here, here, and here…” With each “here” he places his lips softly against the hot skin of his back until he has kissed him seven times.

Sherlock’s eyes drift closed, and he hums with contentment as John continues, kissing the base of his neck and the tops of his shoulders. Small, gentle kisses accompanied by murmured endearments. “I was so proud of you today,” “beautiful boy,” “all mine,” “so sexy.”

Sherlock reaches back and puts his hand in John’s hair as John’s hands stroke his bare stomach, then drift upward to rub and roll his nipples.

“Johhhn.” It’s not a question, just an involuntary exhalation of sound that barely makes it past his lips. John’s previously gentle fingers pinch hard.

“Sir!” he yelps.

John laughs softly against his shoulder “Disrespect. Add one. Tell me, are you trying to earn strokes?”

“No, Sir.”

“Mm-hm,” John says skeptically, still kissing and nuzzling, his short whiskers hurting a bit when they brush against the tender sunburn. His hands move to Sherlock’s hips and pull them back against his groin. John has lifted the kilt and his erection is sliding against Sherlock’s shorts. He can feel his own hard penis straining against his underwear and is about to ask for permission to touch it when he remembers where they are.

“Maybe we should go home, Sir.”

“Mmm no, I can’t wait that long for you. Seeing all the eyes on you to today and knowing you belong only to me…that you obey only me…I’ve wanted you all day and I’m not waiting any longer.”

“But—"

Before he can finish, John spins him around and kisses him hard and deep, one hand gripping his ass and the other in his hair. Any reluctance he was feeling melts away with the press of John’s body against his, the hungry lips, the musky, sweaty smell of him. Sherlock wants to lick every salty bit of the day’s sweat from John’s skin. When they break apart, John takes his hand, removes the blanket from the table and pulls him to a table further from the path and in the shadows. It’s almost full dark now. The moon is out, and the only sounds are crickets and the distant rumble of a band still playing at the festival across the river.

John folds the blanket into a square and places it on the ground beside the table, then he arranges the chairs and sits on the edge of the table with legs spread and a boot resting on the seat of each chair. He points to the blanket.
“Kneel for me, sweet boy.”

But Sherlock doesn’t need to be told. Before John has even finished the command, he’s settled between John’s spread thighs.

“Take out your cock.”

Sherlock complies, unbuttoning and unzipping his shorts and pushing down his underwear to let his erection spring free.

John smiles down at him and brushes aside a lock hair that, despite all the product he tried to tame it with this morning, is falling over his eyes.

“You can touch yourself, but keep your eyes on me.”

Sherlock sneaks a quick peek around to see if anyone’s near. It’s so dark now that it’s unlikely they’ll be seen from the path but the slatted ceiling of the shelter, meant to diffuse the sun’s rays during the day, lets in stripes of moonlight. One of these stripes falls across John’s face and Sherlock looks into the deep blue eyes as he strokes himself. John’s eyes are locked on his, and his right hand rests on the top of Sherlock’s head. The gaze is intense and the tip of John’s tongue peeks between his lips as he watches him masturbate.

His hand on his cock feels good but what he really wants is John. He wants to repay him for this day, this wonderful day, and for everything he’s given him. For every kiss, for every stroke of the paddle, for every kind word and stern admonition. But mostly for the lightness that he feels in his heart.

“Please, Sir. Let me…”

“Is this what you want?” John lifts the kilt to reveal his own cock, jutting out thick and hard.

“Yes, Sir.”

John pulls Sherlock’s head forward and leans down to kiss him. “Then I’m going to fuck your mouth, sweet boy. I’m going to come down your throat.”

Sherlock groans at these words that travel straight to his groin, making him thrust his hips forward, pushing him harder into his fist.

“Why, Sherlock? Tell me why.”

“Because I belong to you.”

“Good boy.” John releases Sherlock’s hair and leans back, hands gripping the edge of the table.

Sherlock uses his free hand to grasp John’s right calf and he presses his face against it. Extending his tongue, he licks, starting just above the sock and moving upward in short, firm strokes, up to the inside of John’s knee and then to the sensitive skin of his inner thigh, tasting the dried sweat, reveling in his scent, moving closer and closer to the prize. Biting sucking, licking, he arrives at John’s testicles and pulls one into his mouth, rolling it on his tongue while stroking his perineum with a finger.

John utters an oath and brings one hand to the back of Sherlock’s head.

“My god, Sherlock!”
He flattens his tongue and drags it slowly up the underside of John’s penis, flicking it across the glans and kissing the tip lightly, then licking again, then kissing, teasing. John’s scent is intoxicating, and Sherlock breathes it in as he opens his lips and lets him slide in.

The hand on his head is joined by another, and soon John is grasping his hair and pulling him forward, urging him deeper.

He opens his eyes and raises them to see John looking straight at him, watching his cock glide in and out of Sherlock’s mouth.

“Sherlock. My sweet boy, my good boy.”

The praise sends thrills of pleasure through him and he increases his motion. He’s so close to coming, his hand flying up and down his own cock as John drives into him mercilessly. He’s briefly thankful for the practice he’s had from street encounters. They were often rough, and he’d learned how to relax his throat to avoid being choked. But this is nothing like those experiences. He wants this. Wants every inch, every thrust, every bit of John that he can take into himself and when he feels John tense and moan with pleasure and release, he welcomes the warm liquid that spills down his throat. He gulps it eagerly.

Pulling away, he keens as he tightens his fist and his own orgasm overtakes him, the cry splitting the quiet of the night. John wraps his arms around him and holds him against his body, muffling the sound as he comes in shaking convulsions.

At last, it’s over, but they stay that way for a long while, Sherlock on his knees, head buried in John’s stomach, John with his arms wrapped around Sherlock’s shoulders, cheek pressed to the top of his head.

“Thank you, Sir,” says Sherlock finally, not moving from his position.

“For what?” Asks John, stroking his back.

“For everything, for today.”

“Thank you for sharing it with me,” John says.

Releasing his shoulders, John takes Sherlock’s face in his hands, kisses him, and then, with his thumb, swipes a bit of come from his chin and places it against his lips. “Missed some.” Sherlock smiles and licks it clean.

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After cleaning up and rearranging their clothing, they emerge from the shelter and walk hand in hand along the path toward the condo. With the excitement of the day behind him, Sherlock is reflecting silently on it, his brain evaluating and cataloging the things worth remembering.

“So you enjoyed Pride?” John asks as if reading his mind.

“Yes, it was more than I imagined it would be. It was...liberating I guess, to be around all of those people who seem so comfortable in their own skin. To have people actually cheering for us, Sir!”
“Well, your dancing was quite impressive.”

Sherlock palms his face and groans. “I really did that, didn’t I?”

John laughs, “You really did. I told you I’d get you to dance.”

_You could get me to walk over hot coals, John._

“Don’t get used to it.”

“Too late, I’m expecting a strip-tease next.”

“Well, maybe for your birthday…” Sherlock lets go of John’s hand and steps in front of him, arms in the air and hips gyrating suggestively, grinding lightly against his boyfriend.

“You little shit, I ought to spank you for being such a tease,” John grins.

“Yes, Sir.”

“How many do you have?”

“Nine, Sir.”

“Then make it ten.”

Chapter End Notes

Sherlock wonders if topless women are legal. They ARE in Columbus Ohio, one of only ten U.S. cities that allow women to go topless and one of the few where there are no restrictions on female toplessness. Tumblr can take a lesson from CumberCurlyGirl's hometown. :) In addition, Columbus is consistently ranked as one of the most LGBTQ+ friendly cities in the U.S.
John introduces Sherlock to a new toy.

Chapter Notes

Sorry it's been a while since we've updated. January was an incredibly busy month for both of us.

Sunday means another lazy morning spent snuggled together. Sherlock had been in the fuzzy, in-between state where you aren’t sure what is real and what is merely the lingering images of your dreams. Sometimes, in his dad’s house, he would wake confused and panicked, sure that Victor lay cold and unmoving beside him, and he would fling his arm across the bed only to find empty space where his friend should have been but would never be. I loved you, I’m sorry I didn’t (wouldn’t) say it.

He’d hope it was just a dream, that the whole last year had been one long awful dream, but when he was fully awake, Victor would be dead, and the guilt of unsaid words a crushing weight. Other times he awoke, and the clatter of noise from the kitchen or the smell of cigarette smoke told him that his father was indeed still alive and that the terrible things he’d done in his dreams were just that, dreams.

This time, though, his dream had been pleasant. He had been in New Hampshire, at Gary and Billy’s bed and breakfast, which they had described to him in great detail at the party yesterday. There was something about a black dog, something mysterious. He’s waking now, and the details are fading, but in the dream, he is lying on a rug in front of a blazing fireplace at the B&B with John, who is stroking his hair. As he feels himself being pulled into reality, he struggles to go back down to this place. Dream John’s hand has moved from his curls to his chest and…mmm...feels nice.

John wakes Sherlock by playing with his nipples, still sensitive from yesterday’s attention, rubbing his fingers across the delicate skin. Sherlock, finally pulled from his dream, rolls over, hunching his shoulders to protect them, but John pushes him onto his back and taking one into his mouth, sucks it hard. He scraps it softly with his teeth and Sherlock moans and puts his hands on John’s head but knows better than to push him off the way he wants to. Sherlock looks down and sees John smile up at him as he switches his mouth to the other one but continues the exquisite torture with his thumb. Surrupitiously, Sherlock moves his thighs together, squeezing his cock between them but John bites his nipple and says, “Rule 6. Spread your legs.”

He teases him a bit more and then makes his way up to find his lips and they kiss, a slow, tender, good morning kiss with just a little tongue, and then a little more until the kisses are deep and passionate and Sherlock’s long limbs are wrapped around John like an octopus. He starts to formulate the request for relief just as John says, “Not now. I have plans.” After disentangling
himself, he practically has to drag Sherlock out of bed to get him to move, and he’s groaning as he makes his way to the bathroom.

“What do you want for breakfast, you lazy thing?”

“Ugh, how can you think of eating after yesterday?”

“Bacon, eggs, and toast then.”

Sherlock mutters under his breath, and John says, “What was that? I believe you’re at ten for the week, aren’t you, Sherlock?”

“Yes, Sir. Nothing, Sir.”

“Thought not.” John grins. Sherlock grits his teeth and closes the bathroom door very gently.

Hungry after all, Sherlock eats everything on his plate while John smiles at him.

He shifts a little. “What?”

“Nothing. Makes me happy to see you eat, that’s all, make sure you write it down. What do you have to do today?”

“Finish up the first assignment for class, work on the admissions essay, exercise.”

John picks up the plates and brings them to the sink. “Hmm. I think I’d like you to exercise first, then shower. That will work out better for what I have in mind,” he says, without looking at Sherlock.

He shivers a little and lets out a puff of breath, wondering what John has in store for him. Whatever it is, it is bound to be better than homework or the dreaded essay. Ms. Hudson had sent back his first draft with so many red lines and comments that the document looked like one of the graded papers that Mr. Anderson used to lay dramatically on his desk while giving him a pitying look and a shake of his head. Sherlock hadn’t cared then, but he does now, he cares a lot, wants to get into college, wants to prove to John and Ms. Hudson, and yes, even to Myc, that he’s not a screw-up.

John turns his head and looks over his shoulder.

“Sherlock?”

“Yes, Sir. Sorry, Sir. I’ll, um, just go get ready, then.”

“Good idea.” John turns back around, smirking.

He has access to the condo’s fully equipped gym, but he usually feels out of place there, awkward and skinny amid the muscular bodies, both male and female. Much preferring the outdoors, Sherlock considers running, but his nipples are still tender, and he decides on biking, thinking there won’t be as much friction. But he’s squirming on the hard racing seat of the bike anyway, wondering what John’s plans are. He comes home, hot from the already blazing summer sun, but playful and energized. After putting his collar on, he plops himself on John, lying on the sofa, and rubs his sweaty body all over him.

Laughing, John pretends to push him off, and in a mock angry voice, says, “Gerroff, you stinky git! I already showered and you’ll have me smelling like a locker room!”

Sherlock sits up innocently and protests, “What? What’s wrong?”
“Go and shower and—”

“I know, be thorough,” Sherlock interrupts in a singsong voice. He gets a hefty swat for it and offers up his best pout, rubbing his ass. John reaches up and touches his protruding lower lip, then hooks his forefinger in the ring of the collar and pulls Sherlock back down until his ear is at John’s mouth. “Is that sass, you sexy thing?” he hisses in a low voice. “If you think I won’t turn you over my knee right now, you’re mistaken. But then, you’d like that, wouldn’t you? So be my good boy and go take a shower...now.” The “now” is said with such quiet and commanding force, that when he releases the collar, Sherlock gets up with a meek “Yes, Sir” and does as he’s told.

When he returns, showered and clean in his navy silk robe, John is in his office, typing on his laptop. Sherlock makes a stop in the kitchen for a cup of coffee and then sits on the edge of John’s desk, watching him work as he sips it. He looks so professional, so adult, with responsibilities and, as a surgeon, with people’s lives in his hands, literally. Sherlock feels pride well up in his chest and into his throat where it forms a lump. That this man cares for him, wants him and believes in him, is still so fucking unbelievable.

After a few minutes, Sherlock ventures, “Should I start my homework, Sir?” John makes a final keystroke and looks up at him. “Yes, I think you should, but before you do, I have something I’d like to try today. It might make studying harder, but I promise I’ll let you get it done.” As he speaks, he opens a drawer of his desk and pulls out a black cloth bag. Opening it, he takes out what Sherlock can by now identify as a buttplug, except this one is longer and thicker than the last one, and curved. He hands it to Sherlock and then picks up his phone from beside the laptop. “Put your hand around it,” he says, tapping the screen of his phone. Sherlock grips the plug and almost drops it when it begins to vibrate.

“Shit!”

John suppresses a laugh at Sherlock’s reaction. “I think you’ll like it, I know I’m going to like playing with you today. It’s an app. I control it from my phone. I can control it from anywhere. Maybe once you’ve finished your work we’ll go out. I’d enjoy seeing you squirm in public, begging me to stop or, even better, begging me to finish you off.”

The vibrations stop and Sherlock is looking at the plug open-mouthed. John extends his hand and takes it, then pushes back his chair and stands to give Sherlock a kiss while holding his chin between thumb and forefinger. “Go get me the aloe and the lube. First, I’m going to put some lotion on your sunburn, then you’re going to bend over the desk for me.”

Ten minutes later, Sherlock’s face is pressed against the cool, hard surface of the desk and the robe is a puddle of blue on the floor. John’s slicked fingers are sliding in and out of him, and he’s trying to be quiet, biting his lip and gripping the edge of the desk, but he can’t help the little sighs that escape.

“You don’t need to be quiet, I want to hear you,” encourages John. “I always want to hear you, what I do to you, how you respond to me.”

John’s fingers are withdrawn, leaving him empty and wanting. But then he feels the plug pushing against him, there is pressure, pushing, pushing, pushing until it breaches him and slides in, filling him, and he gasps and grips the edge of the desk a little harder.

John plants a kiss at the base of his spine, with his hands resting lightly on his hips.

“There you go, all done.” Running his hands up Sherlock’s back to his shoulders he pulls him to standing and turns him around, so they are face-to-face and there’s no chance that John isn’t aware
of Sherlock’s erection between them. It’s touching John’s T-shirt, making a small dark spot of wetness on the green cotton.

“You OK?” John asks, his hands still on Sherlock’s shoulders, holding him steady.

Sherlock nods. He is absolutely, without a doubt, OK. More than OK. His dick is throbbing, but he knows better than to touch it. Homework now seems an impossibility. Essay? No fucking way.

“Sir,” begins Sherlock, a bit of desperation in his voice.

“Shhhh, I know, I know, sweet boy,” John says, placing a finger over Sherlock’s lips and with the other hand, picking up his phone. He makes a few taps on the screen and instantly Sherlock feels the plug begin to buzz inside him. “Oh,” he breathes out, and his mouth stays open because he suddenly needs the extra oxygen. His eyes flutter closed and his knees buckle. John grasps his waist and eases him slowly down until he is sitting on the edge of the desk, which only serves to drive the plug deeper.

“Look at me, Sherlock.”

Sherlock opens his eyes with some effort. The thing in his ass is doing just what it is designed to do, massage his prostate with a constant, glorious, vibration and all of his attention is focused on that small knot of tissue deep inside him that he didn’t even know he had until a few weeks ago. He meets John’s steady gaze with half-lidded eyes, mouth still open.

“It feels good, yeah?” John taps again and the intensity increases. Sherlock groans and leans into John’s shoulder.

“No. Eyes on me Sherlock. I want to see your face,” John says, pushing him gently away but at the same time, stepping closer between Sherlock’s thighs and grasping his buttocks so that Sherlock’s weeping cock is pressed between them.

“See what I can do for you? Anytime I like. You are so beautiful like this. You are so sexy like this.” John continues to whisper praise as he watches Sherlock surrender to the pleasure radiating through his body from that secret spot. The sensation is overwhelming, and for a moment, he finds his mouth unable to form the words that he wants to say. Finally, he gets them out.

“P... please, Sir.”

“Tell me, sweet boy. What do you want?”

“Touch me. Please.”

“Mmm. Ordinarily, I’d prefer to keep you holding on for a bit, but,” John looks at his watch, “schoolwork has to be our priority. I’m going to take care of you first so you can focus on your assignments.”

John taps his phone, and the vibrations stop. Sherlock takes a deep, shuddering breath and closes his eyes, collecting himself, then reopens them and looks at John with regained focus.

“You with me?”

Sherlock nods.

Another tap and the plug starts up again, but so subtly, it could be the rumble of a car over a rutted road. “How’s that? Can you walk?”
Sherlock takes a step, then another, and says, “Yes, Sir, I think so.”

“Alright then, go gather your things and set them on the breakfast bar.” Sherlock tries not to groan thinking of the hard metal chairs. He moves around the condo, tense, expecting the buzz to intensify at any moment. He knows he’s walking awkwardly but decides he doesn’t care. As he’s rummaging in his book bag, the buzzing stops, much to his surprise, and he takes the moment to squat, searching for some notes he had scribbled on a few scraps of paper. Sure enough, as soon as he straightens up again, the vibrations hit like the drop of a roller coaster, and he has to lean against the wall to stay upright.

“Not cool!” he shouts and hears John chuckle in reply as the vibrations slow again. He makes his way gingerly to the breakfast bar, his cock bobbing against his belly.

John meets him there and asks, “You have everything?”

“Yes, Sir.”

John touches Sherlock’s cheek. “I said I’d take care of you and I will. But as soon as you are able, I expect you to get to work, understood?”

Sherlock agrees to these terms wholeheartedly. He would have agreed to shine Myc’s Cole Haan loafers if the reward were John’s hands or mouth on him, and relief from the urgent need that had been sparked with the first vibrations of the toy and was still building. He allows himself to be led to the sofa and sits down as instructed. This causes the plug to shift and makes him sigh as the pressure on that spot, oh yes, oh god, increases.

Then John straddles his thighs and kisses him, and kisses him, and kisses him. Slow, deep kisses alternating with little bites to his lower lip. John’s mouth on his feels every bit as good as what is going on in his ass. Because it’s John’s mouth. John’s touch. John, John, John. Like a mantra in his head. He wants more and pushes his hips up trying for contact.

“Shirt pocket,” John whispers and Sherlock’s hands search blindly to find the lube bottle. John’s lips are on his neck and then the shell of his ear as he uncaps it.

“Your neck, it should be bloody illegal, Sherlock,” John continues. “Lube your cock for me, yeah? I’m going to make you feel so good. You’re going to come for me. You’re going to be my good boy.”

Relishing the promise of these words, Sherlock drizzles lube over his erection and gives one long pull. He wonders if he’s ever been this hard. John sits up and looks at the phone which is still in his hand. “Are you ready?”

“Yes, Si...aaah!” Sherlock cries out as the plug begins to vibrate with intensity. His head falls back against the cushions as his back arches involuntarily. Just as he’s catching his breath, John’s hand closes around him, and there is nothing else; everything fades to blackness and only pleasure remains.

The sounds he’s making...are loud. But Sherlock is beyond caring, beyond embarrassment. He’s in another world altogether, another fucking universe. His eyes are closed, and he’s grateful that John hasn’t ordered them open, because he’s not sure he could obey. Only bits of what John is saying, his voice low and soothing, make it to his brain.

“...beautiful...good boy…mine…”

It feels like the beginning of an orgasm, yet not an orgasm. That rolling tide of pleasure building
and building, but not cresting, diffused through his entire lower body, paralyzing him, while John’s hand works him with slow firm strokes. He’s not sure he can take much more of this, yet doesn’t want it to end. His body finally decides for him and the wave crashes. He nearly bucks John from his lap as he comes. He opens his eyes to find John watching at him with the most tender yet intense expression. He’s still coming, in pulsing, hot streams that reach his chin as John strokes him. He’s moaning and calling to a god he doesn’t believe in. He is wrecked.

With his free hand, John picks up the phone and turns off the plug, then tosses the phone to the side and pushes the sweaty curls from Sherlock’s forehead before leaning his own against it. “I told you I’d take care of you,” he whispers. “I will always take care of you.”

It takes a few seconds before coherent thought returns and a few seconds more before Sherlock’s limbs regain feeling. Looking down at himself, he sees an almost impossible amount of semen striping his chest. He’s staring dumbly, heart still pounding against his ribs.

“Prostate orgasms are like that,” John says, “It’s perfectly normal.”

Sherlock finds his voice but “Oh, Sir.” is all he can say.

John pulls his own T-shirt over his head and uses it to clean the mess from Sherlock’s belly and chest.

“You can relax for a bit and recover, but then you’ll get to work.”

“But what about you?” Sherlock can see the outline of John’s erection under his jeans.

“I can wait. I assure you that I’ll get mine, Sherlock. Now that I’ve taken some of the edge off, I’m expecting you’ll have more stamina later and I intend to take advantage.” John dabs the last bits of come from Sherlock’s neck and chin before leaning down to kiss him sweetly. “Tonight, I’m going to replace that plug with my cock.”

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After an hour spent with his head in John’s lap as they watched the news together, discussing the happenings in the world, Sherlock is dressed and sitting on the sofa with his laptop. Mercifully, John hadn’t made him sit on the hard chairs in the kitchen while wearing the plug. He’s putting the finishing touches on his essay for Queer Studies.

The class hadn’t been nearly as tedious as he’d feared, and the book The Beautiful Room is Empty had engaged him like no other fiction. He’d considered The Outsiders a challenge, and he’d conquered it to please John, and, truth be told, Ms. Hudson. But the story of Bunny, coming of age and gay in the 1950s and ‘60’s, enduring a homophobic father, yearning to be “cured” and at the same time almost compulsively servicing faceless men in public restrooms, kept him wanting more, and he already planned on buying the next book that continued the protagonist’s life after the Stonewall riots. He was captivated, not only by what he felt he had in common with the character but for what now appalled him. He’d avoided naming his own attraction to boys and his feelings for Victor; he’d felt broken, lonely, and most of all, different. He was already different in so many ways, but his gayness was a difference he’d wanted to hide.

That was before John. Before his eyes had been opened, before he’d met Martin and Irene and Kate, Gary and Billy, and seen Ms. Hudson with her wife. Now the thought that someone would
seek to “cure” their gayness, would want to change the very essence of themselves, seems tragic. *I am who I am, and I’m OK with it*. He’s chosen to make the Struggle Against Self the theme of his paper. After reading through the essay one last time, and finally being happy with it, he presses the send key, emailing it to his professor.

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“I’m done with my homework, Sir,” he informs John when his boyfriend arrives home from the gym that afternoon, sweaty and flushed from his workout, a towel around his neck and bottle of water in hand. John crosses the room and takes a seat beside him, then leans in for a kiss.

Sherlock recoils in feigned disgust. “You smell like a locker room!”

John laughs, “You think you’re funny, but you forget something.”

Sherlock raises an eyebrow, “What, Sir?”

“This,” John holds up his phone with his thumb poised over the screen and Sherlock gulps.

“You smell like a locker room,” he repeats, meeting John’s eyes.

“Oh, you want more. Are you begging me? Because if you are, I like it.”

Sherlock reddens a bit, lowering his chin and looking up at John through his lashes.

“Yes, Sir.”

John is silent for several seconds, and he seems to be collecting himself, the muscles of his jaw flexing and relaxing until finally, he says in a quiet voice, almost a whisper really, “Dear god, what did I do to deserve you, Sherlock, you’re going to be the death of me.” He leans in again and this time Sherlock accepts the kiss with enthusiasm.

“I’m not going to give you what you want, not yet. I’m going to get myself cleaned up and you are going to finish your work. Is your essay done? The one for the Common App?”

Sherlock shakes his head. “It’s sooo hard,” he whines.

“You work on it another hour and I’ll show you hard,” John says with a wicked grin, walking backwards toward the bedroom. “If you don’t, then I’ll take it out on your arse.” He turns and disappears down the hall.

Sherlock frowns, crosses his arms across his chest, and sticks out his tongue in John’s direction.

“I know what you’re doing. Add one stroke,” John calls.

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Cursing under his breath, Sherlock walks to the kitchen, excruciatingly aware of the toy shifting
inside him, half expecting it to begin vibrating at any moment, makes a mark on the whiteboard, then stares at it. Eleven. Eleven marks on his body that he’ll admire in the mirror the next day. Eleven strokes closer to…what? Redemption? And will the punishment be meted out today? John had hinted at it, but he isn’t sure. Looking at the eleven tally marks he feels a twinge of anticipation. Hadn’t he admitted to Molly just yesterday that he likes it? “Like” isn’t entirely accurate though. It hurts. It hurts a lot, but it also feels like a little victory — that he is able to endure it, even with tears. And it induces a calm, after whatever demon inside him, exorcised by the pain, has fled; it quiets his mind.

Replacing the marker in its clip, he returns to the sofa and opens his laptop. Taking a deep breath, he clicks on the document file with his admissions essay. Writing the essay had been difficult. He’d stared at the blank screen for what seemed like hours before finally typing, and he’d deleted and started over again and again before he had something he thought good enough to send to Ms. Hudson. It came back with the following note:

_Sherlock,_

_I’ve made some corrections and suggestions, but I think you should consider making your essay more personal. Admissions officers want to get to know and understand YOU. I’m sure they will be impressed with your critique of Dalton’s Law of Partial Pressures, but I know that you have more to offer the world than mere chemistry. You are a unique and gifted young man. Let them see what I see._

_Ms. H_

He huffs out a breath in frustration. What is it that Ms. H sees other than a smart-ass kid with an aptitude for science or an anti-social introvert? What about what she doesn’t see? The son who’s a disappointment to his father, the drug addict willing to sell his mouth for a fix, and now, the submissive who wears a collar and is fucking sitting here with a vibrator in his ass? The science stuff is what he’s most comfortable with, and what he’d written about. It’s never been easy for him to open up, to share, and he can count on one hand the people whom he trusts, not even needing all his fingers. Yet now he’s supposed to write intimate details for some stranger to read? He opens the document with another sigh and starts to type.

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When the hour is up, Sherlock closes his laptop and stretches. All the typing has made his shoulders ache. John is in his office with the door closed, which hasn’t happened before. Curious, Sherlock crosses the room and is about to knock when he hears John’s voice, apparently on the phone. Sherlock knows he shouldn’t, but he presses his ear to the door. He can’t quite make out what John is saying, but he’s speaking in a tone that sounds conversational. Just as Sherlock is about to turn away, he clearly hears the words, “Thanks Myc, no, I’m not going to tell him just yet…Yes, I know, you will hunt me down and kill me…I won’t, I won’t hurt him.”

John is talking about him with Myc. What is John not going to tell him? As he’s standing frozen outside the door, it suddenly opens, and John is staring at him in surprise.

"What are you doing Sherlock?"

“Um, it’s been an hour and…”
“Were you eavesdropping?” John’s expression is dark.

“No, Sir,” he can’t meet John’s eyes, so he looks at the floor.

“Look at me and try again.”

“I didn’t mean to, Sir.”

“Sherlock, when I have my door closed, there’s a reason.”

“It sounded like you were talking to Myc.”

“Whether I was or I wasn’t, the door was closed. It was a private conversation.”

“But if it’s my—”

“Do you trust me?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Then we’re done, and don’t ever do that again. Add two strokes for disrespect.”

Before Sherlock can protest, John changes the subject abruptly.

“And you’re right, the hour’s up. Let’s take a break. I’ve got an errand to run, and you’re coming with me. Would you like to drive?”

“Really?” John had been teaching him to drive the Porsche in an empty parking lot, and he had quickly learned to operate the standard transmission, just as John predicted he would, but so far he hadn’t driven on the street. The prospect of driving overshadows his curiosity about John’s conversation.

“Really,” John says, smiling.

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The wind is whipping through his hair as he puts the Porsche in fifth gear and accelerates past the 65 mph speed limit on the interstate.

“Watch it,” John warns from the passenger seat.

He eases off the gas a bit until they are traveling at legal speed.

“Enjoying yourself?”

Sherlock nods, knowing he’s got the biggest grin on his face, but not caring. Driving the car is exhilarating. It makes him feel carefree and powerful, and it’s fun seeing the other drivers look at them with appreciation. He steals a glance sideways at John who has his arm draped over the door, and his head tilted back, the sun glinting off his aviators. For what seems like the thousandth time, his breath catches as he thinks how handsome and downright sexy his boyfriend is. As much fun as he’s having right now, he can’t help but think about later, of being kissed, of being caressed, of being taken by this man.
Soon they arrive at a shopping mall a few miles from the city.

“I wanted to look for some new jeans and maybe some workout clothes, and I thought you could use some new clothes too. Martin’s got you all set as far as suits go, but I’m tired of seeing you in ratty T-shirts and the same two pairs of basketball shorts all the time.”

“But you’ve already given me so much—”

“No buts, it’s for my benefit too. I have to be seen with you,” John teases. “And besides, Rule 1 applies. Caring for you includes making sure you have proper clothing.

As Sherlock pulls carefully into a spot, he asks, “Sir, what’s going to happen to the car when you go back?”

“It’s a lease. I’ll turn it in. Rule 1 doesn’t go quite that far Sherlock. If you were thinking I was going to leave you the car…”

“Actually, I’ve been wanting to talk about it, not the car, but what’s going to happen to me when the summer’s over.”

John takes his hand and they walk toward the mall. “Yeah, I know, it’s been weighing on me too. Let’s assume you’ll be going to college somewhere in the spring. That just leaves autumn to figure out. I know you aren’t going to like this, but going to stay with Myc may be your best bet. I don’t like the idea of you on your own. I know you’re an adult—"

“Aw, no, please, no. He drives me crazy, we’d kill each other.”

“I don’t want you back with your dad.”

“I’m not going back there.”

John stops on the sidewalk and turns to face him. “Listen, we’ll figure it out. The shopping mall is not really the place to have this discussion. But know this, Rule 1 doesn’t end in August, Sherlock. I’m not going to abandon you, understand?

“Yes, Sir.”

“Right then, let’s do some shopping.”

Sherlock is in the dressing room of the men’s department at Macy’s pulling on a pair of Levi’s. Half a dozen pairs of cotton shorts and polo shirts in various colors litter the floor of the cubicle. The jeans are a skinny fit in a dark wash. He’s had to go up an inch in the waist size from what he currently owns, much to John’s approval.
“Are you going to let me see?” John calls through the door.

Sherlock exits the dressing room to model his outfit.

John nods and smiles, “Very nice, turn around.” There’s no one else in the dressing rooms and Sherlock does as he’s told.

John puts his hands on Sherlock’s waist and whispers, “Your arse looks great in these jeans, you’re getting them.” He slides one hand lower to squeeze a buttock, then moves it to where the base of the plug sits and gives a little push through the tight denim.

Sherlock gasps, and John chuckles. “You are going to be so open for me tonight.” He pulls Sherlock’s hips back against his body.

“Tell me what I want to hear, gorgeous.”

Keeping his voice as low as possible, Sherlock says, “I belong to you. You could have me right here if you wanted.” He hopes this is the right answer. It feels like the right answer. It’s the truth.

John releases him with an exhalation. “Get dressed and let’s go home.”

Sherlock is back in the dressing room, putting on his clothes when suddenly, he is stopped cold by the vibration of the plug. John has turned it on full force. He puts his hand against the wall to steady himself. He’s in his briefs and T-shirt and oh fuck the thing inside him is buzzing and touching him in just the right place. His dick is getting hard and he looks down at it. Shit. His phone vibrates and he picks it up.

“Don’t touch. Your cock is mine. Get dressed and come out.” The intensity of the vibrations goes down a notch.

Holding the clothing in front of him to hide the bulge in his shorts, Sherlock emerges from the dressing room, red-faced.

“Problem?”

“Sir, please, can we go home now?”

John pays for their purchases, and they start heading for the exit, the plug temporarily stilled. John has his arm around Sherlock and it feels natural. They are in the suburbs, not quite the downtown scene, but no one seems to be paying them much attention. A group of girls is walking toward them, laughing loudly. They pass by.

“It’s the freak!”

Sherlock freezes. Sally Donovan! Instinctively, he moves away from John.

“Knew it! Knew you were a fucking queer.”

Sherlock takes a deep breath, horrified and still frozen in place.

“Sherlock.” John’s voice is steady and reassuring. “Trust me?” Sherlock turns his head to meet John’s eyes and nods, holding his breath. He feels like he’s been punched in the gut, but John is so calm.

John reaches for Sherlock’s hand as he turns to face Sally and her friends.
“This young man is the smartest, most interesting person that I’ve ever met. One day, you’ll read about him. You’ll brag to your friends that you knew him. You will be ashamed of yourself for your small-minded bigotry. I pity you. I really do. I’m proud to call Sherlock Holmes my boyfriend and neither of us gives a toss what you and your little band of losers think.” John pulls Sherlock to him and plants a kiss on his lips, then turns and walks away with Sherlock in tow, leaving the girls speechless.

When they are outside, John bursts out laughing. “Did you see her face when I kissed you? Priceless.” Sherlock can’t help but laugh too. “Thank you, Sir.”

“Everything I said was true. Don’t be afraid to speak the truth, Sherlock. Jesus was right. It really does set you free.”

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John doesn’t let him drive home from the mall and instead delights in tormenting him with the vibrator as he squirms in the passenger seat. Somehow the plug’s been connected to the car’s Bluetooth and John is controlling it from the buttons on the steering wheel. The convertible’s top is down, and Sherlock’s trying hard not to make embarrassing faces as John turns the vibrator up, then down, then up, then off, allowing him to recover a bit before the next round, but never long enough to lose his erection. He moans with pleasure and grips the edges of his seat with white knuckles as his prostate is massaged over and over and he slides down, grinding his ass into the leather.

Reaching into John’s lap, he finds the hardness under his jeans and rubs his palm over it. John places his own hand over Sherlock’s and presses it down.

“Christ, Sherlock.”

“Hurry.”

“Almost home,” John says, his voice tight.

The tires screech as they pull into the parking garage and even before the engine dies John is stretched across the gearshift, pressing his mouth to Sherlock’s. “I’m sorry I don’t drive an SUV because if we had a bit more room, I’d fuck you right here.”

“I could bend over the hood...Sir.”

John groans, “That would be incredible, seeing your body draped over my car, just for me. You are fucking killing me.” He kisses Sherlock again before sitting back and running a hand through his hair, blowing out deep breaths through his mouth.

“Let’s go.”

Disregarding the security cameras in the elevator, they can’t keep their hands off one another on the ride to the fourteenth floor. When they entered the elevator, John had activated the vibrator and then grabbed his ass, pulling their bodies together as Sherlock let his hands roam over John’s back. Now outside the condo, Sherlock is leaning against the wall, barely able to stand, as John fumbles with the keycard. At last, they are inside, and John immediately pushes Sherlock against the door and kisses him roughly.
“On your knees,” he growls.

Sherlock drops to his knees and John takes the collar from the drawer and places it around his neck. Looking down at Sherlock he takes his chin between his fingers and lifts it. They are silent for a moment as they gaze at one another. John’s eyes are intense and with dilated pupils, they look almost black.

“How many?” John’s voice is barely audible.

“Sir?”

“How many have you earned?”

“Thirteen.”

“We’d best get started then.”
Only For You

Chapter Summary

The slate is cleared, sex is had, and the work week begins.

The anticipation of what is to come sends a thrill down Sherlock’s spine as he kneels before John in the foyer. Whatever it is, he is ready to bear it. He welcomes it, welcomes the punishment that will make his body stronger and his mind clearer. He is craving surrender. After it all, there will be cuddling, and gentle kisses and he wants the feeling, of being cherished, he does. But right now...right now, he wants violence and passion. He wants John’s hands on him, he wants welts and cries, and stinging flesh; he wants to feel hot breath on his skin and, instead of the plug, the living, pulsing force that is John, inside him, possessing him.

He waits silently for instruction, looking up at John who seems to be fighting for self-control, his jaw taut and his breathing shallow.

“Up,” he demands hoarsely, extending his hand to help Sherlock to his feet.

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When his clothing is lying neatly folded on the chair, Sherlock takes a deep breath and opens the door to the bedroom. He isn’t sure what he was expecting, but he is surprised to see John sitting, fists balled on his thighs, feet flat on the floor. He’s taking deep, studied breaths now and watches intently as Sherlock enters and closes the door behind him.

“I don’t think you know how hard it is for me to keep my hands off you sometimes. Right now, all I want to do is fuck you until neither of us can stand up. But that’s not what you need right now and being pissed off about that is the only thing giving me the strength I need to punish you first.”

Sherlock is still savoring the fact that John is having difficulty controlling himself when he says abruptly, “You’re going to crawl to me.”

“What? I mean...what did you say, Sir?”

John gives him a skeptical look and ignores the question. “How many of your strokes were for disrespect or disobedience?”

“Oh…” He ticks through the list in his head. “...eleven, Sir.”

“Do you remember when you moved in? What was one of the first things I asked of you?”

Sherlock has trouble raising his eyes. He starts to mumble, but John cuts him off.

“Speak up, Sherlock. I know you remember. Look at me and tell me what I asked.”
With a deep breath, he points his chin and says, “You asked me to respect your privacy.”

“You must know by now that I don’t expect you to be perfect. In fact, I like you being a cheeky brat. It shows me that you’re not afraid of me. And I like you walking around with a sore arse. But I will not tolerate true disrespect. Listening to a conversation that I obviously meant to stay private is way over the line. Even if we weren’t in a dom/sub relationship, I wouldn’t tolerate it. Not from anyone. And never from a sub of mine. And so, as a reminder, I want you to crawl to me. As a sign of respect. To help you remember our roles in this arrangement.”

Sherlock had heard but hadn’t believed, hadn’t believed John would make him do something so… humiliating? Crawling wasn’t something they’d discussed. It wasn’t even on the limits list. He bites his lip and looks at John, who is staring at him expectantly. Then he hears the thud of his knees hitting the floor and sees his hands in front of him, fingers splayed on the hardwood. It’s surreal. He’s on all fours just inside the door, and he’s really going to do this.

He moves one hand, and then one knee. Deep breath. Then another crawling step. He feels humiliated, but is that John’s intention? Hadn’t he eavesdropped knowing it was wrong? He’d been curious, and anxious. Another hand, another knee. It’s not so bad. It will make John happy, it will earn him forgiveness. The thought comes to him with the next embarrassing slide of his knee across the floor: maybe it’s not just about making John happy. Maybe it is to help him remember. He wants to trust him. He doesn’t want to be disrespectful. He doesn’t want to make John angry or disappoint him.

He can do it, he can prove his obedience and his repentance. He will do it. Slowly, he advances across the room, excruciatingly aware of John’s eyes on him. He can hear his heavy breathing. He can smell his cologne and below it the familiar masculine scent. Sherlock’s cock bobs hard and heavy as he crawls, and the plug is shifting inside him with each movement. His eyes are locked on John’s and they don’t waver. With each shuffle of his palm, he remembers what John has brought to his life and how grateful he feels. He thinks of the things that he himself has kept private from John and feels sincere regret for his behavior settle in.

Finally, he reaches John and stops.

“I’m sorry, Sir.”

John’s fists, still balled on his thighs, relax, but his face remains serious.

“I know. I know you are. And I know we won’t have to worry about respecting privacy again.” He reaches out to stroke Sherlock’s cheek and lets his thumb slide across his mouth, then dips it inside. Sherlock takes it between his teeth and circles the pad with his tongue.

John exhales. “Thank you.” He bends and kisses Sherlock without removing his thumb. “You are my good boy.” The praise sends a shiver through Sherlock’s body, and he smiles a small smile.

John’s fingers are still moving gently over Sherlock’s cheek, and his stern face belies the tenderness in his eyes. He lets Sherlock stay there on his hands and knees, waiting for a command, driving home the message. Finally, he takes his hand away and stands.

“Alright, let’s finish clearing your slate. Kneel up now.”

Sherlock rises to his knees, which are starting to ache, and reflexively grasps his elbows behind his back. He sees that John now has the crop in his hand and he swallows hard as he stares at it.

“Eyes on me.” John lifts Sherlock’s chin with the flat tip of the crop.
“So, eleven for disobedience and disrespect. What about the rest?”

"Two for Rule five, for forgetting my patch, Sir.”

“You have a strong will, and I like that about you. I’m sure it’s what’s helped you survive and thrive as much as you have. I’d far rather be punishing you for disobedience than self-harm. But still, rules were broken, and there are consequences. Now, you will ask me for what you’ve earned.” As he speaks, John drags the crop across Sherlock’s chest and then down his stomach which flinches at the touch. As it trails lower his mind goes temporarily blank.

A sharp flick of the crop on his belly brings him back.

“Ah! Please punish me, Sir.”

“I’ll punish you, Sherlock. It’s my privilege. I’m going to give you two with the crop for listening in on my conversation. I’ll not have that again. We’re clear on that?”

“Yes, Sir. I am sorry. Really.”

John nods. “I know you weren’t expecting what just happened and you obeyed. We are going to discuss that later, how it made you feel. But to reward you for your obedience, I’m going to put you over my lap and use my hand for the rest. I’m going to spank you.”

So, not the crop for them all, but John’s hand on his bare ass. Sherlock’s breath comes a little faster at the prospect. John hasn’t spanked him this way since that first night he visited the condo.

“Yes, Sir.”

“Before we start, do you need anything? Water? The bathroom?” John gestures to bottles of water and juice that are sitting, ready, on the bedside table.

“No, Sir.”

“Then bend over and put your hands on the bed. You’ll count them and thank me for the strokes.”

Sherlock stands to obey and says, “Yes, Sir, but, not to be disrespectful, what about the plug?”

“What about it?”

“You’re not...you’re going to leave it in?”

“Yes, I am. It stays for now.”

“Are you going to…” Sherlock is afraid to ask for what he wants.

“Turn it on?” John barks out a laugh. “You’re being punished, remember? You want me to stimulate your prostate? That is cheeky.”

Sherlock feels a blush warm his face.

“Bend over,” John commands sternly.

He complies silently, spreading his feet to brace himself against the blows, and it makes him hyper-aware of the plug yet again. He feels himself tightening around it. He knows that John is watching the muscles of his ass, and he tries to stop himself, but can’t.
John’s hands slide over his buttocks. “Mine,” he murmurs. “You are all mine.” Then his fingers slip between them, and the plug is pulled halfway out, then pushed in again. Sherlock bites his lip and shuts his eyes. Since the extraordinary orgasm on the sofa this morning, the rest of the day has been one long tease, and he’s once again desperate for release. Once he takes his punishment, there will be fucking, and, oh, how he wants to be fucked.

He pushes back against the pressure, but the hands are gone, and John says, “Breathe, Sherlock. First things first.”

He inhales deeply and is just starting to exhale when he hears the “whoosh” followed by “crack” and then a searing pain on the back of one thigh, and his breath rushes out with a grunt.

“One. Thank you, Sir.” The words have barely left his lips when the crop falls again across the other thigh. His hands grip the bedcovers as he rocks forward and though he’d tried not to, he whimpers just a little.

“Two. Thank you, Sir.” The plug does very little to distract him from the burning. He’s gasping, trying to swallow air and keep from rubbing the welts he can feel rising on his skin. Just when he thinks his self-control is going to break, he feels John’s cool hands brushing against the stripes. His skin prickles under the gentle touch of his fingertips.

John murmurs, “Those are going to hurt. They’re meant to. Remember how you earned them.”

“Yes, Sir. I’ll remember.”

“Alright, let’s finish. Up you get.”

As Sherlock stands and turns, the skin tightens and stretches, and he can already tell these are going to be worse than any welts he’s gotten before. The backs of his thighs are so much more tender than his ass and not nearly as sexy. They are going to hurt, sitting, standing, moving. He grimaces, caught between the slashes of the crop and the movement of the plug, as he takes the few steps from the bed to the chair where John is already waiting for him. He thinks of the hours he has to spend sitting in class and wonders what his work at the hospital is going to be like. Will they feel worse sitting still or moving around?

John clears his throat, and Sherlock snaps back to the present and the eleven more he’s facing. John’s hand. It will be a relief after the cold harshness of the crop. He remembers that first night when John spanked him on the sofa. It’s a pleasant memory and he’s not afraid. He wants John’s hand, wants to feel those strong thighs beneath him, he craves the intimacy of it, the biting, burning pain of it that binds them, that satisfies his own need to feel cared for and John’s need to care. He remembers how otherworldly it was, and how far he’s come, how far they have come together since the first time John punished him.

“Over my lap.”

He lowers himself gingerly over John’s spread legs. John is careful not to let Sherlock’s cock make contact, and it hangs, neglected and dripping. He waits, trembling with anticipation.

“Eleven,” John says, placing one hand on the small of his back and with the other cupping an ass-cheek and giving it a squeeze. He pushes gently against the base of the plug and Sherlock squirms against it again, a little dizzy at the combination of sensation. Pain? Pleasure? What’s the difference again? Which is he seeking? I can do this.

“I don’t have the patience for you to count and thank me for each one so prepare yourself.”
Before he can get his acknowledgment out, John’s hand connects with a loud crack and Sherlock’s warm, fuzzy memories are instantly replaced with the harsh reality of the stinging slap.

*Shit* is all he has time to think before John is peppering him and he’s struggling to keep from trying to escape by wriggling *like a little kid*. It’s no use though; he can’t even keep track of how many more there are to go. All he can do is hang on and wait for it to be over. He tightens his fists and squeezes his eyes shut trying to keep tears from leaking out. He is so intent on keeping still and quiet, that it is only as the last two blows are laid over the crop marks that he cries out.

John slides his hand over Sherlock’s burning ass before easing him gently off his lap. He crumples, but when his heels hit his abused skin he rises quickly to his knees, gasping from the pain and the sensation of the plug moving inside him. John takes him in his arms, pulls him close, and kisses his temple. “You’re forgiven now, let it go.”

A single sob shakes him as he buries his face in John’s chest. Despite the pain, as in the past, he does feel better, and his mind is clearer. He wipes his eyes against John’s shirt, then pulls away. “Thank you, Sir.”

John kisses his upturned face, his forehead, his nose, his cheek and finally, his mouth, gently, and then with a greedy passion. He buries his fingers in Sherlock’s hair, and his tongue goes deep before he groans and breaks the kiss. “I need you. God help me, I need you.” John inhales deeply and blows it out. “Are you alright? Let’s rest for a bit and I can hold you—”

“No,” Sherlock reaches between John’s legs and places his palm over the erection straining against the cloth. “I need you too. Please, Sir.”

John gets to his feet, and Sherlock immediately presses his lips to the bulge in John’s shorts while undoing the button and working the zipper down. The shorts fall to the floor and then the boxers. John’s cock is rock hard and so tempting that Sherlock wastes no time in admiration, but opens his mouth and takes it in. His hands cup John’s ass as his smooth hot erection slides over his tongue again and again, and John’s hands are back in his hair, tugging and pulling almost painfully.

“Your mouth Sherlock, your mouth. It’s perfect. Fuck.”

Sherlock sets to with vigor but soon feels John pulling him off.

“Not tonight. Not like this. That plug has been getting you ready for me all day. It’s my turn. And tonight, I want to watch you while I fuck you. I want to see your face. I want you to see me, see what you do to me.”

Sherlock’s eyelids fall closed, and he feels John pull him up by the elbows and lunge for his mouth. He sways on his feet and lets John take what he wants from him. When John’s hand closes around his cock and begins to stroke, his knees threaten to buckle. Loose and pliant in John’s grip, he is guided gently down to the mattress to lie on his side. Before climbing in beside him, John pulls his shirt over his head and reaches for something on the table.

“Oh!” he sighs as the toy inside him comes to life, and he contracts into a ball with the pleasure of it.

John chuckles, “I love watching you come undone, sweet boy. Roll over for me. On your back.” He arranges some pillows at his hips and Sherlock rolls onto them, wincing as his tender skin brushes the cloth, but not really caring as his brain is preoccupied with the vibrations spreading through his groin and belly. And when John’s mouth envelops him with soft wet heat, the pain fades completely.
“Sir. Oh, Sir! That feels…” He can’t finish the sentence. He buries his fingers in John’s short hair and drives up into him. The dual stimulation is almost too much, and stars dance behind his closed eyelids as he moans loudly, and with abandon. A twinge of self-consciousness and then, *John wants to hear me, right?* And anyway, he can’t help it.

A firm hand on his hip keeps him from thrusting again, and John switches from deep-throating to licking and lightly sucking just the head of his cock, and it’s driving him mad.

“Slow down Sherlock, you’re not going to come yet and that’s an order. I want to be inside you.”

“I can’t—”

“Yes, you can, and you will. And the more I have to talk, the less attention your cock is getting. Gags were on your list of nos, but I’m tempted to re-negotiate.”

Seeing the logic in this, Sherlock bites his lips and stays silent while John resumes his work *and god, he knows just what to do* bringing him to the brink and easing off again and again in a delicious back and forth of pleasure and denial.

It breaks through his haze when John pulls away and switches the vibrator off. He catches his breath and opens his eyes, torn between gratitude for the relief and grief for the loss of stimulation. There is a look of fierce hunger on John’s face, and he feels more desirable than he’s ever felt in his life. It’s thrilling, a little frightening, and his breathing speeds up again. He freezes as if he is being hunted and sudden movement will trigger the chase. Then he realizes he wants to be caught and reaches up to pull John to him for another vicious kiss.

John grips his hair and tilts his head back, exposing his long white neck. He sucks and scrapes, leaving a bruise that will mark him for days. Then, John moves to his nipple and bites hard. Sherlock arches his back, offering the other up for attention, but John ignores it and works the one until Sherlock is squirming.

“That’s it. You’re mine and I’ll have you now,” John says, sitting back on his heels between Sherlock’s spread legs.

Goosebumps rise up on his arms and he draws his knees up to his chest and lets them fall open. John grips the base of the plug, pulls it out none too gently, and Sherlock hears it thump on the wooden floor. He tries to clench around the absence it leaves, but only for a second because the slick head of John’s cock is nudging against his hole. Without further foreplay, he is breached, and he rocks up to take John in as deeply as possible. John grabs his hips and pulls him even closer, grinding against his burning ass before sliding his hands to the backs of his knees and pushing them toward his chest.

John’s eyes flit between his cock pistoning in and out of Sherlock’s body and watching his changing expressions. As much as Sherlock enjoyed the vibrations and unpredictability of the plug, John’s solid, steady thrusting is better. Sherlock’s mind is still calm from the spanking and so focused. Focused on the man above and inside him. There is John and nothing else. Nothing else that matters.

In and out. In and out. John’s balls slap against his ass in a steady rhythm that soon accelerates, each powerful movement of his hips causing the bed to rock and creak. It feels so good and Sherlock wants to touch his cock, he needs to.

As if reading his mind, John says, “Touch yourself.” He slows his onslaught and pulls almost all the way out before sinking in again, taking his time as Sherlock removes his hand from the
headboard and closes it around his erection.

“That’s it, sweet boy. You feel so good, still so tight, even after the plug. Only I get to fuck you, only I get to come in your gorgeous ass, yeah?” He resumes his former pace.

“Only you, Sir,” Sherlock manages between great gulps of air. His vision is beginning to darken at the edges as he works the head of his cock while John pounds into him relentlessly, still gripping the backs of his knees so hard there will surely be bruises tomorrow. It’s the most physically intense sex they’ve had so far. John is obviously not holding back, and the fierceness of his expression coupled with the forcefulness of his driving hips is thrilling. Their eyes are locked, and John, always in control, seems on the edge of coming undone himself. Sweat glistens on his chest and drips from his brow.

“Oh, Sir ...” Sherlock gasps out.

John’s face changes, softens, as he’s torn from his single-minded focus, and he stops moving.

“Am I hurting you?”

“No, Sir.” This isn’t exactly true, but the pain isn’t the thing. The pain is just fine, actually. The thing is, he can’t get enough of this. He wants to feel John’s hands, rough and demanding, on his body, and his cock as deep as it will go. And then deeper still. He’ll take everything and still want more. “I...this...so good. Don’t stop. Please.”

“Oh, my gorgeous, sexy boy.” Placing Sherlock’s knees over his shoulders, he leans down, kisses him hard, and moves again, burying himself in Sherlock’s body, while panting out between kisses and bites, “I want to consume you, Sherlock. I want to possess you and keep you for myself. I never expected this. Never expected you. I…” John’s voice trails off and Sherlock wonders what he’s left unsaid, but the feel of John’s thick cock sliding into him, the lips on his face and neck, and the grip of his own hand are overwhelming, and the tide of orgasm begins to overtake him.

“I’m going to come.”

“Yes, come for me.”

Everything that has happened today, the vibrator, driving the car, the crawling, the crop, the spanking, especially the spanking, oh god, being over his knee, and John’s brutal passion, converge with the physical pleasure, taking him to the edge of release and then beyond.

“Johhhhhnn.” His cry is shockingly loud, and he’s broken a rule, but no one notices. His muscles contract around the cock inside him, sending John over the brink, and they fall together.

*******

The room dims as the sun sinks low in the summer sky, and the view of the orange and purple sunset from the bedroom window is spectacular. Sherlock is drifting, half asleep under John’s arm, happy and content as John strokes his biceps, his fingertips tracing lazy circles on the still damp skin.

“How did it feel?”
“Mmmm?”
John squeezes his arm gently. “When I asked you to crawl. How did it make you feel?”
“Um...I didn’t want to do it...at first. I thought it would be humiliating.”
“But you did it.”
“Yeah.”
“And was it?”
“At the beginning yes, but then no. Thinking about it was worse. I wanted to show you how sorry I was and how much you mean to me. I think I wanted to prove something. I wanted to do it.”
“For me.”
“For you, Sir. Only for you.”

********

“Good morning Sherlock!” Molly greets him cheerily with a Starbucks cup in each hand as he arrives at the lab on Monday at ten minutes to eight.

“Hi, Molly,” he says as he retrieves his lab coat from his locker and stows his backpack. He flips up the collar of his polo shirt, hoping to hide the bruise John left, and Molly gives him a look but says nothing.

“Bought you a coffee. Black, two sugars, right?”

“Right, thanks,” he says taking the offered cup. “You’re awfully happy for a Monday morning.”

“I am happy, Sherlock! This job is so awesome, I can’t believe we’re here. I mean look at us. We aren’t even in college yet, and we’re working in a lab, in a hospital, with lab coats and everything.” She grasps the lapels of her coat and does a little twirl making her ponytail fly.

“Yeah it is pretty great, but I get the feeling Jim’s not going to let us do anything interesting. He seems like kind of a control freak, and I don’t think he likes me. He likes you though.”

Molly blushes and presses her thin lips together in an embarrassed smile. “I think you just need to get to know him. You could try being nice, you know.”

“Have you ever known me to be nice? And did you...get to know him?” He arches an eyebrow at her.

“We had a nice time, Sherlock, and he’s a good kisser if you really want to know.” She raises her eyebrows at him haughtily.

“Ugh, Molly!”

“Don’t tell me you’re jealous?” She knows he’s not.
“Ha, ha, very funny. No, I just don’t like him, and John doesn’t either. We were worried about you Saturday.”

“That’s sweet, but I can take care of myself, Sherlock.”

An image of Molly against the tree, her pink dress hiked up flashes through his mind, and he makes a face.

Reading his expression, she says, “OK, OK, I get it. You were my knight in shining armor, and I love you for it, but if you remember, I broke bones. You called me a badass.”

He has to smile at this. “Yeah, you were, Molls, but…” Sherlock looks at his friend. She is a badass, in her own unique way. And while she hasn’t always approved of his choices, she’s always been there for him. “Just promise you’ll be careful.”

“I will, and I’ll call my knight if I need him.”

**********

“It’s going to be a busy day,” says Dr. Sawyer after greeting them in the lab. “Lots going on. We’ve got a backlog of work from overnight, and I’ve heard that we’ll be doing some diversion testing of morphine and hydromorphone vials this week.”

“What’s that?” Molly asks. “I’ve heard of morphine, of course, but not hydromorphone.”

“Hydromorphone is derived from morphine but is two to eight times stronger. It’s quite valuable on the street, but generally, we find that when it’s diverted, meaning stolen from the hospital by an employee, it’s to feed an addiction, not to sell. Drug diversion in hospitals is a huge problem. You’d be surprised to what lengths addicts will go.”

Sherlock looks uncomfortably at the floor, thinking how true this is, and how good it feels... maybe just once more... No, Rule number five. Stop that right fucking now, think of John. Remember what he said. “My reputation is on the line, don’t cock this up.”

“Once we caught a janitor reaching into a sharps waste container trying to get used needles just for the tiny bits of narcotic left over. His hand was a bloody mess, and he’s lucky that being fired was the worst thing that happened to him. There are nasty things on those needles. But the most tragic thing is when painkillers are taken from the patients who need them. That’s what really makes me furious,” Dr. Sawyer says, her pretty face drawn into an angry frown. “Think of a cancer patient, in terrible pain and the vial that is supposed to contain a painkiller is filled with water, non-sterile water, even toilet water in some cases.”

“Oh, that’s awful!” Molly exclaims.

“Yes, it is. Some people view addiction as a victimless crime, but in a hospital setting, that’s often not the case. Anyway, we do random tests to make sure that a vial of morphine or another narcotic contains what it’s supposed to. The hospital has had some concerns lately about diversion, so we’re doing testing this week. Security may be bringing down the samples this afternoon. I’ll be here to supervise, but Jim will be doing most of the work. You two can observe and assist.”

“Where is Jim?” Molly says eagerly, and Sherlock rolls his eyes.
“He should be here any minute. Until he arrives, there is some data entry and cleaning you two can start on. Not glamorous, I know, but it has to be done.”

********

“I’m heeeere, people!” Jim announces as he enters the lab. He extends his arms flamboyantly and looks around the room as if expecting applause. Sherlock glances up from the computer where he is entering what seems like an endless stream of numbers and notes into a spreadsheet, and immediately looks back down. Jesus, what a dickhead.

Molly and Dr. Sawyer both greet Jim and the morning’s work proceeds with Jim and the doctor catching up on the weekend’s backlog, while Sherlock and Molly continue with their assigned tasks. Before lunch, Dr. Sawyer calls them to where she and Jim are working.

“Sherlock, Molly, come over here. I’ve got something to show you that I think you’ll find interesting.” They drop what they’re doing and join her at a long table holding various kinds of scientific equipment.

“You two are familiar with mass spectrometry, I assume?” They both nod, with Molly clearly the more enthusiastic of the two.

“Go ahead then, Molly.”

“Every compound has a molecular weight and when bombarded with electrons, will break down into fragments with a unique pattern. The mass spectrometer ionizes a sample with electrons and analyzes the fragmentation, allowing the identification of the compound.”

“Very good Molly, in simple terms, you are correct,” Jim says, giving a double thumbs-up and causing Molly to smile with satisfaction.

“Working in a lab is really just solving mysteries with chemistry. Often these are mysteries where lives hang in the balance,” Dr. Sawyer says. “This is important and exciting work, and the spectrometer is one of our best tools. Jim, do you want to give the background on our case?”

Jim stands up straight and clears his throat self-importantly. “A female patient came in this morning with acute lethargy, hypertension, and tachycardia, which means an elevated heart rate. She said she took Adderall, not uncommon in college students, but her symptoms don’t quite match what we’d expect from amphetamine, and, her urine tox was negative for amphetamines. We’ve got the pills right here,” Jim says, gesturing to a container on the countertop.

Sherlock picks it up and studies the label quietly, then pulls out his phone as Jim continues to talk. His voice drones on as Sherlock’s thumbs move quickly over the screen until Molly breaks in. “So, you think she's lying?”

“Possibly, or—”

“It’s contaminated or not Adderall at all,” interrupts Sherlock, holding up the pill container, and earning an annoyed look from Jim.

“Very good, Sherlock. Go on,” Dr. Sawyer says.
“The label looks identical to the ingredient list for Adderall, but these pills came from India, not the U.S. So, internet pharmacy—suspicious. The label has the address of the manufacturer in Mumbai. Easy enough to look up on Google Earth, which I did, and look.” He shows them the image on his screen, a patch of dirt, some trees, and a few tiny shacks. “It’s a fake.” Sherlock aims his most charming smile in Jim’s direction.

“Excellent!” Dr. Sawyer says. “My thoughts exactly. First, we’ll test the pills for the fragmentation pattern of amphetamine. The molecular weight is one thirty-five and should show fragments of forty-four and ninety-one. Jim’s prepared the sample and we’ll put it in the spectrometer. When you get back from lunch, we’ll look at the data and see what we have. Those diversion samples I mentioned might also be arriving. Should be a fun afternoon!”

Sherlock and Molly fill their trays and head for an empty table in a quiet corner of the busy cafeteria. When they sit, Sherlock makes a face as his sore ass and legs make contact with the hard plastic chair, and he sees comprehension register on Molly’s face. He thinks she’s going to comment, but instead, she says, “So, John lets you use his account for lunch?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s really nice of him.”

“He’s a nice guy, Molly.”

She puts down the forkful of salad that is halfway to her mouth. “Sherlock, I’ve been thinking about what you told me on Saturday, and I know it’s none of my business—"

“Oh god, Molly, please don’t make me regret what I told you. I don’t want to talk about it, it’s private.”

“I’m sorry, but I’m worried about you. Not about what he…what he does to you, but that you might get hurt, emotionally hurt. Isn’t this all a bit too good to be true? Rich foreign doctor takes in a vulnerable kid, buys him stuff, uses him for a plaything—shush, Sherlock!” She points a finger at him before he can object. “A willing plaything, I get that.”

“It’s not playing! He’s not using me!”

She puts her hand over his. “I know, and that’s what I’m worried about. I can tell—to you it’s not playing. You think I don’t know you, but I do. I don’t know him though. How do you know he’s not just playing with you?” She leans forward so she can whisper. “Just using you for sex or to satisfy his…his…need for control, or whatever. What do you really know about him? What happens when you fall in love and he—”

“He won’t! He said he wouldn’t!” Sherlock jerks his hand away and, conscious that he spoke far too loudly, glances around, just in time to see Jim approach, carrying a tray.

_Fucking perfect._

“Mind if I join you?
“Not at all,” Molly says, and Sherlock glares at her.

“Who won’t do what? What’s wrong, Sherlock?” Jim says as he takes the chair next to Molly. “Boyfriend problems?”

“Please, Jim,” Molly says. “It’s nothing.”

He shrugs with a half-smile. “If you say so.”

“I’ve lost my appetite,” Sherlock says, rising abruptly and stalking away without looking at Molly. Before dumping his tray in the trash, he takes the apple. He’s going to need to have something to write down in his food log or John will be disappointed. He walks outside and sits on a bench to eat it, but it has no flavor and, after three bites, he throws it angrily into the trash can.

Molly just doesn’t understand. John won’t abandon him. He promised he wouldn’t. And he believes him. Wants to believe him. He closes his eyes and remembers last night and thinks of the marks he carries on his body, the welts, the bruise on his neck from John’s mouth, and the ones on his thighs from John’s fingers. You can’t fake that kind of passion, can you? That ferocious drive doesn’t just come from desire. Sherlock knows he means more to John than that. Does John love him? He’s practically told him so. In so many words. He definitely promised that they would figure it out. He said he wouldn’t disappear. And John Watson doesn’t break his word.
The Drop

Chapter Summary

Sherlock wakes up not feeling well. After that, the day goes from bad to worse.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sherlock is woken Tuesday morning by the soft brush of lips against his. He opens his eyes halfway to see John, dressed and ready for work, bending over him.

“Good morning, beautiful.” John sits on the edge of the bed and musses his already mussed hair. “Sorry to wake you, but I didn’t want to leave without saying goodbye or checking your stripes.”

“Mmmm, what time is it?” Sherlock says, closing his eyes again and wriggling deeper under the covers.

“Seven-thirty.” John pulls the sheet and duvet back, then fingers the welts on the backs of his thighs. They are a livid pink and starting to darken, but the skin isn’t broken. There is some bruising on his ass and behind his knees, though not nearly as severe. John slides his hand over the reddened cheeks and says, “Aloe after you shower. You can go back to sleep, but don’t stay in bed all day and miss class.” He gives him a gentle smack and Sherlock grunts an assent.

He scratches Sherlock’s jawline gently. “And don’t shave, I like the scruff. I’ve got a full schedule today, but I’ll be home for dinner. We have some important things to discuss.”

Another grunt.

John chuckles softly and pulls the covers back up over him. “See you tonight, sweet boy.” And Sherlock drifts back into a peaceful sleep.

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The next thing he’s aware of is the sound of John’s ringtone, which is unusual enough to make him sit up in the bed. They usually text, and if John has a busy day, he barely has time for that. The clock says eleven forty-five. By this time he should have done his workout and taken a shower.

*Shit.*

He answers in a gruff voice that gives away the fact that he is just waking up.

“Hello?”

“Did you oversleep? You didn’t answer my texts.”

He’s groggy and scrubs at his eyes. “Sorry, Sir. Rule number seven.”
John snorts a little and whispers across the line. “Yes, that’s my good boy, but I’m not keeping track of that right now. The alarm didn’t wake you? Are you feeling alright?”

Sherlock realizes he must have turned the alarm off without even waking, which is something that hasn’t happened since the awful days after—

“Yes, Sir. Sorry, I don’t know what happened.” He takes a quick inventory and realizes he doesn’t feel quite as well as he thought. “Just...tired. Maybe getting a cold or something.”

John is quiet for a moment then asks, “Lots of germs floating around in hospitals. Are you well enough to go to class?”

Sherlock swings his legs over the side of the bed and gets to his feet. “Yeah, I think so.” He feels unsteady and not right in a way he can’t quite identify. “I’m fine, I think I just need to eat something and class isn’t until two.”

“There’s leftover lasagne in the fridge.” There’s a pause. “Have some of that chocolate afterward. And make sure you drink enough water—no, juice, orange juice. Sherlock, are you listening?”

“Yes, Sir. Chocolate and juice.”

“Text me later. I’ll want to know how you’re doing.”

“Yes, Sir. I’ll text you. Before class.” He checks the clock again and scrubs his face. He’s going to have to hurry.

After finishing the conversation and making a stop in the bathroom, Sherlock shuffles to the kitchen and microwaves the lasagne while he sips his coffee. It’s from Angelo’s and his favorite meal, but he finds he has no appetite for it. He forces down a few bites but gives up. He’s not feeling sick exactly, just...off...down? For no reason he can think of. Sunday night was completely amazing. The slate is clear. Yesterday was just an ordinary day. Thinking maybe he needs more caffeine, he drains his mug and pours another, then downs a glass of orange juice. At least it’s something. Food just isn’t happening. He grabs the chocolate bar and slips it into his backpack. Maybe later.

A shower revives him and he feels a bit more like himself. After clearing a circle in the steamed up bathroom mirror, he turns his head and rubs his jaw. Following John’s instruction, he didn’t shave and his face has a shadow of stubble. It does look good. His hair is wet and curly and he’s naked except for the towel slung low around his hips. He snaps a selfie with a big smile and sends it to John, who responds almost immediately with a flame emoji and “Feeling better?” Sherlock sends back a thumbs-up.

He gets dressed and thinks about biking to class to make up for the missed work-out, but realizes he just doesn’t have the energy. He texts John to tell him he’s going to take the bus, but there’s no answer. Probably in surgery.

He has trouble focusing during class, even though the discussion is really interesting. People are sharing their own coming of age stories, and he thinks if he felt better, he’d tell them about what Seb and his gang of idiots did to his bike, but the moment passes. The next thing he knows the class is over. The thought of the bus is exhausting and he texts John again. No answer and he drags himself out of class, and onto the bus.

Once home, he drops onto the sofa and switches on the television. Remembering the chocolate and John’s instructions, he retrieves it from his backpack and eats it while flipping distractedly through
channels. Better late than never. He turns to the Science Channel and one of his favorite shows, How It's Made, but today’s episode is about cupcakes, and he sighs with disgust and turns it off. He feels chilled and wonders if he should check the air conditioning, but settles for snuggling under the blanket hanging over the back of the sofa. Stretching out on the cushions and draping a forearm over his eyes, he is soon asleep.

The vibrations in his back pocket wake him and he fishes out his phone and squints at it, a bit disoriented. He’s still on the sofa and the sun is low in the pink and orange sky outside the wall of windows. He checks the time. Eight-forty.

JW: I’m sorry, but we won’t be able to eat together tonight. Something’s come up. I may be here all night.

He said he’d be home for dinner! Said they had things to discuss. Important things. Sherlock’s brain is still foggy, but he feels the sting of disappointment, sharp and biting, and he sits up, frowning. He knows he shouldn’t whine, but can’t help himself.

SH: You said you’d be home for dinner.

JW: I am sorry. Can’t be helped. Order in, anything you like. How are you feeling?

Sherlock is not feeling well at all. He feels tired and upset, and wants John here with him, wants to be held and comforted, but John obviously has better things to do.

SH: I wish you were coming home.

JW: Sherlock. I can’t. I’ve got an emergency here, and they’re calling me...I have to go. Sure you’re OK?

For the briefest moment, Sherlock considers faking illness to get John home. He’s not sick, is he? Just tired and out of sorts. He knows faking would be wrong. He remembers crawling and his resolutions to be respectful, and how disappointed John was and figures that drawing him away from the hospital with a lie would probably be just as bad as listening in on his conversation. He grits his teeth.

SH: I’m fine. NP

This isn’t true, and it’s getting worse, but he’s a little angry now and pinches the bridge of his nose in frustration. Whatever is keeping John at the hospital is clearly more important than he is.

SH: Bye.

He tosses the phone onto the coffee table, but it slides off onto the floor somewhere. He hears the tone indicating John’s response but doesn’t bother trying to find it. Instead, he curls up into a ball on the sofa, hugging a pillow to his chest. John has an important job and this isn’t the first time he’s had to work late. He’s even stayed at the hospital all night before, but somehow this feels different. Maybe there is no emergency. John isn’t even a regular surgeon at OSU, he’s here to lecture, isn’t he? Maybe he has some other reason to stay late. Could there be another man...or another woman?

Sherlock remembers the little room at the hospital where John had taken him for an afternoon quickie, and pictures John leading some pretty nurse inside, closing the door and… Stop it! Stop it!

Sherlock hurls the pillow he’s been holding across the room, knocking over a table lamp, which crashes to the floor. John wouldn’t cheat on him, he knows this. So why does he feel so miserable?
The alarm goes off at six-thirty. Sometime during the night, Sherlock must have gotten up from the sofa and made his way to John’s bed, but he doesn’t remember it. He flings his arm out, but there is nothing but empty space. No John. Sighing with disappointment, he buries his nose in the sheets trying to find his scent. It’s there, faint and he inhales deeply.

Work. He has to go to work today. *Fuck.* He still feels off. He slept so much yesterday but it hasn’t helped. He still feels exhausted. Achy and chilled. And so lonely. Maybe he should call in sick? He just started working—he can’t. Then again, if he goes to the hospital, he might get to see John. He wonders what he’s doing right now and who he’s with. Did he sleep in that little room and if so, had he been alone? He looks at his phone. The last message from John was last night. “Bye, I’m sorry.” To his shock and shame, he feels tears prickling the corners of his eyes and his anger at himself is enough to propel him out of bed. He wipes his eyes with his arm and heads for the shower.

He turns the water up as hot as he can stand and it helps warm him up, loosen the aches and tension in his shoulders. When he gets out, he looks himself over in the mirror and, in a fit of pique, starts to lather up his face. *He’s not even here to see it.* He can hear himself pouting and tries to remind himself, *Rule one, I will serve, obey and please Sir in all things,* but still sees his hand reaching for the razor. He shaves the stubble off, roughly and too quickly, nicking himself in several spots. He dresses, looking longingly at the bed, sorely tempted to crawl in and burrow down under until John gets home. His phone buzzes and startles him out of the thought. He picks it up quickly, hoping it’s John, but is disappointed.

GL: I’m outside. We need to get going if you’re going to be on time.

He doesn’t remember arranging a ride with Greg last night. John must have done it. He feels gratitude even though he’s still kind of pissed off. The bus might’ve been just too much this morning. He rummages around, stuffing his backpack, certain he’s forgotten a dozen things, realizing he hasn’t eaten in *how long has it been?* but rushes out the door anyway.

He slides into the back seat of the sedan.

“Hi, Greg.”

“Hey, Sherlock, how are ya.”

“I dunno, not feeling great.”

“Sorry to hear it. Sure you want to go to work?”

“Yeah. I’ll be fine…” Sherlock slouches down into the seat and closes his eyes. They ride in silence for several miles before he speaks again.
“How many have there been?”

“How many...people have John asked you to drive for him.”

“Kid, I told you before, I work for the Doc, and he pays me well, so don’t ask me to betray his confidence. I can tell you this much. You’re the first one that I don’t drive home in the middle of the night. That’s gotta mean something.”

Sherlock breathes in deep and hangs on to that scrap of information like a life preserver.

They are nearing the hospital when his phone vibrates:

MH: Are you on your way?

SH: Almost there

MH: Something’s wrong here!

SH: ?

MH: I just got here. There’s security and cops everywhere. I don’t know what’s going on.

********

Sure enough, there are several police cars outside the hospital when Greg drops Sherlock off. There are nurses and orderlies in the hallways, and Sherlock has the weird feeling that they’re looking at him as he passes by, but attributes it to his lousy mood and brushes it off. When Sherlock enters the lab, he sees several hospital security guards and two uniformed male police officers, one tall and one short, talking to Dr. Sawyer. Molly and Jim are standing some distance away. He has his arm around her and her head is buried in his shoulder.

What the hell is going on? Dr. Sawyer sees him, and the look on her face sends cold chills down his spine. The security guards and officers turn and when they spot him, begin to approach.

He is frozen in place. He doesn’t have any idea what is happening but knows that whatever it is is bad. His mind races, trying to think of what he might have done. Maybe it’s his dad, has something happened to his dad? Is he dead? Is he in trouble? As the men approach, he considers countless possibilities at lightning speed. His eyes turn to Molly, who is now looking at him with eyes full of tears and disappointment. Jim’s eyes are sparkling with something like glee, even though his face wears a sad expression. A mask thinks Sherlock, but his thoughts are broken by the words of the taller police officer.

“Sherlock Holmes?”

“Yes?” Wildly, he thinks about turning and running and lets out a sound halfway between a laugh and a sob. Why did I ever think it could last? It’s the same thought he had when that phone call came, from Victor’s father, telling him that Vic had OD’d in the bathroom of their house, had suffocated on his own vomit. Mr. Trevor sounded broken, and there was only sorrow in his voice; no blame, no questions. Sherlock listened in shocked silence, thinking about what Vic said to him
and what he didn’t say back earlier that day. *My fault.* From a very long way away, he hears the officer. “You’re under arrest for…,” and his mind goes blissfully blank.

“The words seem faint and indistinct, like background noise, having nothing to do with him. “Mr. Holmes?” prompts a voice, louder and close to his ear, startling him, and Sherlock realizes that it comes from the officer behind him, the one who has just cuffed his hands. It dawns on him that a response is required, but can’t remember the question. It doesn’t matter, so he just says, “Yeah,” and slips back into himself.

The city passes by in a blur as he leans his head against the window of the squad car, his wrists, pinned between his back and the seat, hurt, but he doesn’t shift to relieve the ache. It’s raining, and he watches the drops of water collect on the glass, then slide down, over and over. *I’ve done something. Something. My fault. Fucked up again. It’s all over.*

**********

He’s led to a high counter with several uniformed men and women behind it, and the officer uncuffs him.

A heavy, harsh looking woman in a too-tight uniform asks wearily, “Name?”

He mumbles, swaying a bit.

“Speak up,” she barks.

The poke of a nightstick in his back makes him gasp and he answers, “Sherlock Holmes.”

“What are your charges?”

Sherlock stares at her dumbly and shrugs. He has no idea why he’s here. Maybe it’s all been a dream. Maybe he’ll wake up and John will be there smiling at him, ready to kiss the nightmare away.

“He’s charged with theft of narcotics from OSU Hospital. Must’ve been using too. He’s been out of it since we picked him up.”

*What? No! That can’t be right. I didn’t…*

The woman rolls her eyes. “Aren’t they all. Son, empty your pockets.”

He opens his mouth to protest but changes his mind. *It doesn’t matter.*

After turning over his phone and wallet, he’s led to a large cell and pushed roughly inside when he balks at the threshold.

“You’ll stay here until you’re called for processing.” The door clangs behind him and the deputy is gone. He looks around. There are concrete benches and a toilet and sink, nothing else. The smell of sweat is strong in the oppressive, unmoving air and, despite the heat, Sherlock finds himself shivering. About a dozen men inhabit the cell, lying on the benches or sitting slumped against the wall. A few look up briefly when he enters but go back to what they were doing.

Still dazed and feeling even worse than before, he heads for an unoccupied bench, then lies down...
facing the wall and closes his eyes.

*********

He wakes to someone shaking his shoulder.

“Yo, brother. Hey. Wake up. Wake up, bro. You alright? What do you need? What are you on? They’ve got to let you see the doc if you got a bad batch or something.”

Sherlock tries to sit up, but he’s stiff everywhere and feels so cold he wants to stay curled up on the…bench? The shaking of his shoulder continues and he shrugs it off because it hurts his head.

He opens his eyes and reality shocks him like the blast of an airhorn. He’s in jail. He’s in a cell, he’s been arrested, John will—he shuts that thought down immediately. He tries to block out the voice that is continuing to ask questions that may or may not be important if only he could focus. Sitting up. Sitting up would help. He swings his legs around, shivering, and tries to warm up by rubbing up and down his arms, but it seems to require so much effort, he’s tempted to curl up again. He shakes his head, to try to clear it, but it makes him dizzy, and he stops. After rubbing the heels of his hands against his eyes, he turns to look at the voice and it’s a skinny, scruffy guy a little older than he is, in greasy jeans and a tattered T-shirt. Sherlock scan his forearms and sees the telltale track marks, fresher than his own, which are barely visible by now.

“It wasn’t smack was it? You need a hit? Are you coming down?” The guy grabs Sherlock’s hand, turns his wrist over and extends his arm but the memory of the same act by John not so long ago is so sharp and painful, he jerks away.

“Was it bad spice? You gotta see the doc if it’s that shit. That shit’ll kill you.”

Finally, the implications of the junkie’s words penetrate the fog that Sherlock feels like he’s lost in and he gets angry.

“I’m not on anything. I haven’t used in almost three weeks. I’m just...I don’t know. I just...I feel sick.”

“Mmhmm,” the man hums skeptically. “You’re shaking, you’re talking in your sleep, and you look like shit. I ain’t telling you what to do, but you should ask to see the doc.”

Sherlock chokes out a laugh, thinking, that’s exactly what you’re doing, but decides it’s not worth the effort to try and tell him so. He needs data. He has no idea what time it is or maybe even what day it is.

“How long have I been in here?”

“I’d say it’s been about four hours. You missed lunch, but I saved half a sandwich for you. And your fruit punch.”

Sherlock looks at the white bread with...turkey? It’s curling up at the edges but he realizes he’s so hungry, he might even eat it. But it’s the mention of the fruit punch that wakes him up. He is desperately thirsty and tries not to hear John saying, “make sure you drink enough water—no, juice, orange juice.” He grabs the container and swallows it in one gulp.
Scruffy guy says, “Whoa, slow down dude. You’re gonna choke. There’s water. I’ll get you some.” He holds out his hand for the container and Sherlock passes it to him, noticing vaguely that his hand is trembling.

When Scruffy returns, he hands back the water and says, “Wig.”

Sherlock had felt like his head was clearing, but now he stares uncomprehendingly.

“What William Wiggins at your service. Everybody calls me Wig.” He looks to the side, a little embarrassed. “Wiggy sometimes.”

Nodding, Sherlock says, “Sherlock. That’s what everybody calls me. And thanks.”

Wig brushes it off. “People did it for me when I was bad off. Pay it forward, know what I mean?”

Sherlock figures he does and feels a surge of gratitude for the brotherhood of junkies. “Yeah.” He downs the container of water.

“But, seriously, you sure you’re not coming off anything, cuz you don’t look good, and I seen some fugly dudes come through here, man.”

Sherlock takes stock of his condition and stands up to try and fill the container himself this time and sways so alarmingly that Wig jumps to his feet and grabs his elbow, narrowly keeping Sherlock from falling.

“That’s it.” He helps Sherlock sit back down and heads over to the door of the cell. “Deputy, hey Dep, excuse me, sorry to bother you, but it’s an emergency. Really, I think the kid here is sick. No joke, he’s falling over and shit.”

He waits a few moments and tries again, this time in a sweet and even more humble voice.

“Officer Gregson, you out there? Pleeeeeease? He don’t look good. Come on, I don’t fool around about that stuff. You know me.”

They hear steps coming down the corridor and the rise and fall of other prisoners’ voices as they pass each cell. Before them appears a tall, broad-shouldered black police officer who appears to outweigh the two of them put together. Drops of sweat are speckled across his dark skin, and he takes a bandana out of his pocket to wipe them off his forehead.

“Yeah, I know you, Wiggy, ‘cuz you’re a goddamn pain in my ass. What are you whining about now?”

“Aw, come on, Officer, you know you love me.”

Gregson narrows his eyes at him and Wig hurries on. “The kid,” he jerks his head towards Sherlock, “I think he’s sick.”

********

Fifteen minutes later he’s escorted to an examining room in the infirmary. Officer Gregson stands at the door, arms crossed over his broad chest while the doctor, a middle-aged woman with an auburn braid hanging down her back and a badge that reads Dr. V. Hunter, greets Sherlock, and
asks about his symptoms as she performs the routine tasks of taking his blood pressure, temperature, etc. He tries to explain about the exhaustion, the chills, the dizziness, the lack of appetite.

“I just feel shitty, and...I don’t know.”

“You don’t have a fever.” She eyes him severely. “What have you taken?”

“Nothing, I’m clean.”

She looks skeptical but doesn’t press. “How are you feeling, besides the physical symptoms?”

“How do you think?” He shouts, “I’m in jail!”

“Watch it,” warns Gregson.

He takes a breath and tries to calm down before continuing. “I’m innocent and I’ve never been arrested before. I’m scared and my boyfriend...well, I don’t think he’s going to be my boyfriend anymore. I’m...sad.” Sherlock starts to choke up and looks at Dr. Hunter apprehensively, but she doesn’t blink an eye, just continues on with her professional instructions.

“Strip down to your skivvies and step on the scale. When was the last time you ate?”

"Shit. How could he have forgotten that he would have to strip? He thinks of the marks on the back of his legs and stares at the doctor long enough that Gregson raps the back of his chair with his club and it startles him into standing up. He kicks off his shoes and reaches for the button of his jeans, turning to face the deputy. They fall to the floor and he steps out of them, then pulls off his shirt and steps onto the scale. He starts to shiver again.

The room is silent and he looks straight ahead at the beige wall, waiting.

“Officer...?” begins Dr. Hunter.

“Uh-uh. Nope, no one’s laid a hand on him. We put him in with Wiggy. He must’ve brought those with him.”

“I’m going to touch these. I’ll be gentle.” Gloved fingers slide over the backs of his thighs, and trace what he knows are the deep purple stripes there along with fading bruises. He flinches. Those marks belong to John, and only he should get to touch them. This thought brings a wave of despair. Will he ever touch me again?

“Mr. Holmes, who did this to you?’”

“John,” he whispers, as the room begins to spin.

“Who’s John.”

“My...boyfriend,” he manages before everything goes dark.

**********

“Mr. Holmes?”
He squints against the bright light. It’s blurry, but slowly Dr. Hunter’s face comes in to focus above him. He tries to sit up but his wrist is fastened to the rails of the bed with a thick black strap, and he falls back down.

“You fainted. You’ve only been out for a few minutes. I’m sorry about the restraint, but it’s standard procedure when there’s no deputy in the room. I asked Officer Gregson to step out.”

“What’s wrong with me?”

“I’m not sure but I’ve got a hunch. The blood work will tell us a lot, including whether you’ve been honest with me about being clean. But before we talk further, you are going to eat something.” She holds up a bottle of juice, a protein bar, and a package of chocolate cookies. There’s a whirring sound and the head of the bed rises until he’s sitting up. He shifts around a bit while Doctor Hunter opens up the package and hands him a cookie, which he stuffs whole into his mouth and washes down with juice. He didn’t realize how hungry he was, and he does feel better.

“Low blood sugar is at least part of it. Do you ever eat?”

Sherlock chokes out a bitter laugh.

Dr. Hunter shrugs and continues. “Alright now, Mr. Holmes, tell me about how you got those marks.”

He looks away, embarrassed.

“May I call you Sherlock?”

Sherlock nods and says, “Mr. Holmes is my dad and he’s the last person I want to think about.”

“All right then, Sherlock. I’m a doctor. In the prison system. Nothing shocks me. And if nothing you tell me is illegal, whatever you say is confidential. You said your boyfriend John gave them to you. Was it consensual?”

He nods, still not meeting her eyes.

“Okay, good. We’re getting somewhere. Usually, unless it impacts their health, a patient’s sex life is none of my business. This time, though, I think it might be significant. When did it happen?”

“Sunday night.”

“Have you ever felt like this after having that kind of sex before?”

“No.”

“Was it particularly intense?”

He thinks about this. The punishment itself wasn’t more severe than usual, was it? Only two crop strokes, but they were wicked hard, and then the spanking. It was the intimacy of being over John’s lap, feeling those strong legs and the hand on the small of his back as the blows landed that was exquisite torture. And the sex that followed, the violence of it, the raw sensuality, the fierce desire on John’s face... He feels warmer just remembering.

“Yeah.”

Dr. Hunter scoots her stool closer and puts a hand on his arm. “I think you may be suffering from Sub Drop. Do you know what that is?”
“Kind of.” John warned him about Sub Drop during their first few weeks together, and it had come up in his own research, but since it never happened, he’d put it out of his mind.

“It’s your body’s response to the drop in endorphins and other chemicals that are released during a BDSM session. The effects are both physical and mental, and the emotional symptoms can be quite debilitating. You might feel sad and lonely, or have feelings of guilt or shame. Everyone is different. Tell me, are you and John in a committed relationship?”

“I thought so, but he hasn’t come for me. So it’s probably over.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. I ask because Sub Drop tends to occur more in committed, intimate relationships. I understand that you might be feeling hopeless and abandoned, but please try to remember that until your hormones stabilize, things are going to seem worse than they actually are. This is obviously not an ideal environment for recovery, but I’ll do everything I can. Have you called anyone yet?”

He shakes his head.

“You need to connect with someone who cares about you. I’ll request that you be processed immediately and in private, then you’ll get to use the phone. I’ll check up on you tomorrow but if things get bad in the meantime, let a deputy know. They can reach me.” She opens up the door and speaks to Gregson for a few seconds, too quietly for Sherlock to hear.

At processing, they take his mugshot, fingerprints and ask him to undress. He endures a strip-search and, when one of the deputies sees the stripes and bruises on his legs and buttocks, he remarks, “You’re gonna fit right in here princess. We got all kinds of daddies that’d love to get a hold of you.” Sherlock’s cheeks burn with embarrassment, but he holds his tongue. He hears Gregson say, “Shut up, Hopkins.”

Somebody, presumably Hopkins, says “What the fuck, Gregson?”

He remembers what his dad told him about dealing with the police. “Keep your mouth shut. They have all the power. They can fuck you up and there’s not a damn thing you can do about it.” He almost smiles. The son of a bitch taught me something useful after all.

He’s given a shirt and pants made of rough material. He’s not allowed to keep his T-shirt and he can tell it’s going to chafe his nipples, still tender from John’s rough attention.

Finally, he’s seated across from Gregson and the deputy leans forward and slides a phone across the desk.

“Make your call.” He sits back, pulls a package of peanut butter crackers from a desk drawer and works the plastic open with thick fingers as Sherlock chews his lip with a frown.

Who? His insides are churning and, he’s briefly afraid he’s going to throw up the juice and cookies on the desk phone that’s sitting in front of him, waiting. Waiting for him to decide.

John? No. He blinks back tears at the thought of what John’s reaction will be. He’ll believe them. Why wouldn’t he? Besides, he must know by now and he hasn’t come.
Dad? Would his dad even come if he called? It would be one more reason to be disappointed in his son. He wishes for the millionth time that his mom was alive. She would come. She would believe me, she loved me no matter what...

Myc. It would have to be Myc. Of course it would. He drops his face into his hands.

Shit.

“Any day now, kid.”

“Can I have a cigarette?” he asks. What does it matter now anyway? The first time, his overdose, was a big mistake, but John had taken him back, given him a second chance. This is so much worse. He’s jeopardized John’s career, innocent or not. No wonder he hasn’t come.

The deputy gives him a withering look and shakes his head.

Taking a deep breath, Sherlock picks up the receiver. He’s about to punch in Myc’s number but, somehow his trembling fingers betray him.

The call goes straight to voicemail. “Hello, you’ve reached Dr. John Watson. I’m not available, so please leave a message.” A beep follows.

To his horror, a strangled sob escapes his throat and he immediately ends the call.

He tries again. Myc picks up on the second ring.

“Hello?”

“Myc, It’s Sherlock...I need you to come get me. I’m in trouble.”

“What’s wrong? Where are you?”

“I’m in Franklin County Jail, Myc. I’m sorry…” The story tumbles out, and Myc has to ask him to slow down several times. He’s ashamed to be crying in front of his big brother, something he hasn’t done since he was little, but he can’t help it. He’s so alone, the misery is overwhelming, and he lets it come. Lets it come as Myc listens.

When he’s done, slumped in the chair with his hand over his face, trying to pretend that the deputy who just witnessed his breakdown isn’t sitting three feet from him, he waits for his brother’s reaction.

“And...John is—”

“Don’t! Please don’t. Not now. I...just. Please. I need help.”

In the calm, reassuring voice that Sherlock recognizes from his childhood, Myc says, “All right. All right, then, Sherlock, I want you to try to calm down and listen to me. Tell me you understand.”

He breathes deeply for the first time in what feels like forever. “I understand.”

“I’m going to get you out. I’ll be on the first flight to Columbus, and I’ll arrange for a lawyer to be there in the morning.”

“So you believe me?”

There is a beat of silence before Myc answers. “I want to Sherlock. I really do.”
Sherlock remains quiet long enough that Gregson raps on the table and gestures for Sherlock to finish up the call.

“I’ve gotta go.”

“Little brother.” Myc’s voice is uncharacteristically tender. “I promised our mother that I’d watch out for you. I’ve been trying for years, but you never let me. Always had such a chip on your shoulder. I know you think of us as rivals but we aren’t. I don’t want us to be. And it appears that we’ve only got each other now. Maybe it’s time to let it go.”

Sherlock sniffs, and takes a tissue from the box offered by the deputy. “Yeah, I guess so.” He remembers Mr. Greenfield’s words...*family is everything. It is precious.*

“You’ve always been strong Sherlock. You need to dig deep and make it through until I get there. I know you can do it. I’ll be there soon.”

“Myc.”

“Yes?”

“Thank you.”

********

Gregson accompanies Sherlock to the cell where he’s to spend the night. Before he locks the door, he hands Sherlock a notepad and rubber pen. “From Dr. Hunter. There’s a note from her on the first page, I didn’t read it.” Sherlock takes the notepad and steels himself as he turns to face the room. He is relieved to see Wig again among the twenty or so men that inhabit the dreary concrete cage that smells of sweat and urine.

“Hey! You look a lot better, kid! The doc took care of you good, right?” He claps Sherlock on the back. “You gotta listen to me, Sherlock, I’ll get you through this.”

Sherlock can’t help himself. He smiles back and says, “Yeah, you were right,” and a little more of the desperate loneliness he’s been feeling slips away.

“Watcha got there?” Wig asks, spying the notepad.

“It’s from Dr. Hunter.”

They both watch as Sherlock bends the pen back and forth for a few seconds.

“ Weird, right?”

“Yeah. Really weird. I’d keep that on the down-low man. Stash it under your mattress.”

Sherlock turns to look at the bunks, then at Wig, who says, “Newbies get the top bunk. That’s the rule.”

The other inmates look at him with curiosity. He does look out of place here. For one thing, he seems to be the only one without tattoos. And the youngest. He finds himself wishing he hadn’t shaved to spite John this morning. At least he’d look a little tougher. His eyes dart around the cell,
evaluating each potential aggressor and he tucks the notebook under his shirt.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got your back,” Wig says.

Sherlock climbs up the metal rungs and sits on the edge of the bunk. The ceiling is low and he has to slouch. He turns to the first page of the notepad and reads the precise block printing:

*Sherlock:*

*Sub Drop is not that uncommon, and it’s nothing to be ashamed of.*

This might not be your thing, but I’ve read that writing about the experience can help people through it. Give it a try. Think of it as aftercare.

I’ll check on you tomorrow.

*Dr. Hunter*

Sherlock thinks about *The Beautiful Room is Empty* and how Edmund White turned his painful experiences into great art, not that he’s expecting to do the same, but there’s something to be said for expressing your thoughts and getting them out of your head. His mom showed him that when she taught him the guitar. He’s gotta work on his writing anyway. He wiggles the pen a few more times and gets started.

Chapter End Notes

Here are some links with more information on Sub Drop.

[the emotional side of sub drop](#)

[and this](#)

What Sherlock was experiencing may be what is referred to in this article as "X-drop", a Sub Drop that occurs days after the experience.  
[Delayed Sub Drop](#)
John, out of town for emergency surgery, learns of Sherlock's arrest.

The coffee from the vending machine is wretched. *Is it some rule that all hospitals have coffee unfit for human consumption?* John takes a sip anyway as he leans wearily against the wall of the corridor of the Cardiology Unit of the Cleveland Clinic and pulls out his phone. Before he can turn it on, a hand claps his shoulder.

“Doctor Watson! Nice work. Congratulations,” says the surgeon who had assisted him during the grueling five-hour transplant surgery. “So glad you were available on such short notice. What were the chances that we’d get a donor heart the very week that two of our best surgeons are in Jamaica on their honeymoon and the other has the flu?”

“Nice work yourself, and glad to do it, but I’m exhausted and looking forward to getting home to Columbus. Don’t suppose they’ll let me go back on the helicopter that brought me?”

“No, probably not. Won’t take more than three hours to drive, though. You’ll be home by ten.”

Several other doctors and nurses join the conversation, and they discuss the successful transplant and the quality of hospital coffee. When they’re gone, John once again turns his attention to his phone. Switching it on, he looks at his text messages. Nothing from Sherlock since last night and their tense exchange. John texted him from the helicopter this morning to let him know he’d be in Cleveland for the day and received no response. A clear violation of the rules.

With a sigh, he slides down the wall to sit on the floor. The adrenaline of surgery is waning and he’s bone tired. Pulling off his scrub hat, he runs a hand through his hair then rubs his shoulder. The old wound always aches after surgery. He wonders why Sherlock hasn’t texted him. Ordinarily, he’d have a dozen messages at least after so much time. *Is he still pissed off about me missing dinner? Is he really sick?* Closing his eyes, he remembers leaving him yesterday morning. How he’d looked, half asleep, naked in the bed. How his hair smelled, how the roughness of his cheek and the milky skin of his hip felt beneath his fingers. He never meant for it to happen, but he’s fallen for the boy in a big way. He’s just about to call Sherlock when he sees the voicemail notification from a blocked number. Pushing play, he listens. There is rapid breathing, and then an anguished cry that cuts off abruptly as the message ends. The voice is unmistakable.

*Sherlock. Oh, god. Oh, god, that’s not good.*

He hits Sherlock’s number and the call goes directly to voicemail. Another violation of the rules. He has a premonition that a rule violation may be the least of their problems, and for a moment he relives the horror of pulling that beautiful lifeless body out of the truck and laying it on the ground. He shakes his head violently and almost shouts out loud, “No!” The adrenaline comes flooding back and brings him to his feet. He strides down the hallway, pulling his scrubs off and dropping them on the floor, careless of where they land. He stabs at Greg’s number on the chance Sherlock’s asked for a ride, even though the driver wouldn’t have taken him anywhere without notifying John.

But that little wanker could probably wheedle him into it.
“Lestrade here. Where are you, boss?”

“Never mind me. Where is Sherlock?”

“I don’t know,” he says, halfway between confused and worried. “The last time I saw him was when I took him to the hospital. He was a little weird like you said, but I asked him if he still wanted to go to work, and he said he did.”

“Did he say anything else?”

“Yeah, he did, and I kinda meant to tell you, but then I couldn’t reach you and…”

“Greg!” He’s close to yelling now.

“He was worried about...his status...with you. He asked me how many others there have been. I told him it was none of his business, but that he’s the only one who’s ever stayed over. That seemed to calm him down.”

“OK. OK. I need you to go to the condo and check on him.”

“On my way.”

*********

The city lights of Cleveland recede as the car travels south toward Columbus. John is fidgeting in the backseat of the Uber, checking his phone every few seconds. What’s taking Greg so long? He remembers Sherlock’s agonized voice and tries his number again. Straight to voicemail and he leaves another message.

“Sherlock, please call me right now. I’m worried. I need to know you’re alright. You’re fucking scaring me.”

The driver gives him a concerned look in the rearview mirror. Ignoring it, John looks down and texts the same message.

Oh, god, please let him be OK. All the possibilities cycle through his head. He said he’d been feeling sick—was it something serious? Or Sub Drop? It had been an intense scene. It would make sense. Dammit. He should have been more diligent about watching for it, talking more about it. If only the last day hadn’t been one goddamn life-or-death crisis after another, he could have been there to get him through it.

Whatever the cause, Sherlock had been upset, but had he been upset enough to use again? John knows how drug addiction works, the dismal recovery rates, how those held in its grip will lie, steal, and hurt those they love to get high. He’s only been clean a few weeks. He’s just a boy, really.

And I fucking left him alone. He slumps in the seat with his face in his hands as the guilt washes over him. He was counting on me, and I let him down. I wasn’t there... His self-flagellation is interrupted by Greg’s ringtone.

“Talk to me.”
“Boss, he’s not here.”

“Look again.”

“I’m telling you, he’s not—”

“And I said fucking look again!” John shouts. “Check the bathtub, the closets!”

“I did,” Greg says evenly.

John takes a deep breath and rubs the bridge of his nose with the heel of his hand.

“Christ. Greg, I’m sorry. I haven’t slept in more than twenty-four hours… I’m… forgive me. I just feel so damn useless right now.”

“No worries. We’ll find him.”

“Did you see a note or anything?”

“No, nothing like that, but… there is a smashed lamp on the floor.”


“Boss… Dr. Watson, you still there?”

“Yeah. Listen. I need you to leave a note in case he comes back. Then drive over to his father’s house.”

“Will do. It’s gonna be alright, Boss, I’m sure of it.”

“I hope so,” John replies, but a cold dread settles like a block of ice in the middle of his chest.

********

John is used to acting, to being in control. Sitting in the back of the car, helpless to do anything but wait, is pure torture.

“Can you go any faster?”

“Sorry, man, I’m already pushing the speed limit. I need this gig. Got a kid in college.”

John huffs in frustration. _Where can he be?_ He tries Molly, but she doesn’t answer. _I thought these kids never detached from their phones._ Swearing, he looks up the number to the Thirsty Scholar.

“Is Pete available?”

“Speaking.”

“This is John Watson, Sherlock’s friend. We met a few weeks ago. I’m looking for Sherlock; has he been there?”

“No way, man. Haven’t seen him, honest. And if he’d been here, he wouldn’t have gotten anything from me. Everybody knows the kid doesn’t get through the front door.”
“If you are lying…”

“Dude, I told you I’m done with that shit. You were very convincing, and I’m not gonna give you any reason to come back here and go all Rambo on me. There’s cops in and outa here 24/7 anyway! None of the kids show up anymore! I don’t know how the hell you did it man, but they won’t leave me alone!”

Myc.

“If you hear from him you call me.” He hangs up before Pete can say another word.

He tries Molly again and this time she answers.

“Hello?”

“Molly, It’s John Watson. I’m trying to track down Sherlock, is he with you?

“What? No! Like, what are you talking about? Don’t you know?”

The coldness in his chest flows downward into his gut. Please, no.

“Know what? What the hell’s going on?”

“He was... god, didn’t Dr. Sawyer…? You mean nobody told you? He was arrested this morning. At the hospital—I’m sorry Dr. Watson, I just assumed you knew. Even if nobody told you, I figured you’d be his—you know—his phone call.”

He’s alive. Tears of relief well in his eyes as he exhales and relaxes back into the seat.

“Dr. Watson?” The voice is faint, and John realizes he’s dropped his hand and the phone to his lap. He raises it to his ear as the full implications of what she said sink in.

“I’ve been in Cleveland all day in surgery. What happened? Arrested? Why was he arrested?”

“Oh, it was awful! There were cops and security all over the lab this morning. They searched the lockers—and they found morphine in Sherlock’s. They said he stole it. Then when he got there, they handcuffed him and took him away. Oh, god, I’ve been crying all day, I don’t know what to think. I thought he was clean, but Jim says—”

“Bloody hell!”

“Dr. Watson, do you think he could’ve…”

“I don’t know, I don’t know what to think. Look, I’ve gotta go. I’m going to try to get a hold of his brother.”

After ending the call, John drops his head into his hands, trying to make sense of the situation. The relief of learning that Sherlock is safe slowly yields to disbelief, and then anger and he slams a fist against the door of the car.

“That little shit!”

The driver looks up into the rearview mirror, wary. “Kid problems?” he asks.

“Something like that.”
“They break your heart, man, but they’re worth it.”

“This one is.”

They are a few miles outside of Columbus when he’s finally able to reach Myc.

“Hello, John.” The voice on the other end of the line is icy.

“Sherlock’s been arrested!” John says, not bothering to return the greeting.

“I know. He called me. I’ve just landed in Columbus, and I’m taking care of it. And him. So you can rest easy and move on with your life. I’ll arrange to have his things picked up as soon as it’s practi—”

“What the fuck are you talking about, Myc?”

“I’m talking about you abandoning my brother. Do you have any idea what you’ve done to him? I misjudged you, John. I should have known better. I thought you cared about him. You actually had me convinced that you were good for him. To think that I was going to let you—”

“Abandoned him? I’m mad as hell at him, but I’m not abandoning him!”

“Then why did he call me?”

John grips the phone so hard, his fingers hurt as he shouts, “I’ve been out of town in emergency surgery since this morning. I just fucking found out what happened and I’m trying to get home as fast as I fucking can. And you know what else? I am good for him...because...because I fucking love him!”

When the driver’s eyes open wide at him in the rearview mirror, John scowls and he looks away.

Myc is silent for several seconds.

“Does he know how you feel?”

“No, I haven’t. I...just...No. And I think we have more pressing matters to focus on.”

“Of course. I didn’t realize you were away. I don’t suppose he knew either? You’ve got to understand that I’m only trying to protect him.”

“Christ, you’re right. He must have thought...I’m going out of my mind here. I’m sorry. I’ve got to get to him. Do you think he really...?”

“I don’t know, John. We have to figure out how to deal with this mess, but you have to tell him how you feel. You didn’t hear what I heard today. He’s hurting and he deserves to know. He hasn’t been close to many people in his life, and those few have let him down, whether they meant to or not. Please.”

“I will. I want to. Need to. Now tell me exactly what happened.”
After Myc relates the events of the day as Sherlock had described them, he and John agree to meet at the courthouse first thing in the morning for the arraignment.

“You’re his brother. Do you think he’s telling the truth? You’ve known him a lot longer than I have.”

“I don’t know. I’ve been aware of his drug use for the last two years. He knows he can’t easily hide things from me. I expect it’s one of the reasons he wouldn’t stay in DC and always came back here. But, despite my misgivings, I can’t remember him doing this well, since... I just never thought him capable of something like this. It’s not him. It doesn’t feel right. He’s smart, and this was really stupid.”

“Yeah, he’s smart, but drugs make smart people do stupid things.”

John opens the door to #1410 and steps inside. It’s dark and quiet, too quiet. After tossing his keys on the table, he turns on the light. It’s the same condo he’s come home to every day this summer, but then again, it’s not. There’s no Sherlock waiting, smiling and eager to see him. No hello kiss or playful ass grab. He opens the drawer of the foyer table and picks up the collar, rubbing it between his fingers. Oh, my sweet boy, what have you done?

He is comforted somewhat by Myc’s assessment of the situation, but does he really understand the level of temptation that the hospital might provide? Had he started using again? How could he have expected him to resist? It couldn’t have been money. John was providing for his every need. How could he have taken all the opportunities John had offered him and throw them away? Given in to his weakness after he put his reputation at risk for him. Throw away their agreement, their contract, the past few weeks, some of the best weeks...He really needs to tell him.

The lamp is still lying on the floor, the bulb shattered. John picks it up and puts it, and the pillow, back in place, but doesn’t have the energy to Hoover the glass shards from the floor. Tomorrow.

He’s so tired, so unbelievably tired, but he doesn’t think he’ll be able to sleep. Not without help and he’ll need to be at 100% to deal with the situation he’ll face in the morning. He pours himself a drink and carries it to the bathroom. Looking in the mirror, he sees bloodshot eyes with bags underneath. He looks older than his thirty-three years. After retrieving a bottle of sleeping pills from the medicine cabinet and swallowing two, he drains his glass.

He falls onto the bed without bothering to undress, the bed he should be sharing with Sherlock. The luxury mattress, feather pillows and Egyptian cotton sheets are soft and comfortable, far different from what his sub... boy... boyfriend? must be experiencing tonight. Is he cold? Frightened? He bloody well should be frightened. Anger surges again, but it soon subsides. The alcohol and sedative work quickly on his sleep-deprived brain as his thoughts turn to what he could have, should have done differently and what he wishes he could do right now. His thoughts are spinning in a thousand directions. Did Sarah suspect Sherlock? But he just started. The drug
diversion problem had been going on for months. Had someone at the hospital known about his history? One of his dealers? Of all days, to have been out of town. *He couldn’t have done it. He wouldn’t have. Would he? Does it matter? If I could just be there for him. If I could hold his hand. If I could tell him how I feel. If...*and then, thankfully, there is nothing but deep, dreamless sleep.
Chapter Summary

Sherlock is reunited with John after his arraignment. It’s not clear whether John and Mycroft believe Sherlock’s story, but they start making plans to find out what happened. Once they are finally alone, John and Sherlock have a heart-to-heart.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Trays!”

Sherlock is jolted awake by this word shouted in a deep, very bored voice. Trays? What? He pulls the thin blanket further up over his shoulders and opens his eyes just a little. A discolored ceiling with a jagged crack is a few feet above. Where am I? He rolls to his side and it all comes rushing back. I’m in jail. His brain replays the events of yesterday. The arrest, the call to Myc, meeting Wiggy. Wiggy. Was he even real? Before he can consider this, the man’s face pops up beside him.

“Hey, kid. Get up, it’s breakfast. You gotta be quick, or you’ll miss out. It’s only sausage and bread, but it’s not that bad. Better than nothing anyway.”

Sherlock groans, “Please tell me there’s coffee.”

“Nah, just powdered milk.”

Sherlock groans again and sits up. He feels better than he did yesterday. He rolls his head from side to side. He’s stiff from the uncomfortable bedding, but no headache and no chills. His stomach is growling, and he figures he should eat something. After making sure his notebook and pen are hidden beneath his pillow, he climbs down and follows Wiggy to the cart of food trays surrounded by a horde of inmates jostling and trading insults as they claim their breakfast.

Sherlock stands with his tray, looking at the tables filling up with men. There don’t seem to be many good options. Most of the guys look pretty rough, and others appear to have mental health issues, muttering to themselves or rocking compulsively. He looks at Wiggy and raises his eyebrows.

“C’mon, we can eat on my bed. Those guys ain’t as bad as they seem. Well, summa them are I guess, but most of them are cool, totally fucked up, but cool.”

Sitting on Wiggy’s bunk and balancing the metal tray on his knees, Sherlock impales the grayish log of meat with a spork and holds it up, examining it with a grimace.

“It ain’t McDonald’s kid,” Wiggy giggles.

“I noticed.”

“So, what happens next?” Sherlock asks, after forcing down several bites of the tasteless meat and unbuttered bread.
“When it’s your turn, you’ll meet with your P.D. in the hallway, real quick-like. Then you’ll see the judge. If you make bail, you get out. If not, you come back here.”

“P.D.?”

“Public defender, y’know, the free lawyer they give you when you can’t pay for a real fancy-ass lawyer.”

“My brother’s getting me one.”

“No shit! That’s sick, man!”

“So, what are you in for anyway,” Sherlock says, feeling a little guilty. As much as they’d talked about his own situation, he’d never gotten around to asking.

“Possession. Weed. Not selling or anything. Just my own stuff. Got pulled over. I’m smart though,” Wiggy taps his forehead, I never have more than two hundred grams. Two hundred and one - that’s a felony. Looking at six to twelve. Two hundred or less, just a misdemeanor, thirty days max, less if I pull a good P.D.”

Sherlock points to the marks on Wiggy’s forearm. “Just weed?”

“Told you, I’m smart. I don’t never keep that shit in my car.”

“So, you’ll get out on bail?”

Wiggy shrugs and shakes his head. “Ever met a junkie with cash? Or somebody to bail them out?”

“I’m sorry.”

“It is what it is, kid. Not all of us got a rich brother.”

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His name is called along with two other men not long after breakfast.

“Good luck, kid! It was nice knowin’ you. Hope I never see you again...if you know what I mean,” Wiggy says.

The man’s face is open and smiling, and Sherlock is overwhelmed by a feeling of gratitude. This loser, this man who seems to have nothing, has been so kind, for what reason, he can’t imagine. He thinks for a moment that if not for John, he might be headed toward a similar fate. John. A little wave of despair washes over him.

“You OK?” Wiggy asks.

“Yeah, fine.” Pushing John quickly from his mind, he extends his hand, and they shake.

“Thanks. I don’t know how I would’ve gotten through this without you. Maybe I can make it up to you somehow. Look me up when you get out.” He writes his number on a scrap of notebook paper and hands it to Wiggy.
Wiggy looks at it, then back at Sherlock. “Sure, kid. Take it easy.”

Officer Gregson cuffs Sherlock and two other men, and he and a female officer, whom Sherlock hasn’t seen before, leads them out of the cell, down a long hallway, and into an elevator. They get off on the fourth floor. The other two men have clearly done this before, and they walk along like zombies, with their eyes on the ground. Sherlock, on the other hand, is looking around, taking in every detail of his surroundings. Men and women in suits congregate in small groups. Young women carrying clipboards and paperwork zip past, and uniformed officers are stationed at several spots along the way. He guesses that this must be the County Courthouse. He’s been here before a few times with his dad when he’d been arrested for drunk driving, so he knows what a courtroom looks like. There would be a judge on the bench in the center, seating for attorneys and other court employees, and a viewing room, separated from the courtroom by glass, for spectators.

They stop outside Courtroom 4D and are instructed to stand against the wall with their feet on yellow footprints painted on the floor. Soon, three of the suits approach; two men and one woman.

“Sherlock Holmes?” The tall man addressing Sherlock is younger than John Gotta get him outa my head, and impeccably dressed in a stylish plaid suit and pink tie. His nails are manicured, his short dark beard is perfectly trimmed, and his tan skin sets off piercing blue eyes. He looks like he belongs on the pages of a magazine.

Sherlock gapes at him for a moment before remembering to say, “Yes, um...Sir,” flinching a little when the word reminds him of John.

“Godfrey Norton,” the man shakes Sherlock’s hand, which is awkward, because of the cuffs. “I’m your attorney.”

“I didn’t do it!” Sherlock begins.

Godfrey puts up a hand to stop him. “I don’t care. We’ll discuss the details later. All that happens today is setting bail and the date of your hearing. Now let’s see,” he looks down at the paperwork in his hand, “you’re charged with grand theft, a fourth-degree felony. I presume you want to plead ‘not guilty?’

“I just said that.”

“First rule of defense: what you plead and what you did, have nothing to do with each other and to tell you the truth, again, I don’t care, and I don’t particularly want to know. Just sign here where it says ‘Not Guilty.’ When we get in the courtroom, I’ll do all the talking. Don’t worry, it’ll be a piece of cake. And please, stop with the ‘Sir.’ Call me Godfrey, or just ‘God’ for short.” He laughs, showing brilliant white teeth.

The courtroom door opens, and Godfrey zips his fingers across his lips to reinforce the point. The defendants file in and are directed to stand on yet more yellow footprints. Sherlock’s case is the first one on the docket. The judge on the bench is an older blonde woman with glasses perched on the end of her nose, “The Hon. Elizabeth Smallwood” according to the brass nameplate. She smiles pleasantly at the cuffed men against the wall as if she were about to renew their driver’s licenses, not determine whether or not they will walk free today.

Another woman, younger, standing at a podium beside the bench, reads from a clipboard. “19CRA158002, The State of Ohio vs. Sherlock Holmes, Grand Theft.”

The judge asks, “Counsellor, how does your client plead…” but Sherlock doesn’t pay attention to
the rest. He’s looking through the glass and into the viewing room. It’s crowded, and he’s searching for Myc. Did he come? Did he bring Dad? God, I hope not. He’s not in the first row. His eyes travel quickly over the second row. Nothing. Third row. Bingo! A couple of tall men are sitting in front of Myc, and he almost doesn’t see him, but there he is. He gives Sherlock a tight-lipped smile and nods his head. Just then, one of the big men gets up, and as he leaves his seat, Sherlock’s heart leaps in his chest, and he leans back against the wall as his knees threaten to buckle. Sitting beside Myc, looking handsome in a polo and sports jacket, is John.

Is this real? He blinks hard and John is still there. It’s not an illusion. He came. Despite the seriousness of his situation, despite his fear, and his anger at being falsely accused, despite all of this, the fact that John is here makes him smile with happiness he can’t contain, and he sees John’s mouth form his name as their eyes meet.

“…$5,000 cash or surety, preliminary hearing will be July 12, 10:00 a.m.,” Judge Smallwood says. “Next.” He doesn’t move. A hand grips his arm and pulls him toward the exit, but he doesn’t want to lose sight of John, and he looks back over his shoulder as he is led away and the door closes behind him.

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The next few hours are excruciating. Paperwork, getting his clothes and other belongings back, and waiting, interminable waiting. Bureaucratic bullshit that is keeping him from seeing John. Pacing in a beige, sterile room, Is everything in this place beige? waiting to be released, his mind is turning over all the possibilities. Is he disappointed? Will he believe me? God, I just want him to kiss me. Will he? Maybe he’s only here to say goodbye—"

“Holmes!”

The uniformed officer scans his wristband with a handheld scanner, then cuts it off without even looking at him. He’s just one of the dozens of men and women who cycle through the system every day. Sherlock takes a deep breath and walks through the door. Free. At least for now.

John, Myc and Godfrey are waiting for him. When he steps out into the lobby of the courthouse, they turn from their conversation and look at him. He stands frozen, not knowing what to do. He wants to go to John, but suddenly he’s self-conscious, and still unsure of what his reaction is going to be.

John moves first; closing the distance between them and wrapping his arms around him so tightly it almost hurts.

“Oh, god, Sherlock.”

“You came. I thought… I thought you were done with me. I thought—”

“Shhh. Of course not, I’m here. I’m here.”

“Ahem.” Myc’s throat-clearing interrupts their reunion.

John releases him but finds his hand and takes it firmly in his own. It grounds Sherlock. He squeezes, to make sure, and John squeezes back. Confirmed. This is really happening. It’s so much more than the gesture itself. It means everything. It means that John isn’t here to say goodbye.
Myc continues. “I know you’ve met Godfrey. He’s the best. He’ll get you a good deal.”

“I don’t want a deal! I didn’t steal anything!” Sherlock looks at Myc, then at John. “I didn’t. I know it looks bad, and they’re are plenty of reasons you shouldn’t believe me, but I swear, I. Did not. Do it. Do you really think I’d be stupid enough to leave evidence in my lock—” He cuts off suddenly, realizing what that sounds like, then continues.

“Why would I? This has been...I have no reason...I don’t know what happened. You’ve got to believe me.” He looks pleadingly from John to Myc.

Myc looks like he’s about to say something but Godfrey beats him to it. “Listen. Sherlock, you have been through a lot in the last two days. This is not the time or place to have this conversation.” His eyes flit to John and Sherlock’s joined hands, and Sherlock sees the raised eyebrows that say that Godfrey understands. “You need to go home, get some rest, and we’ll speak soon. Don’t worry. Your brother is right. I am the best.” He winks and flashes another brilliant smile.

The three of them take a cab back to the condo with minimal conversation. It’s still afternoon, but Sherlock is exhausted and finds himself annoyed that Myc has accompanied them. Myc will want to talk, analyze and plan, but right now all Sherlock wants to do is to curl up in John’s lap and forget the last two days ever happened, at least for a little while. The natural gifts that he shares with Myc, the intellectual acuity, and the uncanny ability to remember and connect details, will be raging soon enough, trying to get to the bottom of this disaster. But first, he wants time to savor the fact that he hasn’t been abandoned by the man he...loves? Yes, he’s certain of it now. As certain as he is that an atom of oxygen has eight protons. He loves John and wants to be held safe in his arms and kissed until he can’t breathe. He misses the feel of the collar, a reminder of their bond, and without thinking, reaches up and touches his neck where it should be. John notices and gives his hand another squeeze but doesn’t smile.

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“No matter what happened, you’ve got to tell us the truth, Sherlock. I’m sure you’re aware of just how serious the situation is. John and I need to know everything in order to help you.” Myc is pacing the floor with a bourbon in his hand as Sherlock and John sit at the breakfast bar. A chicken-salad sandwich and fresh strawberries sit half-eaten in front of Sherlock. John keeps trying to feed him and scowling when he refuses. It’s luxurious fare compared to jail rations, but he doesn’t have much of an appetite. The warm weight of John’s hand is on his thigh. He’s maintained the physical contact between them ever since their reunion at the courthouse. It’s as if he’s afraid to let Sherlock beyond his reach. It’s comforting, even though John’s face remains troubled.

“There’s nothing to tell. I didn’t steal anything. I’ve never stolen anything in my life! And do you really think I’d leave evidence in my locker if I were stealing drugs from the hospital? Even if I were high, I’d have been more careful than that! I’d have been more careful than that as a six-year-old!” His voice has risen, and he’s about to stand up, but the hand on his thigh stops him.

“Let’s be honest here. You had an expensive habit,” observes Myc drily.

Sherlock feels the heat of indignation flush his cheeks. “I worked for every hit, you self-righteous douche!”
Myc gives the pitying look that never fails to aggravate him, “Really? Well, perhaps stealing would have been a step up from ‘working’ as you so euphemistically put it.”

Sherlock glares at Myc and grits his teeth. He’s never spoken to John about the way he used to support his habit, although he supposes he might have guessed, and he sure as hell doesn’t want to talk about it now. Or ever.

“That’s enough!” John exclaims, slamming an open hand on the bar. “Can we please stop the bickering and have a constructive conversation? Myc, that was uncalled for, and I think you owe your brother an apology.”

Myc looks embarrassed, a look so rare that Sherlock wants to memorize it and tuck it away in a corner of his brain to be enjoyed at his leisure.

“You’re right, John. I let the stress of all of this get the better of me. I shouldn’t have gone there. I’m sorry, Sherlock.”

John squeezes Sherlock’s thigh when he doesn’t immediately respond.

“Um, OK, Myc. Thank you, I guess.”

“Alright then,” John says, “Let’s start over, and remember, we’re all on the same team. Sherlock. Let’s assume you are telling the truth.” He holds up his hand at Sherlock’s look of disbelief. “Do you have any idea how that morphine could have gotten into your locker?”

Sherlock takes a deep breath. “Mrs. Hudson always said that you need facts before developing theories, and we don’t have many facts, but I’ll take a shot at it. While I was in the cell, I calculated that there were thirteen possibilities. The lockers are basically made of tin, and if I had the chance to look at them, I could tell whether mine had been tampered with, but if it had been, it would have complicated the investigation and I wouldn’t have been arrested so quickly. You know what they say about coincidence.” He looks at John expectantly but gets only a headshake.

“The universe is rarely that lazy. If we assume that my locker wasn’t chosen at random, that brings us down to six, all involving someone with time and access and information about the lockers.”

John stares at him, mouth slightly open, while Myc looks on with amusement. John looks between them both for a few seconds, and Sherlock seems puzzled. “If my locker were picked at random, it would make it impossible—well, more difficult, to narrow the possibilities down in time for trial. I only had one night to work on it,” he says defensively.

“Did anyone know your combination?” John asks. “Or could you have left it unlocked?”

Sherlock shakes his head. “No, I’m sure I locked it, even though I didn’t have anything worth stealing in it. It’s policy. And I didn’t tell anyone my combination. It’s a four-digit combination making the odds of someone guessing it one out of ten thousand.”

“I agree with you, Sherlock, that the first thing we should do is find out who could open those lockers,” Myc says. “John, can you find out?”

“I’ll get on it tomorrow.”

Myc drops into a chair and crosses his legs, making himself comfortable. “So, what were those six theories of yours Sherlock?”

“Could we not do this now?” Turning to John, he implores, “It’s been a rough couple of days, and I
want to forget about it for just one night. Please.” Then dropping his voice so that only John can hear he adds, “I’ve missed you.”

John’s eyes soften as they look at each other for a long moment, and Myc clears his throat. They look at him, seemingly startled that he’s still in the room. He’s clearly going for a look of annoyance but fails miserably when his stern expression morphs into one that is almost tender.

“I’ll be heading back to my hotel. Obviously, you need some, shall we say, rest, and I’ve got work to attend to. I’ll let myself out.”

As soon as the door closes, John takes Sherlock’s face in his hands. “I missed you too. I’m so sorry I wasn’t there yesterday. I’m just so sorry. I know what you must have thought—”

“I did think you weren’t coming for me. That you knew and you believed them and you—” He chokes back a sob and continues. “And I felt like I was sick, not thinking straight. It all seemed so hopeless. The doctor there said it might be Sub Drop. Sir, it was awful.”

John pulls Sherlock into an embrace and murmurs into his hair, “Sweet boy, part of it probably was Sub Drop. I didn’t think of it till it was too late and that’s my fault. Rule number 1. I wish I could have been there. But I’m here now and I’m not going to leave you. I don’t care what you’ve done.”

“But—”

“Shh, it doesn’t matter right now. We’ll deal with it tomorrow. Right now, it’s just us, and I’m going to take care of you. Would you get your collar and let me put it on you?”

Sherlock sighs, and almost melts into John’s arms. “Yes, Sir.”

As Sherlock retrieves the collar from the drawer, John moves to the sofa and motions for Sherlock to join him. He kneels between John’s knees as he fastens it around his neck. It feels good. Familiar and comforting. John hasn’t kissed him yet though, and Sherlock can’t wait any longer. Throwing his arms around John’s neck, he crushes his lips against his mouth, and John responds immediately, returning the kiss with a hungry enthusiasm, his tongue probing deep as his hands slide into Sherlock’s curls. It’s as if they haven’t seen each other for weeks, not just the two nights they’ve been apart. Sherlock’s heart is pounding so hard, he’s sure John can hear it, as he clings to him with something like desperation.

Finally, John breaks the kiss and rests his forehead against Sherlock’s, breathless, hands still in his hair. “Sherlock, when I thought I’d lost you...When I thought maybe you’d...OD’d again. I went a little mad. I was so afraid, so afraid that you were gone without knowing.”

“Knowing?”

“How I feel about you. It wasn’t supposed to happen. But it did. Shit, you are so young, too young.”

“For what, Sir?”

“For me to love you. God help us, I love you.”

Time seems to stand still, and the only thing Sherlock is aware of is the sound of his own heartbeat pounding in his ears. Did he really say that? Maybe he’d wanted to hear it so badly that he’d only imagined it.

“Sherlock?”
“You love me?”

“Yeah, I do. You are so fucking incredible; how could I not fall in love with you?”

*He really said it.* He can’t help it, but he feels tears start to well in his eyes. So much has happened to him in the last few days. Terrible things, and now this wonderful thing, and it is just too much. His breath hitches in his chest as he tries to respond, but nothing comes out but a squeaky sob.

“Come here.”

John pulls Sherlock up onto his lap and Sherlock buries his face in his shoulder, tears flowing freely now as happiness, relief, fear, anger, guilt, everything that has been locked inside him finds its release. John just holds him without speaking, letting him get it out. But he struggles to get a hold of himself. He’s got to say it back. It’s vitally important that he says it back. That thing he’d never said back to Victor.

He takes a deep breath and wipes his eyes with the heel of his hand. “I love you, Sir.”

“I want to hear you say that using my name,” John says, kissing the top of his head. “For tonight, call me John.”

“I love you, John.”

They are silent for a few moments before Sherlock whispers. “I loved him too.”

“Who did you love, Sherlock?”

“Victor. But I wouldn’t say it. I was afraid to. I was afraid of being gay. And he—” Sherlock takes a deep breath and wills the tears to stay away. “You know how you said you were afraid I’d be gone without knowing?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that’s what happened. He never knew. He said it to me, and I didn’t say it back. The next day I found out he was dead, and it was my fault because I was fucking scared! He’s dead because of me! And he never knew—” The tears come again, and he can’t stop them.

John takes his face in his hands and looks at him severely. “Stop. Just stop right there. It’s true that I don’t know the details, but I do know that people are responsible for their own behavior. There is nothing you could have done or said that would have changed his mind if he was on that path. And for all we know, it was an accident. I believe you’re familiar with that possibility? And you weren’t ready to tell him and that’s all there is to it. You can’t blame yourself. You’ve got to let go of this guilt. You can miss him, you can be sad or even angry that he died, but it is *not* your fault. If you had died a few weeks ago, would it have been your dad’s fault? Or mine?”

Sherlock shakes his head.

“Is anyone else blaming you?”

“No.”

John brings their foreheads together again.

“Oh, Sherlock, you’ve had to deal with so much. This is one burden you don’t have to carry. This falls under Rule 5, hurtful self-criticism. Promise me you’ll work on letting it go. And don’t think
you can’t talk about it with me. About him. We’ll work on it together. I love you, Sherlock. What happened in the past won’t change that.”

“I promise I’ll try.”

“That’s all I can ask for.” John places a tender kiss on Sherlock’s nose, then his lips.

“What would you like to do now? We can do anything you want.”

“I wanna get cleaned up. It was so dirty, and it stank in jail and I haven’t showered for days. I feel really gross. I don’t see how you can stand to be near me.”

John sniffs and wrinkles his nose. “Ew, you're right.” They both chuckle and it breaks the somber mood.

“I’ve got an idea. When was the last time you had a bubble-bath?”

“Like with Mr. Bubble? Not since I was a little kid.”

“Mr. Bubble? Sounds like a porn film I saw once. No Mr. Bubble. I’m not sharing you with anybody, so forget it.”

Sherlock hears himself giggle. Not that long ago he felt like he’d never laugh again.

“Alright then. You are in for a treat. You need a good looking-after and I’m going to give you a bath. Without Mr. Bubble.” He gives Sherlock a mock-stern look and he giggles again.

John smiles at him and says, “Now go finish that fruit and get undressed while I get everything ready.”

Chapter End Notes

Curly here. I'd like to give a special thank you to my friend Ben (not his real name), who, unfortunately, has been an overnight visitor in the Franklin County Jail more than once. He graciously shared the details of his experiences with me. His invaluable input helped make Sherlock's experience much more realistic.
John pampers Sherlock after his ordeal.

Sherlock drops his boxers, and they join the rest of his clothing on the floor of his bedroom. He pulls on his blue robe and turns to see John leaning against the door frame, watching him. He extends his hand. Sherlock takes it, and they walk silently down the hallway toward John’s room. When they reach the chair, Sherlock undoes the silk belt, removes the robe, and, after folding it carefully, lays it on the chair. John unfastens his collar and places it atop the robe, then leads him through the bedroom and into the adjoining master bath.

The lights are dimmed, and there are lit candles on the ledge around the large tub filled with foam. A pleasant aroma permeates the air, and Sherlock inhales deeply, filling his lungs with it.

“Lavender and vanilla,” says John quietly. “It will relax you. But let’s get in the shower first. I’d like to wash you. Get rid of that jail grime. Will you let me wash you, Sherlock?”

“I’d like that Sir—I mean, John.”

John smiles and reaches out to touch his face. “You have no idea how much I’m going to enjoy this. Taking care of you. Making you forget for a little while.”

John begins to undress. Sherlock watches with anticipation as the polo slips over his head to reveal his taut, tanned torso and muscled arms. Then he unbuckles his belt, unbuttons and unzips his khakis, and pushes them down along with his boxers. He stands naked with the flickering candlelight making the blonde hairs on his body seem to shimmer. His penis hangs soft between his thighs, and Sherlock’s eyes linger there for a moment in silent appreciation. When he walks to the shower to turn on the water, Sherlock’s eyes are drawn to his ass. It looks good in jeans and even better bare. He wonders what it would be like to...maybe...just to try it—His thoughts are interrupted when John takes his hand and leads him into the spacious enclosure and under the spray. The water feels amazing as it streams hot over his skin.

“Sit. You’re too tall for me,” John says, after a moment, and Sherlock sits on the bench.

John takes the showerhead from its bracket and wets his hair. Then he shampoos it, rubbing his scalp, making small circles, and gently scratching with firm fingers, and it feels better than Sherlock ever imagined it could. He’s never been pampered and touched this way, cared for. By the man I love. Who loves me. John rinses his hair, then bends to kiss him, as the water, still dripping from his curls, runs over their joined lips. The kiss is as sweet and genuine as any John has given him and Sherlock hopes it’s an indication that he believes he is telling the truth.

When they break apart, Sherlock gets to his feet, and John guides him to turn around so that he’s facing away.
A soapy sponge makes slow circles across his back and shoulders, then his sides and lower back. Closing his eyes, he concentrates on the feel of the sponge and John’s hands on his skin. The stress begins to seep from his muscles as John’s hands work their magic. It’s almost like a massage and has the same result, rooted in chemistry. Endorphins are released, *the body’s own morphine*. The cortisol and adrenaline ebb from his bloodstream, resulting in the overall effect of euphoria. Everything, even love, begins with chemistry. *Beautiful chemistry*. 

The sponge runs down the length of his arm and up the underside to his armpit, as John’s free hand rests on his hip. The stink of sweat, despair, and unwashed male bodies that had lingered on his skin, is carried away by rivulets of water that disappear down the drain. John pauses to get more soap, and then hands, not the sponge, are massaging his buttocks and hips, and he feels the ghost of a kiss on his shoulder blade.

“This feels nice, yeah?”

“So good.”

John’s slippery fingers slide between the cheeks of his ass. Sherlock forgets to breathe for an instant, and John chuckles softly.

“Relax, love. I’m only going to get you clean.”

The fingers continue their journey between his buttocks and gently rub his hole before continuing forward to the sensitive skin behind his balls. On the way back, John slides over again and Sherlock sighs and presses back against him, but John pulls away.

“Not now, sweet boy. Patience. Turn around.”

Sherlock turns to face him, and John picks up the sponge, resuming the firm, circular strokes on his chest and stomach, and then using his hands and a feather-light touch to wash his penis and scrotum. Sliding the foreskin back, he quickly cleans and rinses the sensitive skin underneath. John’s obviously trying to avoid arousing him, and he succeeds. Mostly. He continues with the sponge down his legs, scrubbing a bit at his knees, then gently lifting one foot. Sherlock tenses up, but John reassures him.

“No tickling, promise.” He scours every bit of skin, even between his toes, which does, actually, tickle a little, but also feels good, and repeats the action on his other foot. Satisfied with the job he’s done, John puts the sponge down and sprays away the suds.

“Now you’re ready for the tub. Go get in. I’ll be right behind you.” Sherlock exits the shower stall as John washes himself quickly and efficiently. Sherlock lowers himself into the fragrant bath, and the water is hot, but not too hot. It feels soothing and luxurious, and he sinks down until the water is at his chin.

When he looks up again, John, sitting on the edge of the tub, is tapping on his phone, and soon soft music begins to play from a speaker on the wall, followed by a woman’s voice, sweet and sultry.

“Norah Jones. One of my favorite jazz vocalists, I hope you’ll like it.”

“Mmm.” Sherlock closes his eyes and stretches out in the water. The tub is large and he can almost straighten his legs.

“Feel better?”

“Yeah. Much.”
This isn’t sexual, not yet anyway. It feels comfortable and intimate and…sublime. Sublime? Where did THAT word come from? English class? Mr. Andersen? As he is trying to banish the image of Mr. Andersen from his head, John steps into the tub.

“Budge up.” John settles behind him, legs spread. He pulls gently on his shoulders so that he is nestled up against him. Sherlock turns and rests his face against the valley between John’s shoulder and chest and nuzzles his face against the warm skin. A sense of peace and security envelops him, and all the trauma and fear of the past few days fade into the background, to be dealt with tomorrow. John’s fingers run through his hair and stroke his cheek, bringing up goosebumps despite the warmth of the water. He squirms a little and feels John’s penis start to fill against his back. “Not now, love. I’m taking care of you,” John whispers as he cups Sherlock’s ass and lifts him away.

John’s strong hands begin to squeeze and massage his cheeks. Under his breath, he mutters, “Still scrawny, not acceptable,” and gives him a pinch. Sherlock yelps, but John immediately soothes the spot and kisses him behind the ear. “I’ll fatten you up. More to squeeze.” He moves his hands, massaging the sides and tops of Sherlock’s legs. Sherlock sighs with contentment, then gasps when John’s fingers slip down between his legs and squeeze his inner thighs. The backs of his hands brush against his penis, which begins to swell immediately.

John murmurs in his ear, “There we are. How do you feel? Color?”

“Oh, green. Deep, velvety, forest green. The opposite of beige.”

Sherlock feels John’s head tilt in an unasked question. “Very poetic for a chemist. We’ll get you into an English Literature class yet.”

He brings his hands up and floats fingertips over the creases in Sherlock’s hips, then caresses the tender flesh there. Sherlock sighs with pleasure and his head lolls against John’s shoulder.

“That’s it, let go. I’ve got you.”

Following the creases, his fingers slip under Sherlock’s balls and he lifts and rolls them gently. Sherlock brings his knees up and lets them fall open. John hums and runs one hand along the newly exposed skin, then squirts some body wash into the other from a bottle on the side of the tub. Using the slick gel as a lubricant, he grasps Sherlock’s semi-hard cock and slides the foreskin over the shaft. Sherlock arches his back at the sensation, then thrusts up into John’s hand. With each slow pass he tightens his grip, squeezing and stroking until Sherlock’s legs are trembling.

“Please, Si—John. Please. More.” Feeling liberated by the permission to use his name, Sherlock says, “Faster.”

“Whatever you want, sweet boy,” and he complies, his fist moving more quickly, the fingers of his other hand trailing up to tease a nipple. Still not recovered from the coarse prison shirt, Sherlock twitches and John pulls away. Sherlock takes his hand and lays it flat so that it covers the whole breast. John squeezes gently and continues moving his other hand rhythmically over Sherlock’s now fully erect penis. He adds a twisting motion and Sherlock inhales sharply.

“Oh yeah. Like that. Fuck yeah.” Sherlock keeps up this stream of encouragements, punctuated by moans and whimpers until the tension building in his groin threatens to explode. “Oh, John, I’m gonna come.”

John bends his head and bites down firmly on the muscle between his neck and shoulder, and the sensation and possessiveness of the act combine to push Sherlock over the edge, into an orgasm
that has him shooting long streams of white into the froth of bubbles still floating on the surface of
the water. He moans and thrusts until he is completely spent and collapses back against John’s
cHEST. John cradles him and holds his cock gently until the last of the tremors have passed.

When he’s recovered a bit, Sherlock reaches up to finger the place where he felt John’s teeth.

“You bit me!”

John moves Sherlock’s fingers and inspects the site. “Yup. That’s going to leave a mark. Maybe
even a bruise.”

Sherlock shifts and turns to face John, bringing his fingers back to his shoulder to feel the imprint.
It’s personal in a way that is different from the marks of the crop or paddle and symbolizes their
relationship more intimately. And, after their conversation on the sofa, it means so much more. He
belongs to John and John is his. His dom. His boyfriend. His lover. “I hope so,” he says, and John
kisses him.

“Can I—” begins Sherlock, running his hand up John’s thigh beneath the suds.

“No,” John says, placing his hand over Sherlock’s. “Another time. Today is just for you. Let’s just
sit here awhile. Holding you will be enough.”

They sit quietly, John’s arms wrapped around Sherlock’s shoulders as he reclines against him. The
water is still warm, and the soft, sensual music is soothing.

*It’s not the pale moon that excites me*

*That thrills and delights me*

*Oh no, it's just the nearness of you*

It’s romantic and sexy and completely wonderful, and Sherlock tries not to let any negative
thoughts creep in, but he can’t help it. At this time yesterday he was miserable, sitting in a filthy,
foul-smelling cell with Wiggy, feeling hopeless and abandoned. *Wiggy. Wiggy is still there, not
able to make bail and here he is, in a lavender-vanilla bubble-bath. It doesn’t seem right. Wiggy
stuck by him out of nothing more than kindness. He can’t leave him there to rot for who knows
how long. It could just as easily have been me. And it would be so simple for John to get him out.
He wants to ask. But it’s a risk. Does John even believe he’s innocent? Is he in a position to ask for
a favor after John’s already done so much for him? On behalf of a criminal? He must know
Sherlock well enough by now to see that his conscience is clear. All the tenderness and care? He
believes me. I know he does. He loves me.*

“John?”

“Yeah?”

“Can I ask a really big favor?”

“You can always ask. What is it?”

“In jail, there was this guy. Wiggy. He was really nice to me. Kinda took care of me.”
“A prisoner?”

“Yeah but not a bad guy. Really. He was in for weed, nothing serious, not violent or anything. Anyway, he made them let me see the doctor. And he listened to me when I was going a little crazy. Everyone there seemed to know him, and I think that’s why nobody hassled me. He can’t make bail, and he’s got nobody, so he’s still there...and I was wondering if...I’ve got some cash, back at my dad’s, unless he’s found it, and I could get another job—”

“You want to bail him out?”

“Can we find out at least, maybe? I would pay you back. Please, John.”

John’s arms close around him a little tighter. “My first concern is you, Sherlock, but if this is important to you—”

“It is. I feel like I owe him.”

“Then I’ll make some calls in the morning. Find out what I can; see what I can do. I’m sorry that you had to go through all of that without me and if this Wiggy person helped you, then I’d be happy to be able to help him somehow in return.”

“Thank you.”

“You think I’m upset? Because you’ve cried a couple of times? Tell me you’re joking.”

“No, really. I don’t know what’s wrong with me! Did I tell you that I never even cried when Vic died? I mean, yeah, when mom died, but then never, not until...until you spanked me, and now it keeps happening...and I’m...embarrassed.”

“Embarrassed about what? Having insight? Responding to your emotions? Crying means you have feelings. It means that things are important to you. And maybe it’s a sign that you’re loosening up. And if you feel bad about it, it’s because somewhere along the line you’ve gotten the message that that’s not what real men do, and that is complete bullshit. Crying’s got nothing to do with age or masculinity.”

“You don’t cry.”

“Course I do, Sherlock. I cry. I cried in the back of the ambulance when I thought I’d lost you. I cried almost every night when I got back from Afghanistan. When I came back with only this scar and so many of the other men, good men, my friends, came back in body bags. Don’t ever apologize for crying. Crying is a sign that you’re alive, that things matter to you. Not caring is worse than crying. Holding it in is far worse. It took me quite a while to learn that. Thank goodness for therapy.”
Sherlock is surprised by this casual admission.

“You were in therapy? I thought that was only—”

“For crazy people?” He laughs. “I was pretty crazy at the time. All of us are in our own way. But therapy helps. And sometimes it can save your life.”

Sherlock is quiet for a minute as he considers all this new data. Then he says, “Thank you, John. For all of it. For listening. For being there today. Just...everything.”

John gives him another squeeze. “Of course, I was there for you. We have an agreement. Literally, a signed contract. Haven’t I convinced you that I mean what I say? I would never have abandoned you. It’s not who I am. And we are going to have a conversation about that, young man.” He pulls Sherlock’s face around with a finger on his chin and Sherlock looks into his eyes. They are serious but kind. And blue. Like deep water, and Sherlock thinks he could drown in them if he’s not careful. But maybe he doesn’t need to be so careful anymore.

“I know. I just was so scared. I’m sorry.”

“I understand. We’ll talk about it later. After we figure out what really happened so we can put this behind us. And besides, all of the…” John waves his hand around vaguely, “…paperwork...is just a formality now. I love you. That changes everything.”

Chapter End Notes

Many artists have recorded The Nearness of You. The first was The Glen Miller Orchestra in 1940. The version that John plays for Sherlock was recorded by Norah Jones in 2001. It is beautiful. Listen to it here.
In the Window

Chapter Summary

Wiggy gets bailed out, and Sherlock and John settle in for a relaxing night of Netflix and popcorn that ends up being quite a bit more.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sherlock wakes up to his alarm early Friday morning without even thinking of hitting the snooze button. John has cleared it with Myc, and Godfrey is going to handle the cash bond that will get Wiggy out. Sherlock wouldn’t miss it for the world.

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Wiggy scarcely acknowledges the judge and, when he sees Sherlock, his eyes light up and he waves so vigorously, the court officer scowls and nudges him with his elbow. He mouths an enthusiastic thank you and grins so broadly, Sherlock has to mirror him. He’s still smiling as they lead the exuberant man away to be processed out.

There are hard plastic chairs in the center of the lobby, near the escalator. Many are filled with what appears to be the family and friends of the men and women moving through the system, some on their way in and others on their way out. It’s easy to tell by their faces which one it is. Sherlock settles into an empty chair, using the time to work on his next class assignment, Tipping the Velvet. He’s missed a day but is determined to keep up. Ugh, more fiction. At least the last book was set in the present and he could identify with the main character. Girls this time! Then he thinks of Kate and Irene. And oh shit, Ms Hudson and her wife Marie. He remembers what Ms. Hudson said about herself growing up and decides that he might need to keep an open mind as much as anybody else. But hell if I’m reading lesbian sex!

Tipping the Velvet is set in late nineteenth-century London. Despite his misgivings, it piques his interest. The author paints a vivid and alluring picture of the city, John’s city, and soon he is so engrossed that he’s startled by Wiggy’s choking hug around his neck.

“Bro! Dude! Man, I can’t believe it! Holy shit! You got me out! Nobody ever did anything like that for me before!”

Sherlock wriggles free and gets to his feet, and Wiggy grabs him in a full-body hug. The scent of jail clings to him, and Sherlock stiffens for a second. He doesn’t want Wiggy to get the wrong idea, so he pulls him tighter to return the hug.

Then he steps back and says, “Well, technically, it wasn’t me. It was John! Everything is cool between us!”

“Oh, that’s awesome, kid. I’m really, really psyched for you. Not just cuz it got me out, but you
Wiggy has been on such a manic high, that Sherlock has let him roll on, but the mention of Pete snaps him to attention.

“You know Pete? Thirsty Scholar Pete?”

Wiggy looks at him disapprovingly. “I told you, kid, I know everybody. Some kid OD’d there a couple of weeks ago, and whoever he was, he was connected big-time, cuz—” He cuts off suddenly, and his mouth drops open. He looks at Sherlock, who looks away nervously.

“That was you! Holy shit, that was you! Maybe that’s why you got set up! Pete gets some of his shit from the hospital, no doubt. And your big brother brought down the big guns on him!”

Sherlock looks away, embarrassed and then says, “It wasn’t on purpose. I just hadn’t used in a while and...it was an accident.”

Wiggy puts a hand on Sherlock’s shoulder, almost as embarrassed. “No big deal, kid. Like I said, just try not to make the same mistakes twice, right?”

“No worries. I’m done with that shit.” He sighs. “It was stupid, trying to escape my life and not focusing on the long term. And now, with John...” He trails off.

“Yeah, I’m seriously reconsidering my life choices at the moment too. I’m getting kind of tired of teaching kids the ropes in this joint.”

“You have somewhere to sleep?”

“Yeah, I got friends. And a cousin. I can always find a place to crash. The shelter’s just a block away. Don’t worry about me, man.”

Sherlock nods. “OK, good— Oh! Before I forget, John and I, I mean, John, because it’s his place and, whatever, he said, I mean, he wants, well here. Here’s the address. Come for dinner at seven o’clock.” He shoves a page torn from his notebook at Wiggy, who takes it with a confused look.


Sherlock glares at him. “Shut up. And don’t be late. He’s picky about being on time.” Sherlock absent-mindedly rubs his ass.

*******

The doorman calls up at up at six fifty-seven and Sherlock sees John look at the clock with a pleased expression on his face. He nods to himself, just as pleased, and tells the doorman to let him
up. When Wiggy gets to the door, however, Sherlock berates himself for his stupidity—Wiggy is staring at the floor, embarrassed and wearing the same clothes he was in that morning. And while they were in jail together. And they smell like it.

_He has nothing else._

John comes up behind him and gently shoves him out of the way. He sticks out his right hand for Wiggy to shake and hands him a bundle, a T-shirt, underwear, and a pair of Sherlock’s old jeans, with the other.

“Thank you for coming. These will probably be a bit long on you, but they’ll do for dinner with friends. Loo—I mean the shower is the first door on your right.”

Wiggy’s shoulders drop in relief, and he rushes away in that direction. Sherlock turns and stares at John in disbelief and John shrugs.

“I did an internship at a free clinic for homeless kids in London.”

Sherlock throws his arms around John’s neck and kisses him.

“How did I get so lucky?”

“On the contrary, I’m the lucky one.”

They hear a subtle throat clearing and turn to see Wiggy in the hallway, wrapped in a towel.

Sherlock turns a bright red.

“Sorry to, you know, interrupt, or whatever, but, uh, that shower is like the control panel of a space station or something. I, uh, can’t figure it out…”

John kisses Sherlock once more and says, “Check on the sauce and prep the salad?”

And automatically, Sherlock says, “Yes, Sir,” and blushes an even brighter red. John pinches his cheek, turns and Sherlock hears him saying, “It’s not really that complicated. They just figure they can raise the rent if they…”

Hair damp and jeans rolled up at the cuffs, Wiggy joins them in the kitchen, standing with his hands behind his back, as John dresses the salad and Sherlock sets the table. Once they’re seated, Sherlock watches admiringly as John puts Wiggy at ease and the cheerful, cocky young man that Sherlock relied upon in jail, reappears. John is as charmed as he was, and by the end of dinner John has agreed to put in a good word for Wiggy with the Miranova building management for the maintenance position he had seen posted in the lobby. They send him off with the leftovers and a care package of clothing and toiletries, and Wiggy promises to keep his ears open for any information on the drug theft at the hospital.

“I’m not gonna let you go down for that, man. It ain't right.”

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The following evening, Saturday, they stay in. John makes popcorn, and they sit on the sofa together, watching movies on Netflix. They haven’t talked much about the elephant in the room,
Sherlock’s preliminary hearing, two weeks away. He doesn’t meet with Godfrey until Thursday and there really isn’t anything they can do until then. The waiting is driving Sherlock crazy, and when he’s not studying, he has been obsessed with turning over everything he can remember in his mind and piecing together what happened. But tonight, he is happy to take a break from the worry to just hang out with John in front of the TV. They decide on comedy. John chooses *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, and Sherlock chooses *The Princess Bride*.

“I didn’t figure you for *The Princess Bride* type.”

“My mom had the DVD, we used to watch it all the time. I think she had a crush on Westley.”

They finish the movie side by side on the sofa, bare feet on the coffee table. It’s been a few years since Sherlock has seen it and it makes him feel happy and sad at the same time, remembering how he and his mom would sit on the couch together in the dark living room, sharing a blanket, laughing and saying the lines along with the characters. When Myc was living at home, sometimes he joined them. One son on either side with their mother in the middle holding the popcorn. It’s a pleasant memory.

“Good movie,” John says, clicking off the TV. Lots of memorable lines.”

“You mock my pain,” Sherlock says, imitating Buttercup. Then looks at John expectantly.

“Life is pain, Highness. Anyone who says otherwise is selling something,” John answers with no hesitation.

“Nice!” Sherlock says, then, jumping up, he grabs a magazine from the table, rolls it and then brandishes it at John like a sword. “My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die.”

John rolls up his own magazine and takes the challenge. They parry around the living room jabbing and slashing until finally, they fall giggling back onto the sofa and John envelops him in a bear hug.

“God, I love you.”

Sherlock is silent for a moment then pulls away.

“What did you mean? That it changes everything?”

John takes his hand and composes his thoughts “I was always going to take care of you, so long as we had a contract. But now. Now it’s deeper, more personal. I’d want to be a part of your life even if we were to tear up that piece of paper. And I’m going to ask you, would you like to keep the contract in place? Do you want to remain my sub?”

The question surprises Sherlock. He hadn’t considered that John might be willing to release him from the contract, but then again, he had always been free to terminate it, hadn’t he? He doesn’t want that part of their relationship to change. And, assuming he’s not in jail, he will gladly kneel before John, accept the lashes and blows, and wear the marks proudly, as a symbol of John’s love for him.

“Yes.”

John narrows his eyes, and Sherlock quickly adds, “Sir.”

John grins and says. “I’m glad, and that’s one stroke. And since we’re keeping the contract in
place, we need to talk about you doubting me. Oh, and then there’s the fact that you didn’t answer your phone when you were pissed-off at me about working late. I think those are worth three apiece. John hooks his finger in the ring at Sherlock’s throat and pulls him forward, then kisses him on the lips. “So, now we’re at seven. I expect you to update the whiteboard,” he whispers, then kisses him again. And again.

“Right now,” John murmurs against Sherlock’s lips.

“Right now, what, Sir?”

“Update the whiteboard. Now,” John says, releasing his hold on the collar.

“Can’t I do that tomorrow?” Sherlock asks, running his hand up John’s thigh, not wanting to interrupt the kisses. Along with the threat promise? of punishment, they were making his jeans feel a bit too tight.

I intend to clear your slate tonight. Right now, as a matter of fact, so tomorrow will be too late. And now you’re at eight.”

“Oh!”

John nibbles on his earlobe. “I want you. And I want you to show me how much you want to be my sub. There’s no reason to wait.” Sherlock can feel that John wants him as his hand reaches its destination and rests over the zipper of John’s pants. Sherlock presses down and John rolls his hips, pushing his thickening cock into his palm. “Do it.”

Obedient now, Sherlock gets up and walks to the kitchen. Taking the marker from its bracket, he slowly and deliberately writes his tally-marks and transgressions on the board. When he’s done, he looks at it thoughtfully. Am I a good boy? Do I even want to be? I want to please him, but this...

He reaches out and touches his fingertip to the total, written neatly in black. I want this too. He wipes the finger on his jeans and returns to the living room, dropping to his knees between John’s spread legs.

John is leaning back on the sofa, his own hand now resting on his crotch, casually stroking. “Good boy. Now I’d like you to get up, go to your room, and prepare yourself. You will meet me in my room in exactly fifteen minutes.”

Sherlock does as he’s told. By now, he feels like an expert at bottom prep. They’d had embarrassingly explicit discussions on the topic, beyond the merely “be thorough” command and he’s bookmarked the article “17 Tips to Happier, Healthier Bottoming.” A special shower attachment makes the process simple and efficient.

As he’s drying off, he notices a plug, larger than the last, and lube just beside the sink. John must have placed them there when he wasn’t looking. He obviously wants him to put in the plug himself. Sherlock is the tiniest bit disappointed about this. He likes having John do it.

Resting a knee on the vanity top, he squirts lube on his fingers and then rubs gently around his hole before slipping one finger inside. He adds more lube, then tries two. He has to push but finally gets them in. For the briefest moment he is tempted to explore further to find that sweet spot. Rule 6, no
masturbation. Rubbing my prostate would probably count. Removing his fingers, he picks up the black silicone plug. Bigger than the last one but still not nearly as big as John. He blushes a little as he thinks of John’s penis and how much he likes it. Sliding into him, filling him, taking him either gently or roughly. He’s jolted from his thoughts by the alarm on his watch. He’d set it for fourteen minutes so that he wouldn’t be late. When John says fifteen minutes, he means fifteen minutes.

Quickly squirting lube on the plug, he positions it at his entrance and pushes. Then pushes harder. Relax! Relax the butt. One final push and it pops into place. He takes a few seconds to settle himself and let his ass adjust to the intruding object. Once both feet are back on the floor, he looks at his watch again. Shit!

With no time for a robe or even a towel, he hurries toward John’s room. When he enters, John is standing before the wall of glass, his back to Sherlock, gazing out over the city. He’s shirtless and wearing the tartan kilt.

“You’re late.”

“I’m sorry, Sir.”

“Add two. How many does that make?” John asks, still looking out of the window.

“Ten, Sir.”

“Second drawer. Bring me the whip on the left. The red one.”

Sherlock goes to the bureau and pulls out the second drawer, there are several different leather implements inside in a neat row. On the left is a red and black whip with a short handle and a long leather lash that is rolled in a sort of tubular fashion, except for the end which is flat and tapered. It looks evil. He picks it up and walks to where John still stands by the window. Finally, John turns and takes the whip.

“Kneel. Eyes on me.”

Sherlock kneels, grasping his elbows behind his back.

“Good boy,” John says, and it triggers a ripple of pleasure.

John fingers the whip in his hand. “This is a dragon-tail, one of my favorites.” He flicks the end painlessly over Sherlock’s chest. “It can be light, almost like a back scratch, or wickedly painful. It’s harder to control than the paddle or the crop, and I need you to be still. I want to immobilize you. Is that OK?”


“Come.” John motions for him to stand and then leads him to the doorway.

“I’m going to cuff you. It’s not supposed to hurt, so let me know if you are uncomfortable.”

There is a pile of black leather with silver hardware near the door that Sherlock hadn’t noticed in his rush to be on time and John pulls something from it. “Wrist please.”

Sherlock holds out a wrist and John buckles the wide leather strap around it. It’s made of leather, but lined with a softer material, and there is a D-ring attached to it. It’s snug but not tight.
“That OK?”

“Yes, Sir.”

John fastens one to his other wrist and then turns him and fastens each wrist with a carabiner to rings that have been embedded into the doorframe, just above his head. These are definitely new.

‘I put those in today,’ John says, reading his mind. “Easy enough to patch over when I leave. I’d love to see you on a St. Andrew’s Cross though.”

Sherlock makes a mental note to Google this tomorrow.

John kneels and cuffs each ankle, then spreads his legs and attaches them to the door frame as well. Now he is spread-eagled in the open doorway, completely helpless and at John’s mercy, but he’s surprisingly calm. Almost serene.

John is behind him and then there is a hand on his hip, and it slides around to his belly as another one grasps the plug and gives it a tug.

“Mmm, you’ll be nice and open for me tonight.” He kisses Sherlock’s shoulder. “Tell me, did you break any rules when you were getting ready? Did you touch yourself?”

“No, Sir,” Sherlock says, relieved that he hadn’t succumbed to the temptation. Not because he’s afraid of more strokes, but because he doesn’t want to disappoint John.

“That’s my good boy.”

John begins to massage Sherlock’s ass and smack him gently with his open hand, alternating between the two actions. I’m going to hit you here and on your upper back. The motion is like snapping someone with a towel, it’s all in the wrist. I’ll start slow and warm you up; that part might even feel good. I’ll warn you when the first of the ten is coming. You will count and thank me.”

“Yes, Sir.”

After a few minutes of rubbing and spanking, not hard enough to hurt much, but enough to make his skin warm, John steps away. Sherlock assumes that he is picking up the red and black whip and he holds his breath and tugs a bit at the cuffs. Being so completely restrained and vulnerable isn’t scary but thrilling. Having chosen to be at the mercy of someone he loves and trusts is so sexy —

The first strike hits his ass, and he clenches his cheeks, but mostly in surprise. The whip makes a thwyp sound as the tip of it just grazes his skin, and there is a brief stinging sensation. Thwyp, thwyp, thwyp. Again and again the tip of the dragon-tail makes contact. With his ass, with his thighs and his shoulder-blades. John was right, it almost feels good, and he relaxes. John is moving behind him, shifting position to reach different areas and vary the impact. Thwyp, THWYP, thwyp. Now John is interspersing harder strikes among the gentle flicks and Sherlock gasps at the sting.

“What’s your color, love?”

There is no way he’s going to say anything else but green. He’s ready, eager even, to take this punishment. To embrace the pain and conquer it. And afterwards, John is always so attentive and tender, not to mention hungry for him.

“Green, Sir.”

“Good boy, I’m going to start now. If you need to yell, do it. Don’t hold it in, I want to hear you.
And remember that it’s OK to cry.”

“Yes, Sir,” Sherlock says. But I may like it too much.

There are a whoosh and a SNAP and a fiery pain on his ass that he thought he was ready for but isn’t. “Ahhhhgh!” he yelps, twisting his body to escape the lash.

There is a pause, and John is silent. Oh shit! Count and thank him!

“One. Thank you, Sir.”

Whoosh, SNAP. This one on his back. After a yelp, he catches his breath.

“Two. Thank you, Sir.”

The next few come in a rhythm and leave him writhing in the cuffs, grunting with each burning strike and hissing out his thank-yous between clenched teeth. It’s exactly like being snapped with a towel—if the towel were on fire and tipped with razor blades.

“You can do better than that,” John says. “Let me really hear you.”

By the eighth stroke, Sherlock is shouting each time the triangular tip of the dragon-tail lands on his body. He’s so loud that he’s sure the people below them can hear, but he doesn’t care. It feels good to let all the bad feelings, the stresses and doubts inside him, escape through his voice.

And then it’s over. “Ahhgh fuuuuck! Ten. Thank you, Sir.” His entire posterior is burning and throbbing and his chest heaving. Sweat trickles into his eyes, burning them, but can’t wipe it away, so he squints. Chemicals released by his brain to cope with the pain are coursing through his veins and inducing the bliss that has become so familiar. He craves it now. Ten strokes don’t seem like that many. He could have endured more, and the realization makes him smile with pride.

John is behind him, hands ghosting over his abused flesh.

“Hey, love. You did so well. My good boy.” Lips on his shoulder, his spine. Then John is in front of him, kissing him. “You’ll have some beautiful marks tomorrow.” Another kiss. “Are you all right?” Then a kiss on the tip of his nose. He wipes the sweat from Sherlock’s brow with his thumbs.

“Yes, Sir.”

“Oh, you lovely, sexy thing,” John breathes, holding Sherlock’s face in his hands. “What you do to me…” Then he begins to unbuckle the cuffs, massaging each wrist and ankle in turn. When Sherlock is completely freed, John leads him, unsteady, to the bed and hands him a bottle of juice. “Drink.” While he is drinking, John offers chocolate, but Sherlock shakes his head. Then John pulls him down to the bed and cradles him under his arm. As he strokes Sherlock’s hair, he murmurs sweet things, nonsense, and “I love yous”.

The afterglow of the beating is at its peak, and Sherlock feels so warm and floaty and safe in John’s arms. He keeps his eyes closed and lets John’s words caress him. He dozes off. When he wakes, he is still on his side, nestled against John’s shoulder. He sighs and John kisses his forehead.

“I love you, Sir.”

“I love you too, Sherlock. Feeling good, are you?” John runs his fingertips over Sherlock’s back.
Sherlock realizes that he has an erection and that John must have felt it pressed against his hip.

“Mmmm, yes, Sir.” He raises up on his elbow to seek John’s lips and as they kiss he lets his fingers run over John’s muscled chest, circling first one nipple, then the other before wandering down his belly and following the trail of hair to the waistband of the kilt. He slides his palm over the fabric, rubbing gently as he feels John getting hard beneath it. When he hikes it up and reaches underneath, he feels only skin. John makes a rumbling sound deep in his chest. Encouraged, Sherlock grasps John’s cock and squeezes. Then John’s hand is in his hair, pushing their mouths together harder as Sherlock works his hand up and down. John’s hand slides down Sherlock’s back and over his burning ass, tracing the welts there, then between his cheeks and to the base of the plug. He tugs at it, pulling it part-way out and then twisting it back into Sherlock’s body. Sherlock moans and grinds his cock harder into John’s thigh.

“Are you ready for me to fuck you, love?”

These words almost make Sherlock come, and he gasps.

“Liked that, did you?” John smiles.

“Y..yes, Sir. Please.”

John places a hand over Sherlock’s pumping fist, stopping him. “Get up.”

They both stand and John leads him to the window that makes up one wall of the bedroom. He presses Sherlock against it, and the smooth, cool glass soothes the smarting skin on his back and ass.

They kiss, there in the window, for all of the city to see. John is still wearing the kilt, but Sherlock is naked, mooning anyone who might be looking up.

John kneels and grips Sherlock’s erection, then slides back the foreskin before taking the head into his mouth and sucking lightly. Sherlock sees stars when the back of his head smacks against the glass.

“Ohhh,” he moans.

John’s mouth and tongue move over him expertly, and the feeling is exquisite. The simultaneous cooling and burning on his back and the silky warmth of John’s mouth on his cock are almost too much.

“I’m goin—”

“No, you’re not,” John says, pulling off. “Not until I give you permission.”

Then John stands and turns Sherlock around so that he is facing the window.

“Spread your legs and put your hands against the glass.”

Sherlock obeys and looks out into the night. The lamp on the nightstand is on, and anyone looking up would easily see him. He can see people walking on the path below, and the twinkling lights of the bridge over the Scioto River and the skyscrapers beyond it. He realizes that he’s about to be fucked in the window in plain sight of at least a dozen people.

John’s hands run lightly over his body, his shoulders, his sides, his hips. Then he pulls the plug out without ceremony and drops it on the floor. Sherlock is still slick from the lube he used earlier, but
he hears the familiar snick of the bottle as John applies more to himself. Then, after tucking the hem of the kilt into the waistband, he grasps Sherlock’s hip with one hand and pulls him back until he can feel John’s hardness against his hole.

“Tell me what you want, sweet boy.”

“Please, Sir. I want you inside me.” Sherlock gulps as he hears the words.

John slides the tip up and down over Sherlock’s entrance. “So all the people down there will see you getting fucked? So they’ll see your collar and know that you belong to me?”

“Yes, Sir.”

Fingers dig into his hip as the head of John’s cock breaches him. John is much bigger than the plug and he gasps as he’s stretched. Then suddenly he’s empty, but only for an instant because John presses in again. He teases him, popping just the head of his cock in and out while Sherlock tries to keep still. Tries to keep his palms flat on the window. He watches his breath fog the glass and hopes that it will obscure his face if someone down there happens to have binoculars. Oh god, would anyone actually have binoculars?

The teasing stops and then there is pressure against Sherlock’s neck. John has grasped the back of his collar and pulls against it as he slides his full length smoothly into Sherlock’s body. The split-second of panic is quickly replaced with calm as John’s hips come to rest against his ass. He can still breathe. I trust him.

John is still for a moment and then begins moving, using Sherlock’s hip and collar for leverage. Sherlock arches his back so that John’s cock brushes his prostate with each stroke, and it feels wonderful. It’s a deep and diffused pleasure that radiates from his groin and throughout his belly. His beaded nipples are pressed flat against the window and, with each powerful thrust of John’s cock, the tip of his own rubs against the glass, leaving little smudges of pre-come. The collar, tight against his windpipe but not choking him, brings a new sensation to the experience.

“Sherlock. Oh yeah. So good. You like this?” John is breathing hard and talking in a stream of consciousness kind of way that doesn’t seem to demand an answer. “Take it...Your arse is so tight...Fuck...So beautiful...The marks...What you let me do...So beautiful...My good boy…”

The words are driving Sherlock nearer the edge, and his cock is bobbing and leaking. He wants to touch, but he hasn’t been given permission. He wants to push his penis up against the glass, but that would mean moving away from John. But surely John would follow him, sandwiching him between his body and the window, pressing, grinding...

“Please Sir, May I—”

“No. Keep your hands on the glass.”

And so, Sherlock keeps his hands on the glass as John continues to thrust into him with long, deep strokes until Sherlock’s thighs begin to tremble. Then, John lets go of his collar and grips his hips with both hands. “OK, you can touch, you can come now.”

Sherlock reaches down and grasps his neglected cock. It doesn’t take long. John has increased his pace, and Sherlock matches it, twisting and pulling himself, now oblivious to anyone who might be watching from below. He feels it building, coiling in his groin. A crescendo. Almost there.

“Oh, oh!”
“Come for me, Sherlock. Be my good boy and come.”

He does, and his knees buckle. John catches him with a forearm across his belly and holds him up as he leans forward with his cheek against the window. And then John comes too, and Sherlock can feel the hot wetness and the trickles of semen running down his legs, then breath against his back. Without a word they collapse to the floor, panting.

John scoots to the bed, and leaning against it, pulls Sherlock to him. He brushes the sweaty curls from his face and kisses him. “You were amazing, love. Just amazing.”

Sherlock smiles contentedly.

“As soon as you’re ready, I’m going to put aloe on your marks, and you will eat something. No arguments. Then bed. You can clean that up tomorrow, John points to the ejaculate dripping down the glass where they had just stood.

“Do you think anyone saw us?” Sherlock says.

John shrugs. “Maybe, but I don’t care, do you?”

“No, Sir.”

And he really doesn’t.

Chapter End Notes

There really is an article [17 Tips for Happier Healthier Bottoming!](#)

Tipping the Velvet was made into a mini-series by the BBC in 2002 and our own Benedict Cumberbatch had a role. [summary here](#) Impress your friends with this trivia - "Tipping the velvet" is Victorian slang for cunnilingus.

If you are interested in learning more about the dragon-tail whip and how to use it, there is a YouTube video on the topic [here](#).
Hope

Chapter Summary

With his freedom at stake, Sherlock, with the help of Molly and Wiggy, tries to figure out who set him up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

On Sunday, he finally works up the courage to text Molly. He remembers her face that morning at the lab, stricken and disappointed, clinging to Jim. It surprises him how much he cares what she thinks. It still feels foreign and unsettling, letting himself care. This summer has been so full of surprises. Having friends, being with people who accept him, Molly, Martin, Mrs. H., Irene, Kate and all of John’s friends, even Greg. And John. Of course John, the cause of it all. John who loves him. Where would he be if John hadn’t walked into Rod’s on that May afternoon? Going nowhere fast? Sucking dicks to get high? Rotting in the ground, like Victor?

But then again, he is facing prison if he can’t get out of this mess. He picks up his phone.

SH: I’m out

MH: *thumbs up emoji*

This short response isn’t like the normally effusive Molly.

SH: I DID NOT DO IT!

MH: I don’t know what to think rn

SH: You should think that I wouldn’t be such an idiot!

There are three dancing dots, then nothing. Molly stops and starts her response several times until finally, text appears.

MH: idk, you’ve done idiotic things before

Sherlock bites his lip. She’s right, but this is different from the accidental overdose. That was a miscalculation made when he was under mental stress. He doesn’t feel like explaining all of this over text.

SH: I’m sorry. You’re right. I’m scared. I don’t know what to do, but I can’t do nothing

MH: What do you need?

SH: Can you come over? Help me figure it out?

There is a long pause, and Sherlock holds his breath waiting for the dancing dots to appear and finally, they do.
MH: Can’t today. I volunteer at the rescue shelter on Sundays. Tomorrow after work? I’m off at 2.

SH: Thank you

MH: *heart emoji*

Sherlock smiles.

**********

He usually likes to play outside on the balcony, but it’s too hot on Monday afternoon, and so he’s on the sofa with his guitar. He has Dr. Hunter’s notepad beside him and a pencil behind his ear. Not the rubber one. He left that one behind in the cell, not wanting reminders of the awful place. But he’d kept the notepad. The scrawled words that poured out of him when he was full of pain and despair, in the bunk above Wiggy, deserve to be put to music he thinks. Maybe the doubts and angst will flow out as his fingers move over the strings, giving them voice. A purge. It’s not so different from when John whipped him and his cries carried away the pain, both physical and emotional, leaving him cleansed and unburdened.

This music might only be for himself and, if good enough, for John. Or, the composition might end up crumpled and in the trash can, but the process is therapeutic and helps him think. As he’s strumming, the bell rings. Molly! He’d left her name at the front desk with instructions to let her up. He practically runs to the door.

When he opens it, she is standing there, in white pants and a floral print blouse which she must have worn to work, sunglasses perched on the top of her head. Her cheeks are flushed with the summer heat, and her thin lips are pressed into a flat line as her eyes meet his. They are full of anguish and uncertainty.

His shoulders slump. Her doubt wounds him more deeply than he expected. “Moll, I…”

Abruptly, her expression softens, and before he can finish the sentence, the breath is nearly knocked out of him as she flings herself against him, arms encircling his waist, and cheek pressed to his chest. “Oh, Sherlock! Oh, my god.”

Awkwardly, he returns the embrace. He’s not used to hugging anyone but John. Her body is comforting, soft against him, and she smells good. He finds he doesn’t want to let her go. He squeezes tighter, no longer awkward. “Molly, I didn’t do it.”

She pushes back and looks up at him. Her brown eyes search his. “Sherlock, I want to believe you. I do. It doesn’t make sense. But Jim…”

He releases her and steps away.

“Jim? What the hell did Jim say? He doesn’t even know me. You know me, Molly.”

“He…he just said that addicts will do anything. Dumb things.”

“I’m not an addict! I’m not! I’ve used, but…wait, where would he even get that idea? How would he know? Mycroft made sure nobody —” Realization sweeps over him. “Molly, did you tell him?”
She looks at the floor. “Sherlock, I’m sorry. It...might have slipped out. I... had too much wine after the parade and we were back at his place…and I had more wine...and he asked about you…”

“Oh, Molly, please tell me you didn’t…”

Her eyes flash. “Didn’t what? Didn’t sleep with him? So it’s fine for you to have John? To let him tie you up and…and have his way with you and...whatever, but it’s not OK for me? That’s not fair, Sherlock!”

He takes a deep breath. “That’s not what I meant. Of course, your boyfriend is an asshole but—”

He’s immediately sorry he said this out loud because her face gets redder and she opens her mouth to retort, but before she can speak, he holds up a hand.

“Sorry! I shouldn’t have said that. What I meant was that it’s none of my business what you do with him, but I’m pissed that you talked about my personal stuff!”

Now it’s her shoulders that slump and she looks like she might cry. “I’m so, so sorry. It was wrong. I wish I could take it back. Please forgive me, Sherlock.”

He’s angry about the betrayal, but she looks so pitiful that the feeling quickly fades. After all, she came here to help him. He thinks of his call to Mycroft; John, showing up at court, and he gives her a small smile and opens his arms. “I forgive you. Come here.” As they hug again, she whispers, “He’s not my boyfriend, and I didn’t sleep with him.”

“I’m glad,” he whispers back. Because he is an asshole and I don’t want him to hurt you. This time he keeps the thought to himself.

“So, what can I do?” Molly asks after she has a chance to take in the condo, oohing and ahhing over the view and especially the gourmet kitchen.

“Come to my room, and I’ll show you what I have so far.”

“Just so you know. I wouldn’t normally follow a guy into his bedroom, but in this case…because you’re gay and all, I suppose it’s OK.” Her eyes are twinkling as she teases him.

He’d tidied up knowing she was coming. His room is neat and simply furnished, with a bed, dresser and desk. His guitar stand and an amplifier are in the corner, and over the desk is a large bulletin board cluttered with colored sticky notes and push pins connected with string. Her eyes flit over all over the room as if she’s looking for something.

“You look surprised,” he says. “Were you expecting a dungeon?”

“Um. I don’t know what I was expecting. So, I guess the Red Room of Pain is down the hall?” She blushes and giggles.

He looks at her blankly.

“Never mind. It’s from a movie. Forget I said it.” She settles cross-legged on the bed.

Sherlock points to the bulletin board. “So, I’ve been trying to piece together what happened last Monday. Let’s start at the beginning. We both clocked out at two, but I remember we didn’t walk out together because you were talking to Jim. So when did you leave?”

She thinks for a moment, lips pursed and twirling the end of her ponytail with a finger. “I only stayed in the lab for about...another ten minutes, but I didn’t go home right away. I went to the
cafeteria to get a coffee and read while I waited for my mom. She picked me up at three to go shopping.”

“But you never went back to the lab.”

“No.”

“So we both left the lab at two.” He takes two sticky notes from the board, writes something on one and repositions them. “So between two pm on Monday and eight am on Tuesday, someone put the hydromorphone in my locker. We need to figure out who. And to figure out who, we should try to figure out why. Motive. Who had motive and opportunity? But I think we should start with opportunity because my locker was locked. It had to be someone with access.”

“Sherlock, are you absolutely sure you locked it? Maybe you forgot.”

He raises an eyebrow. “I locked it. No question. I don’t forget things like that.”

“Well, that does narrow it down.”

“Exactly! So who could have been in the lab after we left?”

“I guess Dr. Sawyer or one of the other doctors. We haven’t met the ones that work the evening shift. Jim, maybe. Custodians? Security definitely. That’s a lot of people,” Molly says.

“Oh, I’ve got them all written down here.” He gestures at a cluster of sticky notes, some with strings that are attached to other sticky notes. “But—” He’s interrupted by the doorbell. “That’s weird, I’m not expecting anyone.”

When he looks through the peephole, he sees Wiggy in the hallway, head bobbing, forefingers poking the air, dancing to music that must only be in his head because he doesn’t have earbuds in. Sherlock grins and opens the door.

“Wig, good to see you! What’s up?” He extends his hand, but Wiggy ignores it and gives him a hug instead. *Three hugs in an hour. Might be a record.*

“I just had my interview, man! For the maintenance job. I think I did OK. I was nervous as shit though. I wanted to thank the Doc for doing me the solid.”

“John’s at work but come on in. My friend Molly’s here and I’d like you to meet her. She’s in the bedroom.”

Wiggy’s perplexed expression is priceless, and Sherlock rolls his eyes. “We’re just friends, Wig, Jesus.”

Wiggy spits in his hands and runs them through his sandy hair, pushing his longish bangs from his face as Sherlock leads him down the hallway. “You sure this is OK, man?”

“Yeah, don’t worry. She’s cool. She’ll like you.”

Molly greets him warmly, and Sherlock gives her the abridged version of how they met.

“…he really took care of me in there and now John’s helping him out a little.”

“That was so nice of you, er, Wiggy,” Molly says. “I’m glad Sherlock had someone to lean on, I’m sure it was awful.”
“And I got lots of connections on the street, so I’m gonna try to figure out who pinned that job on him. I got good instincts about people, and this kid is innocent.”

“We were just talking about that,” Sherlock says. “Can you stay for a while?”

Wiggy grins, pulls out the desk chair and straddles it backwards. “For now I got nothing but time, dude.”

Sherlock goes back to the sticky notes. “OK, John did some digging and found out that the only people who have master keys to the lockers are security and some of the custodial staff. I guess people were always getting locked out of their lockers and taking up security’s time, so the maintenance supervisors were given master keys. So, we can rule out Dr. Sawyer, Jim, and the other medical staff—for now.” He takes several notes and moves them to the side of the board.

“Because there could be more than one person involved?” Molly says.

“Yeah.”


“That’s the thing. I don’t even know any of them! Maybe it was random, maybe it didn’t have anything to do with me.”

“I bet it did though,” Wiggy says. “Like I told you, Pete gets his supply from the hospital. Or he used to until you and your brother went and ruined it for everybody. Someone’s gonna be mad about that. Real mad. Nah, it’s too much of a coincidence.”

Sherlock nods. “My brother always says that about coincidence: The universe is rarely that lazy.”

Wiggy nods back. “Your brother is one smart ass sunovabitch.”

“Tell me about it.” He sighs deeply. “I was just getting to Pete.” Sherlock points to a green sticky note. “He didn’t know that I got the lab job, and I know Myc would’ve made sure he kept his mouth shut about me. He’s very persuasive. Nobody at the hospital knew about my...situation, except John and Molly. At least that’s what I thought...” He aims a frown in Molly’s direction. Wiggy follows the look and nods to himself as he realizes what happened.

“I told you I’m sorry!”

“So Jim knows and who knows who he might have told. Anyway, that puts the Pete angle on the top of the list.” He uncaps a marker and draws a star on the green sticky note.

“Let’s just ask him,” Wiggy says.

“Why would he talk to Sherlock?” Molly says. “Sounds like he would be on Pete’s shit-list at the moment.”

Sherlock steeps his fingers under his chin and thinks for a moment. “If my big brother can bring down the hammer, he can lift it up. I’ll call him tonight. And I’ll have to clear it with John, but I’m sure he’ll agree. So, Wig, you up for a visit to the Scholar tomorrow?”

“Oh, hell yeah!”
Wiggy was so enthusiastic and convincing that Sherlock uses his argument when he calls Myc.

“It’s the only explanation that covers all the details! And really, at this point, Pete will do anything you ask him to. We have nothing to lose. Even if we’re completely wrong, we can give the police a lead on a dirty hospital employee! Pete is desperate.”

Sherlock can almost see Myc’s eyebrow lift. “And, yeah, I know what you did to him. Someday I’d like to hear about what it is you actually do for a living, Myc—unless that means you’ll have to kill me. But seriously, I really think this might work. Even if we can only implicate somebody else, it will improve my chances, right? Reasonable doubt and all that?”

Myc is silent, and Sherlock holds his breath.

“Let me check with Godfrey.”

Sherlock pumps his fist.

******

The next afternoon, Wiggy meets Sherlock in the lobby of Miranova.

As they push through the revolving door, Wiggy asks, “So are we gonna take the bus?”

“We’re going to ride in style. John’s letting us use his driver today.” Sherlock gestures grandly at the black sedan at the curb.

Wiggy’s eyes grow wide.

“Good afternoon Mr. Holmes, Mr. Wiggins,” Greg says, opening the car door for them and giving Sherlock a wink. Sherlock had texted him earlier to fill him in about Wiggy, and he is giving them the royal treatment.

They slide into the back seat, and Sherlock grins at Wiggy, who for once, is speechless.

“I know. It’s sweet. I’m trying not to get used to it. A month from now I’ll either be in prison or...I don’t know where, but for today, let’s enjoy it.”

“Yolo,” Wiggy says.

“Yolo,” Sherlock agrees.

******

Pete greets him cheerfully enough. “Hey, Wiggy, man, long time no see. I heard you were on the
inside again."

"Yeah, you heard right, but those days are over, dude. I'm sick of that joint, and I'm gettin' a real job now! At least I'm tryin'. May even be able to get off the street."

"That's great. I'm glad for you. Is he with you?" He jerks his head toward Sherlock, who has his head down, letting his hair obscure his face and is pretending to look at his phone, and Wiggy nods.

"Especially since I got nothin' for you," Pete continues. "My supplier's gone. I'm out of the trade. So don't even say anything. I think the place might be bugged. That kid's brother really fucked me over."

Wiggy listens with interest, uncharacteristically silent as Pete lays out his troubles. Sherlock, still unrecognized, is hanging behind him in the shadows, the bar dim even in full daylight.

"...Even my legit clientele has disappeared." He gestures at the empty bar. "I'm about to lose my liquor license and, if that happens, there's no way I can pay the mortgage or my child support."

Wiggy nods and then says, "Yeah, about that, Pete. I think I have the solution to your problem right here." He grabs Sherlock by the elbow and pulls him forward.

When Pete sees Sherlock, he reaches down under the bar, comes up with a pitted and scarred wooden baseball bat, executes a perfect one-handed leap, and lands on the other side with it over his shoulder. Then he freezes.

"You son of a bitch. You ruined my life!" After a second, he drops the bat on the floor and says, "But I'll be damned if I go to prison cuz of you."

Pete starts spinning in a circle, looking up at the ceiling, yelling. "Hey! You! Whoever you are! Listen up! You heard me? I'm out. No more junk. I quit. And I'm telling the kid to get out!"

He turns to Sherlock, jabs a finger at him, and yells again, "Get the fuck out!"

Wiggy holds up his hand and grabs Sherlock again as he tries to turn for the door.

"Pete! Pete, listen to me, OK? Just give me a few minutes. Please. Have I ever done you wrong?"

"Shit, Wiggy." Pete sags. "No. You never did. Out of all the assholes that ever came through that door, you're the only one who never tried to screw me. You're still an asshole, but you're all right. For an asshole. You've got five minutes. Talk fast."

Wiggy pulls Sherlock to one of the round tables and holds out a chair for Pete, who takes a deep breath and grits his teeth. When they're all seated, Wiggy begins.

"I'm gonna tell you the truth, so remember that. Sherlock fucked up."

Sherlock jabs him with his elbow, but Wiggy keeps right on talking.

"He OD'ed, yeah, but it was a mistake, and nobody would even have noticed, but the kid has, shall we say, friends and relatives in high places." Wiggy jerks his thumb toward the ceiling.

Pete scowls and says, "Yeah, I noticed."

"So, anyway, he didn't make it happen, but he can make it un-happen, if you know what I mean."
Pete laughs in spite of himself. “You always got an angle, Wiggy. You’re lucky you’re funny, cuz otherwise you’d a been dead by now. Like they say, if only you used your powers for good.”

Wiggy tilts his chair back on two legs, grinning the grin that must’ve saved his life on more than one occasion, and says, “Shit, man, that’s what I’m telling you. I’m trying to save both your asses. And we’re all gonna stay outta jail!”

Pete shakes his head. “What’s the scheme this time?”

“So, Mr. Genius here got set up. He was framed. Somebody stashed shit in his locker at the hospital. They nailed him for it.”

“Damn. They let you work at the hospital after you’d just OD’d? Holy Jesus, who the hell is your brother anyway? Just my luck to piss off the fucking Godfather.”

Sherlock puts his hand on his chest. “I had nothing to do with it, I swear!” Pete lowers his voice and leans in. “Let’s go out to the parking lot.” He gestures around the bar with his chin, and they all get up and make their way outside.

Wiggy takes control of the conversation immediately. “We can fix it. I mean you are out of the trade now, forever, if you want to stay in Columbus, but do the right thing here, and you might get to keep the bar. But we need your help. We need to figure out who framed the kid here, cuz none of this is going anywhere until he’s out of trouble.”

“And why do you think I can do that?”

Wiggy rolls his eyes. “Do I really need to spell it out? The hospital? It’s not that complicated.”

“You think it was my supplier who set him up.” Pete takes out a pack of Marlboros and lights one up. The smoke drifts by and Sherlock inhales. It smells good, and it’s on the tip of his tongue to ask for one, a reflexive response. *I don’t smoke anymore, John.* He swallows the question before it escapes.

Wiggy drops his chin and looks at Pete. “How many people are dealing from the hospital? I heard it was only the one.”

“That’s the thing, though. I don’t know. I don’t even know who my guy is. Was. He goes by Mark Twain, if you can believe it—how corny can you get? Anyway, I never met him. We only agreed on a price and arranged the drop-offs. There was a courier. Don’t know his name either.”

Wiggy looks confused. “What’s wrong with Mark Twain?” Sherlock and Pete look at him for a second, then Sherlock puts his hand on his shoulder and says, “I’ll tell you later.”

Sherlock turns back to Pete and perks up, his craving to smoke forgotten. “Describe him, the courier.”

Pete shrugs. “I dunno. White guy, my age, average height, had a gut, kinda all-around average except for his hair. He’s got this red hair. Really blazing red. Tries to hide it under a Bengals’ cap.”

“OK. That’s good. Anything else? What else does he wear? Does he have tattoos?”

“Mmm. Not that I remember.”

Sherlock runs a hand through his hair in exasperation. “Think! Details are important.”
Pete takes a long drag on his cigarette and closes his eyes, thinking. “Mmm. He matched.”

“What?”

“His clothes, they matched. Like a uniform. Dark gray pants and shirt, or maybe they were blue. I only remember that they were kinda dirty. And he had a bunch of keys on his belt, and other stuff too, like tools or something. I remember them jangling.” He opens his eyes again. “Sorry, that’s all I got.”

Sherlock files this data away in his head. He’ll add it to the bulletin board later.

Wiggy picks up the questioning. “So you don’t know your supplier’s name, but you talked to him on the phone to set up the drops, right?”

“No, we only texted.”

So, you’ve never actually heard his voice?” Sherlock says.

“Nope.”

While Sherlock is pondering this, Wiggy keeps going. “Maybe text him and tell him you’re back in business? If we could find a way to get him to talk to you, we could record it. That would be awesome. But even if we can just get the flow of product started up again, we could nab the courier. We’d be on our way to getting our boy exon...exonic..”

“Exonerated?” Sherlock offers.

“Yes, that!”

Pete looks at Wiggy, then at Sherlock, thinks for a bit and says, “I’m gonna need a lawyer.”

Wiggy claps him on the shoulder and says, “Gotcha covered.”

******

When John gets home, Sherlock is waiting at the door, collared, and eager to tell him of their meeting with Pete. When Sherlock first proposed that he accompany Wiggy, John had said no. The exact words had been “Hell, no!” uttered in a voice angry enough to give Sherlock pause. John hadn’t wanted him anywhere near Pete or the Thirsty Scholar, but Sherlock had begged and pouted, and finally worn him down. He’d agreed, but with the condition that Greg drive and remain nearby.

Before John can even say hello, Sherlock assaults him with a stream of words. “Wiggy was right, Pete was getting some of his stuff from the hospital and he doesn’t know the name of the guy but he agreed to help us find out who it is and guess what he agreed to tape him John I can’t believe it Wiggy is really awesome I think we should have him over again and there’s a redhead courier with a uniform and—”

“Whoa! Slow down,” John laughs, placing a finger on Sherlock’s mouth. Then he pauses, and his features transform into an ominous frown that Sherlock knows well. “You on something? Sherlock, so help me, if you—”
“No! Sir, of course not! I’m just...feeling hopeful.”

John’s smile returns. “Then welcome me home properly, and after that, we’ll talk.”

Sherlock slides to his knees and wraps his arms around John’s hips, his cheek against the smooth cotton of his shirt. He can feel John’s pulse and the warmth of his skin through the fabric. “Hello, Sir, I’m glad you’re home.”

“Well done, but I’d really rather have a kiss.” He pulls Sherlock to his feet and presses him to the door as Sherlock slides down a few inches. John’s hands frame his face, and the kiss is slow, tender, and undemanding. An “I love you” kiss, not a “let’s fuck” kiss. It’s comfortable, domestic, and completely wonderful.

As they embrace and Sherlock rests his head on John’s shoulder, John whispers in his ear. “You were talking quite quickly, but I distinctly heard ‘John’ in that avalanche of words. Enthusiasm doesn’t invalidate the rules.”

“Yes, Sir. Sorry, Sir. How many?”

“I think two.”

“Yes, Sir.”

********

“What is this?” Sherlock is holding a forkful of some sort of dark green vegetable under his nose and sniffing it warily.

“It’s kale,” John says; as if this fact should make Sherlock find it desirable. The stuffed chicken that John made for dinner is delicious, as is almost everything he cooks, but this…Sherlock sniffs again and wrinkles his nose.

“It’s good for you. At least try it—Let me rephrase. You will try it.”

Sherlock extends his tongue and touches the kale with the tip. It’s not awful. He’s about to put the fork into his mouth when his phone buzzes. Saved! He puts down the greens and picks it up. It’s Molly.

“It’s Molly. May I? Please?” They have a rule about phones during dinner, but now, with all that’s going on, John might make an exception. John nods.

“Molly.”

“Hi, Sherlock. I’m just calling to find out how everything went today. With your deal—um, the guy at the bar.”

“Pete.”

“Yes, Pete.”

“I’m gonna put you on speaker, I’m with John. He’s forcing me to eat kale. Cruel and unusual punishment.” He sticks his tongue out, and John holds up his index finger, then points toward the
whiteboard. Sherlock opens his mouth in mock outrage, and John smiles at him, shaking his head.

“Kale’s good for you!” Molly says.

Sherlock rolls his eyes. “So I’m told.”

He fills her in on the visit to the campus bar and recounts the conversation with Pete.

“So a redhead in a uniform—gray or maybe blue. But no nametag…” Molly says.

“My dad wore a uniform like that at the auto shop, but his name was embroidered on it. So probably our guy works someplace that requires an ID badge,” Sherlock says.

“Like the hospital,” John says.

“Exactly. Not definitively the hospital, but it makes sense. It fits. Except I was there such a short time, I never saw anyone wearing something like that. And John...Well...He…” Sherlock looks at his boyfriend hesitantly.

“Sherlock is trying to say that I’m not very observant. It’s true, I’ve not paid much attention to non-medical staff, and in my defense, I spend most of my time in the classroom, not anywhere near the labs. But it should be easy enough to look into. Molly, let’s both of us keep our eyes open tomorrow, and I’ll make some inquiries.”

She doesn’t answer.

“Molly, you there?”

There is a clicking sound and Molly’s voice comes back, a little breathless. “Guy’s you aren’t going to believe this. I’m sending you a pic. Last week. The day it happened, remember I told you that I was waiting for my mom in the cafeteria? Well, I was bored, so I took some selfies to send to Janine...”

“How are selfies—”

“Just look!”

Sherlock opens the photo. It’s a close-up of Molly’s face. She’s puckering her lips and raising her eyebrows, goofing off. A typical teenage selfie. But Sherlock immediately recognizes the detail of importance. Over Molly’s shoulder are two men talking. One is holding the handle of a mop; the other man is angled so that his face isn’t visible. Both men are wearing navy blue uniforms. The one with the mop is a blonde and the one facing away is a redhead. Not just red, but blazing red.

“Molly, I love you. John. Look, our redhead! Well, probably our redhead. So he does work at the hospital! We can find him, maybe set him up! Even if Pete can’t get the other guy—and, by the way, how do we even know it’s a guy? to talk, now we have this angle to chase. And maybe there is no mysterious Mark Twain. Hell, maybe there’s only one person. It’s possible that the supplier and the courier are one and the same. Ahh, it’s all making sense! He’s a custodian and would have keys to the lockers. He has access. We can get Pete to ID him!” Sherlock is standing now and gesturing wildly, flushed with excitement.

John puts a hand on his arm. “You’re doing it again, the avalanche thing. Take a breath. I agree this is great and I’ll follow up on that guy tomorrow. It still doesn’t explain why you though.”

Sherlock sits back down and runs his hand through his curls.
Molly chimes in. “Maybe it was random. Maybe when your Mark Twain or Mr. Red found out they couldn’t sell to Pete anymore, they decided to get rid of it someplace, and that someplace just happened to be your locker. Maybe they just wanted to throw suspicion on someone else and get rid of the evidence. There might have been even more people at the hospital that knew about Sherlock’s...accident.”

John looks at Sherlock, confused, but he waves him off.

“The simplest answer is usually the best, right?” Molly says.

“True,” Sherlock agrees, “and maybe motive doesn’t matter at this point—if we have our suspect, or at least one of them.”

“Don’t get too excited,” John says. “We still have to prove it.”

Chapter End Notes

Folks, we know it's been a while since the last update. This chapter and the next one were more time consuming to write than most, and Kameo and I have been discussing them for literally months. Chapter 26 is in good shape, and we promise that you won't have to wait another six weeks for it. We are in week seven of the nine and a half week journey, in the home stretch, so to speak. Thank you, dear readers, for your support. We love and appreciate you.
Mark Twain

Chapter Summary

John investigates a lead and gets more than he bargained for.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The basement is gloomy and industrial, with bare cinder block walls and low ceilings, so different from the bright, bustling hospital above, with no smell of disinfectant and no sound system blaring out intermittent pages. It’s eerily quiet except for the muffled sound of country music which must be coming from one of the rooms that line the narrow corridor.

Earlier this morning, John had asked around about a custodian with red hair and struck pay dirt. A name. Jay Wilson, Custodial and Maintenance Supervisor, and he is about to pay Mr. Wilson a visit. Following the music, John comes upon a small room with a table, lockers and a refrigerator, and he pauses in the doorway. Two men in blue uniforms, one blonde and one bald, sit at the table, drinking coffee, an open box of doughnuts between them.

“You lost, doc?” the blonde says good-naturedly.

“We don’t see too many sawboneses down here in the basement,” the bald one adds. “Now two in one day,” he turns to the blonde. “We might need to spruce up the place.”

John smiles at them. “Hello, fellas. I’m looking for Jay Wilson.”

“Young man, I ain’t seen him lately, but he might be in the boiler room.” Blondie hooks a thumb over his shoulder. “End of the hallway. Take a right.”

John thanks them and starts off in that direction. When he finds it, the door, which has an “Authorized Personnel Only” sign on it, is ajar. He pushes it open and takes a step inside. It’s a large room, and dim like the rest of the basement. There are pipes everywhere, large and small, running vertically and horizontally, snaking throughout the space. It reminds him of the “pipes” screensaver he used to have. A faint smell of... sulphur? hangs in the air. Dominating the room are three green cylindrical tanks, taller than John and fitted with various gauges and controls.

He doesn’t see anyone and is just about to call out when he hears murmuring. Curious, he advances and peers around the first tank. Nothing. He takes another step. Two. The voice stops abruptly, and he freezes instinctively. After a moment, the voice resumes, and now he hears another, although the second is barely audible. With a premonition, he quietly pulls out his phone, silences it, and then, after tapping a few more times, drops it into the pocket of his lab coat. He keeps moving, slowly and carefully, the sound of his footsteps camouflaged by the soft whirl of machinery and the occasional hissing of steam.

There is nothing behind the second tank either, and he makes his way slowly toward the third. Now he can clearly hear a man’s voice.

“I told you I was sorry. I never got the message. I thought we were done. Out of business. Finito.
Didn’t want that burner on me. Security’s been all over the place since last week, and regular police too. I hid it in my tool shed at home, the wife never goes there. Anyway, so Pete’s buyin’ again? Son of a gun, that was a short retirement. But maybe we ought to lie low for a while, y’know, until the kid’s convicted?"

“I can’t wait. It turns out I still need that money, I want you to go see him. Make sure he’s committed. I don’t want him pulling out at the last minute like last time. Up until now, he’s been dependable, but if I really have to cut him loose, I’ll need your help to find another buyer. I’ll set up the meeting.”

John is standing motionless, listening with astonishment. Until the kid’s convicted? Bloody hell, they’re talking about Sherlock! It’s a shock to have stumbled upon the conversation but he is doubly shocked by the second voice. It’s female. And familiar. His brain is racing, trying to place it. Who...? Who is it? Suddenly his phone blares Aretha Franklin’s “Nessun Dorma,” the ringtone Sherlock had selected for himself and installed on John’s phone, and it echoes in the cavernous boiler room. What the fuck? He had silenced it! Frantically, he pulls the phone from the pocket of his coat and declines the call.

“How much did you hear?”

John looks up to see the red-haired man who must be Jay Wilson standing at the edge of the third tank, a look of bewilderment on his ruddy face.

“I ah, um. I guess I’m lost... Was looking for the um...bathroom.”

“Yeah, Doc, really lost. Didn’t you see the sign? You shouldn’t be back here.”

There is no way John is going to walk out now. None. Not with Sherlock’s freedom on the line. This man is clearly involved in framing Sherlock. His Sherlock. That makes him an enemy. John should leave. That would be the rational thing to do. Leave and alert the police. But he needs evidence! And who is the woman? The identity of that voice is so, so close to the surface of his mind, but just out of reach. The adrenaline is flowing freely now, not surgery adrenaline, more like battlefield adrenaline, raw and urgent. His anger is about to get the better of him, he knows this, and yet he can’t help it. His hands reflexively ball into fists. He can take this man. He takes a step forward but is halted by the second voice.

“He’s not lost. Hello, John.” Dr. Sarah Sawyer steps from behind the tank.

“Sarah!”

“How much did you hear?”

“Enough.” John’s mind is reeling. Can’t be. Sarah Sawyer. She’s earned his respect. They have been friendly over the four summers he has been coming here. He never even would have considered her capable of something like this. But she’s a doctor! I guess we all have bad days. And he has delivered Sherlock right into her hands. Bitch. “Why?”

“Does it matter?”

“No. Maybe. How could you, Sarah? I thought you were one of the good guys.”

“Who is he?” Wilson demands.

“Dr. Watson. Sherlock’s...friend.”
“Who?”

“Holmes. The kid.”

“An innocent young man,” John says, his voice almost trembling. He wants to act, to rip them both to shreds, but stays still and outwardly calm.

“I’m sorry, John. I didn’t mean for it to go the way it did. You and I were friends.”

“Once again. Why? And why him? I want to understand. Maybe there’s a way out of this? For everyone?” If he could keep her talking, keep them both talking...

She laughs. “You can’t help me, not unless you have a time machine.”

“What are you talking about? Sarah, what the hell happened?”

Her cheeks are flushed and she looks like she’s about to cry.

“We think we’re so smart, we doctors. Well, it doesn’t matter how smart you are ninety-nine percent of the time when you’re stupid one percent of the time and someone finds out.” “Everyone said I wouldn’t make it. Said I wasn’t smart enough—my own mother!. But I did it. I worked three jobs to save enough money for medical school. I lived in a rat-infested apartment with four other people for years while my friends were buying cars and taking vacations. I scrabbled and fought and I did it. I’m a **doctor**. I have a good life. I have a good husband. After everything I’ve done to get here, I’m not going to let him take it away.”

“Who? Who’s trying to take it away?”

She wipes at her eyes with the back of one hand. “Jim.”

“Dr. Sawyer, I think you’d better shut up now,” Wilson warns.


“He ruined the plan. I couldn’t sell because of him and that debacle at the Scholar. My buyer got cold feet.”

“How did you—”

“Jim told me. Wanted me to use the information to fire him. But then Security started nosing around, and it turned out that keeping him was more useful. Who’d believe an addict?”

“Doc, that’s enough.” The custodian grabs Sarah’s arm but she shrugs it off.

“It’s all right, Jay. This conversation never happened. It’s our word against his. And besides, I know something about him. About who he really is. His...shall we say, hobbies, and that he’s fucking Sherlock, a kid, a student. I’ll bet he wouldn’t want the administration to know about that.”

He can feel a hot rage building. Sweat is trickling down his back, and his breath is coming quick and shallow. It does feel like a battlefield, like Afghanistan. Face to face with an enemy and a life at stake: Sherlock’s life. **No mercy**. He clenches and unclenches his fists. **Control, John. You can control it.** These are Ella’s words, and he can hear them spoken in her calm and rational therapist’s voice. He takes a deep breath, holding it for a count of four, like she taught him, deciding that he should turn around and walk out of the room and straight to the police, and not beat the shit out of
both of them. Another deep breath. OK, I’m calm. Just a little more evidence...If I could get just a bit more.

“You are wrong, Sarah, about everything. You think you have something on me. You don’t. Sherlock is an adult and not my student. I’m proud to be in a relationship with him and It’s no secret. I’ve never broadcast my personal life, but there isn’t anything I’ve done that I’m ashamed of. And even if there were, this summer gig I’ve got? I’d give it up in a heartbeat for him.” As he is speaking, he reaches into his pocket and withdraws the phone, ignoring the internal voice, Sorry, Ella, warning him again not to let anger cloud his judgment. “Oh, this conversation most definitely did happen. You see, I’ve been recording everything. And now, the cherry on top.” He holds up the phone and snaps a photo, then drops it back into his pocket.

The movement is quick. Quicker than he expects. A flash of red and then silver. Wilson is coming at him. With lightning reflexes, John raises an arm and diverts the wrench that is meant for his head but ends up smashing against his forearm. He ducks under Wilson’s arm and twists and they end up face to face.

“Gimme the phone!”

John tries for an uppercut, but the custodian lunges at him, and they topple over together. He almost blacks out for a split-second as his head connects with the concrete floor but recovers, a little bit foggy. Why didn’t I notice the wrench? Sherlock would have noticed the wrench. They grapple and roll. First Wilson on top, then John, then Wilson again.

He lands a punch that bloodies the man’s nose and receives a glancing blow across the jaw with the wrench in return. He concentrates on getting control of the tool. He grabs for it. Misses. Tries again and manages to find a purchase on one of the fingers gripping it. He yanks, bending the joint in a direction it wasn’t meant to bend. There is a satisfying crack and Wilson shouts in pain. His fingers loosen, and John takes the opportunity to wrest the wrench from his grip. With a backhanded blow, he hits the man across the temple, and the custodian collapses on him, limp and unmoving. God, he’s heavy. John pushes him off. The whole altercation probably lasted ninety seconds, but it feels like an hour has passed since it started. His arm and head are throbbing with pain. Sarah! He sits up and looks around.

She is backed up against the wall, her mouth hanging open, hands clutching the fabric at the collar of her blouse. But her eyes are not on John and he follows her gaze. His phone must have fallen from his pocket at some point during the fight and it now lies on the concrete floor, equidistant between them. Her eyes flit to his, then back at the phone. They both lunge at the same time, but she has the advantage of being upright. She reaches it first and brings the heel of her shoe down upon it. Then again. It makes a crunching sound. Before she can stomp on it a third time, John seizes her ankle, and she goes down hard on her ass with a thump and a little squeal of pain. He keeps hold of her ankle with his left hand and grasps the phone with his right. She’s scooting backwards toward the wall, kicking at him with her free foot. He curses as it smacks the side of his head. Jay’s open toolbox is nearby, almost within her reach and he’s not sure how far she will go; what she is capable of. He can’t risk it. With the precious phone secured, he uses both hands to pull her back toward him. She’s small and slides easily across the smooth concrete, and he uses his body to pin her against it, now holding her wrists. She's panting and wild-eyed, and he stays still, waiting for her thrashing to cease.

“She’s a little bit of a bear. She’ll need a minute.” He lets her cry for a moment.

“Oh, I hate him!” she wails.
“Do you want to tell me what happened?”

She sniffs. “I was so stupid. So fucking stupid. It was a work party. He was charming and handsome. He made me feel pretty. We were both drinking and I did something so stupid! It was just once and it didn’t mean anything. Nothing! I love my husband.”

“Are we talking about Jim Moriarty?”

“He’s smart, good looking. He made me feel…” she shakes her head and continues, “young and sexy again. At the moment it was what I wanted. What I thought I wanted. My husband Charlie and I…well it’s complicated. But the next day I realized what a fool I’d been. I thought I could just put it behind me. I told Jim that it was all a mistake. But he had video!”

“He’s blackmailing you?”

She nods. “Charlie can’t find out. He can’t! And Jim’s my employee. I’ll lose my job and maybe my license. Do you understand? I was going to lose my husband and my career. After how hard I’ve worked to build this life, I couldn’t let that happen. I didn’t know what else to do.” Tears are streaming from her eyes and forming little pools on the gray floor.

“So you framed an innocent kid and were going to let him rot in prison to save your own skin, not to mention all the other kids out there you helped to poison.”

“I’m sorry, John.”

“I am too. I’m sorry for you. You’re a good doctor, Sarah, and you’ve thrown it all away.”

“You can’t prove anything!”

“I think the phone is fine. Probably, just cracked glass. I’m glad you weren’t wearing heels.” He releases her wrists and gets up, leaving her lying on the floor. His jaw hurts; he touches it, and his fingers come away bloody. Nothing to be done about that. Removing his blood-spattered lab coat, he rolls it up and tucks it beneath his arm before turning and heading for the door, but stopping by the still unconscious custodian. He checks his pulse, then steps over him.

“Please, John. Don’t. I beg you. As a friend.”

John looks over his shoulder. She looks tiny and frightened and miserable, but then he thinks of Sherlock in a jail cell, that beautiful mind and endless potential caged and tormented and he is surprised by the depth of the coldness that he feels toward her. She almost took Sherlock away from him, and he will never forgive her for it.

“We are not friends,” he says as he continues toward the exit.

“…fucking sensible shoes.” is the last thing he hears as the door clangs shut behind him.

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The screen of the phone is shattered so thoroughly that the touchscreen is useless. But John hopes that this is the extent of the damage. The data might be recoverable.

He had gone directly from the basement to the first floor of the hospital and out a side door, then
across the grounds to the parking garage. He didn’t want anyone stopping him, asking about his face. He was going home. Home to Sherlock.

“Dr. Watson, are you all right?” asks the front desk attendant in the lobby of Miranova as he strides by.

“Fine.” He waves a hand in her direction without turning his head and gets on the elevator. The reflective doors show him what he already knows. There is blood on the front of his shirt and on his face, which in addition to being cut, is swollen and purple from the impact of the wrench. And he might end up with a black eye from the toe of Sarah’s sensible shoe. None of this matters right now.

He waves his keycard and opens the door of #1410. Sherlock is lying on the sofa with his laptop on his stomach. Notebooks and pens are scattered on the coffee table. John can see the dark curls above the sofa’s armrest, and one leg draped over the back, barefoot. His long toes are flexing and wiggling. It’s as if the rest of him can lie still only if some part of him is in motion.

“Mmmgrph...Wig..” comes the almost unintelligible mumble from the sofa.

“Sherlock.”

His head pops up. “John? What are you doi—Oh, shit! What happened?” The laptop, forgotten, thumps to the floor as Sherlock springs from the sofa and bounds across the room. “Your face!”

“Dr. Watson?” Wiggy emerges from the kitchen with a bottle of lemonade in one hand and a plate of leftover chicken in the other. “Jeezus!”

John grins, and then immediately grimaces from the pain in his jaw. “It’s not as bad as it looks. And you should see the other guy.”

“What happened?” Sherlock repeats.

“It’s over. It’s over love. You aren’t going to prison. You’re safe.” John takes Sherlock’s hand and it’s limp. His mouth is open, and John can see the brain behind those blue eyes whirring, trying to process what he’s heard. His eyes grow shiny with tears and still, he says nothing. John waits. The lower lip trembles and is bitten. John waits.

“Oh, John.” It’s almost a whisper. And then Sherlock is in his arms. The hug is so tight that John can barely draw a breath, but he doesn’t care. The only thing that matters is that he has Sherlock, and he’s never going to let anyone hurt him again. He will do anything to keep him safe. He can feel his boyfriend’s heart pounding against his chest and warm breath on his neck. He could stay this way all day. In fact, he would like nothing better than to take Sherlock to bed right now and make love to him in the softest, tenderest way. To show him how much he is cherished. But there will be time for that later.

Eventually, Sherlock let’s go and steps away, drawing the back of his hand across his eyes. They both remember Wiggy and turn to look for him. He hasn’t moved. He is still standing there, hands full and a big goofy smile on his face. “I...um... Should I leave?”

“No,” John says. “I’m sure you’ll want to hear this too. You two are never, not in a million years, going to believe it.”

“That it was Dr. Sawyer?” Sherlock says.

John is speechless for a moment and shakes his head, incredulous.
“How the hell did you—”

“I tried to call you earlier. To tell you, but it went straight to voicemail. I tried texting too.”

“Yeah, that. How did you do that?! Make it ring? My phone was silenced!”

“When you asked me to fix that problem you were having with your e-mail settings, I might have made my number an emergency override,” Sherlock says, looking sheepish.

John lets this go, much more interested in knowing how Sherlock knew it was Sarah.

“Well, we were all assuming that it was a guy. Balance of probability I guess, but I didn’t rule out a woman. We didn’t have all the facts you see, so that possibility had to be on the table. I was pretty sure that our redhead courier worked at the hospital, because of the locker. Likely a custodial supervisor - because they have keys. Simplest answer is usually the best. But it did seem unlikely he’d be able to get his hands on any drugs by himself because they keep that stuff so secure. So it had to be a doctor, nurse or someone else with access to them. Our Mark Twain. To be honest, Jim Moriarty was at the top of my list. This morning I went to the hospital website and looked through the directory, to get more information on him. I didn’t find out much, but it has pictures and short bios of all the docs.” Sherlock retrieves his laptop from the floor and brings it to the breakfast bar. John and Wiggy watch as he pulls up a webpage. “See? There’s Dr. Sawyer.” John and Wiggy lean in and look at the headshot of the pretty smiling woman. Underneath is her name. Dr. Tamsin Sarah Sawyer M.D.

“I told Sherlock that it was a funny name,” Wiggy says. “Although I reckon it ain’t funnier than Wiggy!”

“Or Sherlock. But anyway, we googled it, and it turns out it’s a feminine version of Thomas,” Sherlock says and looks at John triumphantly. “Tamsin Sawyer. Tom Sawyer. Mark Twain!”

“I’m impressed—”

“Don’t be. If Wiggy hadn’t wanted to look it up—”

“—that you knew that Mark Twain wrote Tom Sawyer,” John says, smiling. “Mr. Anderson would be proud.”

Sherlock makes a face and continues. “Anyway, I knew that wouldn’t prove anything, but it was one hell of a coincidence. And why would she choose something so obvious? I called Myc and told him about it. He told me that it’s quite common for criminals to use aliases that have some connection with their own identity. It’s some weird flaw in human nature. It would be so much smarter to just pick some random name out of the phone book. People are idiots.”

John recounts his encounter with Willson and Sarah in the boiler room and pulls the damaged phone from his pocket. “We can get the data from this, yeah? I think it might just be the screen. I hope so, because If we can’t, it’ll be my word against theirs.”

“But we got Pete. He can ID Wilson,” Wiggy adds. “Wilson’s the little fish in all this. Betcha he’d squeal on that Tamsin bitch to save his own ass. Seen it happen a million times.”

Sherlock looks at both of them, nonplussed. “The phone is irrelevant now.”

Now it’s their turn to look perplexed.

“The cloud, John! The cloud! You have the latest IOS.”
“Do I?”

“You do. I updated you. All your voice memos and photos are backed up to the cloud. Immediately. You could throw that phone in the Scioto, and it wouldn’t matter.” Sherlock’s eyes are sparkling, and he is grinning so widely that his normally smooth face is full of crinkles. Adorable crinkles. To see him so happy makes every painful throb in John’s head and arm worthwhile.

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They talk for a few minutes more and then John calls Godfrey and puts him on speakerphone to tell him the good news.

“Fantastic, but there are legal issues of admissibility,” Godfrey says. “Who’s in the recorded conversation? Be specific.”

“At first it’s just Sawyer and Wilson,” but my phone rang and I was discovered. John aims a dark look at Sherlock, who mouths a “sorry.” “but from that point forward it’s a three-way conversation.”

“You owe your caller a big thank you. If you hadn’t been discovered and been a part of the conversation, it wouldn’t be admissible in court.” John looks at Sherlock again and he is grinning. A smug, insolent grin. He grins back. Regardless of how well things have turned out, punishment is in order, and John thinks of how satisfying it will be to wipe that bratty smile off his face with the sting of the paddle. But then, that may have been Sherlock’s plan all along.

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After Wiggy polishes off the chicken and accepts John’s offer of bus fare, they say good-bye.

“Doc, I’m gonna pay you back, and you’ll be seein’ more of me because I got the job!”

John shakes his hand. “That’s great, William, I hope you take this opportunity seriously. No drugs.”

“No worries, Doc. I already turned over that leaf. No more drugs.”

The door closes and they are alone.

Sherlock takes John’s hand and leads him to the sofa.

“Sit. I’m going to take care of you.”

“Really, It’s just a few cuts and bruises—”

“Let me. I want to. Please.”

John waits as Sherlock goes to the bathroom and kitchen and comes back with an armload of
supplies.

“Here, cold-pack for your head. You’ve got a lump.” He hands it to John who presses it to the back of his head where it had slammed against the concrete floor. Sherlock takes a wet washcloth and carefully cleans the dried blood from John’s face, then dabs the cuts with antiseptic cream. His face is serious, with the space between his eyebrows creased with concentration as he works, and John feels no pain, only happiness and relief as he lets Sherlock tend to him. It feels odd, but good, to have Sherlock taking care of him for a change.

“You’re going to have a black eye tomorrow,” Sherlock says, leaning back to look at John critically.

“It was worth it, Dr. Holmes. You are worth it.”

“It’s really over, isn’t it?”

“I think so.” John picks up Sherlock’s hand and kisses it. “Thank god.”

Sherlock is quiet for a moment and seems to be gathering himself. Then he straightens his shoulders and begins.

“I want to talk about something.”

“Go on.”

Sherlock blows out a breath and continues, “I have been so worried about going to prison and clearing my name that I pushed everything else aside. But now. Now I’m thinking about the future again. When you leave, Sir...I...just can’t imagine not being with you. You’ve done so much for me already, and I know it’s too much to ask.” Sherlock’s fingers tighten around John’s, and his eyes are welling with tears. “Can’t you stay? If you love me, can’t you stay? Please? I don’t want to live with Myc, and even if I get accepted to—”

“I can’t, Sherlock. It’s just not possible.”

“Oh.” Sherlock pulls his hand away and looks at his lap. A single tear falls and makes a dark splotch on his blue T-shirt.

“Listen, I—” John is interrupted when his phone rings. Glancing at it he sees that it’s Myc. “Hello Myc, we’ve got great news.”

But Sherlock, after giving John a wounded look that sends a stab of pain through his heart, has already fled down the hallway.

“Sherlock!”

The bedroom door slams.
The red-headed custodian, Jay Wilson was inspired by Jabez Wilson of Doyle's The Red-Headed League (although the canon character was not a villain).

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